

Evaluation of the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund (Shared Prosperity Fund)

A report to Cadwyn Clwyd

March 2026

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund focused on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the tourism and experience economy within Flintshire to create jobs, boost community cohesion and increase private sector investment.

The project received £357,857 through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF): 2025-26 to deliver against the 'boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector' investment priority. This project was preceded by the UK SPF: 2023-25 round of funding and aimed to build on its success by continuing to provide funding to meet high demand for support and financial resources among enterprises.

York Consulting was commissioned to assess the delivery of the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund and review progress against its intended outcomes and impacts.

Project design

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund provided support through two main strands:

- **Tourism Business Infrastructure Grants:** A 70% grant up to the value of £17,500 (£25,000 project value) was available for SMEs.
- **Tourism Sector Collaboration and Feasibility:** Building on the feasibility funding from the previous SPF project, this element continued to support third sector, Local Authority (LA), and community groups to develop relevant feasibility studies, targeting the development of tourism infrastructure and the visitor economy.

Cadwyn Clwyd, a social enterprise, in collaboration with Business Wales and Flintshire County Council carried out the delivery of this project.

Project delivery

Two staff members from Cadwyn Clwyd, a project officer and an administrative and financial support staff member, managed the project, with support from a Flintshire County Council business & tourism development officer and a Business Wales advisor. Promotional activity included outreach via social media, digital platforms, sector-specific networks and groups, drop-in sessions, promotional materials, officer referral and amplification through word of mouth. The application process involved completing an online form, after which grants were awarded through a panel process. A total of 20 grant applications were approved, with 1 grantee withdrawing from the project due to unrelated external factors. Additionally, 4 feasibility study applications were successful out of the 9 that expressed an interest.

Project delivery included three key aspects:

- **Grant management:** A grant panel reviewed and awarded applications.
- **Promotion and engagement:** Promotion through various channels led to online form completions and subsequent application awards.

- **Support and guidance:** Continuous support from the project officer, project support role and Business Wales helped grantees navigate their individual projects, from successful applications to project delivery.

Outputs

In terms of outputs achieved, 12 new enterprises received grants and non-financial support and a further 7 enterprises - previously supported in an earlier funding round - also received support, against a target of 15. In total, 19 enterprises received grants and non-financial support. Finally, 4 feasibility studies were developed, meeting the target of 4.

Several types of enterprises were supported through grants, including those operating in accommodation and food service, activities, arts, entertainment and recreation and wholesale and retail trade. In addition to this, a museum, a leisure centre, a religious retreat and a community interest company undertook feasibility studies through the fund. As such, the projects' breadth of impact spans a wide range of services, venues, and tourism opportunities.

Outcomes and Impacts

The project exceeded its target outcomes:

- 10 new enterprises and a further five enterprises part of the previous round of funding were supported in adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes, a total of 15 grantees against a target of 5.
- 11 new enterprises and a further 7 enterprises part of the previous round of funding were supported in adopting new or improved products or services, a total of 18 grantees, against a target of 10.
- A total of 16 jobs were safeguarded from four new grantees and five grantees that that previously received support, exceeding the target by one.

The top two impacts achieved through the project, as reported by grantees, were increased sales/business and improved quality of product/service. Feedback obtained through qualitative interviews garnered further insight into the impacts achieved. These included improvements to businesses' offerings through diversification and additional income streams, enhanced reputations among clientele and local communities, and increased site accessibility. In addition, impacts on the local economy were highlighted, such as improved services for deprived and rural areas, and increased potential for tourism in the region.

The project also made modest to strong contributions on progress towards net zero, promoting the Welsh language and equality of opportunity. It demonstrated a high level of additionality: around half would not have been able to undertake their intended improvements at all without the grant, while the other half could have done so only in the future, with the funding accelerating progress by anywhere from twelve months to several years.

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund also aligned itself strategically to Flintshire Council's long-term goals, directly supporting the destination management plan, and other local, national and UK SPF aims and relevant priorities.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund was managed effectively, overcoming challenges around timescales and minor delays. The model of wrap-around support continued to add value to grantees, especially to those less experienced or lacking confidence. The funded projects contributed towards a range of outputs and outcomes aligned to local, national and UK-wide priorities, filling a clear gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire.

Several recommendations emerged as a result of undertaking the evaluation, including reviewing and streamlining the application process, reviewing the timescales for application submissions and project delivery and the provision of more up-front information about project eligibility to increase reach among less confident applicants.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF): 2025 - 26

Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund

19 BUSINESSES RECEIVED GRANTS

supporting a range of wholesale, retail, hospitality and leisure sectors to undertake improvements such as building extensions, installing solar panels, upgrading customer spaces, enhancing accessibility, purchasing specialised equipment, improving outdoor facilities, and modernising operational processes.



BUSINESSES ALSO RECEIVED VALUABLE NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT

JOBS SAFEGUARDED AS A RESULT OF SUPPORT

16

"We employ around 30 people, it varies a bit on the seasons, some are part-time and full-time, this sort of funding supports securing those jobs. This project helped with efficiency and security. It will hopefully help us get more business, retain jobs and grow. Without this support we wouldn't have grown as quickly."



18 BUSINESSES ADOPTING NEW OR IMPROVED PRODUCTS OR SERVICES

"The project would have not gone ahead. It was the extra bit of funding that helped turn it from a standard restaurant to something more special. It has delivered significant uplift in sales, we've taken 2 extra employees on and the restaurant has only been open 2 months!"



ENTERPRISES ADOPTING NEW TO THE FIRM TECHNOLOGIES OR PROCESSES

15

"We've installed automated doors to improve accessibility and reduce heating costs. We have a lot of coach guests, and it can be hard for people to get into the building. The guests have been telling reception that it's been much better in terms of access to the hotel, and during bad weather the lobby feels warmer."



4 FEASIBILITY STUDIES

"This report will strengthen future funding applications that will improve seeking funding for improvements. [...] this piece of work was important to do, and there would have been a gap without it."



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1. Introduction and methodology

York Consulting LLP was commissioned by Cadwyn Clwyd to evaluate the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund – a project focused on supporting micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the tourism and experience economy within Flintshire to create jobs, boost community cohesion and increase private sector investment.

The project received £357,857 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF): 2025-26. The £900 million UK SPF: 2025-26 funding aimed to support local investment, to kickstart economic growth and promote opportunities in all parts of the UK.

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund aimed to deliver against the 'boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector' investment priority. For this, it provided capital funding to micro and small business projects seeking to undertake new-to-firm innovation, enhance productivity, become more energy efficient and adopt low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports.

The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the delivery of the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund and review progress against its intended outcomes and impacts.

Methodology

The evaluation methodology included a review of key documents, analysis of management information, consultations with key stakeholders and grant managers, and a survey of grant recipients followed by in-depth interviews with a selection of grantees.

Document review

A document review, in conjunction with project inception, was undertaken to inform the fieldwork with stakeholders and grant recipients. The following documents were reviewed:

- Cadwyn Clwyd's SPF Project Continuation bid documentation.
- Promotional materials for the Funds, application forms and guidance documents.
- Data-collection mechanisms developed for the monitoring of outputs, outcomes and impact.
- Relevant strategy documents, including UK SPF guidance¹, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act² and the Flintshire County Council plan 2023 – 2028³.

The insight drawn from the document review and inception meeting was instilled into the logic model for the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund (Figure 2.1).

Management information analysis

The analysis of management information was carried out to understand the project's performance against targets. This involved reviewing:

- Grant award panel meeting minutes.
- Quarterly progress reports.
- Project and grant recipient claim forms.

¹ UK Shared Prosperity Fund 2025-26: Technical note

² Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: the essentials

³ Flintshire County Council Plan 2023 – 28

- Project proposal forms for feasibility studies.

Fieldwork

Table 1.1 summarises the fieldwork completed during the evaluation of the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund between October 2025 and February 2026.

Table 1.1: Summary of completed fieldwork

Component	Fieldwork
Consultations with stakeholders	Consultations with the Cadwyn Clwyd project officer (1), Cadwyn Clwyd project support and Flintshire County Council tourism officer (1).
Survey of grant recipients	Distributed to 19 grant recipients. Received 19 responses (100% response rate) with 10 agreeing to participate in a follow-up consultation.
Interviews with grant recipients	Completed 9 online or telephone interviews with grantees.
Interviews with feasibility fund recipients	Completed 2 online/telephone interviews with fund recipients and 1 online interview with a consultant.

2. Project design

The Tourism Growth Fund project offered a 70% grant up to £17,500 in grant value (£25,000 project value) to SMEs operating in the tourism and visitor economy within Flintshire. The project also supported the development of 4 feasibility studies. The project was delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd – a social enterprise which provides guidance and support to communities and enterprises in North East Wales and further afield. The project was delivered in partnership with Flintshire County Council who supported in a strategic capacity. Delivered between April 2025 and February 2026, the project aimed to:

- Create jobs and boost community cohesion through investments that build on existing industries and institutions.
- Increase private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for micro and small businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, enhance productivity, and increase sales and revenue.
- Continue the funding to meet high demand for support and financial resources among community groups, further strengthening long term sustainability, enhancing operational resilience and ensuring continued community benefit.

There were two strands to the project:

Tourism Business Infrastructure Grants (up to £25,000)

A 70% grant up to the value of £17,500 (£25,000 project value) was available for SMEs.

Enterprises could apply for the business grants funding to support projects which:

- Undertook new-to-firm innovation.
- Invested in improving visitor experiences.
- Targeted new markets.

These projects thus needed to contribute constructively towards the tourism and visitor economy within Flintshire.

Tourism Sector Collaboration and Feasibility

Building on the feasibility funding from the previous SPF project, this element continued to support third sector, local authority (LA), and community groups to develop relevant feasibility studies, targeting the development of tourism infrastructure and the visitor economy.

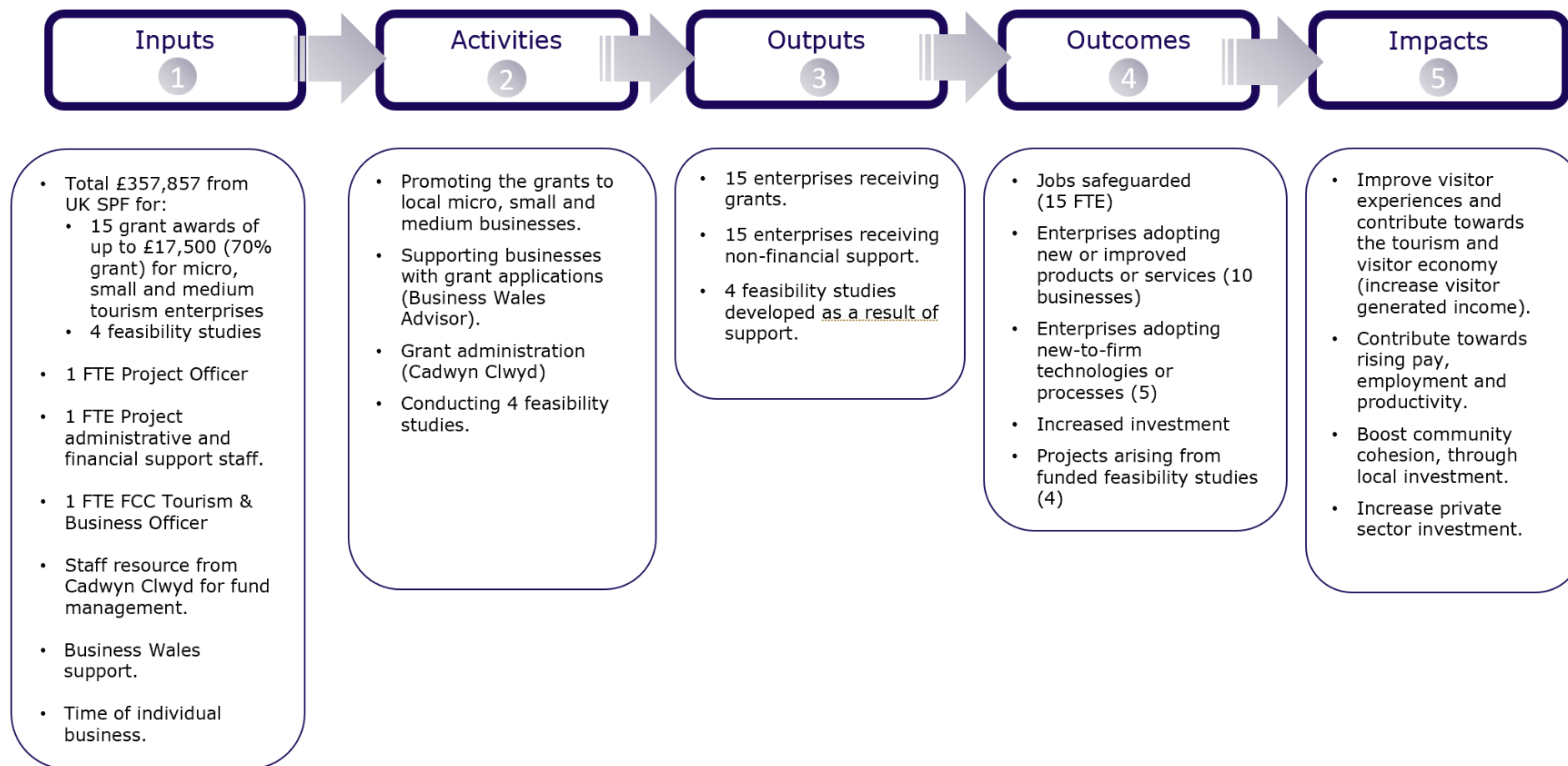
Projects under this strand were supported with development work required to deliver projects targeting the development of tourism infrastructure and the visitor economy (e.g. community groups, third sector, public sector) and entailed costs such as feasibility, consultancy, marketing, coordinator costs etc.

In addition to providing grant funding, the project offered a wrap-around support function, including project officer support and guidance, and support from Business Wales to help businesses access the funds.

Logic model

The project logic model (Figure 2.1) was developed by York Consulting and informed by a review of project documentation and conversations with key stakeholders. It sets out the activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project. The logic model was used to develop the evaluation questions which informed the design of evaluation research tools and analysis of project data.

Figure 2.1: Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund Logic Model



Key progress indicators

The key progress indicators outlined in Cadwyn Clwyd's SPF: 2025-26 Project Continuation bid are set out in the following tables. They include target outputs and outcomes, as well as project expenditure.

Figure 2.2: Planned outputs

Output Reference	Output indicator	Target
OP09	Number of enterprises receiving grants	15
OP10	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	15
OP26	Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	4

Source: Tourism Growth Fund SPF bid

Figure 2.3: Planned outcomes

Outcome Reference	Outcome indicator	Target
OC09	Jobs safeguarded as a result of support	15
OC11	Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	10
OC12	Number of enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes	5

Source: Tourism Growth Fund SPF bid

Project budget

The project was awarded £357,857 in SPF 2025-26 funding. Figure 2.4 outlines how the planned project budget was allocated.

Figure 2.4: Tourism Growth Fund project budget

Cost	Amount
Grants	£266,251
Consultancy	£27,401.74
Project delivery staff – Cadwyn Clwyd	£35,000
Marketing and publicity	£3,421
Evaluation	£3,579
Overheads – accommodation (Cadwyn Clwyd)	£9,972.13
Project management, administration, and evaluation	£12,232.13
Total	£357,857

Source: Tourism Growth Fund SPF bid

3. Effectiveness of project delivery

Grant management

Staffing

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund was overseen by a project officer from Cadwyn Clwyd. The project officer led on fund promotion, managing application processes, panel coordination, and overseeing feasibility studies. The project officer was supported by:

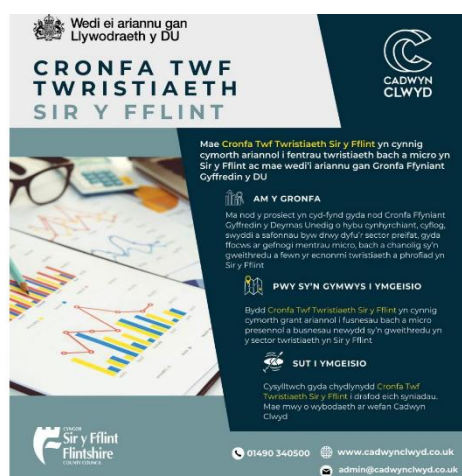
- Cadwyn Clwyd administrative and financial staff. They managed SPF claim processing, documentation checks, financial administration and overall monitoring.
- A Business & Tourism Development Officer from Flintshire County Council, who reviewed and approved applications as part of the grant panel and promoted the fund across Flintshire's visitor economy sector.
- Business Wales advisors who supported applicants with producing the required cashflow forecasts and business plans.

A grant panel made up of representatives from Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council reviewed the submitted applications and made decisions on grant awards.

Promotion and initial engagement

Both Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council supported the promotion of the fund by reaching out to their existing networks of SMEs, including those they had previously worked with. Both organisations also promoted the funds via social media, digital platforms (e.g. council website and Cadwyn Clwyd channels), targeting sector-specific networks and groups, and held drop-in sessions for businesses to explore how they could be supported. Other methods of promotion included sharing promotional materials via press releases, officer referral and amplification through word of mouth.

Feedback from 12 grantees interviewed for the evaluation indicated that businesses found out about the fund through various routes, most commonly directly from Cadwyn Clwyd or Business Wales, followed by word of mouth and groups such as Flintshire Tourism Association and Taste North Wales.



Of the 19 grantees who progressed with their application, 12 were new businesses and 7 had previously received support through the previous SPF project. Promotional efforts were focused on attracting businesses that had not previously received funding; however, several past recipients were also keen to reapply, submitting proposals for new and distinct projects, separate from those funded in the previous round. In total, 20 applications were received, with one grantee withdrawing due to unrelated external reasons.

The feasibility fund was designed to support business groups, town councils and social enterprises, where commissioning a specialist would support them to advance their development plans. Promotion of the funds for the feasibility studies seemed sufficient; there were five more expressions of interest than the number of awards granted.

In the view of key stakeholders, there were two main reasons as to why those organisations interested in the fund did not end up receiving grants for feasibility studies. The first reason related to timing or organisational readiness, with some grantees not in a position to undertake a feasibility study at the time of application. The second reason was the cross-border or cross-county nature of the organisations, which constrained how their projects could align to funding/budgets in other counties and/or their reach in Flintshire was low, thus making a feasibility study hard to justify on value/impact grounds.

Application process

In the previous round of funding, businesses were asked to complete an initial expression of interest and a pre-eligibility form. If eligible, they were then invited to complete a full application with support from the project officer and Business Wales. However, feedback received from the previous evaluation indicated that this process was too onerous for grant recipients. As a result, the process was simplified to requesting potential applicants to complete an online application with support from Cadwyn Clwyd. Twenty capital grant applications were received and completed, which went on to be awarded grants through a panel process. One grant recipient dropped out of the project due to unrelated external circumstances. The Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund received 9 expressions of interest of which 4 were awarded.

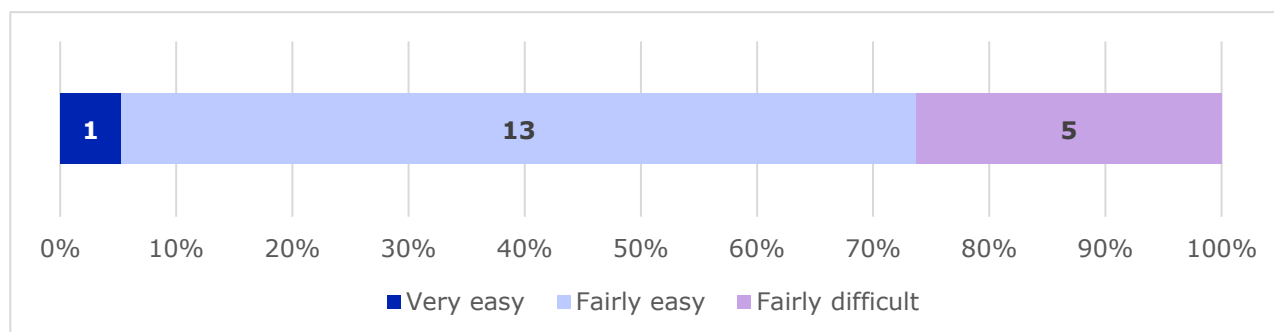
The support available from Cadwyn Clwyd and Business Wales was designed to help businesses collate the necessary information for the application and develop a business plan and cashflow forecast, which was a requirement to receive the grant. The project officer also supported businesses, especially those with limited experience of applying for grant funding, to make improvements to their applications. This enabled smaller and less experienced businesses to successfully apply for the grants.

As shown in Figure 3.1, the survey of grant recipients showed that they were generally positive in response to how they found the application process. Of the 19 respondents, one found it 'very easy', 13 found the process 'fairly easy' and 5 found it 'fairly difficult'. Qualitative feedback revealed that some grantees found the application process straightforward, especially if they had applied to the fund before. However, others highlighted challenges such as:

- Navigating the length of the application process.
- Clarity in the wording of some of the questions.
- Formatting (e.g., pop-up boxes) or technical glitches (most were mitigated with the support of the project support officer).

- Lack of a feature to in-fill information.
- Mandatory questions that were not relevant to grantees having to be answered with “N/A” or “0”.
- Not having separate forms for English and Welsh, which had a negative impact on readability and length.

Figure 3.1: Ease of the application process



Source: Survey of grant recipients (n=19)

Award process

Applications were submitted to the grant steering group panel, comprising of representatives from Cadwyn Clwyd (2) and Flintshire County Council (2). The Cadwyn Clwyd project officer also sat on the panel in a non-voting capacity. Prior to the meeting, members of the panel scored each application on the following factors:

- Innovation
- Economic benefit
- Outcomes
- Value for money.

Projects were subsequently discussed at the panel meetings. The grant funding panel received 20 applications in total, all of which were approved, though one project withdrew due to unrelated external circumstances.

Project delivery support

The project officers continued to support the businesses throughout the delivery of their projects, which was clearly valued by the grant recipients. Survey responses indicate that all found the support from Cadwyn Clwyd either ‘very useful’ (16/19) or ‘fairly useful’ (3/19), and interviewees praised the project officer for their responsiveness, helpfulness and knowledge. Some grantees felt like they could not have completed the application without the support of project officers, while others could have but not to the same quality or efficiency. Beyond notification of award, feedback from qualitative interviews revealed that the project officers helped keep on top of project progress, enabled delivery on time and supported with the claims process.

“[The project officer] was helpful, she was always available on the phone to support with the process.” – Grantee

The support from Business Wales was generally viewed positively by grant recipients, with most finding the support either 'very useful' (14/19) or 'fairly useful' (2/19). Two grant recipients stated that they found the support from Business Wales either 'fairly unhelpful' or 'very unhelpful'. One grantee stated that they didn't know how they found the support from Business Wales. The grantees interviewed expressed that they either could not have completed the application without support from a Business Wales Adviser, or would have been able to, though not to the same quality, certainty or efficiency.

Stakeholders reported that the delivery of the project went well, with most of the projects being submitted on time. There were only a few minor delays on account of contractor availability and weather.

Consultants that supported the feasibility studies were either contacted directly or recruited via a tendering platform (Sell2Wales). Grantees typically obtained three quotes. The panel then reviewed and approved the most suitable contractor. Insights from an interview with a consultant revealed that Cadwyn Clwyd supported them not only in administrative tasks, but also with commercial advice and report reviews.

"[The representative from Cadwyn Clwyd] is tenacious in finding commercial streams to explore how funding can be generated." – Consultant

Outputs

As shown in Table 3.1, the project exceeded expectations, with 19 enterprises in total receiving grants and non-financial support. Twelve of the businesses supported had not received SPF funding and support before. Seven of the businesses that received support had benefitted from the previous round of funding, and as the grant funded activity differed from the previous SPF grant, it was permitted to claim these as businesses receiving grant and non-financial support under this SPF transition project. This grant offered these businesses the opportunity to build on previous successes and maximise impact. Finally, 4 feasibility studies were developed as a result of funding, meeting the target of 4.

Table 3.1: Progress against planned outputs

Output Reference	Output indicator	Target	Actual
OP09	Number of enterprises receiving grants	15	19
OP10	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	15	19
OP26	Number of organisations receiving non-financial support	4	4

Source: Tourism Growth Fund – SPF claim form February 2026

The Tourism Growth Fund has supported a wide array of businesses in the following sectors:

- Accommodation and food service activities (8 projects)
- Arts, entertainment and recreation (6 projects)
- Wholesale and retail trade (5 projects).

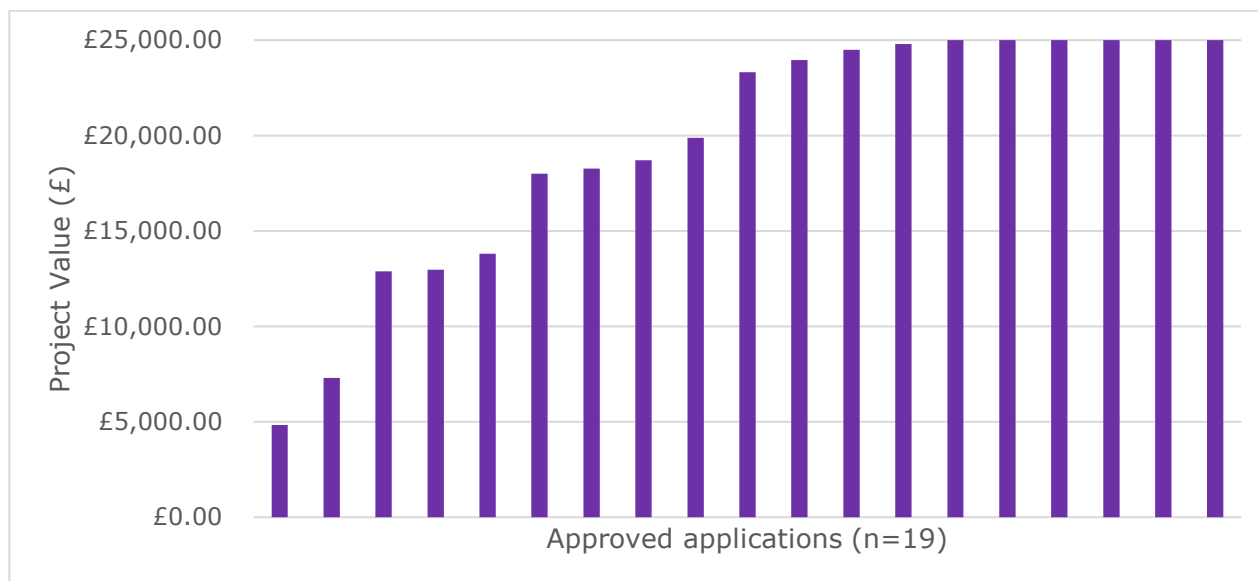
This broad reach of the Fund has enabled the project to maximise its impact across the Flintshire tourism sector, supporting varied services, venues and tourism opportunities.

The Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund successfully engaged with a range of initiatives, highlighting the diverse efforts to boost tourism and heritage in the region. The project supported the following 4 projects:

1. **Mold Museum & Library – ‘Treasures of Prehistory Exhibition’:** This project explored the development of a temporary exhibition called “Treasures of Prehistory”. It built on a previous feasibility study funded by the Community Renewal Fund to explore how the Mold Cape could benefit residents and support tourism in the local area. The grant covered promotion activities and the development of the exhibition panels. The project supported partnerships with other Museums, from the National Museum of Liverpool to the other museums in the county, where the exhibition will tour in the future. The project has also led to follow-up events and increased footfall in the museum.
2. **Divine Television Foundation Limited – ‘Assessment of prioritised and accelerated development of the visitor and tourism role of Divine Retreat Centre’:** A project to investigate the feasibility of developing the historic Divine Retreat Centre of Pantasaph’s visitation and tourism capacity. It included collating a baseline of current activities undertaken, which were then analysed in terms of contribution to Flintshire’s portfolio of tourism infrastructure and the county’s visitor economy. Subsequently, a forward plan business case was developed to support future investment towards the benefits and outcomes evidenced.
3. **Bettisfield Colliery Community Interest Company – ‘Bettisfield Colliery Old Winding House’:** This project built on a previous feasibility study funded through another round of the grant to transform the historic Bettisfield Colliery Winding House into a publicly accessible historic site for local communities and visitors with an interest in the industrial and social history of the North Wales coastal area. The current study aimed to identify a baseline figure of visitors on the coastal path adjacent to the colliery to support future funding applications.
4. **Gwella Wales Deeside Leisure Centre – ‘Nysa Sensory 360™: Deeside Leisure Centre Feasibility Study’:** This study explored the development of a full Sensory 360 Accessibility Model to improve visitor experience at Deeside Leisure Centre, with the goals of increasing footfall, improving accessibility, and supporting Flintshire’s tourism growth priorities. It included five distinct elements: a sensory infrastructure assessment, digital feasibility/mapping, visitor engagement & demand analysis, cost & implementation plan and economic impact assessment.

Awarded grants totalled £266,251. Figure 3.2 outlines the distribution of total project value for each business. Around half (10) of the funded projects had a value above £20,000, with 6 of those having a value of £25,000. In addition, 7 were valued between £10,000 and £20,000, with an average of £16,360. Finally, two smaller projects were valued under £10,000. This indicates a range of projects were funded, differing in size.

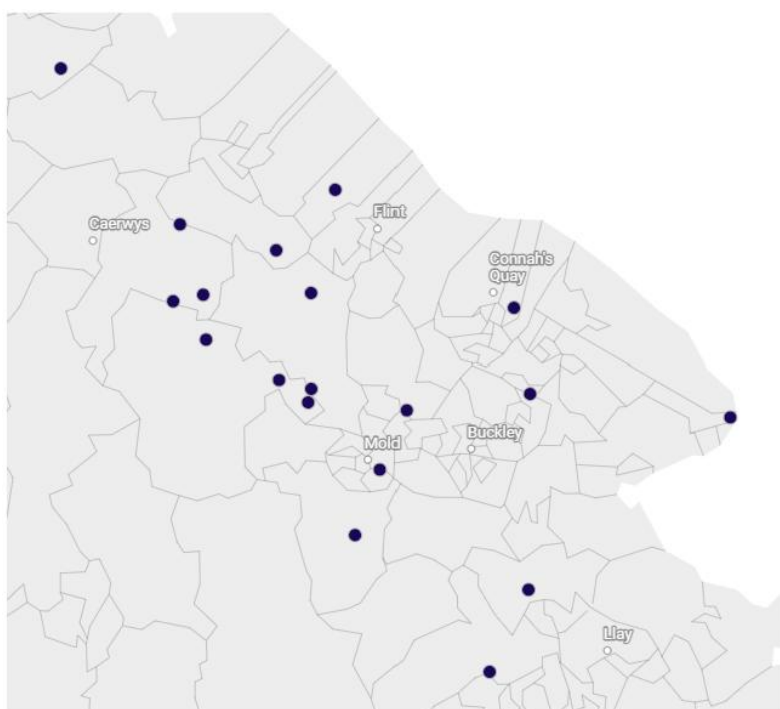
Figure 3.2: Distribution of approved projects by value



Source: Tourism Growth Fund - Outputs & outcomes February 2026

Figure 3.3 shows that the geographical range of the supported projects spans several towns across Flintshire, as well as more rural areas. This distribution suggests a broad and diverse impact across the county.

Figure 3.3: Geographical distribution of projects



Source: YCL analysis of funded organisations, February 2026

Challenges and enablers

Challenges described by Tourism Growth Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Awareness:** Grantees reported being made aware of the availability of the fund too close to the application deadline or finding out about it by chance. One grantee mentioned that

more information up front about the scope of projects that could apply would be useful, as when they first encountered it, they thought they would not be eligible.

- **Timescales:** Meeting the project timescales, from receipt of the award to the completion deadline, proved challenging, especially for projects involving building works. Grantees expressed difficulty in organising and managing external service suppliers to meet the deadline. Stakeholders also echoed this, reporting that some businesses, particularly seasonal operators, expressed hesitancy in applying to the fund based on the uncertainty of completing the project within the deadlines provided.
- **Procuring quotes:** Grantees sometimes struggled to assess which quote represented best value, with some receiving widely varying prices for the same service and others seeing quotes increase later in the project.
- **Administration issues:** Reported by two grantees, particularly around claiming back the funds once the delivery of their project ended.
- **Cashflow:** A couple of grantees expressed that it would be helpful to expedite receiving the funds at the end of the claims process, especially for businesses struggling with cashflow. One grantee mentioned going into overdraft to cover business costs while waiting to receive the funds.

"[...] the timescale it's always too short. There is a lot of time involved in building infrastructure or physical buildings." – Grantee

Case study 1 – Inflatabubble Ltd

Inflatabubble Ltd is an indoor inflatable and soft play centre. The managing director came to know about the grant through his existing relationship with a Business Wales mentor. The motivation behind applying for the grant related to increased competitiveness in the industry, and it was hoped that an interactive soft play football pitch would broaden the product range offer and give the business an edge. This project would have not been possible without the grant due to the recent increase in business rates. Although the cold season is usually a busy time, the football pitch has been in constant use since its implementation, with children frequently queuing to take their turn on it. Staff can now get involved in refereeing, rather than just helping children play safely. The new football pitch offers the opportunity for children from a deprived area to socialise through a team sport with others in their community and get involved in physical activity. Now that some inflatable elements have been replaced with the soft play elements of the football pitch, a lot less energy is used, which has also made the business more sustainable.

Enablers described by Tourism Growth Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Working with trusted providers:** Grantees had the flexibility to appoint suppliers they already knew and trusted, facilitating supplier-selection and giving them confidence.
- **Flexibility:** Flexibility of Cadwyn Clwyd, including extending the deadline of delivery if needed, accommodating changes to the project and allowing grantees to claim more than once to support business cashflow but also use funds underspent.

- **Wrap-around support:** Frequent meetings between Cadwyn Clwyd and grantees to progress applications and projects. This not only helped grantees stay on track to achieve their projects, but it also provided them with confidence.

4. Outcomes & impact

Progress against outcome targets

As shown in Table 4.1, the number of new grantees supported in adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes, adopting new or improved products or services, and jobs safeguarded exceeded the targets. In terms of the extent to which these targets were exceeded:

- **The number of enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes:** This achieved double the target among new grantees. A further five enterprises from the previous funding round also adopted new-to-the-firm technologies or processes, bringing the total to 15 enterprises.
- **The number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services:** This exceeded the target by one among new grantees. A further seven enterprises from the previous round of funding also adopted new or improved products or services, bringing the total to 18 enterprises.
- **The number of safeguarded jobs:** A total of 16 jobs were safeguarded from four new grantees and five grantees that that previously received support. This exceeded the target by one.

Table 4.1: Progress against planned outcomes

Outcome Reference	Outcome indicator	Target	Actual
OC09	Number of enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes	5	15
OC11	Jobs safeguarded as a result of support	15	16
OC12	Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	10	18

Source: Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund - SPF claim form February 2026

Impact of the funding

Grant recipients indicated that the funding supported a wide range of positive impacts for their business. Those who completed the evaluation survey reported the following impacts:

- Increased sales/business (15)
- Improved quality of product/service (15)
- More efficient business processes (9)
- Reduced energy costs/increased energy efficiency (9)
- Promoted networking and collaboration (8)
- Increased productivity (7)
- Increase in employee satisfaction (7)
- Improved workforce skills (6)
- Boosted community cohesion (6).

Other impacts reported by grant recipients included an increase in employee pay, environmental operator credentials and enhanced visitor listing.

"Overall, my experience with the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund has been very positive. The funding has made a meaningful difference to our ability to develop and promote the business." – Grantee

Interview feedback provided further detail about the varied impacts of the funding on participating enterprises:

- **Improved offering:** The funding helped grantees increase and diversify their service or product offer, adding additional income streams and improving profitability.
- **Improved reputation:** A couple of grantees reported that they have received positive feedback from clients about the improvements made using the grant. One grantee mentioned that due to the improvements, the business has been used to facilitate community events.
- **Increased accessibility:** Two grantees reported that the changes made through the grant improved how people moved around the site.
- **Supported the local economy:** Grantees reported that their projects supported their local economy in various ways. For some, the fund enhanced the services they provide to local communities, often in deprived, rural areas with limited access to facilities. Others reported that their businesses play a significant role in tourism in the area and the grant has positively impacted footfall and interest in visiting. In one case, the grant has enabled collaborations with the local council to support tourism advertising in the area.

"We are currently working with the council, supporting with some of their projects, so the grant is already paying off in terms of the value for Flintshire." – Grantee

The grantees clearly expressed their need for this funding. Feedback gathered through surveys and interviews suggests the funding was highly valued by the participating businesses, with all survey respondents rating the value of the funding to their organisation as 'very important'.

Case study 2 – Yvonne's Café

Yvonne's Café is a sole trader business located in Connah's Quay on the Wales Coastal Path. The owner's son was made aware of the grant through the local council and decided to apply to help maintain the business in operation. The grant was used to acquire solar panels to reduce running costs and replace old (and in some cases unsafe) outdoor seating furniture. Since the project was completed, the electricity bill has halved which has improved the profitability of the café and helped keep staff employed. The outdoor furniture, made of recycled plastic bottles, received a lot of compliments from visitors. Since the completion of the project, someone from the cycling association offered to promote the café on their website if small improvements were made for cyclists to store their bikes. Without the grant, the business might have been able to purchase solar panels and replace the furniture in 2 to 3 years' time but may not have been able to acquire the battery for the solar power at all.

Cross-cutting themes

There was evidence of projects having a positive impact on cross-cutting themes: net zero, equal opportunities and Welsh language.

Progress towards net zero

The fund greatly contributed to progress towards net zero, with survey data indicating that 15 out of the 19 projects supported green initiatives. Feedback from grantee interviews indicated that several projects focused on improving energy efficiency by changing heating systems, installing solar or improving processes to reduce energy consumption. Through some projects, existing site features were replaced with environmentally friendly solutions. Funding sustainable technologies and solutions also directly contributed to Flintshire's environmental goals, specifically under the 'Creating Sustainable Places and Communities' and 'Valuing the Environment' strategic policies.

Impact on equality of opportunities

A modest contribution was achieved through the fund in terms of impact on equality of opportunity, with survey data indicating that 6 out of the 19 projects addressed this theme. Some grantees reported that through the fund the businesses became more accessible and, as a result, opportunities for visitors to enjoy or make use of the local area increased.

Stakeholders also highlighted that inclusion was embedded in the delivery of the project, by making the application system accessible online, and Cadwyn Clwyd staff providing tailored support for businesses less confident in navigating digital processes or grant applications.

Impact on Welsh language

There is some evidence that the fund contributed towards the promotion of the Welsh language, with survey data indicating that 3 out of the 19 projects addressed this theme. Interview feedback and project documentation suggests that the feasibility studies supported through this fund promoted the Welsh language, for example, by making project reports and exhibition content available in Welsh.

Additionally, Cadwyn Clwyd developed bilingual promotional materials and communications about the fund, made the application forms dual-language, and the project officer, a first language Welsh speaker, supported groups in their preferred language. As such, the Welsh language was promoted throughout the duration of the project.

Additionality

All 19 projects funded indicated additionality was achieved. Around half of the grantees highlighted that they would have never been able to fund the projects by themselves. A few reported they would have had to rely on loans to implement their desired changes without the fund. Half of the grantees would have sought to fund elements of their projects without the grant at a later date. They reported that the funds they received had boosted their business operations forward from 12 months to several years. On the whole, these findings indicate a high level of additionality and that the project filled a clear gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire.

"[Without the grant] it would take significantly longer to achieve our business goals, and we would not have seen the benefits we are currently

experiencing. The only option would have been to apply for a loan.” – Grantee

When interviewed, some of the grantees mentioned challenges related to recent stagnation in their industries and increased business running costs. These circumstances led to an inability to undertake or progress their projects without receiving the funds from Cadwyn Clwyd.

Stakeholders highlighted that the fund complemented existing projects (other business grant opportunities e.g. town centre property improvement grants), but there are no funds that specifically support tourism and visitor-economy businesses.

Case study 3 – Tree Tops and Train Tracks

Tree Tops and Train Tracks is a company operating a woodland management, sawmill and eco-camping, glamping and tree top experience business in North Wales. The business had applied for the previous round of grant funding and was part of the Flintshire Tourism group, which is how they were made aware of the second round of funding. The director was hoping that through this grant they would be able to diversify their income streams, improve efficiency and stand out as unique within their industry. The grant was used to install a wood kiln, expand off-grid solar capacity and extend the cabin with a rope bridge and platform.

Since the delivery of the project, there has already been an increase in the amount of bookings for the cabin, with interest growing over social media regarding its new extension. The cabin itself was funded using the first round of SPF funding, which has allowed for year-round provision of services, with the company only operating seasonally before. The wood kiln has enabled the business to stop relying on air-dried timber, significantly speeding up the drying process from one year to one month. Not only has it increased the amount of timber they can sell, but they can also now produce furniture for guests, which has added another income stream. This has improved the productivity and resilience of the business. Sawdust and other waste can also be put in the kiln as fuel. Additionally, solar panels and battery storage were also purchased through the grant, enabling the business to use renewable energy to operate, which has reduced running costs. Without the grant, all these improvements would not have been financially possible in the foreseeable future, and it has boosted the business ahead by 4 to 5 years.

Strategic fit

In the view of strategic stakeholders, the fund's priorities and objectives aligned closely with Flintshire's long-term goals. The fund directly supported the Flintshire Local Development Plan⁴, the Flintshire Destination Management Plan 2024-2026⁵, and wider council objectives, contributing to an improved visitor offer, stronger local economic resilience, and progress toward carbon-reduction targets. Through the scheme, businesses were supported to upgrade, innovate, and strengthen their operational capacity in line with the council's economic vision.

Outcomes achieved under the strategic themes of sustainable development, innovation and inclusion already described above were supported by Cadwyn Clwyd by building capacity

⁴ Flintshire Local Development Plan

⁵ Flintshire Destination Management Plan 2024-2026

among small businesses and enabling them to engage effectively regardless of previous experience. Business Wales's involvement provided additional structure and quality assurance, ensuring projects aligned with sustainability and innovation goals. Together, the delivery model reinforced inclusive, developmental and well-supported participation.

UK SPF objectives: Supporting Local Business	
Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions, and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities.	A total of 16 jobs in Flintshire were safeguarded through the tourism enterprise projects undertaken under the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund.
Promoting networking and collaboration, through interventions that bring together businesses and partners within and across sectors to share knowledge, expertise and resources, and stimulate innovation and growth.	There is some evidence indicating that the fund made a modest contribution towards promoting networking and collaboration, particularly around creating opportunities to collaborate on tourism growth projects with other local organisations.
Increasing private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium-sized businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, adopt productivity-enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports.	The fund directly supported 19 capital grants and 4 feasibility studies for local enterprises and organisations operating in the Tourism sector, directly investing in and supporting the growth of the economy in the area. Through the fund, 15 enterprises were supported in adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes and 18 enterprises were supported in adopting new or improved products or services. Fifteen of the projects funded addressed some elements related to green initiatives, including improving energy efficiency and adopting environmentally friendly solutions.
UK SPF objectives: Communities and place	
Strengthening our social fabric and fostering a sense of local pride and belonging, through investment in activities that enhance physical, cultural and social ties and access to amenities,	The fund has enabled communities, especially those in rural or deprived areas of the county, to benefit from better services and facilities where such opportunities can be more limited.

such as community infrastructure and local green space, and community-led projects.	Several grants were used to fund enterprises that had strong connections to local heritage and a vested interest in improving tourism in the area.
National policy: Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	
A prosperous Wales: An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing fair work.	Fifteen out of the 19 projects funded supported green initiatives, including changing heating systems, installing solar, improving processes to reduce energy consumption and adopting environmentally friendly solutions, contributing to achieving net zero by 2050.
A Wales of cohesive communities: Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities	Improvements to buildings, facilities and services achieved through the fund have enabled an increase in opportunities for communities to connect, and for locals to engage in social and recreational activities.
A Wales of vibrant culture and Thriving Welsh Language: A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.	Several of the capital grant-funded projects and some of the feasibility studies supported through the fund incorporated a Welsh language promotion element.
A more equal Wales: A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances).	Six out of the 19 projects funded addressed equality of opportunity, particularly in improvements around accessibility of enterprises, demonstrating a modest contribution towards a more equal Wales.
County strategy: Flintshire County Council's 2023 – 2028 plan	
Supporting communities in Flintshire to reduce their	Fifteen out of the 19 projects funded supported green initiatives, including changing heating systems, installing solar, improving processes to reduce energy

carbon footprint. [Priority: Green society and environment]	consumption and adopting environmentally friendly solutions, therefore supporting communities to reduce their carbon footprint.
Resilient communities where people feel connected and safe. [Priority: Personal and community well-being]	Improvements to buildings, facilities and services achieved through the fund have enabled increased opportunities for communities to connect, locals to engage in social and recreational activities, and to benefit from better services and facilities where such opportunities can be more limited.
Enable business continuity and encourage appropriate investment [Priority: Economy]	The fund directly supported 19 capital grants and 4 feasibility studies for local enterprises and organisations operating in the tourism sector, investing in and supporting the growth of the economy in the local area.
Flintshire Destination Management Plan	
Marketing and Communication	The fund's successful promotional activity was, in part, a result of collaboration and information sharing between local networking, sector-specific groups, the council, Cadwyn Clwyd and Business Wales.
Great Products and Places	As the fund provided 19 capital grants and 4 feasibility studies to local enterprises and organisations working in tourism, Flintshire's destination profile was directly invested in. Emerging evidence suggests increased interest in tourism and greater footfall as impacts of the projects. One of the main enablers of the projects was grantees' ability to make use of established relationships with local suppliers to make improvements, not only providing them confidence, but also promoting the local economy. The feasibility studies developed provided grantees with a clear case of what is needed to make improvements for the visitor experience.
Partnership & Engagement	Fifteen out of the 19 projects funded supported green initiatives, contributing towards decarbonisation / net zero.

Added value

Evidence collected and reviewed for this evaluation has highlighted a range of key success factors that Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council have brought to delivery of the Tourism Growth Fund. These include:

- Existing Relationships to local networking and sector-specific groups and expertise, enabling **targeted support** and engagement from a wide range of enterprises and organisations in the area.
- A positive relationship with Flintshire County Council and a clear gap in provision, **denoting that efforts were complimentary rather than duplicative.**
- Experienced and knowledgeable project officers, **facilitating organisations (particularly those less confident or newer enterprises) to access the funding.**
- Wrap-around support enabling **efficient delivery** of the fund within the given timescales.
- The panel award process that ensured projects funded **aligned well strategically** with UK SPF goals and other regional and national priorities.

Together, these factors indicate that Cadwyn Clwyd and FLVC's delivery of the Tourism Growth Fund demonstrates strong added value.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund was effective in its delivery, with most projects completed on time despite challenges around tight timescales and minor delays.

Lessons from the previous round of funding led to a streamlined application process, including the removal of the expression of interest stage. While grantees noted some challenges with the application process, most of them found it easy to complete. Support from Cadwyn Clwyd and Business Wales further facilitated the process, with grantees reporting that they would not have been able to apply at all - or not to the same standard - without this help.

The model of wrap-around support previously employed continued to add value, especially to those less experienced with grant applications or newer, less confident businesses. After award notification, grantees received ongoing support to progress their projects and ensure timely delivery. This included tailored input for feasibility studies, with the project officer's expertise informing the final reports. Cadwyn Clwyd's flexibility, frequent check-ins and strong communication were key enablers of projects' success.

The 2025-26 Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund met its target SPF outputs of supporting new enterprises with financial and non-financial support. Grants were offered for 7 businesses that received support in a previous round of funding, in addition to the 12 new businesses supported. This not only exceeded the target but also built on previous achievements and maximised impact. The SPF outcomes were greatly exceeded through the support provided for new and previously funded grantees, particularly for number of enterprises adopting new-to-the-firm technologies or processes and jobs secured.

The fund made a positive contribution towards the local economy and community. Businesses reported increased sales, product quality, more efficient business processes and reduced operating costs, among others. As a result of the funding, grantees were able to make improvements to their offer, reputation, accessibility and employment opportunities. In addition to better servicing local communities in deprived, rural areas through the fund, grantees reported a raised level of tourist interest, already noting more footfall since project delivery.

These outputs, outcomes and impacts directly fed into local, national and UK level strategic priorities, from objectives described in the destination management plan and wider council strategy to UK SPF aims and relevant priorities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings detailed in this report, we would recommend consideration of the following for any future business grant projects:

- Review and further streamline the application process by ensuring clarity around wording, layout and system design issues. For example, having separate forms for English and Welsh applicants.
- Providing additional details about eligibility on the project webpage, and/or more clearly signposting on the webpage that businesses should contact the project officer if they have questions about eligibility, to reduce the chance that someone may incorrectly assume they are ineligible. It may also be worth exploring in future evaluations the types of information

applicants reviewed prior to making an application, to understand more fully their decision-making process.

- Flintshire County Council should continue to maintain their partnership with Cadwyn Clwyd to retain the sector knowledge for the distribution and management of grant funding in the future. The effective delivery during the 2025-26 period was made possible because of the relationships, experience and insight built up over recent years.