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Nottinghamshire
County Council



UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)
**East Midlands Combined County Authority
(EMCCA) Region**

2025 - 2026 Open Call 2 (OC2)

Supporting Local Businesses

Invitation to bid

April 2025

This programme is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund



1. Introduction

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) was introduced in 2022 as the successor programme to the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). It was originally funded until 31 March 2025. The current government has extended this for a further year to 31 March 2026. The original programme was funded directly to Local Authorities by the Government. In 2024 the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) was established covering Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (EMCCA Regions). The Government will issue 2025-26 UKSPF funds to EMCCA who will then allocate some of this funding to Local Authorities to allow them to continue to fund local provision.

Nottinghamshire eligible Councils set out their approach in an evidence led Investment Plan in 2022. This was approved by the Government. The plan for the programme for 2025-2026 will be to use the available funding to build upon on the successes and achievements to date, in advance of the Government's successor programme, anticipated to start in April 2026.

2. Background

The UKSPF was a central pillar of the previous UK Government's Economic Prosperity improvement agenda and provided £2.6 billion of funding from 2023 to 2025. It has improved pride in place and increased life chances across the UK through investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills.

The current government has decided to continue funding for UKSPF for a further year before it updates its support programmes from 2026 to 2029. Nationally, it is expected that there will be approximately 60% funding of the 2024-25 budget available in 2025-26.

The UKSPF supported the delivery of the previous Government's missions under three investment priorities: **Communities and Place; Supporting Local Business; and People and Skills.**

Government has published a refreshed prospectus for the UKSPF programme for the 2025-2026 year, which echoes much of the prospectus for the original programme. This [prospectus](#) and a related [Technical Note](#) can be found on the gov.uk website.

Nottinghamshire County Council is the commissioning authority for this call on behalf of East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) for delivery of the regional Supporting Local Businesses strand of the UKSPF programme for 2025/26 across EMCCA Regions.

EMCCA Regions share a collective ambition to drive regional economic growth by prioritising support for high-growth businesses, enhancing international trade through targeted export initiatives, and providing comprehensive business skills development via tailored workshop programmes.

Key Priorities for Supporting Local Businesses

- Enhancing Economic Prosperity – Reducing regional inequalities in employment, pay, skills, and productivity while fostering a more entrepreneurial, sustainable and inclusive economy.
- Improving Access to Finance – grants, loans, and investment to help start-ups scale and succeed.
- Developing Skills & Mentorship – Offering training, leadership development, and direct expert business guidance.
- Driving Innovation & R&D – Encouraging research, tech adoption, and digital transformation.
- Unlocking Market Opportunities & Expansion – Supporting access to new markets, supply chains, trade & business networks.

- Promoting Sustainability & Resilience – Encouraging green growth, responsible business practices, and long-term adaptability.

This translates into the following funding priorities under UKSPF for 2025-26:

	UKSPF Investment Priorities	UKSPF Funding Priorities
2.	Supporting Business Export Supporting High Growth Supporting Business Workshops	Supporting Local Businesses

The themes of inclusion, productivity and carbon neutrality are interwoven throughout each region's priority.

Open Call	Min grant for 2025-26	Max grant for 2025-26
OC2 - Supporting Local Businesses		
Lot 1: Supporting Business Export	£443,000 revenue	£456,000 revenue
Lot 2: Supporting High Growth	£443,000 revenue	£456,00 revenue
Lot 3: Supporting Business Workshops	£179,000 revenue	£192,000 revenue

Applicants should note while all parties are hopeful that the funds will be available in due course, this Open Call process is happening before the necessary decision making by EMCCA and by Nottinghamshire County Council has happened. That means that unless and until those decisions are made, no grants will be awarded through this Open Call process.

The government will allocate the 2025-26 UKSPF funding for Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire to EMCCA rather to the City and District councils as was the case with the 2022-2025 programme.

EMCCA proposes to allocate a portion of these funds to regional-level activities, while the remaining funds will be allocated to local authorities to support local projects and activities.

To avoid duplication, confirmation of activities funded at the regional level by EMCCA may influence the grants Nottinghamshire County Council awards for local initiatives.

Applicants should note that no grants will be awarded through this Open Call process until Nottinghamshire County Council's UKSPF allocation has been formally confirmed.

3. Grant Awards

Please note as this Open Call has been published in support of EMCCA's regional plans for its UKSPF programme and the amount of UKSPF Supporting Local Businesses funding that Nottinghamshire County Council will be allocated to administer, manage and monitor:

- The funding available to an individual organisation is specified as a maximum grant amount.

- It is anticipated that one grant will be issued per Lot through this Open Call for EMCCA regions Supporting Local Businesses
- in the event of Nottinghamshire County Council not receiving sufficient funding, no grants will be awarded
- applicants should outline their projects, including the expected outputs and outcomes, for the period from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026. Should additional funding become available to extend this provision beyond the specified dates, Nottinghamshire County Council reserves the right to offer further grant funding to successful applicants to support the continuation of their projects.

There will be three funding lots:

Lot	Anticipated number of grants awarded
Lot 1: Supporting Business Export	One
Lot 2: Supporting High Growth	One
Lot 3: Supporting Business Workshops	One

Applicants can apply for funds from any of the lots so long as the value is not below the minimum or maximum stated for each lot in section 2.

Nottinghamshire County Council is expecting to allocate this funding to more than 1 organisation through this Open Call, given the different nature of some of the interventions. However, multi-discipline organisations may be able to deliver the support required across the three lots but would need to demonstrate that they can deliver each element better than single support intervention providers.

Please note - grant funding allocations are indicative and subject to change and/or approval at the discretion of the Government and/or of Nottinghamshire County Council.

4. Aims of UKSPF Supporting Local Business Project

Supporting businesses to achieving their potential for export, high growth and skills, and delivering customised support are vital to enhancing productivity, expanding the local business community, and driving economic growth that benefits everyone.

Local Priorities for Supporting Local Businesses

Supporting local businesses across EMCCA Regions is essential for fostering economic prosperity, employment growth, and community well-being throughout the East Midlands. The combined region enjoys a central geographical position in the UK, providing businesses with exceptional connectivity via road, rail, and air, making it an ideal location for investment, innovation, and growth.

- The regions focus specifically on key clusters for this call (including related supply chain) —
 - Manufacturing & Engineering
 - Green Energy and Technology,
 - Creative and Digital Industries
- leveraging sectoral strengths to encourage innovation, attract investment, and boost productivity. Strategic business support initiatives include tailored mentoring and accelerator

programmes for Enterprises with high-growth potential, dedicated export readiness to help businesses enter new global markets, and extensive workshop offerings to build skills in digital transformation, innovation, access to finance, leadership and business planning. These combined efforts aim to foster job creation, strengthen competitiveness, and position the region prominently within both national and international markets.

- Special attention should be given to local cultural and economic variations, recognising the diverse needs across both cities, districts, boroughs, and rural communities. This includes tailoring support measures linked to this call, as well as facilitating access to broader support programmes e.g. Transport Equipment Manufacturing, and those offered by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT).
- Higher scores will be awarded to applications that commit to engage and support enterprises in every district and borough as well as the cities.

Regional insight

- **Derby** is home to thousands of businesses, from entrepreneurial sole traders through a vibrant community of SMEs to global giants who underpin a strong, resilient economy and business community. It is known as the UK's Capital for Innovation and stands out through its global reputation in advanced manufacturing, engineering and hi-tech sectors such as aerospace, automotive, rail, composites, med-tech and green-tech, anchored by world-leading businesses including Rolls-Royce, Toyota, and Alstom. The city's strong industrial heritage is integrated within its community and cultural identity, promoting ongoing innovation, heritage tourism, and skilled local employment.
- **Nottingham's** strengths lie in life sciences, creative industries, carbon reduction technologies, and financial and business services, supported by the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University. Its distinctive cultural heritage, iconic landmarks like Nottingham Castle, attractiveness for inward investment and globally recognised legends like Robin Hood enhance its vibrant tourism and cultural sectors. Nottingham continues to thrive as a hub for emerging technologies, including AI, digital health, and creative digital industries.
- **Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire** are characterised by diverse local economies, combining strengths in agriculture, heritage tourism, creative industries, logistics, manufacturing, and SMEs. Key economic priorities include expanding export capability, place brand, driving high-growth business opportunities, and increasing regional productivity, attracting talent and increasing job opportunities. Emphasis is placed on innovation, digitalisation, and resilience in local businesses. Both counties prioritise enhancing competitiveness in global markets, supporting sustainable economic expansion, and leveraging sector-specific strengths. Additionally, meeting infrastructure demands, addressing skills gaps, and encouraging inward investment remain central to regional ambitions. These strategic priorities reflect the counties' commitment to economic diversity, sustainable green growth, and long-term prosperity.

5. UKSPF Outputs and Outcomes

In the Indicative Deliverables document The outputs and outcomes associated with the 2025-26 UKSPF interventions are detailed below. The definitions of the outputs and outcomes can be found in Appendix B of the application.

Supporting Local Businesses Open Call Outputs and Outcomes

Lot 1: Supporting Business Export

Lot 1 Outputs

- Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
- Number of enterprises receiving grants

Lot 1 Outcomes

- Jobs created as a result of support
- Number of enterprises engaged in new markets
- Number of enterprises with improved productivity
- Number of new to market products

Nottinghamshire County Council aims to award grants through this Open Call to support projects that provide tailored support that meets the unique growth needs of established businesses across EMCCA Regions. This could include 1-2-1 consultancy, peer to peer networking, access to relevant training opportunities or access to wider expert support.

Applications that allocate a portion of the available funds to provide businesses with access to grant funding will receive higher scores. These grants should be used to amplify the project's impact, such as by supporting additional, complementary activities that contribute to achieving the UKSPF outputs and outcomes outlined above.

The Council identifies the following outcomes as key for businesses aiming to increase exports; creating jobs and engaging in new markets.

Lot 2: Supporting High Growth

Lot 2 outputs

- Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
- Number of enterprises receiving grants

Lot 2 outcomes

- Jobs created as a result of support
- Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services
- Number of enterprises engaged in new markets
- Number of enterprises with improved productivity
- Number of new to market products
- Number of R&D (Research & Development) active enterprises

Nottinghamshire County Council aims to award a grant through this Open Call to support a businesses who are in high growth phase.

“This is best described as: High growth businesses experiencing rapid increases in revenue, employment, or market share, typically achieving annual growth rates of at least 20% for three consecutive years. These businesses are innovative, agile, and quickly capitalise on market opportunities, significantly contributing to economic development and job creation.”

Applications that allocate a portion of the available funds to provide businesses with access to grant funding will receive higher scores. These grants should be used to amplify the project’s impact, such as by supporting additional, complementary activities that contribute to achieving the UKSPF outputs and outcomes outlined above.

This project aims to inspire high-growth businesses to innovate, grow sustainably, and scale strategically. By accessing expert support, funding, developing strong leadership, expanding markets, adopting green growth practices, and unlocking new opportunities, they can drive long-term success.

The Council identifies the following outcomes as key for businesses aiming for high growth, creating jobs, improving productivity, accessing finance investment and being active in Research and Development.

Lot 3: Supporting Business Workshops

Lot 3 outputs

- Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support

Lot 3 outcomes

- Number of organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support

Nottinghamshire County Council is pleased to announce this grant opportunity, designed specifically to support a business workshop project aimed at strengthening the existing enterprise ecosystem across the EMCCA regions. The project will directly benefit established local businesses, aligning broadly with the sector priorities outlined in Lots 1 and 2, while also providing the flexibility to effectively address unique local business challenges, specific needs, and to remove barriers limiting business growth.

“Business Workshops are described as: interactive training sessions designed for small to medium-sized groups, focusing on developing practical skills, solving specific problems, or enhancing knowledge through guided activities, hands-on exercises, and active participation.”

Key objectives identified by the Council to maximise project impact include:

- Facilitating access to relevant and targeted training opportunities via in person and online delivery.
- Addressing specific regional barriers that hinder business growth, expansion and innovation.
- Ensuring in-person delivery is accessible to businesses at local level across all geographical regions.

Through this initiative, established businesses within EMCCA regions community will receive practical workshop support to enhance their capabilities, strengthen their competitive advantage, and contribute significantly to the vitality and sustainable growth of the regional economy.

6. What costs can be attributed to the grant?

Revenue funds can be used to contribute to the costs of ongoing operational expenses required in the running of the project, including:

- Staff salary costs (including Employer NI and Pension contributions).
- Overheads related to employing staff involved in delivering activities funded through the grant.
- Cost of business travel.
- Marketing and publicity costs
- Participant costs / hardship support.
- Small items of equipment (less than £5,000).

7. Timescale and process

Nottinghamshire County Council will run an open call for the 2025-2026 UKSPF programmes.

Technical Workshop	4 th April 2025
Open Call documents published on Nottinghamshire County Council UKSPF webpage	4 th April 2025
Deadline for submission of Open Call applications	21 st April 2025 – by 23:59hrs
Grant Agreements issued to successful applicants	30 th April 2025
Project start	1 st May 2025
Implementation Meeting with NCC and successful applicant	Week of 5 th May 2025
Project end	31 st March 2026

The anticipated timescales given above may be subject to change depending on:

- when the Nottinghamshire County Council 2025-26 UKSPF funding allocation is confirmed by EMCCA
- the number of applications received
- timescales for submission and approval of UKSPF 2025-26 Investment Plans (if these are required)
- the outputs and outcomes included in the 2025-26 programme (and their definitions)

8. How will applications be assessed?

Nottinghamshire County Council will assess all grant applications submitted before the deadline of 21st April 2025 – by 23:59hrs.

Assessment will involve four stages; Gateway, Scoring, Moderation and Further Moderation (if required), including sign off of shortlisted applications. Questions that are to be scored have been weighted.

Further information regarding the assessment criteria can be found in Appendix A: UKSPF Nottinghamshire Assessment Criteria.

Following assessment, Nottinghamshire County Council will inform all applicants of their outcome.

Successful applicants will enter into a grant agreement with Nottinghamshire County Council. A template grant agreement will be provided for reference as part of the bid documentation.

9. How to apply

To apply for grant funding, applicants must complete and submit the following documents to Nottinghamshire County Council using the email address: UKSPF@nottsc.gov.uk

- UKSPF 25-26 OC2 **Business Support** - Application Form
- UKSPF– 25 26 EMCCA OC2 - **Business Growth** - Appendix B
- Evidence of Economic and Financial Standing (1.1 of the application form)

Applications submitted in any other format will not be accepted.

Complete applications must be submitted by: 21st April 2025 – 23:59hrs

10. Further information

For any technical queries please email: UKSPF@nottsc.gov.uk

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (FOR OC2)

Stage 1. GATEWAY CRITERIA

Criteria	Pass	Fail	Partial
Criteria 1: Application signed, fully completed and returned on time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	-
Criteria 2: Economic and Financial Standing*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 3: Economic and Financial Risk*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 4: Financial clawback in past 12 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 5: Policies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Criteria 6: Liability Insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**These will also be assessed via due diligence checks on Equifax and Spotlight.*

Applications that fail any criterion cannot progress to Stage 2. Scoring.

For the questions which have been assessed as partial, progress to Stage 2 is allowed. Scoring will be allowed with justification from the Assessor.

STAGE 2. SCORING

The maximum score for each question is 5, based on the scoring framework below, but some are weighted through the multiplication of the assigned score. For example, a score of 5 weighted by a factor of 4 will equal a total score of 20. The maximum score and multiplication weightings are shown on the application form in the dark grey box to the right of each question.

SCORING FRAMEWORK

Score	Assessment	Description
0	Unacceptable	Response to the question is unacceptable or no response received. Does not give the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
1	Poor/Weak Response	Inadequate detail provided or some of the answer not directly relevant to the question. Is supported by none or a weak standard of evidence in several areas giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
2	Below Expectations	Limited information provided, and/or a response that is inadequate or only partially addresses the question giving rise to concern about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
3	Satisfactory Response	Acceptable response in terms of the level of detail, accuracy and relevance. Is supported by a satisfactory standard of evidence in most areas but a few areas lacking detail/evidence giving rise to some concerns about the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract.
4	Good Response	Comprehensive response in terms of detail and relevance to the question and supported by good standard of evidence. Gives the Fund confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. Meets the Fund's requirements.
5	Very Good Response	As Good, but to a better degree in terms of precision and relevance. Is comprehensive and supported by a high standard of evidence. Gives the Fund a high level of confidence in the ability of the bidder to deliver the contract. May exceed the Fund's requirements in some respects, for example, added value such as integration/synergy with other projects.

The weighted score for Part 2 of the application form for each of the lots will be out of 120

Scoring for Appendix B of the application (the excel document)

The financial details in Appendix B will be used to evaluate the value for money of the proposed project.

The number of businesses engaged, along with the number achieving each output and outcome, will be used to assess the project's impact and effectiveness.

Higher scores will be awarded to projects that:

- Offer a comprehensive range of support
- Focus on key steps for facilitating supporting businesses
- Demonstrate that the support provided will lead to businesses achieving programme outcomes

Weightings will be applied to certain criteria to reflect their relative importance in the proposal.

To prevent all applicants from submitting figures that would guarantee maximum scores in the appendix, the scoring framework and weightings will not be made available prior to the Open Call deadline

For Lot 1: The weighted score for Appendix B of the application will be out of 65

For Lot 2: The weighted score for Appendix B of the application will be out of 65

For Lot 3: The weighted score for Appendix B of the application will be out of 44

The Total Score for each Lot will be the combined score for the Part 2 in the application form, plus the relevant lot's Appendix B score

If you apply for more than one Investment Priorities, they will be scored separately.

STAGE 3. MODERATION

Funding from each Investment Priority will be awarded to the applicants with the highest score. The number of successful organisations for Lot 1 will be dependent on the availability of funds.

Where applications tie on scores, further moderation criteria will be applied as detailed in Stage 4, or applicants may be invited to discuss/negotiate their total project values.

In selecting projects, overall caps will be applied in line with the maximum total funding available for each Lot. This may result in applicants being invited to discuss/negotiate their total project values, their planned profiles of expenditure and outputs and outcomes, or the proportions of revenue and capital funding.

STAGE 4. FURTHER MODERATION (IF REQUIRED) AND SIGN OFF OF SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Based on the degree of moderation required to end up with a range of Grants which doesn't exceed the maximum funding available in each Lot, Nottinghamshire County Council, at its discretion, will agree an additional ranking or scoring framework (e.g. impact on Nottingham's priority sectors).

NOTIFICATION OF INVITATION TO BID OUTCOME

Once the outcome of the assessment process has been notified to all applicants, organisations can request feedback on their applications and scoring.