

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

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Rt Hon Brandon Lewis MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
(By email)

23 October 2020

Shared Prosperity Fund

Dear Brandon,

As you will be aware, with little more than two months remaining until the end of the Brexit transition period, the UK Government has still not provided substantive detail on how it plans to replace EU Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds with the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). That is despite the Shared Prosperity Fund being announced before the 2017 general election. In light of Brexit and the significant economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a timely and effective replacement for ESI funds is more important than ever.

On 14 October, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee [took oral evidence](#) on this issue from a range of stakeholders in academia, business, the voluntary sector, local government and the Northern Ireland Department of Finance. We discussed their concerns, the effectiveness of the current EU funding regime and their key priorities for the Shared Prosperity Fund. We have also published [a letter](#) and [paper](#) from the Department of Finance, which set out the Executive's position.

I press that this evidence is given full and urgent consideration by you and those in Government working on the SPF. One witness described it as "inexcusable that so many people in so many parts of the United Kingdom know so little about what the new fund is going to involve, how it is going to be managed and how it is going to be allocated." That is despite the need for a replacement for ESI funds being "obvious ever since the 2016 referendum".

Witnesses expressed their anxiety about the lack of clarity around the amount of Shared Prosperity funding Northern Ireland will receive, the objectives of the programme and the administrative structures. Programmes have taken significantly longer to deliver in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK and the EU, so avoiding a cliff-edge and guaranteeing at least the maintenance of current funding levels in a separate pot is vital.

It was extremely disappointing to hear that there has been no UK Government engagement with stakeholders in Northern Ireland, on the Shared Prosperity Fund, since early 2019. This must be addressed immediately, because priorities and needs have changed due to the pandemic. Your role as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland means that you are well placed to lead such engagement across Whitehall.

I note [reports](#) that the upcoming multi-year Spending Review is to be scrapped. This, we understood, was when clarity about the Shared Prosperity Fund would be provided. Therefore, can I request that

in your response to this letter, you provide details on each of the points mentioned above as soon as possible. Organisations across Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK deserve to know what is happening, but they have been left in limbo for far too long.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Simon Hoare', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee