

Kenneth Gibson MSP, Convener of the Committee
Finance and Public Administration Committee
Committee Office, Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

9th February 2023

Dear Mr Gibson,

Thank you for your request for information about the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth and our work to support central and local government with the development of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).

The What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth (“What Works Growth”, or “WWG”) is an evidence centre funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the Department for Transport, and the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. WWG’s remit is to improve the use of evidence and evaluation in local growth policy in the UK.

WWG in Scotland

WWG produces evidence reviews, toolkits and briefing, and delivers training and workshops. These are designed to support local governments to deliver cost-effective local growth interventions and carry out high-quality evaluation. These resources and events are open to stakeholders across the UK. In the past year officials from the Scottish Government and three Scottish local authorities attended our events.

Our online resources draw on evidence from around the world (we include all English-language studies about interventions in OECD countries). We use a high evidence standard when selecting studies for inclusion in our resources: level 3 or above on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale for evidence reviews, or level 2 and above on the scale for briefings and toolkits. This is to ensure that we only include studies that tell us about causal relationships between interventions and outcomes. We use systematic search methods to ensure that all relevant evidence is captured, so any English-language studies from Scotland which meet the evidence standard should be included.

As well as delivering resources and events, we sometimes work directly with local and national governments to support better evaluation and use of evidence for specific policies or interventions. One example of this is the scoping study mentioned in your letter, done in partnership with DLUHC. While we are open to collaborations from

across the UK, we have not done any projects of this type with the Scottish Government to avoid duplicating the activities of What Works Scotland. As What Works Scotland has now closed, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss areas of mutual interest.

Informing decision making for the UKSPF 'Communities and Place' investment priority

The 'Communities and Place' priority relates to improving outcomes for crime, health, wellbeing and pride in place. This means WWG's work is less relevant to this than the other UKSPF investment priorities which cover employment, pay, skills, productivity, and research and development investment. As such, our toolkits and guidance do not generally cover studies which show evidence of impact for interventions which could be described as supporting the Communities and Place investment priority. We wouldn't expect them to be a suitable source for decision making around investment in the 'Communities and Place' priority for the UKSPF, and we don't know of any examples where they have been used in this way.

Considering the UKSPF as a whole, we did produce a summary of evidence from interventions relevant to DLUHC's Levelling Up Fund in 2021, which has some similar aims to the UKSPF. We're not aware of the extent to which this, or our publicly available toolkits and guidance, influenced the choice of UKSPF investments, if at all. The Levelling Up Fund summary is available here: [https://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence Briefing Levelling Up Fund Interventions and Impacts.pdf](https://whatworksgrowth.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence_Briefing_Levelling_Up_Fund_Interventions_and_Impacts.pdf)

Evidence of impact for Scottish based interventions supporting the UKSPF Communities and Place investment priority

As discussed above, our reviews focus on local growth outcomes, rather than the crime, health, wellbeing and pride in place outcomes covered by Communities and Place in the UKSPF prospectus.

We are currently undertaking a series of rapid evidence reviews which cover interventions and outcomes more relevant to the UKSPF 'Communities and Place' priority than those covered in our previous reviews. These may also include studies of Scottish based interventions, if any meet the appropriate evidence standard. They will be published later in 2023.

UKSPF scoping study

In 2022 we did a UKSPF evaluation scoping study in partnership with DLUHC, as referenced in the UKSPF prospectus. The study was commissioned and delivered between March and August 2022. The remit of the study was to consider whether a programme-wide impact evaluation of the UKSPF would be feasible and would deliver suitably reliable findings, given the design constraints of the programme.

Among other things, the study briefly discusses whether variation in timing or intensity of UKSPF funding could be used to enable evaluation of the programme as whole (for example, to assess whether places that receive funding earlier see benefits earlier) and concludes that this is unlikely to provide a robust assessment of impact.

I hope this information is useful. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need anything further.

Yours sincerely

Professor Henry Overman