



Growth Hub Annual Report 2019-2020 (1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020)

LEP Accountable Body:	Shropshire Council
Local Enterprise Partnership:	Marches LEP
Growth Hub name:	Marches Growth Hub
Date of Annual Report:	May 2020
Name of person completing report:	Yasmin Sulaman
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Deadline for return to BEIS:	Tuesday 30th June 2020

This template has been produced by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to help aid the production of 2019-2020 Growth Hub 'Annual Reports'.

LEPs are asked to ensure that information is included that will be helpful to enable BEIS to assess how individual Growth Hubs are progressing and to aid the identification of best practice and local innovation to help inform the ongoing development of the Network.

LEPs are however, free to use an alternative format for their review (e.g. where part of LEP Annual Report) as long as the key content areas specified within the template are incorporated within final reports. This will ensure a level of consistency in order that BEIS and any externally contracted evaluation organisations are able to compare and contrast information presented by different Growth Hub models and typologies.

BEIS also need this information to ensure consistency and transparency and to help demonstrate the impact to HMT and others that the funding provided by BEIS in 2019-2020 has increased the level of take-up of business support and is helping to drive business growth in local places. This information is therefore critical in helping to inform the future development of Growth Hubs and in helping to shape future policy thinking.

BEIS therefore request that LEPs submit their Growth Hub Annual Report to **BEIS in word format (not as a pdf)** and that each section should provide the details requested in a short, informative and concise way without losing the key information. BEIS would also be grateful if LEPs avoided referring BEIS back to other reports for information, but provided the information needed to answer each question within the body of the template.

Annual Reports should be submitted to Growth.Hubs@beis.gov.uk no later than **Monday 25th May 2020** and copied to your Area Lead.

Executive Summary

- **Please set out the primary objectives and priorities of your Growth Hub for the 2019-2020 funding period and the high-level achievements from the last twelve months demonstrating how these objectives have been met (1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020).**

Introduction

The Marches Growth Hub (MGH) is an important tool used by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (MLEP) to engage with and support entrepreneurs/businesses.

The MLEP area spans 2,300 square miles and is home to 30,775 businesses of which 89% are micro businesses with fewer than ten employees. To be able to cover such a broad geographical area with limited resources and funding, the MGH has had to continuously develop robust strategic partnerships and excellent working links with three Local Authorities (LA's), two Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), our Higher Education Institutions (HEI), several private sector-led business network groups and government all of which are key to the MGH success.

The MGH receives £205k per annum from the Department for Business, Energy, & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) towards operating costs. The MGH is managed by the MGH Steering Group and Shropshire Council acts as the Accountable Body. During October 2019, the MGH received £31,578.94 additional growth hub funding from BEIS to support the delivery of EU Exit Readiness Business Advice and £33k via West Midlands Cluster to support EU EXIT Business Readiness Engagement. There was an additional £140k allocated to the West Midlands Cluster to support EU Exit Business Intelligence. The £140k remained with the Cluster lead, Coventry LEP who led on this exercise with the extensive support from each of the growth hubs within the cluster.

MGH Model

The MGH partnership model includes a virtual growth hub and website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk that is supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire. Since July 2018, virtual hub telephone enquiries have been handled by the National Business Support Helpline (NBSH). The MGH supports individuals and businesses by linking them to national, regional and local support including: -

- GOV.UK (in particular BREXIT/EU Exit and most recently COVID 19 Business Support)
- Department for International Trade (DIT);
- Intellectual Property Office (IPO)
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI);
- LA Economic Development teams and
- A portfolio of European Union (EU) funded programmes delivered by partners.

Due to the limited funding and resources, the three local authorities, University of Wolverhampton (UoW) and University Centre Shrewsbury provide facilities and Business Support/Economic Development staff to support the operation of the three physical growth hubs. The MGH partnership model operates with significant input from the aforementioned partners.

MGH Resource

The MGH project is managed by the Marches LEP Business Support Officer (BSO) who acts as the Growth Hub Lead. The BSO is supported by the LEP Admin Officer 1 day per week. The BSO role involves Government/West Midland Cluster liaison and reporting, virtual hub management (including the MGH website), budget management, supporting the three physical growth hubs and Access to Finance Policy. The BSO also leads on and provides secretariat support to MGH Operations Group, MGH Steering Group, MGH

Campaign Meetings and the newly formed Marches LEP Access to Finance Group.

MGH benefits from: -

- A low-cost high return model due to partner contributions (Local Authorities, University of Wolverhampton and University Centre Shrewsbury);
- Sound public sector and private partnerships;
- Effective co-ordination of business support provision;
- Highly regarded physical premises;
- Efficient one-stop-shop and signposting; and
- Successful marketing.

MGH Objectives and Priorities between 1st April 2019- 31st March 2020 included: -

- Continue to increase interactions (telephone/e-mail/face to face) with individuals/businesses and to signpost them to appropriate follow up support, including referrals to EU programmes (grants & loan), local authority business support and, where appropriate, private sector providers. This is encouraged by working with our PR and Marketing Consultants, to maximise awareness and engagement via the MGH website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk, e-newsletters, social media campaigns, advertorials and promotion of MGH events;
- Partnership development;
- Project development; and
- Extend communication and use of on-line support.

High level achievements 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020: -

MGH awareness, engagement and interactions -

- A total of **10,184 business** interactions took place through light touch, medium and high intensity growth hub support;
- A total **670** individuals have been helped to start a business;
- A total of **1,251** referrals were made to partners including EU programmes (grants and loans), local authority business support and, where appropriate, private sector providers;
- Across the three physical growth hubs, there was a total of **325** growth hub events (growth hub led and those held in collaboration with partners) with a total of **8,288** attendees of which **6,488** were businesses. High profile events were delivered in partnership with the MGH with themes including Access to Finance, Skills, Digital/Technology, Leadership, Sustainability in Business, Third Sector, Business Expo and Get Ready for BREXIT;
- MGH acted as gateway to **19** EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £17.5million. A further £4m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest EU schemes (Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), Business Growth Programme (BGP), Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined **£1,641,922** to Marches businesses between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of **100 jobs**. In addition, the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Growth Programme awarded **£3m** to Marches businesses during 01 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The investment will lead to the anticipated creation of **200 jobs**;
- MGH medium to high intensity data returns have identified that **£2,620,174.00** private sector match was secured;
- Customer satisfaction was **consistently high** (between 4.5 and 5 on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is poor service and 5 is excellent) for physical growth hubs support;
- Light touch engagement with businesses continues to be provided through a user friendly and easy to navigate website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk. During this period, the website has

featured **114** news releases and **86** pieces of online content related to business support on offer, including case studies. A link to all MGH case studies can be found here:

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/>

- The website received **34,044** website visits (**22,382** unique visitors). **Ten** digital newsletters were issued and sent to a mailing list of **2,000**. These newsletters were supplemented by regular joint local authority/partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives delivered to in excess of **7,000** businesses;
- **Three** major communication campaigns were launched during 2019/20, 1) to help promote the £10m EU funding available to SMEs, 2) support businesses ahead of leaving the EU and through transition and 3) support for businesses affected by both flooding and the Coronavirus pandemic. The campaigns were run alongside several mini campaigns targeted at businesses in different sectors and at different stages of the business journey.
- Social media statistics show that both followers and reach for Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have **increased** since 31 March 2019. Social media reach was a mixture of organic and paid for in this period.
- There were more than **238** separate pieces of Media and PR coverage logged as a result of MGH PR campaigns, content and news releases.
- The MGH has maintained a Brexit advice page for businesses since 2018, and during the early part of 2019, this was developed into a Brexit Toolkit which was updated weekly and more frequently once the Ready for Brexit campaign was launched by Government. Businesses were able to access up to date information on Brexit, sector specific advice and general help and guidance of how they can best prepare for a no deal or a negotiated Brexit process. This toolkit was supplemented with social media content as well as a dedicated Get Ready for Brexit digital newsletter;
- During February and March 2020, the impact of flooding and Covid-19 led to a surge in businesses seeking help from the MGH. This was evidenced by an increase in demand for business support through the three physical growth hubs, NBSH and the MGH website. Business engagement through the three physical growth hubs increased by 767% when we compare the number of enquiries received in March 2019 versus March 2020 (325 in March 2019 versus 2,818 in March 2020). The NBSH received a 464% increase in calls with 36 calls being received in March 2019 compared to 203 in March 2020. MGH Website saw a 133% increase in visitors to its business support pages in March 2020, compared to March 2019. For general business support and advice guidance pages on the MGH website, demand was up 85% in March compared to the pre-pandemic month. The MGH teams also played a key role for the local authority partners in distributing grant funding awarded by central government. MGH events and business engagement activity during this period shifted on-line to ensure businesses were able to access advice, support and information and a varied 'virtual' event programme which included MGH led and partner events;
- The MGH COVID 19 information page and toolkit for businesses was developed in March 2020 and this was updated in-line with all government announcements. The page also included links to GOV.UK, local authority and partner information. This page was supplemented with social media content as well as dedicated COVID 19 newsletters. 2,941 visited the dedicated COVID 19 information resource page on the MGH website in March 2020. A link to the page can be found here: <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/coronavirus-information-for-businesses/>
- The MLEP survey into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our business base and local economy was launched on 6 April 2020. The survey closed at the end of April 2020 with over 500 individual businesses having responded. A report containing the overall outcomes of the survey plus information broken down by sector and local authority area can be found here .
- As part of the 2019/20 MGH evaluation, the MGH has commissioned three impact case studies

to help demonstrate value for money and short, medium and longitudinal impact on business growth. These case studies were used to promote business success and help encourage business growth as part of the MGH £10m Growth Challenge PR & Marketing Campaign. They were also publicised in a number of business supplements during January and February 2020. Links to the three case studies are included in Section 4 of this report.

Partnership Development

- Partnership working has continued to be encouraged through the MGH governance and meeting structures, i.e. through the MGH Operations Group (two monthly), MGH Steering Group (quarterly) and MGH Campaign (two monthly) meetings. These continue the sharing of good practice;
- MGH continued to work closely with three Business Boards in Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire and Herefordshire. The Business Boards help to provide direct links to private businesses which helps both publicise and test the effectiveness of the MGH service;
- Success continued with collaborative events and workshops with both existing partners and newly developed partnerships across the Marches. Namely, a few include Shropshire HR, The Telford HR Forum, Hereford Means Business and several EU projects/programmes;
- MGH continued to develop new partner relationships with some recent relationships being with Small Business Commissioner, Be The Business – Business Growth Mentoring Programme, and with new EU project managers and many more. Further details are provided in Section 1 of this report;
- MGH further developed the excellent working relationship with local DIT team (delivered through Shropshire Chamber of Commerce) and West Midlands wide DIT team (further details including outputs/outcomes are provided in section 1 on page 14);
- As an outcome of the above activity, the MGH have further developed their stakeholder list to ensure wider engagement through the MGH newsletter;
- Covid -19 gathering of intelligence on the impact on the Marches Economy – In addition to the MGH weekly and adhoc reporting to BEIS, the LEP Chair hosted virtual meetings once every 2 weeks with local partners including the NFU, FSB, British Business Bank and two Chambers of Commerce, Business Board Chairs and Private Sector Board members to hear about the support their respective business groupings were seeking from the government and whether the government business support was right and reaching the businesses. Feedback included how businesses were responding to the government's recovery and social distancing guidance. The LEP Chair fed this information up every 2 weeks into the West Midlands Group of LEP Chairs which then informed the 2 weekly LEP Network meetings held with Ministers and senior civil servants from MHCLG and BEIS. The LEP Chair also provided regular written reports on the issues impacting on the economy to Marches MPs including the outcome of the MLEP COVID 19 survey.
- The Data Sharing Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding between BEIS, National Business Support Helpline and the LEP is still to be finalised. This has impacted on referrals from the NBSH to the Marches LEP. The MLEP are currently seeking legal advice on non-funding agreements.

Project Development

- All four Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) schemes were promoted on the MGH website, through the MGH Operations Group, MGH Steering Group, three Business Boards and via our business support networks. A number of events were held by the three physical growth hubs to help promote the scheme on offer.
- Following the successful Access to Finance Summit events and Strategy Workshops across the

Marches during 2018/19 and early part of 2019/20, the MLEP Access to Finance Strategy was approved by the LEP Board on 24 September 2019. The main objective of the Access to Finance Strategy is to promote the availability of external finance to local businesses seeking to grow thereby adding value to the local economy. The strategy also includes building capacity and capability within the MGH teams to support effective business engagement and appropriate signposting and referrals. To support the Access to Finance Strategy delivery plan, a MLEP Access to Finance Group has been formed and is led by LEP Board Access to Finance Champion Paul Kalinaukas and supported by the BSO;

- The MGH worked closely with and supported Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, both of which were successful in securing BREXIT Readiness Funding (for Membership Organisations who provide advice to business organisations);
- Through the West Midlands Cluster, the MGH supported an EU Exit Business Intelligence telemarketing exercise. As a result of the exercise, a West Midlands BREXIT report was produced and launched early March 2020. A link to the report can be found here <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/Reports/reports/Final-WM-Brexit-Report.pdf>
- Additional growth hub funding to support EU Exit Readiness Business Advice via Growth Hubs – Due to COVID 19, all planned business advisor activity could not be delivered, and this resulted in a minor underspend of £266.74 from the allocated £31,578.94;
- EU EXIT Business Readiness Engagement funding was allocated to the MGH via the West Midland's Cluster Leads Accountable body - Coventry City Council. MGH resilience activity was delivered with the support of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce. Due to COVID 19, all planned activity could not be delivered, and this resulted in an underspend of £7,097.50 from the allocated £33,000.00;
- The Midlands Energy Hub continued to develop its pipeline of projects within the Marches in line with the MLEP Energy Strategy. There are currently eight projects on the "shortlist" with a combined estimated investment value of £14M, generating over 63MW of renewable energy and saving 4,000t of CO2 emissions. Opportunities here are promoted through MGH.

Extend communication and use of on-line support

- MGH Campaign meetings are held bi-monthly. The group is made up of staff from the MGH virtual hub, three physical hubs, University of Wolverhampton and representatives from the PR/Marketing consultancy team. The aim of the group is to share best practice, strategically plan events in a collaborative and themed manner, support the promotion of events and ensure alignment of MGH marketing/branding protocols and comms framework.
- During March 2020, MGH events and 121 support moved to on-line due to COVID 19. On-line support has been well received by the business community and will be considered as part of the growth hub delivery strategy moving forward.

Growth Hub 2019-2020 Grant Spend Position

B. Please confirm details of the financial position in respect of your 2019-2020 grant.

Total BEIS grant for 2019-2020 awarded	£ 205,000
Estimate of any underspend of the 2019-2020 awarded at this time (please provide reason for underspend)	£Nil

Breakdown of grant spend throughout the financial year.

£ Funding spent	
Q1 – 1 April to 30 June 2019	£29,309.39
Q2 – 1 July to 30 September 2019	£44,369.60
Q3 – 1 Oct to 31 December 2019	£30,228.60
Q4 – 1 January to 31 March 2020	£101,092.41
TOTAL GRANT SPENT OR COMMITTED*	£205,000.00

Please provide a breakdown of the expenditure by activity to help inform a BEIS internal audit of Growth Hub budget spend in 2019-2020 (this can be taken from the Excel spend spreadsheet which accompanies every claim submitted to BEIS).

Note that this only relates to core BEIS Growth Hub funding and not any other locally accessed funding streams e.g. ERDF, etc:

Per activity as shown on your Schedule 1 form	Full year spend
	£
Growth Hub Operational costs	£55,459.16
Telephone	£475.93
Legal costs	£713.59
Hub website maintenance/hosting/SEO	£1,805.00
Skills Site Maintenance/hosting	£300.00
Hub CRM	£6,500.00
Marketing/advertorials/events	£74,260.66
3 Physical Hub development	£33,782.13
Information database licences	£30,120.00
Evaluation	£1,020.00
Steering and Ops Meetings/Sponsorship	£563.53
	£205,000.00

Route of BEIS Grant Funding through to paying of salaries/suppliers:

Please provide a short paragraph on the route the funding takes once it has been paid by BEIS to the Accountable Body. We are interested to learn details such as who actually pays the supplies invoices, staff salaries etc.

The Growth Hub grant is paid direct to Shropshire Council (Accountable Body) who hold the grant monies on behalf of Marches LEP, Shropshire Council also run the financial management system on behalf of Marches LEP, payment to suppliers and salaries are submitted to the financial system and then paid by Shropshire Council. Shropshire Council, within the financial system, records all payments made on behalf of Marches LEP and also the cash held, at the end of the year cash balances are calculated. All payments made are subject to the policies of Shropshire Council.

Please confirm what sources of additional funding and/or resources have been leveraged in by the LEP and/or Growth Hub in 2019-2020 to add further value to your Growth Hub service? Where possible please provide top line detail on how this funding and/or resource

is being used. What are the benefits of this to the Growth Hub and its customers?

Funding and Other Resources:

The MGH includes a virtual hub which is supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford & Wrekin. The MLEP area spans 2,300 square miles, so we have established these three sites with partners to ease access to the MGH services.

Due to limited core funding and resources, we work in partnership with our three local authorities (Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin), University of Wolverhampton and University Centre Shrewsbury who provide excellent facilities for meetings/workshops/drop-ins and Business Support/Economic Development staff (total of 7.5) to support the operation of the three growth hubs. These partnership contributions significantly enhance the scope and breadth of growth hub services offered. The MGH operating model is designed to maximise leverage of public and private sector funds and enable effective referrals to wider economic growth initiatives.

Local authority contributions to the MGH are estimated as below: -

- Shropshire Council – heat, light and operating costs related to MGH Shropshire premises and dedicated staff resource (estimated £130k per year);
- Telford and Wrekin Council – dedicated staff resource at Marches Growth Hub Telford & Wrekin (estimated £242k per year);
- Herefordshire Council – dedicated staff resource at Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire estimated £70k per year); and
- During March 2019, each of the three local authority Economic Development teams supported the growth hub teams in dealing with the very high level of business enquiries received as a result of COVID 19.

Our Higher Education (HE) partners contributions are estimated below:

- University of Wolverhampton provides premises, equipment and covers all rent, heat and lighting costs at Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin and Marches Growth Hub – Herefordshire – estimated to be £35K per year. (To note: During 2019/20, the university carried out a review of its business engagement activity. As a key MGH partner, we await the outcome of this review to understand possible implications to the MGH service in Telford & Wrekin. There is no change to the service in Herefordshire); and
- University Centre Shrewsbury provides rooms for events and conferences – this is estimated to be £2k per year.

EU Funding

MGH SME businesses had access to 19 EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £17.5million. A further £4m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest ERDF schemes (BEEP, BGP, MBIG and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined £1,641,922 to Marches businesses between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 100 jobs. In addition, the RDPE Growth Programme awarded £3m to Marches businesses during 01 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. The investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 200 jobs.

An information sharing event is held each financial year to support referrals. The last event took place on 3 October 2019 and similar events will be scheduled in 2020/21. The event brings EU project managers, growth hub staff, local authority economic development officers and other business support together to support relationship building and alignment of the business and enterprise support landscape. The event provides an opportunity to find out more about new projects as well as providing a refresher on some of the

more established projects. A member of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) technical team is a MGH Operations Group member and helps keep the group informed.

Skills Related Funding Secured by the LEP:

MLEP was successful in their bid for £75K funding from Department for Education to support the development of the analytical toolkit for Skills Advisory Panels. This funding is enabling us to have a better understanding of current and future skills and employment priorities that will impact on our area. This will result in an evidence-based approach to skills development programmes and may provide further opportunities for integration of business support and skills interventions, particularly in our strategically important sectors.

Careers and Enterprise Company

Work with Careers and Enterprise Company funded Enterprise Co-ordinators has continued in order to highlight the importance of links between businesses and schools as part of careers education and guidance.

European Social Fund (ESF) funding has been allocated to the following projects:

- **IN2 Youth Support Partnership** works with young people aged 15-24 not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET to support them into further learning or work.
- **Skills Support for the Workforce** provides training for employees in businesses with less than 250 employees. The training is fully funded and flexible to develop their skills, improve their prospects and support the growth plans of the business. The project also supports people affected by redundancy with upskilling and reskilling.
- **Building Better Opportunities** works with some of the most disadvantaged people in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin aged 19+ to help them overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion.
- **Building Skills and Growth Capacity** is improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems. The project supports the growth of SMEs and microbusinesses by ensuring they can identify and access skills development options that align with and unlock their growth plans.
- **Life Ready, Work Ready** engages SMEs, young people and schools and colleges to ensure there are easy ways for business and education to come together to share information on skills that employers look for, enable employers to influence activities in schools and to give people a better understanding about the jobs and skills needed in the local area.
- **Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology (MCMT) Skills for Growth** is improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems. The project supports SMEs in the manufacturing and engineering sector by assessing and delivering skills solutions essential to help them grow.

Each of the ESF Project Managers has met with the MGH teams in order to encourage referrals to their schemes and to better understand issues affecting the local business community.

Progress of Growth Hub in 2019-2020

C: Summary of Growth Hub progress in 2019-2020

- **Strategic Partnerships**
- Please confirm how the Growth Hub was delivered in 2019-20 (i.e. in-house, external, consortium of partners). Please confirm if this delivery model will continue or if there are plans to change this/re-procure in the next twelve months – if service is contracted out when do current contract dates end/need to re-procured? Please confirm:

MGH 2019/20 Model

The MGH partnership model included:

- Centrally managed virtual hub including a general enquiries e-mail address enquiries@marchesgrowthhub.co.uk and a website <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/>
- Telephone enquiries handled by the NBSH
- The virtual hub was supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire.
- The LEP Board Deputy Chair (Small Business Champion) chaired both the MGH Steering and MGH Operations Group.

Virtual Hub

During 2019/20 the MGH virtual hub service was delivered in-house as part of the LEP team. The team included a FTE BSO (Growth Hub Lead) who was supported by the LEP Administrator 1 day per week.

The BSO role involves managing the day to day operation of the MGH contract, managing the virtual hub (including the website), Government/West Midland Cluster liaison and reporting, budget management, supporting the three physical growth hubs and Access to Finance Policy. In addition to this, the BSO organises and provides secretariat support to MGH Operations Group, MGH Steering Group, MGH Campaign Meetings and the newly formed Marches LEP Access to Finance Group. Representing the MLEP, the BSO is Chair of the MEIF Regional Advisor Board which meets quarterly (tenure until November 2020).

Physical Growth Hubs

Due to limited funding and resources, we continued working in partnership with the three local authorities and University of Wolverhampton who provided facilities and generic Business Support/Economic Development staff (7.5 FTE) to support the operation of the three physical growth hubs.

The 7.5 FTE local authority staff which will be referred to as the physical growth hub team hosted a programme of events and outreach activity, offered a drop-in service and the opportunity to have face to face appointments. The growth hub team worked with individuals and businesses to identify their key needs and signposted and made referrals to appropriate in-depth support, including our EU funded programmes. Additional 2019/20 funding allowed the physical growth hubs to broker in skilled Business Advisors to support the delivery of EU Exit Readiness Business Advice.

The University of Wolverhampton continued to provide premises, equipment and covered all rent, heating and lighting costs at MGH Telford & Wrekin and MGH Herefordshire. The university carried out a review of its business engagement activity during 2019/20. As a key MGH partner, we await the outcome of this review to understand possible implications to the MGH service in Telford & Wrekin. There will be no change to the service delivered in Herefordshire.

PR & Marketing support for the MGH is provided by an external agency via an annual contract. The MGH products and services are proactively promoted through website content, regular MGH e-newsletters, social media, through e-marketing campaigns and advertorials.

The same delivery model will remain in place during 2020/21. Part of the additional £257k growth hub funding announced in March 2020 will help fund the much-needed additional resource to support the BSO. It will also allow the physical growth hubs to broker in business advisors, specialist advisors and admin resource to support the delivery of the growth hub service. This will help the MGH consolidate its quality driven model which in turn will support business growth and productivity.

- The primary organisation/s delivering the Growth Hub and whether they are a public or private sector organisation?

Due to MGH limited resources, we work in partnership with the three local authorities and the University of Wolverhampton who provide tier one Business Support/Economic Development generalists (5 FTE) to

support the operation of the three physical hubs. Customers can access 121 face to face support including support with completing funding applications and signposting/referrals to projects delivered by the network of public and private sector organisations.

- If delivered externally, the relationship under which the Growth Hub is delivered? (i.e. memorandum of understanding, service level agreement, informal arrangement etc.)

We deliver an internal growth hub service with partners and have in place a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and Data Sharing Agreement (DSA). These two key documents specify that direct referrals to partners are responded to within 48hrs, data protection protocols are followed, information on the website is maintained and kept up-to-date and KPI reporting requirements are met. In addition to this, marketing protocols are in place to ensure that MGH branding remains consistent. The SLA and DSA are under review at present by the MLEP.

- What do you perceive to be the benefits of this approach to the LEP?

This model is extremely cost effective and recognises the strength of our partners. It ensures that the service continues to be valued by our local businesses and the wider business support services network. It also helps ensure that the MGH service remains to be the first port of call for accurate, up-to-date and impartial information on business support across the whole of the LEP area. The model also aligns with local authority account management system and ties in with wider economic growth initiatives championed by the LEP.

- How did the LEP explore and support cross-boundary working with other LEPs, Growth Hubs and strategic partners in 2019-2020 to ensure value for money (e.g. cluster working; joint projects, sharing resources etc)?
- What approach has the LEP through its Growth Hub taken to continue to develop strong, inclusive strategic partnerships across the LEP and/or Mayoral Combined Authority area during 2019-2020?

The LEP has a strong track record in working with other strategic partners and work continues with: -

- West Midlands EU funded business support and innovation projects such as Business Growth Programme as well as supporting extensions of projects such as Manufacturing Growth Programme
- Three other LEPs on Cyber Security (Cyber Resilience Alliance). This is a shared vision to support the development of the cyber security sector with Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Swindon & Wiltshire. This is being developed under the auspices of 'Cyber Triangle' and discussions have been held with BEIS, the Home Office and DCMS to raise awareness of assets and initiatives;
- Worcestershire LEP to better understand the needs of the food and drink sector. Worcestershire LEP attended the Marches LEP LIS consultation session held in Ledbury in 2019.
- WM LEPs where the MLEP contributes to and supports the work programme sharing information on common issues and to develop joint approaches;
- Supporting Midlands Engine (including MEIF, Midlands Connect and Midlands Engine Trade and Investment Strategic Programme Group including inward investment activity and Midlands Engine Enterprise Sub-Group);
- Midlands Business Support Network – The BSO attends the network meeting which occurs four times a year. The network includes West and East Midlands GHUBs along with several national business support providers. Opportunities for cross border working are investigated as well as sharing best practice and coordination of events to ensure value for money is obtained across the wider area.
- Growing Mid Wales partnership to develop understanding of the emerging Mid Wales Growth Deal

and to identify potential opportunities for joint working;

- Better Business for All (BBfA) - The BSO is a member of the BBFA Steering Group which includes economic development and regulatory services representation from across the Marches, as well as business representation. A pilot BBfA in Shropshire is currently being developed but has had to be put on hold due to COVID 19. The pilot will help develop a co-ordinated approach to deliver greater consistency of advice, make it simpler for businesses to understand regulatory support available, improve communication with business, and demonstrate how good regulation is good business.

New LEP relationships/networks/Clusters include:

- West Midlands Cluster Group supporting delivery of business support including BREXIT, EU EXIT and COVID 19 projects;
- MLEP Access to Finance Group established in March 2020;
- To share best practice and understand areas for development, the MLEP participated in a Peer Review session in March 2020 with D2N2 LEP. This has enabled a better understanding of some operating practices that could be adopted by the MLEP, e.g. the potential capitalisation of LGF to fund resources.
- How has the LEP ensured that the Growth Hub has been embedded in any upcoming Local Industrial Strategies? What progress has been made to date?

The MLEP Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) were developed with partners and aligned with areas of specialism across the Marches region and the economic growth plans that each of the local authority partners have developed. An event was held at the House of Commons on 8 May 2019 to formally launch the SEP.

As part of the development of the LIS, MLEP held a programme of facilitated consultation events with stakeholders. This included MGH Steering and Operational Groups, MGH clients and partner projects. The draft LIS was submitted to government in December 2019 for feedback. Currently, the draft LIS is being updated taking on board government feedback. Moving forward, the LIS will be developed to include MLEP COVID 19 recovery plans.

MGH will continue to provide information on and access to a range of business support programmes, including those that are designed to support the LEP's key sectors as defined in its SEP and draft LIS.

Innovation and productivity improvement form part of the key strands of the draft Marches LIS. The LEP will work with strategically important companies (and their supply chains) to identify innovative projects that increase efficiency, reduce costs and drive productivity in our core and emerging sub sectors. The MGH will remain central to the delivery of and access to business support and innovation services.

1. National and Local Integration

What approach did the LEP take, via the Growth Hub, to develop strong, inclusive partnerships with all of the local and national players (public and private) involved in the ongoing development and delivery of the Growth Hub? Please provide a summary of working relationship in 2019-2020:

National services and local providers namely, FSB, two Chambers of Commerce, Department for DIT, IPO, UKRI and EU funded projects are encouraged to hold events and regular clinics at each of the three physical hubs (free of charge). This increases the opportunity for local businesses to update their knowledge, obtain quality advice and access networking opportunities.

Sector Deals:

N/A

Innovate UK (IUK) / through Science and Innovation Audits:

The MLEP continued to work with Ewa Bloch, Innovate UK's Regional Manager for the West Midlands to help understand how we can further support those businesses that have already received funding and how we can support additional businesses.

In addition to this, we promoted Innovate UK's services and events and continuously improved the information on our website.

Science & Innovation Audit

The Marches LEP is working with Worcestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire and Gloucestershire LEPs under the Cyber Resilience Alliance following the completion of the Science and Innovation Audit in 2018/19 (https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/industrial_strategy/A-Science-and-Innovation-Audit-for-the-Cyber-Resilience-Alliance-270618-MASTER-VERSION.pdf). Actions to develop 'Cyber Triangle' maximise the competitive advantage of this sector have been included within each area's LIS. The establishment of Cyber Quarter – the Midlands Centre for Cyber Security on Skylon Park in Hereford is a key asset for the Marches and the MGH plays a key role in delivering business engagement and business support activities.

Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN):

The physical growth hub teams refer businesses to the University of Wolverhampton Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) programme.

The LEP and growth hub teams also work closely with Mark Matchett who is the KTN lead supporting the 'Place' based innovation agenda in the West Midlands and a Knowledge Transfer Adviser - West Midlands.

Mark when he is able to, spends time at each growth hub delivering drop in sessions/workshops/seminars and also piggy backs onto MGH events. The MGH website is kept up to date to reflect the KTN/KTP offer including links to success data and case studies.

Department for International Trade (DIT) / Enterprise Europe Network (EEN):

All three physical growth hubs have a regular DIT presence which has helped inform both the MGH Steering and MGH Operations Group on emerging business issues and concerns. Events providing practical support to new exporters and new markets were delivered at each of the 3 physical hubs and as part of the MGH events programme.

A very successful 'Get ready for Brexit' workshop was delivered with DIT on 18 October 2019 at Shrewsbury Town Football Club with over 70 delegates in attendance.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-businesses-supported-to-create-brexit-action-plans/>

As part of the EU EXIT Business Readiness Engagement activity, a number of MGH resilience events were delivered to support existing exporters. Further activity will be considered in 2020/21 to raise awareness of the DIT support on offer.

West Midlands Chambers of Commerce (WMCC) summary of DIT and ERDF contract performance 1 April 2019 – 31 Mar 2020 –

Overall performance in the 2019/20 financial year in the Marches has generally been good. The year started well for both DIT teams and progress and performance against targets was maintained generally in line with profiles. However, the last three/four months of contract delivery saw a drop off in demand and subsequent dip in local team performance. Both the Shropshire and Herefordshire teams saw levels drop, and as such

they ended the year with some underperformance. It is important to stress however that overall DIT performance in the West Midlands resulted in all contracted targets being exceeded with the teams in the Marches playing their part in the delivery of yet another successful year.

The Marches position overall when compared to the other DIT teams operating in the West Midlands is shown in the following table: The Marches positioned (out of six)

DIT Target	Position
Export Win Value	4 th
Export Win Volume	5 th
New Exporter Volume	6 th
Unique Exporter Wins	6 th
MSB Exporters Volume	3 rd

The final positions show a slight downward shift in ranking when compared to previous years. DIT believe this to be in part down to some staff changes within the Shropshire DIT team but shouldn't be taken out of context given that there were some extreme results delivered in other areas that sway these results.

The Marches ERDF SME International Growth Project concluded on 31st March 2020. Between April 2019 to March 2020 the project provided grants to a total of 8 SMEs providing over £17,952 of ERDF funding to support their Internationalisation aspirations and promising the creation of 9 new jobs.

The project directly supported a total of 82 SMEs, with 50 SMEs receiving ERDF grant funding to support them with International Growth. The total value of grants issued was £99,533 against an overall target spend of £115,328 giving a small underspend of £15,795. The final position ERDF output position is summarised as follows for :

ERDF Output	Target	Achieved
C1 Number of Businesses Assisted	91	82
C2 Number of Businesses receiving Grants	43	50
C4 Number of Businesses receiving 12 hr assists	48	44
C5 Number of New Enterprises Supported	3	1
C8 Number of New Jobs Created	21	31

The ERDF project overall exceeded on all its targets with the exception of the C1 target where the DIT team fell short on the West Midlands target by just 49. This contrasts with a significant over achievement of the C8 target, where 276 new jobs were achieved against the West Midlands target of 142. Again, with the teams in the Marches playing their part in this result.

Over the course of the year, DIT supported 120 businesses in the Marches through 29 separate activities including events, clinics and masterclass. No Marches companies were involved in Mission activity during the period although these were promoted.

DIT and WMCC value their partnership with the MGH and continue to seek innovative ways to build and strengthen their work. The MGH have been extremely supportive of the Export agenda and have jointly delivered a number of highly valued and successful events including the delivery of DIT 'Get ready for Brexit' workshop, as well as adding value both in amplifying DIT messaging, increasing network reach and in

delivering direct referrals to the DIT and ERDF programme.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-businesses-supported-to-create-brexit-action-plans/>

EEN

Referrals were also made to the EEN and the MGH continues to promote their services and events.

British Business Bank (BBB):

MGH continued to work very closely with the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) Senior Relationship Manager and MEIF fund managers to help support outreach activity and raise the profile of the funds available. The MEIF Senior Relationship Manager is a member of the MGH Operations Group and leads on a Growth Hub8 Group which the MGH teams attend and support.

Marches MEIF Progress

Current MEIF Fund of Funds position at the end of March 2020: -
£64.4m invested and loaned in 317 investments/loans in 257 SMEs
Of which the following was in The Marches;
£1.83m invested and loaned in 19 investments/loans in 17 SMEs

MEIF Fund of Funds position for the financial year (1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020):-
£40.13m invested and loaned in 180 investments/loans in 130 SMEs
Of which the following was in The Marches;
£1.05m invested and loaned in 9 investments/loans in 8 SMEs

The MEIF Senior Relationship Manager Ryan Cartwright is a member of the MGH Operations Group. Ryan with the support of the Local Experts in Residence helped delivered alternative finance training to the growth hub teams to help build capability and capacity.

Two members of the MGH team represent Marches LEP on the MEIF Regional Advisory Board (RAB). The BSO is currently the MEIF Regional Advisory Board Chair.

Intellectual Property Office (IPO):

The IPO contact Sophie Walker continues to actively work with the growth hub teams. Where possible, Sophie uses the hot desk facility and delivers events at each of the 3 physical growth hub locations to ensure that local businesses are able to tap into relevant patent, trademark and intellectual property support. During April 2019 - March 2020, Sarah supported 3 businesses in the Marches via a workshop. Sophie is currently planning on-line training for new advisors and workshops for both advisors and businesses.

Be the Business (Productivity Leadership Group):

Banks:

Be the Business (Productivity Leadership Group)

The Mentoring for Growth Programme is now available to Marches SMEs. <https://www.bethebusiness.com/group-event/mentoring-for-growth/>. Following a meeting with Andrew Cleobury - Marches Mentoring Advisor in September 2019, Andrew is actively working with all three growth hubs to explore possible referrals to the programme. Andrew and Damini Sharma, MD of OM Group and a mentor from the programme delivered a very informative presentation to the MGH Operations Group on 20th February 2020. Since then, Andrew has received 2 mentor suggestions for the programme and work continues to help develop a Marches business mentoring relationship.

Banks

The growth hub teams have continued to work with the MLEP's Experts in Residence Gemma Bourne, and Deborah Norton.

The BBB MEIF Senior Relationship Manager and the Experts in Residence (NatWest Bank) have supported growth hub team training to help support team capability and capacity. Training was delivered in January and March 2020 and this activity was key aspects of the Marches LEP Access to Finance Strategy.

The Experts in Residence have delivered monthly mini NatWest Boost your Business events in partnership with the MGH. In March 2020, this activity was put on hold due to COVID 19.

The MGH teams have delivered a number of very successful high-profile Access to Finance events in partnership with Banks and alternative finance providers. Full details can be found in the links below:
<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2019/08/06/funding-summit-hailed-huge-success/>
<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2020/01/27/telford-finance-event-hailed-huge-success/>

Marches LEP Access to Finance Strategy

Following the successful Access to Finance Summit events and Strategy Workshops across the Marches during 2018/19 and early part of 2019/20, the Marches LEP Access to Finance Strategy was approved by the LEP Board on 24 September 2019. The main objective of the Access to Finance Strategy is to promote the availability of external finance to local businesses seeking to grow thereby adding value to the local economy. The strategy also includes building capacity and capability within the MGH teams to support effective business engagement and appropriate signposting and referrals. To support the Access to Finance Strategy delivery plan, a MLEP Access to Finance Group (sub-group of the MLEP) has been formed and is chaired by LEP Board Access to Finance Champion Paul Kalinaukas and supported by the MGH BSO. To date, one telephone call with the group has been held in March 2020. Group activity is currently on hold due to COVID 19.

ICAEW / Accountants:

The MGH have continued to link into ICAEW members and other accountants through the Professionals Partnership in Shropshire and Telford which is supported by the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. MGH Herefordshire links into a similar network in Herefordshire through events and business clinics run by accountancy and finance professionals.

Angel Networks:

MGH continues to promote the BBB's Regional Angels Programme. The programme is designed to help reduce regional imbalances in access to early stage equity finance for smaller businesses across the UK. It aims to address this issue by increasing the availability, supply and awareness of angel and other early-stage equity investments across the country, particularly in areas where this type of finance is less readily available.

Referrals into the MEIF also offers access to a range of finance options include venture capital and business angels.

At present, there is no dedicated Angel Networks within the Marches area.

Universities/Business Schools:

MGH Hub Telford & Wrekin and MGH Herefordshire are sponsored and hosted by University of Wolverhampton which allows access to information on Higher Education including undergraduate, post graduate programmes, degree level apprenticeships and business support projects.

Events being delivered by University Centre Shrewsbury, the University of Wolverhampton and Harper Adams University are promoted on the MGH website's events calendar and information on training providers, FE and HE programmes is contained on its skills micro site at

<http://skillssearch.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/>. NMITE, the emerging higher education institute in

Herefordshire, is also developing a working relationship with MGH Herefordshire.

Business Intermediaries (e.g. Chambers, FSB etc):

All three physical growth hubs are very supportive of FSB, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and Women In Rural Enterprise (WIRE) activity and events that take place across the county. Where possible, business events are arranged in partnership with these organisations and information on forthcoming events is shared to avoid duplication. The MGH also promote partner events on the MGH events calendar.

FSB and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce are represented on the MGH Steering Group. Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce are yet to confirm a representative.

Both Shropshire and Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce supported the MGH to deliver a programme of resilience events (West Midlands Cluster EU EXIT Business Readiness Engagement funding).

Local/Combined Authorities:

As detailed earlier, our 3 local authorities are critical to the delivery of the MGH. They provide staffing for the 3 physical growth hubs which enables effective referrals to core local authority economic growth and business support services.

Enterprise Zones:

MGH Herefordshire is based on Hereford Enterprise Zone (HEZ) which is the UK's only Enterprise Zone with a defence and cyber security focus. Business located on the Enterprise Zone are encouraged to use the growth hub for access to business advice and information. In 2020/21 MLEP will explore opportunities to access HEZ funding to sponsor the delivery of events at MGH – Herefordshire.

Catapults/Incubators and Accelerators:

MLEP works closely with the Manufacturing Technology Centre (MTC) - part of the High Value Manufacturing Catapult to identify opportunities for joint working. The MGH promotes events delivered at MTC and other Catapult sites in the UK.

Hereford Shell Store Business Incubation and Innovation Centre

Preparatory work has begun for the redevelopment of the derelict building on HEZ (Skylon Park). This will be the first Incubation Centre in the Marches. The project will help create more than 2,000 square metres of employment space, with room for new and growing businesses to set up and expand alongside facilities for development and innovation, presently earmarked for the new NmiTE University in Herefordshire. The centre was due to be completed in 2020 but could be delayed due to COVID 19.

<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/shell-store-development-to-create-a-business-incubation-and-innovation-centre/>.

Start Up and Growth Accelerator Programme

MGH Shropshire is developing a pilot Start Up and Growth Accelerator Programme for Shropshire working in partnership with a media company.

Better Business for All (BBfA)/Regulators:

The MLEP is a member of the BBFA Steering Group which includes economic development and regulatory services representation from across the Marches, as well as business representation.

A pilot BBFA project is in progress for Shropshire at present. It was agreed by the Steering Group that surveys – one for businesses and one for local regulatory officers who interact with businesses will be conducted in the first instance.

Both surveys have now been conducted and results are yet to be analysed. The results of these surveys will be the foundation for an event for local businesses and regulators to agree a way forward for BBfA in Shropshire.

Libraries/Business & IP Centres:

MGH Shropshire have a place on the Shropshire Libraries mobile library to support outreach activity in rural areas across the county. The mobile library visits 240 villages during a two-week period.

MGH - Shropshire also hold 121 surgeries at different libraries every month in the market towns. MGH Herefordshire and MGH Telford & Wrekin are currently exploring opportunities with their local libraries. This outreach activity is currently on hold due to COVID 19.

Enterprise Agencies:

There is no Enterprise Agency presence in the Marches however MGH works with and often hosts events by organisations that champion business start-up, e.g. Women in Rural Enterprise, Shropshire Youth Support Trust, Prince's Trust etc.

Others (public and private):

BEIS are particularly keen to know about any good examples of partnership working with the private sector. If there are any key private sector partners that you wish to mention please do so here, including a short summary of the type of activity taking place and how it could benefit the wider Network.

Below are some of the good examples of partnership working with the private sector.

Business Boards

The MLEP is private-sector led - it has the voice of its business community at its heart and engages with employers through the three Business Boards in Shropshire, Telford and Herefordshire. As well as engaging with individual businesses, the Business Boards also work with organisations including the Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, National Farmers Union and local authorities. A representative from each of the three business boards sit on the MGH Steering Group.

LEP Network

The Network sees all 38 of the UK partnerships come together on areas of shared importance, to work with Government and share knowledge and good practice.

Midlands Business Support Network

The network includes National Business Support Providers along with the West and East Midlands Growth Hubs. Opportunities for cross border working will continue to be investigated as well as sharing best practice and coordination of events to ensure value for money is obtained across the wider area.

IOD & IOEE

The MGH continues to work closely with the Institute of Directors (IOD) and Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE).

Shropshire Wildlife Trust Partnership

MGH Shropshire team is supporting Shropshire Wildlife Trust with the Meres & Mosses Business Environment Network. A successful high-profile Sustainability in Business Summit was delivered during 2019/20 but due to COVID 19 the planned Refuse, Reduce, Recycle and Reuse event has been postponed to 10 February 2021. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2020/02/11/successful-sustainability->

[summit-draws-packed-crowd/](#)

Partners for Social Enterprise Networking

MGH Shropshire continue to support a Social Enterprise Programme which includes high profile events, the last of which was delivered successfully in November 2019. Future events will be planned in due course.

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2019/12/10/spark-social-event-hailed-huge-success/>

The Entrepreneur Club

Work continues with The Entrepreneur Club and a wealth planning specialist to deliver a suite of workshops for growth businesses. The workshops are followed by business 1:1 surgery sessions with the MGH Shropshire team.

CATAX

CATAX are sponsoring MGH Shropshire, allowing the team to use their designated meeting rooms at Shrewsbury Town Football club and The Shrewsbury Club. The growth hub team are also part of joint business visits with CATAX to help raise awareness of R & D tax relief and Capital Allowances on commercial properties.

Retail Collaborations

This initiative involves retail businesses taking up an empty unit in a shopping centre for free for a set period of time. Businesses are asked to complete an expression of interest with successful businesses securing a unit space. The successful businesses then go on to trial the retailing unit for a set period of time. Successful outcomes are measured as permanent take-up of units in the Shopping Centre. MGH - Shropshire will revisit this initiative in the future once COVID 19 lockdown restrictions are eased.

HR Collaborations

The growth hubs actively worked with local HR specialists and delivered workshops and events encompassing employment and company law. The workshops and events were followed-up with 121 meetings and business surgeries.

MGH Telford & Wrekin supports the local HR Forum which is a private sector led networking and discussion group made up of HR professionals from the area's larger employers. This enables referrals to the MGH's events programmes and wider support.

MGH Shropshire are planning a HR Conference around Leadership & Performance in 2020 following a very successful event in September 2019 at Shrewsbury Town Football Club. This event saw 170 delegates from across the region come together for a day of inspiring talks and workshops, delivered by several internationally renowned figures. <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2019/10/leadership-conference-2/>.

Growth Hub Gurus

MGH Telford & Wrekin's Growth Hub Guru Club is an extension to the growth hub team and delivers a series of free interactive workshops based around each stage of the business journey. The gurus share their expertise and work with businesses to help them overcome barriers. The initiative has become a core part of MGH Telford & Wrekin events programme offer.

Marches Skills Provider Network

The first Herefordshire Skills Show took place on 3 July 2019 in partnership with Marches Skills Provider Network <http://www.mspn.co.uk/>. The event was very well organised and attended and received extremely positive feedback from delegates. Due to the success, a second event is being planned for 2020.

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/skills-show-targets-hard-to-reach-workers/> MSPN also supported the Shropshire All About Apprenticeships event on 5 February 2020 and the Telford

Apprenticeship, Employment and Skills Show on 5 March 2020.

EU Programmes

The MGH acted as the gateway to 19 EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £17.5million. A further £4m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest ERDF schemes (BEEP, BGP, MBIG and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined £1,641,922 to Marches businesses between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 100 jobs. In addition, the RDPE Growth Programme awarded £3m to Marches businesses during 01 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 200 jobs.

The growth hub teams, and project managers continue to work very closely to help maximise promotion and up-take. New projects are invited to speak at the MGH Operations Group.

Local Authority Town Councils and Town Clerks

The growth hub teams continue to actively work with the Town Councils and Town Clerk teams to help support outreach activity. This includes growth hub presentations at Town Clerk meetings to help raise awareness of the MGH service.

Festival of Enterprise 2019

The MGH teams exhibited at the Growth Hub Village which was part of the Festival of Enterprise 2-day event at the NEC Birmingham on 23rd & 24th October 2019. The Festival of Enterprise is the only UK business exhibition dedicated to helping accelerate start-ups and scale ups. The event included: -

- 5 free to attend keynote stage (Start up, Scale up, Marketing, Funding and high-profile Business leaders);
- Over 120 talks from business experts and major brands from the worlds of consulting, innovation, funding, marketing, technology and leadership;
- Over 150 exhibitors;
- Opportunities to network;
- Drinks receptions; and
- Fun features (simulators and tastings).

There was no charge to participate in the Growth Hub Village in 2019 – all the MGH was asked to do was help promote the show to our database and via our website. The MGH teams found the event useful in particular, networking with the other business support/growth hub exhibitors and came away with a number of business enquiries. There is a cost associated with the 2020 event which is deemed not to be value for money.

Charity Sector Support

MGH Shropshire team have worked with partners to deliver 1:1 surgery support for the Charity Sector concentrating on Charity Accounting and Charity Governance, i.e. trustee roles and responsibilities.

Herefordshire Means Business

MGH Herefordshire have further developed their partnership and supported the Business EXPO in May 2019 which was attended by 600+ delegates. At the event, the growth hub lead had the opportunity to connect with exhibitors and explore collaborative working as well as make new contacts and business leads.

2. Governance

- Please confirm the governance arrangements that were in place in 2019-2020 and the role of the LEP and Accountable Body in providing oversight and ensuring compliance of the Growth Hub. If your governance arrangements changed during the funding period/or are set to change in the next three months, please provide details of:
 - Why governance arrangements were/need to be change(d)?
 - What new measures were/will be put in place?

Please ensure you include the role of the LEP and Accountable Body in providing oversight and compliance of the Growth Hub (including line of sight back to LEP Board and national LEP Local Growth Assurance Framework). Do include charts/diagrams if possible.

2019/20 MGH Governance Arrangements

Governance arrangements have not changed since the submission of the 2019/20 Schedule 3 and Growth Hub Bi-Annual report. During the next 3 months, there are plans to appoint a Corporate Services Director who will be responsible for MLEP Governance and compliance with the responsibilities associated with becoming company limited by guarantee in 2019.

The MLEP Board oversees the setting of the strategic direction for the MGH and receives progress updates from the Chair of the MGH Steering Group. The last MGH update was provided to the LEP Board on 24 September 2019. Shropshire Council acts as the MLEP's Accountable Body.

The MGH Steering Group is a sub-group of the LEP Board and meet quarterly. On joining the MGH Steering Group, each member (excluding local authority partners) are asked to complete the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government template of the Register of Members' Interest Form and this is reviewed on an annual basis by the LEP Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in line with the LEP Conflicts of Interest Policy. In addition to this, members are asked to declare any interests at the start of all meetings for any relevant agenda items. The group has a very important role to play with regards to governance and provides guidance on key issues such as policy, objectives, budgetary control, marketing strategy and resource allocation.

The MGH governance is outlined in the Accountability & Assurance Framework including the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the group. The TOR is reviewed annually, and the election of the Chair takes place every two years. The Chair of the MGH Steering Group is also the Small Business Champion on the LEP Board. MGH Steering Group agendas and minutes are prepared in line with the TOR.

The MGH Operational Group is an officer level working group which meets every two months to ensure that activities are co-ordinated effectively across the LEP managed virtual hub and the partner-led three physical hubs in Shrewsbury, Telford & Wrekin and Hereford. The group reviews business support services from all partners in order to manage referrals, monitor outputs and share information.

The MLEP team meets with the Accountable Body (finance team) monthly to review spend against profile and to discuss any concerns. The information from this meeting is used to update the Performance Risk and Management Committee (PRMC) which meet every 2 months and is a sub-group of the LEP Board comprising 3 LEP Board members, three Section 151 Officers and the LEP CEO.

BEIS quarterly claim deadline dates are noted at the beginning of the financial year. Internal deadline dates are agreed with the finance team to ensure that quarterly claims are checked and submitted on time with the appropriate evidence.

The MGH Audit report is carried out by Shropshire Council and the audit team are given sufficient notice to carry out the work required. This helps ensure the year-end reporting deadline is met. The audit service provided by Shropshire Council is a **chargeable service**.

The MGH Steering Group Membership comprises:

- Chair (private)- LEP Board Member/ Chair of Telford Business Board (nominated small business champion)
- Herefordshire Business Board (private)
- Shropshire Business Board Representative (private)
- Telford & Wrekin Business Board Representative (private) – New representative TBC
- Shropshire Chamber of Commerce (private)
- Marches Skills Provider Networks (private)
- Federation of Small Businesses (private)
- Department for International Trade (public)
- University of Wolverhampton (public)
- Telford & Wrekin Council (public)
- Herefordshire Council (public)
- Shropshire Council (public)
- Marches LEP (private)
- PR/Marketing consultant (private)

In attendance: - Cities and Local Growth Unit team member

MGH Operational Group

This is an officer level working group which meets every two months to ensure that activities are co-ordinated effectively across the LEP managed virtual hub and the partner-led three physical hubs in Shrewsbury, Telford & Wrekin and Hereford. It reviews business support services from all partners in order to manage referrals, monitor outputs and share information. Its membership includes:

Local Partners:

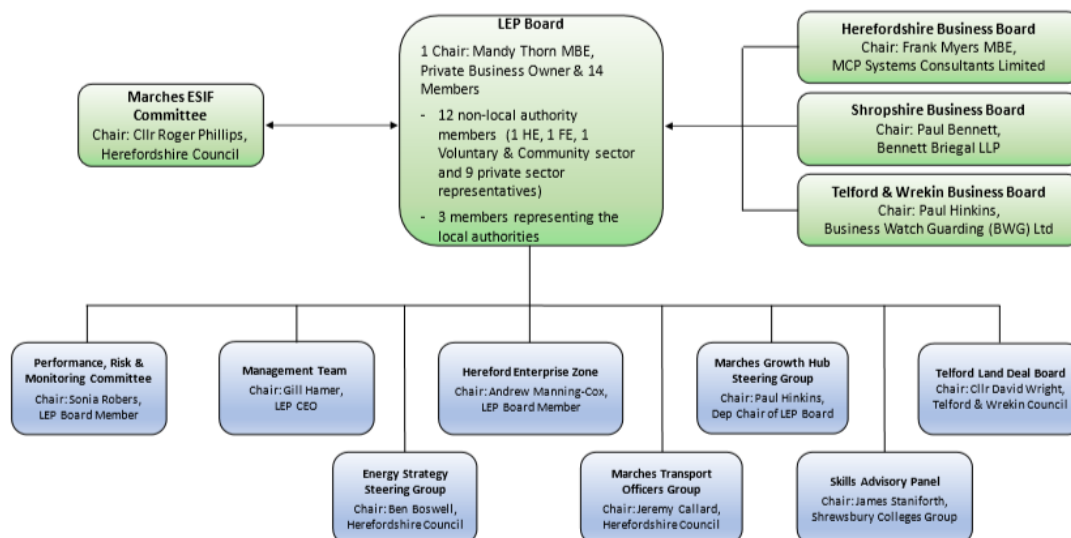
- Herefordshire Council
- Shropshire Council
- Telford and Wrekin Council
- Shropshire Council (European Regional Development Fund Technical Assistance Officer)
- University of Wolverhampton
- Marches LEP
- PR/Marketing consultant

National:

- Department for International Trade
- Economic Growth Solutions (Deliver Manufacturing Growth Programme and work across 15 LEP areas)
- British Business Bank

Diagram 1 on page 23 sets out how the MGH Steering Group reports into the MLEP Board, the reporting structure plus our three Business Boards. The LEP Board is made up of the Chair and fourteen members.

Diagram 1: Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Group Structure



- **Triage. Diagnostics and Signposting**

Local Infrastructure

- What Growth Hub delivery model/typology was employed during the 2019-2020 funding period?
 - Was this consistent or did it change during the twelve-month period? Why was this delivery model/typology chosen?
 - If applicable what is the contract period with the current provider?
 - What value does this model add over other models?
 - What was the benefit to the businesses using the Growth Hub?

The MGH partnership model remained in place during 2019/20 and did not change during the twelve-month period. The MGH model included a virtual growth hub and website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk that was supported by three physical growth hubs situated in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire. Since July 2018, virtual hub telephone enquiries have been handled by the NBSH. The MGH supports individuals and businesses by linking them to national, regional and local support including: -

- GOV.UK (including BREXIT/EU Exit and most recently COVID 19 Business Support)
- DIT;
- IPO;
- UKRI;

- LA Economic Development teams and
- A portfolio of European Union (EU) funded programmes delivered by partners.

Due to the limited funding and resources, the three local authorities, University of Wolverhampton and University Centre Shrewsbury provide facilities and Business Support/Economic Development staff to support the operation of the three physical hubs. The MGH partnership model operates with significant input from partners.

The MGH project was managed by the Marches LEP BSO (Growth Hub Lead). The BSO was supported by the LEP Admin Officer 1 day per week.

MGH model benefits from: -

- A low-cost high return model due to partner contributions (Local Authorities, University of Wolverhampton and University Centre Shrewsbury)
 - Sound public sector and private partnerships;
 - Effective co-ordination of business support provision;
 - Highly regarded physical premises;
 - Efficient one-stop-shop and signposting; and
 - Successful marketing.
-
- Were any additional physical Growth Hub locations opened in 2019-2020 Please provide details (including why these locations were chosen).

MGH did not open any additional physical growth hub locations in addition to the three physical growth hubs situated in Shropshire, Hereford and Telford & Wrekin.

- Did the Growth Hub employ its own advisers/staff, or were contractors/delivery partners used?

As detailed earlier, our three local authority partners are critical to the delivery of the MGH. They continue to provide staffing for the physical hubs which enables effective signposting/referrals to core local authority economic growth and business support services.

- How many were employed and what were their job titles/roles?
- Were Growth Hub staff generalists or did they have a specialism? Did advisers hold any accreditations (e.g. SFEDI)? What were the benefits derived?

Physical Growth Hubs

As previously mentioned, due to limited resources we work in partnership with the three local authorities. The three local authorities provide a total of 7.5 officers to support the operation of the three physical hubs during 2019/20.

Breakdown as follows: -

- MGH Shropshire – 2 FTE advisers and includes the Growth Hub Manager
- MGH Herefordshire – 1 FTE Growth Hub Manager/Business Adviser supported by 0.5 wider Economic Development Team
- MGH Telford – Part time Growth hub Manager that oversees the operations and does not advise businesses, 2 FTE Business Advisers, 1 FTE Growth Hub Coordinator that left in December 2019 (responsible data reporting and submitting spend claims) and 1 part time Business Support Officer who started in September 2019. The FTE Growth Hub coordinator replacement will start their

position in May 2020.

Business Advisers are tier 1 Economic Development Officers (generalists), most of which hold or are working towards a Level 5 – Business Support Diploma/Certificate. To note, we do not have an established skilled advisor team in our hubs, however during 2019/20 the hubs were able to access wider economic development team/additional business advisor support using the additional £31,578.94 funding from BEIS to support the delivery of EU Exit Readiness Business Advice. This additional resource also helped support the influx of COVID 19 enquiries during March 2020.

- Did the Growth Hub use the Business Support Helpline? Please provide details. If the Business Support Helpline is not used please provide details of the local arrangements.

In July 2018, MLEP transferred the virtual hub helpline to the NBSH. NBSH web chat support is also available via the MGH website. During 2019/20 the NBSH received 637 enquiries (169 related to COVID 19 in March 2020).

- How did the LEP ensure that the Growth Hub continued to proactively promote both public and private sector support services and programmes that provide businesses with access, and information to:
 - Enable them to trade internationally/any other internationalisation activity beyond trade support
 - Improve the take up of modern technologies that improve productivity (e.g. cloud computing, data analytics, CRM, automation/machine learning etc.)
 - Stimulate investment in science, research & development
 - Adopt leadership & management best practice
 - Improve workforce skills and access the right talent/apprentices needed to grow
 - Increase business awareness and participation in public procurement and major infrastructure projects

How did the LEP ensure that the Growth Hub continued to proactively promote both public and private sector support services and programmes that provide businesses with access, and information to:

The MGH website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk includes information and links to national, regional and local business support services, training, events and tender opportunities. It has been designed with a searchable directory. A filter to the search facility has been created to help businesses pinpoint eligible products and services.

The website also includes an Employer Skills Search Facility. This was developed by the MLEP and its Skills Board (this has now been replaced by the Skills Advisory Panel (SAP) which includes business representatives, training & skills providers and universities). This search facility brings together in one place all the providers delivering training, skills and qualifications in the Marches. As well as detailing, more than 1000 courses on offer, it is designed with employers in mind. It offers businesses a chance to search directly

for courses, training and skills adding value to their staff and their businesses.

All programmes are proactively promoted by the MGH PR/Marketing consultants. This is done through website content, regular MGH e-newsletters, through e-marketing campaigns, social media and advertorials.

MGH News Releases

During 2019/20 the MGH website featured 114 news releases and 86 pieces of online content related to business support on offer, including case studies (links are provided below in case studies section). This has resulted in a 20% increase in web visits over the course of the year.

Website Statistics

Web Statistics	April 2016 - March 2017	April 2017 - March 2018	April 2018 - March 2019	April 2019 - March 2020
Website users (unique visitors)	13,484	16,238	17,297	22,382
Total Web visits	24,340	26,603	27,366	34,044
Page views	83,371	83,854	78,542	92,805
Average time spent	4.07 mins	3.24 mins	2.56 mins	2 min 35 secs
Return/new visitors	24%/76%	18%/82%	17%/83%	17%/83%
Most visited pages	Calendar/Start-up support/About us Shropshire	Calendar/About Us Shropshire/Start-up support	Calendar/About us Shropshire/Finance and Funding - Grants	Calendar/Finance and Funding and MGH Shropshire

PR/Marketing Campaigns

Three major PR/Marketing campaigns were launched during 2019/20:

- The £10m Growth Challenge - an access to finance focused strategic campaign to encourage take up of national and local EU funding options to support business growth;
- Get Ready for Brexit/Business Resilience - to support businesses ahead of leaving the EU and through transition; and
- Crisis support – for businesses affected by both flooding and the coronavirus pandemic.

The campaigns were run alongside several mini campaigns targeted at businesses in different sectors and at different stages of the business journey.

The £10m Growth Challenge campaign was developed in response to business feedback about the challenges of accessing finance for growth. The two-tier campaign promoted a £10m pot that includes EU business support programmes (grants and loans) available to help drive business growth and create jobs. The campaign urges companies and entrepreneurs across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin to bid for a share of it. The aim of the campaign was:

- To bring cohesion and clarity to the business support on offer across the region;
- To increase the volume of larger SMEs interacting with the MGHs;
- To offer a more strategic, joined-up approach to business funding;

- To offer specific sector-led activity;
- To develop new contacts and leads for individual growth hub teams; and
- To deepen the alignment of the MGH brand with business support.

The benefits to the MGH included: -

- Targeting higher growth, higher output companies;
- Development of partner companies for follow-on activity;
- New leads/contacts;
- Year-long campaign allowing flexibility of approach;
- Marches-wide campaign but bespoke activity for individual growth hubs; and
- Tie in with events already planned.

The £10m Growth Challenge campaign had a soft launch in April/May 2019 and a formal media launch in July 2019 which included the Chair of the MGH Steering Group, Paul Hinkins, being interviewed by local BBC. This resulted in significant brand awareness for the MGH and an immediate uplift in enquiries both to the NBSH helpline and the physical growth hub teams. There was a correlating spike in web traffic to the campaign landing page on the MGH website, with 496-page views on launch date, the highest single day figure for this six-month period. The effectiveness of the campaign was interrupted by several factors, including Brexit, the pre-election period prior to the general election period, flooding and most significantly coronavirus.

In early 2020, the MGH developed resources to support businesses affected by flooding in the region including sub-pages for local authority partners which required agile support as teams moved into crisis response. The fourth quarter saw all MGH communications pivot to supporting businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The MGH was the first business support organisation in the region to have a dedicated Covid-19 resource library www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/coronavirus on its website, supported by a programme of social media promotions and e-newsletters signposting businesses to help available.

Social Media

MGH Twitter had a total of 3,940 followers which is an increase of 16% since 31 March 2019. Potential viral reach totalled 3.8m.

The MGH Facebook page received 675 likes and 693 follows which is up 28% since 31 March 2019. The average monthly reach was 10,343 (including 2 paid for campaigns) with average organic monthly reach at 3,643.

LinkedIn had 623 followers (up 100% since March 31 2019) with 7,500 average monthly impressions.

Note – All updates are shared across MLEP and Hereford Enterprise Zone channels, as well as significant sharing via MGH partners.

Newsletters:

Ten mailchimp newsletters were issued to a combined MGH/MLEP mailing list of 2,000. These newsletters were supplemented by regular joint local authority partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives, delivered to in excess of 7,000 businesses.

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/help-for-businesses-coronavirus>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/supportduringcoronavirus>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/supportingbusinesses>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/jointhe10mgrowthchallenge-397398>

<https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/brexit-preparation>

<https://us3.admin.mailchimp.com/campaigns/show?id=3576797>

<https://us3.admin.mailchimp.com/campaigns/show?id=3511713>

<https://us3.admin.mailchimp.com/campaigns/show?id=3511713>

<https://us3.admin.mailchimp.com/campaigns/show?id=3416393>

<https://us3.admin.mailchimp.com/reports/show?id=3411829>

Case studies

The following list of businesses have been supported by the MGH and these case studies have helped promote support available to businesses during 2019/2020:

Signs & Labels, Herefordshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/signs-looking-good-for-herefordshire-company/>

Flower & White, Telford

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/meringue-company-enjoys-sweet-taste-of-success-thanks-to-marches-growth-hub-help/>

Oakland Eggs, Shropshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/growth-hub-help-guarantees-cracking-future-for-shropshire-egg-producer/>

Stokly, Herefordshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/hereford-based-stokly-secures-200000-midven-investment/>

Serchem, Telford

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/chemical-firm-clean-up-in-the-middle-east/>

KarePlus, Telford

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/telford-company-to-create-20-new-jobs/>

Maybe Solutions, Market Drayton

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/maybe-solutions-market-drayton-shropshire/>

Media Relations, PR & Press Online and Offline Coverage

More than 238 separate pieces of media coverage have been secured as a result of MGH PR campaigns, content and news releases between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, an increase of 26.5% on the previous year.

These have appeared in the key print titles for the region, including the daily Shropshire Star newspaper, the Midlands News Association weekly titles and other Shropshire and Herefordshire weekly titles, including the Hereford Times.

Regular features have appeared in both Shropshire Business magazine, the Business Matters magazine of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Business Direction, the magazine for Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce.

BBC Herefordshire & Worcester and BBC Shropshire, the BBC local radio stations in the Marches, have covered MGH news and MGH Chairman Paul Hinkins and Marches LEP Chair Mandy Thorn MBE have both been interviewed by the BBC for breakfast and drive time programmes in relation to the £10m Growth Challenge campaign.

Specific examples of each of the above points is detailed below:

- Enable them to trade internationally/any other internationalisation activity beyond trade support

This is supported through referrals to locally delivered DIT programmes and services, including international trade missions, support for new exporters and support for existing exporters that are seeking new international markets.

The MGH have been extremely supportive of the Export agenda and have jointly delivered a number of highly valued and successful events, as well as adding value both in amplifying DIT messaging, increasing network reach and in delivering direct referrals to the DIT and ERDF programme. Example of events include a very successful 'Get ready for Brexit' workshop delivered with DIT on 18 October 2019 at Shrewsbury Town Football Club with over 70 delegates in attendance. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-businesses-supported-to-create-brexit-action-plans/>. In addition to this high-profile event and as part of the EU EXIT Business Readiness Engagement activity, a number of smaller MGH resilience events were delivered to support existing exporters.

MGH and DIT continue to seek innovative ways to build and strengthen partnership activity. DIT outputs and outcome are detailed in section 2 on page 12.

- Improve the take up of modern technologies that improve productivity (e.g. cloud computing, data analytics, CRM, automation/machine learning etc.)

All three growth hubs delivered a suite of digital support with partners through their events programme. More details on partners programmes are detailed Scale Up section of this report.

MGH Shropshire supported the Tech Severn 2019 Event <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2019/09/tech-severn-2019-conference/> which had over 600 attendees joining the two day event in September 2019. Headlining the event was former host of "The Gadget Show", and six-time Guinness World Record holder, Jason Bradbury. The event showcased some of the best digital and technical solutions to help support people, businesses and the environment. Attendees heard about the latest innovations in housing, technology-enabled care, education, modern methods of construction, Digi-health, eco and green technology.

MGH Shropshire launched and delivered a successful Digital Skills Academy in November 2019 which was led by Lucas Karemo from Google's Digital Garage who is one of Google's top digital trainers. The ten-module academy provided a comprehensive guide to making the most of all forms of digital marketing. The academy was hailed a success and there are plans to deliver more activity in the future. <https://www.shropshirelive.com/business/2020/02/17/google-backed-digital-academy-hailed-a-huge-success/>

MGH Telford & Wrekin continues to strive to become a 'Digital Hub' to help support their local business community. A new EU Digital Enterprise Project, SOLVD, in 2020 will play an important part of this. MGH Telford & Wrekin are working with the University of Wolverhampton colleagues to get everything in place.

The MGH Steering group received an informative presentation in March 2020 from Hugo Russell, Digital Projects Manager from University of Wolverhampton. Hugo updated the group on Hereford Centre for Cyber and Security and the aforementioned Digital Enterprise Project.

Yet to be launched, the Marches LEP Digital Strategy can be found below. The strategy includes business support and refers to the role that MGH can play in encouraging businesses to adopt technological processes, automation and digital literacy <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/research/The-Marches-Digital-Strategy.pdf>. The formal launch of the strategy was delayed due to COVID 19.

- Stimulate investment in science, research & development

Eligible businesses were encouraged to access in-depth support from relevant EU projects and partners e.g. through the AGRI, Manufacturing Growth Programme, KTN etc. Specific details of relevant EU projects are detailed in the Scale-up section of this report.

New EU project managers were invited to speak at MGH Operations Group. During 2019/20 we have heard from the following new projects - UK-Centric Supply Chains www.ukcentricsupplychains.co.uk/ and CALMERIC <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/business-services/funding-and-support/support-for-inventors/calmeric-project/>.

Awareness raising events are also held in the 3 physical growth hubs to promote innovative practices.

- Adopt leadership & management best practice and Improve workforce skills and access the right talent/apprentices needed to grow

Leadership & Management Best Practice

All three growth hubs delivered a suite of leadership & management support with partners through their events programme.

MGH Shropshire supported a high-profile Leadership Conference that took place on 19 September 2019 at Shrewsbury Town Football Club with 170 delegates in attendance. It was a first-of-its-kind business event, organised by Shropshire HR – part of Shropshire Council. The day included a day of inspiring talks and workshops delivered by several internationally renowned figures.

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2019/10/leadership-conference-2/>

Links to some of the other HR related MGH events and workshops have been provided below:

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/free-workshop-will-help-companies-get-to-grips-with-hr-essentials/>

<https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/business/2019/07/02/help-on-hand-to-make-the-move-from-mate-to-manager/>

Improve Workforce Skills and Access to Talent

Businesses were encouraged to access MGH website information on local training providers to meet their skills needs. Events on skills issues and potential solutions, e.g. traineeships, apprenticeships, recruitment and retention etc were held at each of the three growth hubs. In-depth programmes, e.g. the Manufacturing Growth Programme, allow businesses to attract consultancy support for leadership and management skills development.

MGH Herefordshire supported the Herefordshire Skills Show on 3rd July 2019, the first skills show of its kind in Herefordshire. The event attracted 550 visitors (excluding exhibitors). The feedback was extremely positive. The show was aimed at schools and was also open to the public in the evening. Attendees were able to receive expert advice and guidance from local businesses and training providers. There was over 60 stands and delegates were able to have 1:1 conversation with employers, current apprentices and further

education and training providers. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/skills-show-targets-hard-to-reach-workers/>. A second Skills show will be considered during 2020/21.

During 2019/20, the MLEP received the following amounts of funding from the Department for Education through the National Apprenticeship Service: -

- £3,000 to support National Apprenticeship Week 2019, to inform employers and to promote apprenticeship opportunities
- £5,000 to support Industry Placement Events with employers and to promote T Levels
 - Increase business awareness and participation in public procurement and major infrastructure projects

Businesses were encouraged to participate in public procurement opportunities, and these were promoted on both the MLEP the MGH website. In addition, events were held at the three growth hubs to highlight opportunities and increase awareness of good practice in tendering. An example is provided below:

MGH Shropshire supported a Sustainable Supply Chains event held at University Centre Shrewsbury on 3rd April with 33 attendees (30 unique businesses). The growth hub also had a speaking slot to promote the work of the MGH and exhibited at the event.

<https://www.sustainabilitywestmidlands.org.uk/events/sustainable-supply-chains-3-4-19/>

- What action was taken to ensure that the Growth Hub continued to simplify the local business support landscape (e.g. minimising duplication)?

To ensure the business landscape is not populated by duplicate products and services, the LEP officers work with the Marches European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) Committee to ensure that any new applications for business support funding are discussed at the MGH Operations Group to ensure that they compliment current business support rather than duplicate. A member of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) technical team is a MGH Operations Group member and helps keep the group informed.

- Has the LEP and/or Growth Hub developed or purchased any new innovative online tools or localised on-line content in 2019-20, that might be of interest/benefit to other Growth Hubs e.g. diagnostic tools; benchmarking tools, rate and review systems etc? If yes, please provide details.

The three physical growth hubs continue to develop their CRM systems to allow for standard reports to be produced to support light/medium/high intensity data collection and reporting.

The MLEP are currently exploring investing in Power BI system to support data collection and the more effective use of data.

Overview of Key Performance Outcomes

D. Key Performance Outcomes. Provide information on the key outcomes of your Growth Hub linked to the requirements of the 2019-2020 'Metrics and Evaluation Framework'.

Indicator	Local KPIs (where set by the LEP)	Annual Total (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020)	Cumulative Total (since launch of Growth Hub)
Number of businesses that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)		9,900	21,039
Number of individuals ¹ that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)	4,565 individuals (year-end target)	11,241	22,769
Total number of unique visitors to Growth Hub website		22,382	73,323
Number of businesses receiving 'medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support	364 (year-end target for combined medium and high intensity support)	264	656
Combined turnover (amount £) of businesses receiving 'Medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support.		£290,189,266.00	£415,592,288.00*
Combined employee numbers (FTE) of businesses receiving 'Medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support.		5864.75	7254.75*
Number of businesses receiving 'high intensity' support e.g. account management / intensive support directly provided by the Hub or partner organisation	364 (year-end target for combined medium and high intensity support)	20	323
Combined turnover (amount £) of businesses receiving 'High intensity'		£50,358,000.00	£59,880,037.00*

¹ Number of businesses and individuals are both required as (for example) several individuals from the same business may attend an event; may contact a Growth Hub separately via different routes on different issues.

support i.e. sustained support and using significant Growth Hub resource.			
Combined employee numbers (FTE) of businesses receiving 'High intensity' support i.e. sustained support and using significant Growth Hub resource.		342	542*
Number of businesses receiving 'Medium' and 'High intensity' support that, have the opportunity, ambition and greatest potential to grow (including Scale-Ups)		198	585
Total number of individuals who been helped to start a business		670	1128
Number of businesses referred to a mentoring programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		71	338
Number of businesses referred to a skills or training programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		17	164
Number of businesses referred to a finance and/or funding programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)	182 (year-end target)	182	408
Number of businesses referred to an innovation and/or R&D programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only).		25	60
Number of businesses referred to an export/import support programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only).		16 (new data collection)	16 (new date collection)
£Private sector match secured (where linked to Growth Hub)		£2,620,174.00	£6,202,304.23

- Indicates that collection of data started from 2018/19

Notes:

Measures such as “combined turnover” or “combined employee numbers” should only include the local business office receiving support (in the case of multi-site businesses). They will be calculated by aggregating the values recorded at firm-level. They should be the most recent values held by the LEP/GH at the point of reporting.

Measures such as “total number of businesses referred” do not need to reflect whether (or not) the referral was taken up.

3. Customer Satisfaction

In line with the requirements of the 2019-2020 'Metrics and Evaluation Framework' for 'medium' and 'high' intensity interventions only, please provide the tabulated responses to the satisfaction question set out below:

“How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of this service?” rated on a five-point scale.

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
0	0	0	10	147	157

For 'light-touch' interventions, a survey approach is sufficient. Questions that could be included based on standard questions asked of customers by all Growth Hubs.

“How satisfied were you with the service received?”, rated on a standard five-point scale?

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
1	2	50	212	139	404

Note: (1 Very Dissatisfied- very poor, 2 Somewhat Dissatisfied - poor, 3 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied- average, 4 Somewhat Satisfied - good, 5 Very Satisfied – excellent)

“In the absence of Growth Hub support, how likely would you be to undertake the same activity?” rated on a standard five-point scale?

1/5	2/5	3/5	4/5	5/5	Total
154	148	276	221	310	1,411

Note: (1 Very Likely, 2 Somewhat Likely, 3 Neither Likely nor Unlikely, 4 Somewhat Unlikely, 5 Very Unlikely)

4. Data, monitoring, reporting, evaluation and value for money

- How has the LEP ensured that the systems and processes were in place for the Growth Hub to comply with the metrics and evaluation standards as laid out in the 2019-2020 “Monitoring & Evaluation Framework”?
 - Please include information on the processes for accurately collecting both aggregated and non-aggregated (firm-level) data categories.

The MGH consists of a central team which sits within the LEP and is supported by three physical growth hubs all of which use separate CRM systems. The MGH central team use Tractivity CRM system and the three physical hubs all use Evolutive CRM systems.

To support physical growth hub data collection, an excel spreadsheet has been developed in-line with BEIS Metrics & Evaluation Framework.

Evolutive have also supported the three physical hubs to set-up the collection of aggregated and non-

aggregated data so that it can easily be entered into their CRM systems including an online form to simplify the process and reduce the number of keystrokes and clicks. In addition to this, dashboards and reports have been created to automate the extraction of both the aggregated and non-aggregated data from the CRM systems. This means that colleagues at the three growth hubs no longer need to manually extract data or manipulate data in excel.

Part of the 2019/20 physical growth hub allocation was ringfenced to support further CRM development to enable better data recording and analysis.

- - Please detail your experience in collecting unique business identifiers (e.g. Companies House Registration Number, VAT/PAYE and postcode), is the LEP and/or Growth Hub able to do this?

The three physical growth hubs collect business identifier information when collecting medium to high intensity data but not from every business. Some businesses are more aware of this information than others. If the growth hub requests the information from the business, they very rarely come back to them once they have left the face to face meeting. The growth hub then tends to complete the blanks by carrying out research on the internet via Companies House etc. There is no concern with regards to collecting post code information.

It should be noted that there is a significant number of micro businesses in the Marches, many of which are sole traders, therefore the proportion of businesses supported that appear on Companies House records due to incorporation, will be low. In addition, micro businesses will often be below the VAT threshold level.

- Have there been any challenges faced in collecting the requested data?
Please provide detail.

There have been no challenges in collecting the 6-monthly medium/High intensity data from the physical growth hubs. At times, monthly light touch data was not received on time and this was due to a change of resource/capacity. Light touch data is used for reporting purposes at the MGH Operations Group and MGH Steering Group meetings.

- Are you currently using, or planning to use the 'firm level data' collected by the LEP and/or Growth Hub to undertake qualitative and/or quantitative assessments of the Growth Hubs impact on those businesses receiving 'medium' and 'high intensity' support?
 - If so, what will these assessments examine? E.g. economic impact, operational efficiency, business productivity, customer satisfaction etc.

We have continued to collect firm level data but due to lack of budget, we were unable to carry out any qualitative and/or quantitative assessments. The additional growth hub funding in 2020/21 will allow for a full evaluation of the MGH and this will include an assessment to fully understand the impact on those businesses receiving 'medium' and 'high intensity' support.

- How are you measuring the impact your Growth Hub has had in terms of businesses (or individuals) acting on the help/advice they received from the Growth Hub? What have you found?

With BEIS' approval, 2019/20 MGH evaluation included the commissioning of three impact case studies to help demonstrate value for money and short, medium and longitudinal impact on business growth. Links to

the case studies are listed below: -

Signs & Labels, Herefordshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/signs-looking-good-for-herefordshire-company/>

Flower & White, Telford

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/meringue-company-enjoys-sweet-taste-of-success-thanks-to-marches-growth-hub-help/>

Oakland Eggs, Shropshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/growth-hub-help-guarantees-cracking-future-for-shropshire-egg-producer/>

• **Scale-Ups**

- There is an enhanced focus on identifying and supporting high growth potential/scale up businesses in 2019-20. Please provide an update on the progress of the LEP's Scale-Up Plan in terms of providing services to scale up businesses through the Growth Hubs as defined in Principle 5 of your Grant Offer Letter. How has this developed and built on local Scale-Up plans? Please provide details of any 'high-growth or scale-up' programmes that you are either delivering or promoting via the Growth Hub and what can you tell us about their impact?

LEP Scale-up Plan Progress

This section includes Marches Scale-up activity comprising a number of strands: -

- Scale-Up Institute;
- High Profile events;
- E-Marketing Campaigns;
- Professional Service Intermediaries; and
- In-depth Business Support for SME's.

ScaleUp Institute

The BSO worked with the Scale-Up Institute to provide a Marches update for the 2019 Scale-up Review which was published on 11 November 2019. A copy can be found here <https://www.scaleupinstitute.org.uk/scaleup-review/> /

High Profile Events Programme

MGH delivered a number of high-profile events across the Marches during 2019/20. Themes included Access to Finance, Skills, Digital/Technology, Leadership, Sustainability in Business, Third Sector, Business Expo and Get Ready for BREXIT.

E-Marketing Campaigns

The following e-marketing campaigns were run during 2019/20: -

#growthchallenge

#coronavirus #covid19

#EUExit #EUExitAdvice

#Brexit #GetReadyforBrexit #MarchesGRFB

#flooding

#Telford2020

#businessresilience
#businessfinance
#scaleup
#QueensAwards
#SocialEnterprise Week
#SmallBizSatUK
#IWD2020
#giveanhour
#ExportingisGREAT
#NAW2020 #lookbeyond

Professional Services Intermediaries

Following the successful Access to Finance Summit events and Strategy Workshops across the Marches during 2018/19 and early part of 2019/20, the Marches LEP Access to Finance Strategy was approved by the LEP Board on 24 September 2019. The main objective of the Access to Finance Strategy is to promote the availability of external finance to local businesses seeking to grow thereby adding value to the local economy. The strategy also includes building capacity and capability within the MGH teams to support effective business engagement and appropriate signposting and referrals. To support the Access to Finance Strategy delivery plan, a MLEP Access to Finance Group has been formed and is led by LEP Board Access to Finance Champion Paul Kalinauckas.

https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/download/access_to_funding/Marches-LEP-Access-to-Finance-TOR.pdf

In-depth Business Support for SMEs

These programmes are focussed on SMEs with a desire/capacity to grow including creating new jobs.

MGH acted a gateway to 19 EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support) with a total financial value of over £17.5million. A further £4m of investment in business support schemes is in the pipeline. Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue until June 2023. The four largest ERDF schemes (BEEP, BGP, MBIG and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined £1,641,922 to Marches businesses between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 100 jobs. In addition, the RDPE Growth Programme awarded £3m to Marches businesses during 01 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. The investment will lead to the anticipated creation of 200 jobs. Newsletter attached with more details and success stories.



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3 (3).pdf

Some of the high-growth/scale-up programmes that are delivered/promoted via the MGH are detailed below including impact information where it has been provided:-

Marches Building Investment Grant (MBIG)

MBIG, funded by the European Regional Investment Fund is a £2.5m capital grant scheme providing grants of up to 45% of project costs (maximum grant £100,000) to business across the MLEP area. The grant enabled businesses to extend, reconfigure or renovate commercial premises to increase productivity and employment. MBIG scheme closed in December 2019. A total of 516 enquiries had been received since the start of the scheme in February 2017 (10 during Sept- Dec 2019). The scheme supported 24 businesses, 2 of which were start-up businesses.

A total of £1.5m has been directly awarded to businesses aiming to create an additional 99 jobs. At scheme closure 104.5 jobs had been created. The target for the scheme was to deliver 110 jobs. Despite de-committing £900,000 of this budget due to many businesses changing their business plans as a result of the uncertain economic climate, the average costs per ERDF job has exceeded the original target. The actual cost per job currently equated to £14,040 against the scheme's original target of £22,700.

An independent summative assessment was undertaken, and the key findings of the report stated that:

- The scheme addresses the issues raised in West Midland Local Industrial Strategy along with the Marches SEP to improve access to finance and the lack of land for employment space;
- The net GVA by 2025 from the business supported through the scheme will exceed £24m; and
- By 2025 the ratio of GVA increase to ERDF cost will equate to 13.3:1.

The link below provides an example of a project supported this year by the scheme:

<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/laser-specialist-pinpoints-opportunity-for-growth-following-major-grant-funding/>

In September 2019, Herefordshire Council secured a further £3m of ERDF funding to support Marches Business Investment Programme 2 (MBIG2). MBIG2 programme contains two schemes, the extended Marches Building Investment Grant and the Small Equipment Grant (SEG). MBIG2 was launched in November 2019 and provides an improved offer to businesses under this programme. Businesses can access grants of up to £150,000 (50% contribution) to extend /reconfigure commercial properties and can now also access funding for new build developments. The Small Equipment Grant (SEG) went live in March 2020 and provides funding for capital equipment purchases up to £10,000 (50% contribution).

The programme since launching has received 154 enquiries. Three MBIG grants have been awarded and 2 SEG have been offered to businesses in the Marches.

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200139/community/393/community_funding_advice_and_business_grants/

The MBIG project manager was invited to present at the July 2019 MGH Operations Group meeting. This was an opportunity for the group to hear about progress to date and plans for Phase 2 of MBIG programme. The MGH works very closely with the project manager and this is evident from the number of enquiries and support received by Marches businesses.

Business Growth Programme 2 (BGP2)

Effective from April 2019, BGP2 offers grants of £2,500 - £1,000,000 and is designed to strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and help businesses grow. The programme is available to:

- Start-Up B2B Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) moving into or located in the MLEP Partnership area only; and
- Existing B2B SMEs moving into or located in The Greater Birmingham & Solihull and the MLEP Enterprise Partnership areas.

Part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Birmingham City Council, BGP2 builds on the successful delivery of the £33m Business Growth Programme which closed in December 2018.

Between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, 30 BGP applications were approved totalling £949,503.00 which will help to create 99 jobs. Private sector match totals £716,341.34 with £170,872.00 private sector leverage. Case study links can be found below:

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/14922/flower_and_white_case_study

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/14718/jesmonite_case_study

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/868/grant_funding_boost_for_ledbury_business

<https://www.shropshirelive.com/business/2019/05/07/cleaning-supplies>

<https://www.rossgazette.com/article.cfm?id=118751&headline=Business>

Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP)

MGP provides free advice and support to manufacturing SMEs to help them: -

- Identify opportunities and create plans for growth and improvement;
- Work with the best external experts to implement those plans;
- Cover 35% and 43% (Transitional areas) of the cost of implementing the plans through a growth/improvement

grant; and

- Connect to wider support to maximise opportunities for growth.

This project has been operating since October 2016 and is now working across 15 LEP areas. Delivered by Economic Solutions Ltd, the programme supports SME Manufacturers to grow by identifying, understanding and removing barriers to growth and enabling sustainable business improvement.

Progress from 1 April 2019 to 31st March 2020 includes 42 grants offered worth £120,489 to businesses within the Marches. Delivery of the current programme is scheduled until the end of March 2022, a further extension is planned thereafter and is currently at final submission stage. A breakdown of impact has been provided in the infographic links below. Representatives from this programme are members of the MGH Operations Group.
<http://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/>

Case Studies:

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/motor-design/>

<https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/specialist-manufacturer-invests-for-growth/>

<https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/success-stories/>

<https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/energised-shropshire-manufacturer-defies-brex-it-uncertainty-with-20-sales-increases/>

<https://youtu.be/bHybnIQnTCY>

Market Intelligence for the Marches: https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Marches-MGP2-Insight-Report_03-2020.pdf

Manufacturing Intelligence: Manufacturing National Barometer

<https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/market-data/barometer/>

West Midlands Chambers of Commerce (WMCC) summary of DIT and ERDF contract performance 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020: -

Overall performance in the 2019/20 financial year in the Marches has generally been good. The year started well for both DIT teams and progress and performance against targets was maintained generally in line with profiles. However, the last three/four months of contract delivery saw a drop off in demand and subsequent dip in local team performance. Both the Shropshire and Herefordshire teams saw levels drop, and as such they ended the year with some underperformance. It is important to stress however that overall DIT performance in the West Midlands resulted in all contracted targets being exceeded with the teams in the Marches playing their part in the delivery of yet another successful year.

The Marches position overall when compared to the other DIT teams operating in the West Midlands is shown in the following table: The Marches positioned (out of six)

DIT Target	Position
Export Win Value	4 th
Export Win Volume	5 th
New Exporter Volume	6 th
Unique Exporter Wins	6 th
MSB Exporters Volume	3 rd

The final positions show a slight downward shift in ranking when compared to previous years. DIT believe this to be in part down to some staff changes within the Shropshire DIT team but shouldn't be taken out of context given that there were some extreme results delivered in other areas that sway these results.

The ERDF SME International Growth Project concluded on 31st March 2020. Between April 2019 to March 2020 the project provided grants to a total of 8 SMEs providing over £17,952 of ERDF funding to support their Internationalisation aspirations and promising the creation of 9 new jobs.

The project directly supported a total of 82 SMEs, with 50 SMEs receiving ERDF grant funding to support them with International Growth. The total value of grants issued was £99,533 against an overall target spend of £115,328 giving a small underspend of £15,795. The final position ERDF output position is summarised as follows:

ERDF Output	Target	Achieved
C1 Number of Businesses Assisted	91	82
C2 Number of Businesses receiving Grants	43	50
C4 Number of Businesses receiving 12 hr assists	48	44
C5 Number of New Enterprises Supported	3	1
C8 Number of New Jobs Created	21	31

The ERDF project overall exceeded on all its targets with the exception of the C1 target where the DIT team fell short on the West Midlands target by just 49. This contrasts with a significant over achievement of the C8 target, where 276 new jobs were achieved against the West Midlands target of 142. Again, with the teams in the Marches playing their part in this result.

Over the course of the year DIT supported 120 businesses in the Marches through 29 separate activities including events, clinics and masterclass. No Marches companies were involved in Mission activity during the period.

DIT and WMCC value their partnership with the MGH and continue to seek innovative ways to build and strengthen their work. The MGH have been extremely supportive of the Export agenda and have jointly delivered a number of highly valued and successful events including the delivery of DIT 'Get ready for Brexit' workshop, as well as adding value both in amplifying DIT messaging, increasing network reach and in delivering direct referrals to the DIT and ERDF programme. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/marches-businesses-supported-to-create-brexit-action-plans/>

Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation (AGRI)

Aston University and Harper Adams University have been part funded ERDF to support the delivery of a AGRI. AGRI assists Marches based SMEs to innovate and develop new products and services in order to exploit growing market opportunities; particularly in agri-tech, food and drink manufacture and specialist food and drink logistics, as well as to break into new agri-food markets.

The AGRI project will aim to support 90 SMEs in the region over 3 years and to date has worked with 98 companies, 85 of which have completed, helping to develop new products and services with both short one-to-one assists and longer-term innovation development collaborations. Twenty-four of these companies have moved on to longer term innovation development support, which 22 have now completed. Additionally, the project has delivered 7 of its targeted 8 specialist workshops; covering areas such as precision agriculture, logistics, innovation in food and drink production and measuring and sensing in food processing. Additional project information can be found at www.agri.org.uk and on Twitter via @agritechsupport.

The project is currently in the second stage of an ERDF application to further extend its delivery in the MLEP region for another three years.

European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI)

EBRI supports businesses to apply for collaborative research funding to develop new products, processes and technologies and take them to market. The MLEP results for period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020:

Project start date – 01 July 2019

- MLEP enrolments in period – 6 (3 More developed and 3 Transitional)
- Claimed in period – 1 (C1, C5, C26 – Transitional)

www.bioenergy-for-business.org

System Analytics for Innovation (SAfi) / Think Beyond Data

The aim of the SAfi Aston University project is to help businesses use their data to:

- Automate and scale business processes
- Find better, more efficient solutions
- Gain a deeper understanding and new business insights

Think Beyond Data delivered by Aston University enables businesses to make better use of their data, empowering them to better understand and control their domain, through the use of leading-edge AI, machine learning and analytics techniques.

Marches project outcomes are detailed below:

The Cheese Fridge

An analysis of cheese sales data highlighting issues in the quality / how they record sales. Further analysis was performed on what type of cheeses sold best and what type of shop had the best sales. Finally, the project took their daily shop visits to restock and optimised them to reduce their fuel costs /CO2 emissions.

Rethink Productivity Ltd

Created an Excel VBA macro to highlight and fill in missing entries in data on employee activities collected by ReThink's consultants using their app.

Flower and White Ltd

Basic data analysis and recommendations for next steps (to develop a metric for productivity and use data to analyse productivity and optimise processes).

Bridge Cheese Ltd

Basic data analysis and recommendations for implementing automated stock tracking, and automated data management (to save 2-3 hours analysis per day) and moving from Excel-based systems to a database/warehouse management system.

VR Simulation Systems Ltd

Evaluated a prototype Augmented Reality (AR) system developed by VR Simulation Systems to support better fault detection in circuit boards. Conducted background research and provided a report on state-of-the-art technology for AR fault detection systems.

Code Assembly

In depth analysis of machine learning, the bottle necks in the process regarding development time and potential methods to mitigate for these to help the company move forward with their desire to automate aspects of the machine learning process.

Travelling Kiwis Ltd (Shrewsbury Family Chiropractic)

Evaluated the data collection processes and assessed the completeness of business data being collected. Provided a report with the recommendations on (a) what data should be digitalised, (b) what additional data should be collected and (c) how machine learning can be applied to effectively analyse customer data.

Black Radley

Conducted background research into state-of-the-art facial and emotional expression recognition and classification. Delivered a report detailing public datasets that can be used for training and testing purposes, image annotation software and tools for creating own datasets, and facial and emotional expressions recognition techniques. (A case study is in preparation for this one as it developed into a longer term collaboration).

Shropshire Festivals

Processed customer geolocation data (4784 UK postcodes) and provided an interactive map visualisation of the customer locations within the UK. www.thinkbeyonddata.com

Innovate 2 Succeed

This is an Innovate UK funded project delivered within the Marches by Coventry University Enterprises Ltd. This is a fully funded programme that is targeted at ambitious SME's that wish to grow and develop new products and services. The aim of the programme is to help SME's bring products and services to market more quickly and with less risk. In addition to this, the programme helps to improve innovation and growth capabilities.

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, the programme interacted with 9 companies in the Marches area and of these 3 have joined the programme. All 3 are involved with business growth through innovation (both products and services).

The programme continues to operate during the current COVID-19 outbreak through the use of remote support and coaching. In addition, the project is also supporting a number of innovate businesses through this period via our "5 Day Assist" to weather the storm.

The programme has been financed by Innovate UK until March 2022 and the programme will be looking to further support companies across the MLEP area.

<http://www.cuebusinesssolutions.com/innovate2succeed-i2s/>

Innovation Vouchers

The Innovation Vouchers scheme targets SMEs and aims to develop new processes and systems to improve efficiency and to bring new products and services to market. The scheme offers innovation vouchers to eligible companies and this needs to be matched by company's own funds to spend on business innovation and business growth activities.

The scheme received 30 applications from businesses in the Marches area, out of which 30 SME's were awarded an Innovation Voucher amounting to £73,500. Four businesses were awarded their vouchers (£8k) within April 2019-30th June 2019. Private sector investment amounted to £73,500 (match funding).

The new phase of the Innovations Vouchers project is only working with SME's within GBS LEP area – this phase started on 1st July 2019. Case study: - <http://www.innovation-vouchers.com/case-studies/>

Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF)

MEIF aims to transform the finance landscape for SMEs in the Midlands and to realise the region's potential to achieve economic growth through enterprise. It provides commercially focussed finance through the following products: -

- Debt Finance Business loans;
- Small business loans;
- Equity finance from; and
- Equity finance for proof and concept.

Current MEIF Fund of Funds position at the end of March 2020:

£64.4m invested and loaned in 317 investments/loans in 257 SMEs of which the following was in the Marches - £1.83m invested and loaned in 19 investments/loans in 17 SMEs. <http://www.meif.co.uk/>

Please see attached press notice announcing new data released as part of an [Early Assessment Report](#) which charts the Midlands Engine Investment Fund's early progress and impact on the region.

Some MEIF case studies are detailed below:

- Stokly secures £200,000 Midven investment <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/hereford-based-stokly-secures-200000-midven-investment/>
- Kare Plus secures £910,000 loan from Maven to expand care network <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/kare-plus-secures-910000-loan-from-maven-to-expand-care-network/>
- Shropshire based company Maybe Solutions to expand to Birmingham and create new jobs thanks to a six figure funding package from Maven Investment <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/news/shropshire-company-to-expand-to-birmingham-and-create-new-jobs-thanks-to-funding-deal/>
- A Telford-based audio-visual hire company has secured £100,000 from BCRS through MEIF. <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/six-figure-funding-makes-growth-a-reality-for-telford-tech-hire-company/>

Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology @ University Centre Shrewsbury (CREST)

In partnership with Reaseheath College, CREST@UCS helps SMEs across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin to develop and test new products, processes or services. The support includes research collaborations, bringing products to market, feasibility and testing, lab facilities on site, masterclasses and workshops.

In total, 42 SMEs have received the standard package of support under ERDF, which is a minimum of twelve hours support. Of these 42, 7 have been start-ups less than a year old. 18 enterprises have received longer term research and innovation support. Officially, this has resulted in 3 new jobs being created, 1 new product to market and 2 new products to firms. However, from feedback received it is believed that more jobs have been created within businesses that have been supported.

The areas in which at least 12 hours support has been provided include:

- Renewable Energy – 6 companies
- Software/geospatial – 10 companies
- Manufacturing – 7 companies
- Waste (reuse, recycle, repurpose) – 8 companies
- Planning/development/construction – 3 companies
- Land contamination/pollution/land use – 7 companies
- Consultancy – 1 company (that doesn't fit any other category).

Some examples of recent impact:

Business support:

- New service offering, waste and resource assessments completed for a number of beneficiaries
- Produced report on the potential of harvesting and utilising bracken
- Value proposition and business model offering has been taken up by 3-4 beneficiaries
- Research completed into ground source heat pumps heat recovery from pig slurry
- CREST support led to a local company winning a PARSEC grant competition - €10,000 with the possibility of entering stage 2 and winning €100,000
- Fully booked GIS workshops fully booked in December – beginners and intermediate.

- Market research that led to the development of a reusable cup being launched in Shrewsbury
- Bioreactor research in the CREST laboratory into how to reduce N levels in agricultural run-off water
- Research into the viability of a new animal bedding product using waste straw
- Use of GIS to help with crop yield prediction and disease detection in broccoli fields
- Research into nutrient and biomass loss from silage clamps
- Use of drones to develop understanding of groundwater movements.

Other:

- A case study of our work in NCUB State of the Relationship Report
- Development of Smart Rural with 3 events held throughout the year, and a number of webinars currently online
- Creation of water and geospatial forum – professional business networks – both with 40+ members. We hold bimonthly events that are regularly fully booked
- Sponsorship of Marches Blue Business Awards – rewarding businesses who are working to improve water quality of reduce its consumption
- Sponsorship of the Environmental Innovation Award at Shropshire Chamber Awards - recognising environmentally aware businesses that have introduced or developed innovative environmental practices, processes or technology either for use within their own business or for the marketplace.

Stats from summative assessment:

- 17% of businesses supported through the programme cited a significant increase in their turnover, with a further 25% of businesses citing an increase.
- A total of 40% of businesses completing the survey had stated they had not previously engaged in publicly funded business support
- 22% of businesses (or just less than one in four) stated they created jobs after they engaged on the programme.
- One in four businesses stated CREST had had a very positive impact in increasing collaboration with other businesses and research institutions, with a further one in three businesses stating a positive impact, 58% overall.
- 25% of businesses stated their involvement in the project stimulated significant growth within the businesses, with a further 58% stating their involvement in the project had some form of impact on innovation and growth.

Link to case studies: <http://crestatucs.com/case-studies/>

Link to testimonials: <http://crestatucs.com/>

Advanced Materials Characterisation and Simulation Hub (AMCASH)

AMCASH is a business support service for SMEs. It allows access to key facilities and expertise within Metallurgy and Materials. The core offer is for 2-days work fully funded through ERDF in the areas of Polymers, Microscopy or Modelling of metallic alloys.

The service aims to deliver to 40 SMEs in The Marches (Transition area). AMCASH is in a great position to support firms as they enter the return-to-work phase; get back up and running; and innovate for the future.

In the financial year 2017-2019, within the first phase of AMCASH, we delivered four engagements – out of a total of 11 engagements throughout the programme. www.amcash.co.uk

Focus Digital

The Focus Digital project was managed by Coventry University Enterprises Ltd and operated in 4 LEP areas including the Marches (more developed and transition). The overarching objective of the project was to encourage businesses to innovate and use more digital activity and technology within their own business and with clients.

Focus Digital project helped eligible SME's to 'step up' the digital ladder by accessing a range of workshops, one to one support and capital and revenue grants to help improve the use of digital technology and services within a

business. Please note that this project closed in September 2019.

Progress to project close date has been summarised below: -

- 5 Social Media Marketing workshop with a total of 50 attendees.
- One to one support was provided to 12 clients.
- Grant payments was made to 12 businesses totalling £61,750.00. Funding has supported drone and camera purchases, development of a CRM system and website development including video images, systems integration between website and back office systems, specific app development for new product launch and purchase of CAD product design software.
- Total grant funding secured match of £92,525.

<http://www.cuebusinesssolutions.com/focus-digital/>

Digital Solutions

Digital Solutions at University Centre Shrewsbury has been initially funded through the European Regional Development Fund as a Priority 1b project promoting digital research and innovation until December 31th 2020.

The project builds on existing expertise and resources to deliver targeted support to SMEs, aligning with the MLEP growth plans for its digital and related sectors, particularly how digital developments can be used to unlock growth in the health sector. Innovation activity in areas such as health and digital advancements are positioned as focus areas that will drive productivity.

The project activities address digital innovation from two angles:

- Working with SMEs to develop new digital innovations – (research and innovation); and
- Working with SMEs users of these technologies, particularly SMEs in the health sector, but open to any sector – (technology transfer and commercialisation).

Although the project started in January 2018, delays and issues with recruitment resulted in the project only becoming fully active towards the end of 2018/early 2019. However, since the team has been in place, the project is meeting all its business support targets and is supporting a growing pipeline of businesses that have expressed an interest.

Up to 31 March 2020:

- 140 SMEs have expressed an interest in support;
- Of those, 35 have or are currently, receiving/received innovative support;
- Of the 35, 23 have completed their support package;
- Of the 23 completed 4 are currently receiving long term collaborative support from University Centre Shrewsbury;
- The project has exceeded the new product to firm target by 2 (8 claimed, target 6) and are anticipating achieving the new product to market by the end of the year (1 claimed, target 3);
- The project is also forecast reaching out target 40 business support outputs by the end of December 2020; and
- Recent impacts can be found in the document attached below.



LEP - Digital
Solutions update M

www.digitalucs.co.uk

UK-Centric Supply Chains

UK-Centric Supply Chains project offers business support to businesses in the food and drink, automotive and associated manufacturing sectors assisting them to map, assess and improve the capabilities of their supply chains with the view to maximising UK content and gain a better understanding of their supply chain in terms of

geography/location and relationships with suppliers/customers.

A diagnostic is carried out with the unique Supply Chain Readiness Level (SCRL) tool to assess the companies supply chain maturity. The results are analysed, and a plan proposed for the identified needs, followed up with support from academic supply chain experts on a one to one basis as well as offering workshops. The SCRL tool also supports managers' decision-making processes for future supply chain activity.

This project started on the 1st October 2018 and will end on the 30th September 2021. The project's remit is to support a total of 28 SME's within the MLEP (transitional area), four of which will be start-up companies. The project established good stakeholder relations in the first three months and made connections with businesses in the area. A significant amount of development activity has been undertaken developing leads and contacts and attending events. Full delivery started from June onwards and within the MLEP, 7 SME's have been reported as receiving (C1, C4) 12+ hours of assistance with a further 13 SME's enrolled and receiving 'supply chain assistance' from the project but not reported as completed. There are a further 10 SME's in the pipeline and a large list of prospects. The project metrics have been met and SME's are pleased with the support received.

A dedicated Business Engagement Manager for the Marches, Jamie Pratt joined the project in September 2019 and has established good stakeholder relations. Jamie has attended many events held by the MGH and has also established good links with other projects in the Marches creating good cross-referrals.

A successful workshop on Thursday 14 November 2019 at the Manufacturing Technology Centre in Bridgnorth introduced the project to 33 companies. A series of monthly SME clinics and a planned workshop for March and May 15th, 2020 have been cancelled due to COVID 19 but webinars and podcast are currently being arranged to enable the project to continue to offer support and assistance to companies during the lockdown period.

Within the last turbulent 12 months where BREXIT dominated the political arena and reflected in businesses hesitating on larger-scale decision making, it then finished the period with the UK lock-down due to COVID 19 pandemic. The turbulences have further highlighted the need to have good supply chains and the significant challenges that many manufacturers and food and drink producers face. The need for programs such as UK-Centric Supply Chains to help address issues in these sectors has never been more important and SME's have been very receptive to the program. www.ukcentricsupplychains.co.uk/

Marches Renewable Energy (MarRE) project

MarRE is designed as a straightforward grant scheme allowing any eligible applicants to apply for a 50% grant for the installation of eligible renewable technologies on their premises. Grants are awarded for new installations.

MarRE seeks to support a wide range of applicants. Eligible applicants include Local Authorities, statutory and non-statutory public funded organisations/bodies, Higher and Further Education Institutions, voluntary/community organisations, private sector companies, registered charities and not-for-profit organisations.

There is no maximum grant, although installations are expected to be in the range of 4-200kWp. Installations larger than 200kWp will not be considered for this project.

The grant scheme has awarded nine grants worth over £150,000 to projects that will deliver nearly 500kWp of renewable energy. Over £1.5M of funding is still available to a range of organisations including SMEs towards the cost of installing renewable energy technologies. For more information about MarRE see the electronic copy of the new MarRE leaflet [here](#) and the Case Studies ([CS 1](#), [CS 2](#), [CS 3](#)) which have been written to encourage more applications. www.herefordshire.gov.uk/MarRE

University of Wolverhampton EU Projects

- Two of the projects are now closed but were active in the timeframe being reported (IPSS and C2G)
- The remainder of the projects are all active in **other areas as well from the Marches and their data is included** as it is difficult to split out.

Innovative Product Support Services (IPSS) – This project is now closed

The IPSS programme supported businesses through the early stages of developing a new product or process. The programme was specifically designed to support businesses developing:

- Advanced manufacturing and engineering;
- Building Technologies;
- Defence & Security;
- Environmental technologies and low carbon;
- Food & Drink (Agri-food);
- Photonics;
- Digital technologies;
- Transport technologies;
- Electronics; and
- Medical technologies.

Businesses benefitted from staged support, from an initial 2-day review through further, more intensive stages of assistance with design, engineering and intellectual property where there was good potential for placing the new product on the market. For the most compelling opportunities, there was the possibility of a funded research collaboration to progress the development of the technology.

No. of enterprises receiving support	23
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	23
No. of new enterprises supported	6
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	5
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	5
No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	8

Connect 2 Grow (C2G) – This project is now closed

The project provided opportunities for companies to benchmark their proficiency in the SOLVD arena by completion of a Digital Review and Digital Skills analysis, thus highlighting areas needing support, and or advice & guidance. Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	6
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	6
Number of enterprises receiving Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage support	10

BECCI (Built Environment Climate Change Innovations) - Active

The BECCI project benefits SMEs in the Black Country and MLEP areas of the West Midlands, by providing free support in the development of products and services that reduce carbon usage. The project:-

- Supports inventors to get their products and processes adopted by industry.
- Linking academic research into business, driving innovation in areas such as smart grid, battery storage, heating and cooling controls, social landlord engagement and property developer support.
- Testing and measuring of products, with access to a variety of technology including thermal comfort sensors, energy loggers, air tightness kits, ventilation measuring kits and a portable weather station.
- Hosting technology showcases, challenges and workshops, providing SMEs with exhibition opportunities.
- Strategic research in energy efficiency with social housing providers, developers and commercial organisations.

www.wlv.ac.uk/BECCI. Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	31
No. of new enterprises supported	1
No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	10
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	3

Composite & Additive Layer Materials Research and Innovation Centre (CALMERIC) - Active

Calmeric will benefit companies that do not presently have full in-house capability to develop advanced components manufactured using composite or additive layer technologies. Research Collaborations typically involve high level design and engineering analysis, prototyping, testing and material or microstructure analysis.

Since the project start in 2019, the project has invested over £100k worth of high spec equipment including a Compression Moulding Machine, a Non-Destructive Testing Machine and an ANSYS High Spec Simulation Machine to carry out research and innovation projects in the field of advanced engineering materials.

Currently the tender activities continue for two further items of equipment for the CALMERIC project a Fatigue Testing Rig and CT Frame. It is hoped these will be concluded in the next month.

The project has invested in three PhD Research Graduates who will work alongside the companies to support the progression of the research collaborations.

In total to date, the project has received over 50 enquiries and are currently working with 6 beneficiaries with another 6 in the pipeline for the next quarter. These are excellent companies who fall commendably within the Calmeric sectors, the project is progressing 4 of these companies further into Research Collaborations this year. www.wlv.ac.uk/Calmeric. Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	6
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	6
No of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities	3

Science in Industry Research Centre (SIRC) - Active

SIRC supports companies in the West Midlands to develop new science-based products. Eligible applicants benefit from initial fully funded support to refine their product concept and its development requirements (typically a minimum of 12 hours support from SIRC specialist staff). For businesses with an innovative product of high potential, additional support can be provided by specialist academic, technical and research staff at the University of Wolverhampton in the form of Intellectual Property (IP) review and guidance, IP grants, Scientific research, new product design & prototyping and laboratory testing. The project is expected to close early 2022.

www.wlv.ac.uk/SIRC Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	3
Number of enterprises receiving grants	0
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	3
No of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities	4

SPEED - Active

SPEED is the extension to the Enterprise Action project and is being delivered in Shropshire & Telford from January 2019 – December 2021. SPEED will support entrepreneurs to start up their own business through one to one support, workshops and an opportunity to apply for a grant up to 50% of the total cost. www.e-action.org. Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	57
Number of enterprises receiving grants	14
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	52
No. of new enterprises supported	27
Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (£)	£21,142.04
Employment increase in supported enterprises	42.5
P11. Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	129

Smart Concept Fund - Active

The Smart Concept Fund offers a Proof of Concept grant designed to support the commercialisation of new technologies.

- Product Development;
- Prototyping;
- Testing;
- IP Protection; and
- Market research.

The Smart Concept Fund is a grant scheme offering up to 60% of approved project cost (Maximum value of grant £30,000) towards demonstrating 'Proof of Concept' and bringing a product or technology innovation closer to market.

The grant is awarded against capital and/or revenue costs incurred in carrying out an approved project and is available to qualifying SMEs located in the Marches.

Eligible applicants benefit from support provided by a specialist new product development consultant to help them define a programme of work that will demonstrate 'Proof of Concept' for their new product or technology innovation, supported by a Business Plan justification.

The acceptance criteria are targeted towards advanced engineering products and technologies that are in line with the economic development strategy for the Marches. If a Smart Concept Grant is awarded, then the business commences procurement against the approved project plan and must fund purchases through its own cash flow. Grant is paid after evidence of settlement of invoices is proven.

The business meets its own resource and internal costs in full – grant is paid only against eligible procured and invoiced bought-out costs.

<https://www.wlv.ac.uk/business-services/funding-and-support/the-smart-concept-fund/>. Impact is detailed below:

No. of enterprises receiving support	14
Number of enterprises receiving grants	16
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	14
No. of new enterprises supported	0
Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)	16
Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	6
Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	3
No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	7

Cyber Quarter - Active

The Midlands Centre for Cyber Security, a Police RCCU Hub and proactive network facilitation service.

- Providing a Cyber Range designed to immerse the business in a real-world customer network that can be used

for educational training and for testing response procedures to known or simulated threats;

- Strategic insights and planning to address their cyber and security needs;
- Live demo environment to test & develop cyber defence and attack measures alongside leading cyber security academics and
- Hub and facilitator for the cyber, security, blue-light and defence communities.

www.cyberquarter.co.uk. Impact is detailed below:

C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	6
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SOLVD (Solutions for Digital Enterprises) - New

Accelerating growth in digital businesses through opportunities, challenges and innovative solutions.

- Assists digital leaders with their technology, digital & security strategies;
- Solving commercial problems through digital technologies;
- Accelerating digital and technology companies by accessing new markets; and
- Consultancy and support to enable the development of products or services and bring these into their business or to market.

www.wlv.ac.uk/solvd

ECMS (Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills) - New

Offering SME's in the manufacturing and engineering industry short courses and training to upskill the ageing workforce.

- Hire of facilities and rooms for meetings, events, conferences, training etc;
- Manual & Commercial training and short courses;
- Material testing and analysis;
- Specialist training provision at the National Foundry Training Centre; and
- State of the art equipment (Labs, Foundry workshops, CAD IT Suite).

The ECMS project is based within the Black Country but companies from the Marches region can be provided assistance and have started to receive this (they have to travel to one of the core sites to receive the interventions however). www.theecms.co.uk

Lessons Learned/Further Activity

Lessons learned/good practice in 2019-2020.

Please indicate what lessons you have learned to date and how this has helped the LEP improve the Growth Hub service.

- What has worked well?

The support from the West Midlands cluster model has worked well especially with intelligence gathering and the production of a BREXIT report.

- What has not worked well?

Impact on MGH Resource

From October 2019, the additional BEIS reporting and Cluster activity (BREXIT/EU EXIT and COVID 19 during March 2020) has impacted on the BSO's capacity. These are only some of notable activities; weekly conference calls, weekly/adhoc intelligence reporting, project management of the additional funding streams to ensure planned activity was delivered both on time and on budget, spend claims to Cluster lead's accountable body, coordinating/supporting DIT and MLEP high profile 'Get ready for Brexit' workshop and additional year-end reporting to BEIS.

As this activity was not foreseen at the beginning of the financial year, the BSO has provided excellent planning,

financial/budget management skills and re-prioritised/repackaging workload, resulting in adherence to all deadlines (without compromising quality of work) without any additional support. Spreading the BSO resources thin, has reduced capacity to deliver any additional support for example supporting the newly formed MLEP Access 2 Finance Group.

The allocation of funding on a short term/one-year basis limits the LEPs ability to develop longer term activity plans and consider staffing and delivery resources in a more strategic way.

Payment of VAT

Following incorporation of the MLEP (Company Limited by Guarantee) in April 2019 and following legal advice, the MLEP is now required to pay VAT on goods and services. In 2020, the MLEP was able to cover the cost of MGH VAT incurred during 2019/20. The MLEP has budgeted to pay MGH VAT incurred during 2020/21 for core growth hub funding only (£205k). VAT incurred with the additional funding allocation (£257K) will need to be paid for by the MGH as part of the £257k spend. This will need to be taken into account when planning budgets in the coming years.

- How has the LEP learnt from challenges it has faced in delivering its Growth Hub and how has this helped to improve capability and delivery of the Growth Hub?

The LEP have learnt that there is a need to review resources supporting the Growth Hub. The additional funding is very much welcomed but there is a need to ensure sufficient resource (with the right skill set) is in place to support the BSO moving forward allowing the planning and management of a much larger budget (£462k instead of £205k), delivery of short-term COVID 19 recovery plans, to support the cluster model moving forward including EU Exit activity. Additional resource is also required across the wider MGH team to enable in depth support for businesses as they move to economic recovery.

In addition to this, the LEP have learnt that remote working, virtual events/meetings need to be adopted as part of the growth hub delivery strategy moving forward.

Case Studies/Best Practice

Please provide up to three case studies that showcase the Growth Hub best. When choosing please ensure the Case Study is no more than 12 months old. You may also wish to consider case studies that align to the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan priority sectors/planned Local Industrial Strategy.

Signs & Labels, Herefordshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/signs-looking-good-for-herefordshire-company/>

Flower & White, Telford

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/meringue-company-enjoys-sweet-taste-of-success-thanks-to-marches-growth-hub-help/>

Oakland Eggs, Shropshire

<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/growth-hub-help-guarantees-cracking-future-for-shropshire-egg-producer/>

Note: If you have any additional material that you think would further illustrate the work and impact of your Growth Hub on driving business growth and/or increasing productivity please attach these, listing what you are sending within your covering email. This could include info-graphics, diagrams and flow charts or case studies.

Other information could include quotes from businesses you have assisted and any innovative or collaborative activity with intermediaries.