

Marches Growth Hub Review & Evaluation



Final Report
December 2017

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Executive Summary

The Marches Growth Hub was launched on 20 October 2015 and offers a single point of access to information and guidance on business support available to enterprises across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development. The overarching aim of the Marches Growth Hub is to deliver a key Strategic Priority for the LEP, that of Supporting Businesses and thus, as set out in the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), *'create an exceptional business support environment for aspiring growth businesses through access to finance and incentives to innovate, promote the Marches as a business investment location and support both new and established businesses'*.

The Growth Hub's main partners are the three Local Authorities of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, the Department for International Trade (DIT) West Midlands and the University of Wolverhampton. Other strategic partners include two Chambers of Commerce (the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the Marches Skills Provider Network, the University Centre Shrewsbury, Harper Adams University, Herefordshire Business Board, Shropshire Business Board and Telford & Wrekin Business Board, which also link into multiple private sector-led business network groups.

Support offered to businesses through the Marches Growth Hub is delivered by:

- A virtual hub;
- A local helpline (0345 6000727); and,
- Three Physical Growth Hubs located in Telford & Wrekin, Shrewsbury and Hereford.

Warwick Economics & Development (www.w-eed.com) was appointed by the Marches LEP in August 2017 to review and evaluate the Marches Growth Hub. The evaluation aims to satisfy the Government's requirement that an independent evaluation of the Growth Hub be carried out before the end of 2017/18, as set out in the BEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Growth Hubs for 2016-2018. It also aims to provide local partners with independent feedback on the value of the work of the Marches Growth Hub and the investment in supporting local SMEs.

To meet these requirements, key evaluation tasks have included:

- Desk-based review and descriptive analysis of the most recent management and administrative data collected by the Marches Growth Hub central team and an analysis of the reach of the Marches Growth Hub through social media. The Marches Growth Hub started reporting medium and high intensity data to BEIS from April 2016 and the findings of this report link to data recorded from that date to September 2017.
- Feedback on the delivery model, partnerships and operational arrangements put in place to deliver the Growth Hub, drawing upon a review of background information and consultations with 27 key stakeholders.
- Customer feedback from end-users of the Marches Growth Hub support, i.e. businesses.
- Desk-based review of approaches adopted by Growth Hub operations in eight LEP areas. These are Swindon & Wiltshire, Cumbria, Lincolnshire, Enterprise M3, York, North Yorkshire and East Riding, Stoke & Staffordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire.

Key findings of this review and evaluation are summarised overleaf.

Key Findings

The independent review has shown that, between October 2015 and September 2017, the Marches Growth Hub has delivered a range of business support activities, capitalising on the capabilities and capacity of its major partners.

A total grant amount of £1,317,120 has been received by local businesses to date in grant funding, alongside expert support to develop new products, access new supply chains and export overseas.

It is too early for the full impacts of business support to be manifested, given that the Marches Growth Hub has been operating for less than two years. Nevertheless, there is evidence that medium and high intensive support provided to local businesses is delivering results as measured by the number of jobs created. For example, available information shows that 236 jobs have been created to date by businesses that have received support of medium intensity (102 jobs) and high intensity (134 jobs). It is also worth highlighting that these figures are very likely to underestimate creation of jobs through support received by the Marches Growth Hub given that the Marches Growth Hub only started reporting medium and high intensity data to BEIS from April 2016.

Furthermore, customer satisfaction with the service provided by the Marches Growth Hub is relatively high (between 4.5 and 5 on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is poor service and 5 is excellent) across both modes of support i.e. virtual and Physical Growth Hubs.

Light touch engagement with businesses has been provided through a user friendly and easy to navigate website. This has received more than 43,000 website visits (24,000 unique visitors) since launch. A monthly digital news digest is issued to a growing number of users keeping them up-to-date on existing and new products and services as well as promoting achievements and events.

Comparisons with other Growth Hubs indicate that within a relatively short period of time, the Marches Growth Hub is operating on a par with more resourced and/or longer established Growth Hubs. For example, the Marches Growth Hub covers one of the largest geographical LEP areas in the country. Nevertheless, it has established an effective network of local and national providers that deliver business support to local businesses through both, a virtual hub and three Physical Hubs, and it has secured the continuous commitment of its partner organisations despite a decrease in BEIS funding. Drawing on these resources, the Marches Growth Hub has made good progress in terms of improving the awareness of business support and providing a single point of access and signposting to information and guidance on business support available to enterprises across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development. In comparison with some other Growth Hub websites, the Marches Growth Hub website is clear and easy to use and includes a Skills Employer portal, which enables employers to find training to support the upskilling of staff.

What is working well?

- **Low Cost High Return Model:** The Marches Growth Hub capitalises on the capabilities and capacity of its major partners, thereby enabling them to cover a large geographical area whilst ensuring efficient use of resources. The Marches Growth Hub financial model is relatively low cost, providing a virtual hub (based in the Marches LEP offices) that is 100% funded by BEIS, plus three Physical Hubs, supported by staff and financial resources from the three Local Authority partners and the University of Wolverhampton. The three Physical Hubs are located in buildings either owned or leased by the University or Local Authority – that bear the bulk of the cost of these facilities. It is worth noting that the Marches Growth Hub was awarded £250k by BEIS in 2015/16 to set up the virtual hub website, helpline, CRM, pay for staffing and contribute to the

set-up and marketing of the three Physical Hubs. However, in 2016/17 and 2017/18 funding was reduced and the Marches Growth Hub was awarded £205k per annum by BEIS. Nevertheless, in that time, the partner organisations maintained the commitment to running the three Physical Growth Hubs including staffing despite the decrease of BEIS funding and the uncertainty at that time of any future funding or whether the government wished to maintain Growth Hubs. Moreover, within this period (2015/16 to September 2017), the Marches Growth Hub boosted total business interactions by around 60% while at the same time customer satisfaction remained high and awareness of the Marches Growth Hub increased.

- **Sound Partnerships:** The Marches Growth Hub focuses on linking businesses to different types of support provided by national and local providers, thereby avoiding reinventing the wheel and enabling the Marches Growth Hub to respond effectively and efficiently to specific sector and/or local business needs over time as well as changing policy priorities. The Marches Growth Hub links businesses to national service and local providers, namely, FSB, the two Chambers of Commerce, DIT, Intellectual Property Office (IPO), Innovate UK, Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), and ERDF funded projects that all have been holding regular clinics at the Marches Physical Hubs (free of charge) to increase the opportunity for local businesses to update their knowledge, obtain quality advice and access networking opportunities. The Marches LEP is also a key partner in the Midlands Engine (a long-term strategy for economic growth for the wider region). One of the strands born from this strategy is the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF), which is a collaboration between the government-owned British Business Bank and ten Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in the West Midlands and East & South East Midlands and provides commercially focused finance to help SMEs start up and grow. The Marches Growth Hub is working very closely with the British Business Bank Senior Relationship Manager and fund managers to support the delivery of MEIF.
- **Effective Co-ordination of Business Support Provision:** All key stakeholders recognise that the main achievement of the Marches Growth Hub to date has been in terms of improving co-ordination of business support across an area where the business structure and priorities of Local Authorities are quite different. The Growth Hub has also fostered greater collaboration among various partners.
- **Highly regarded Physical Premises:** The delivery model adopted by the Marches Growth Hub reflects the local economic structure and the diverse business population needs given that a virtual hub alone would not be able to reach as many businesses nor provide networking opportunities for micro and small businesses. The presence of Physical Hubs in the specific locations is regarded as a vital element of the Marches Growth Hub offer given that it strengthens the capability and capacity of the Marches Growth Hub to support specific sectors and types of businesses that are of importance to the respective localities. The physical presence also offers local businesses the opportunity to meet face-to-face with the Marches Growth Hub staff on the ground, and this is seen by businesses as integral to supporting businesses locally. It also offers space for smaller businesses to work, network and feel part of a wider business community. Furthermore, events organised by the Physical Growth Hubs, and in particular events jointly organised with partner organisations, are seen as highly successful as they offer local businesses the opportunity to network and be informed about policy developments and available support in a cost effective way.
- **Efficient One-Stop-Shop and Signposting:** The virtual hub is offering a one-stop-shop for businesses at point of entry, providing breadth of business support knowledge in a cost effective way. The fundamental concept of the virtual hub as the single point of contact and gateway to

business support provision is welcomed by both businesses and key stakeholders as it is seen to streamline the access point for businesses. Furthermore, it has a good website which enables self-service and also gives advisers a good base to refer businesses to. It is also well used as demonstrated by the increasing number of visits by returning users and new users.

- **Successful Marketing:** The Marches Growth Hub has developed a marketing strategy to support successful outreach and to continuously improve how the Growth Hub engages with key audiences. There is an active programme of communications, delivered as part of a cross-platform strategy. Activity includes online marketing, events that complement Government and regional business support campaigns, PR, editorials, and a sustained digital campaign via e-marketing, e-newsletters and social media to ensure viral reach and recognition of both the brand and the Growth Hub support on offer. The Marches Growth Hub is active on Twitter, Facebook and Linked In, offering businesses multiple channels to engage with the business support on offer. From the start of 2017, the focus has been on specific # campaigns such as Get Started and Get Growing to support regional activity and business support programmes aimed at helping growth potential businesses, in line with the Government's scale-up priorities.

What are the key challenges?

Going forward, a number of issues were highlighted by key stakeholders as posing challenges for a cohesive business support provision infrastructure in the area. These include:

- The large and diverse economy of the Marches area. The size of the area and the economic/business structure will continue to require multiple types of intervention and coverage, and hence a wide range of resources for business support provision to be effective.
- Grant funding. This is in general still too complex for many businesses, with some funding only available to certain types of businesses. Furthermore, some current ERDF and Government funding is not appropriate for businesses in Shropshire.
- The focus of support for businesses. For some, business support funding is too focused on new technologies and innovation. However, given the diversity of the local business base, a combination of business support programmes to facilitate growth in a range of key sectors is needed to drive up productivity across the Marches area.
- Market/business targeting. According to key stakeholders, business support providers in the area tend to work with and target the same companies. A key issue to be addressed in the future would be how to widen business reach while at the same time achieving relatively high impact and maximum results.
- Competitive market. The Marches LEP Strategic Economic Plan offers a single strategic document and a joined-up vision for the Marches area as a whole. Nevertheless, the three Local Authorities have different priorities and this makes full alignment of activities more challenging. Furthermore, providers are fighting for customers/referrals and each has different models/targets/funding and effective coordination remains a real issue.
- Employer engagement and achieving impact. While recognising that some employers will never engage to explore available solutions for their needs and most importantly may not implement the advice provided, selective/targeted business intensive support is seen as the most efficient and effective way to deliver growth.

- Reliance on a range of partners for delivery requires putting systems in place to ensure that:
 - Messaging about what the Growth Hub does is consistent.
 - Quality of services provided to businesses does not vary.
 - The three Local Authority partners continue to support the Marches Growth Hub to capture the required common metrics data.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report presents the findings of the independent evaluation of the Marches Growth Hub programme.

Background

- 1.2. Warwick Economics & Development (www.w-eed.com) was appointed by the Marches LEP in August 2017 to evaluate the Marches Growth Hub (<https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk>).
- 1.3. The Marches Growth Hub was launched on 20 October 2015 within one of the largest geographical LEPs in the country (covering 2,300 square miles). Growth Hubs were set up to ensure that business support advice and provision is joined up and easy to access. Specifically, Growth Hubs were set up to:
 - Improve the awareness and coordination of local and national business support;
 - Provide a diagnostic and signposting service to help businesses find the right support easily, no matter what their size or sector; and,
 - Improve the impact and value for money of business support.
- 1.4. The Marches is home to 29,800 SMEs in a mix of rural and urban settings. The aim of the Marches Growth Hub since its launch has been to offer a single point of access to information and guidance on business support available to enterprises across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development. Within the last 23 months, through its virtual hub (www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk), central local helpline (0345 6000727) and network of three Physical Growth Hubs in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford & Wrekin, the Marches Growth Hub has focused on linking businesses to intensive support from partners including the Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP), DIT, Local Authority business support teams and EU funding programmes (18 programmes). Since April 2016, a total grant amount of £1,317,120 has been received by local businesses in grant funding, alongside expert support to develop new products, access new supply chains and export overseas.
- 1.5. The evaluation covers the operation of the Growth Hub from October 2015 to September 2017 and aims to satisfy the Government's requirement that an independent evaluation of the Growth Hub be carried out before the end of 2017/18 (as set out in the 'Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Growth Hubs for 2016-2018), with the emphasis on the following key areas:
 - **Data**
 - To look at the data being measured in relation to BEIS evaluation framework
 - To test robustness and progress towards targets
 - **Partnership Working**
 - To review partnership arrangements
 - To seek feedback from partners on the value of the Marches Growth Hub
 - **Operational Arrangements**
 - To review operational arrangements and their effectiveness
 - **Customer Feedback (i.e. businesses)**
 - Drawing upon an appropriate sample of customers/end users of the Marches Growth Hub support and collate their feedback, qualitative and quantitative
 - **Benchmark**

- A comparison on marketing reach, impact and value added against 2-3 other similar Growth Hubs
- 1.6. The Industrial Strategy White Paper confirms that the government will provide continued funding to enable Growth Hubs to bring public and private sector partners together. However, no further details have yet been released about the amount of funding or how it will be made available to Growth Hubs. It will still be important for the LEP to consider utilising alternative sources of funding. The evaluation findings can therefore play a critical role in evidencing the sound use and impacts of investment to date and offering a timely assessment of the hub, profiling outputs, outcomes, and impacts, to support the LEP in shaping the future delivery of the Growth Hub and maximising funding allocations going forward. Within this context, the findings of this evaluation aim to inform discussions on the future provision of the Growth Hub activities at the Marches Growth Hub, Growth Hub Operational Group meeting, Steering Group meeting, Management Team meeting and with the LEP Board.

Report Structure

- 1.7. The remainder of this report is structured as follows:
- **Section 2** provides an overview of the delivery model of the Marches Growth Hub. It also includes a summary of practices adopted by other Growth Hubs. As part of the evaluation, eight Growth Hubs were reviewed (desk-based review) as follows:
 - Swindon & Wiltshire
 - Cumbria
 - Lincolnshire
 - Enterprise M3
 - York, North Yorkshire and East Riding
 - Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire
 - Gloucestershire
 - Worcester
 - **Section 3** provides a review of the support provided by the Growth Hub to date – including review and descriptive analysis of the most recent management and administrative data collected by the Marches Growth Hub and an analysis of the reach of the Marches Growth Hub through social media.
 - **Section 4** summarises feedback on the delivery model, partnerships and operational arrangements put in place to deliver the Growth Hub – drawing upon review of background information and consultations with 27 key stakeholders.
 - **Section 5** presents a summary of customer feedback from end users of the Marches Growth Hub support i.e. businesses, drawing upon feedback provided to date.
 - **Section 6** draws conclusions and provides recommendations. It also sets out a provisional Action Plan for consideration by the Marches Growth Hub.

2. Marches Growth Hub Operational Model

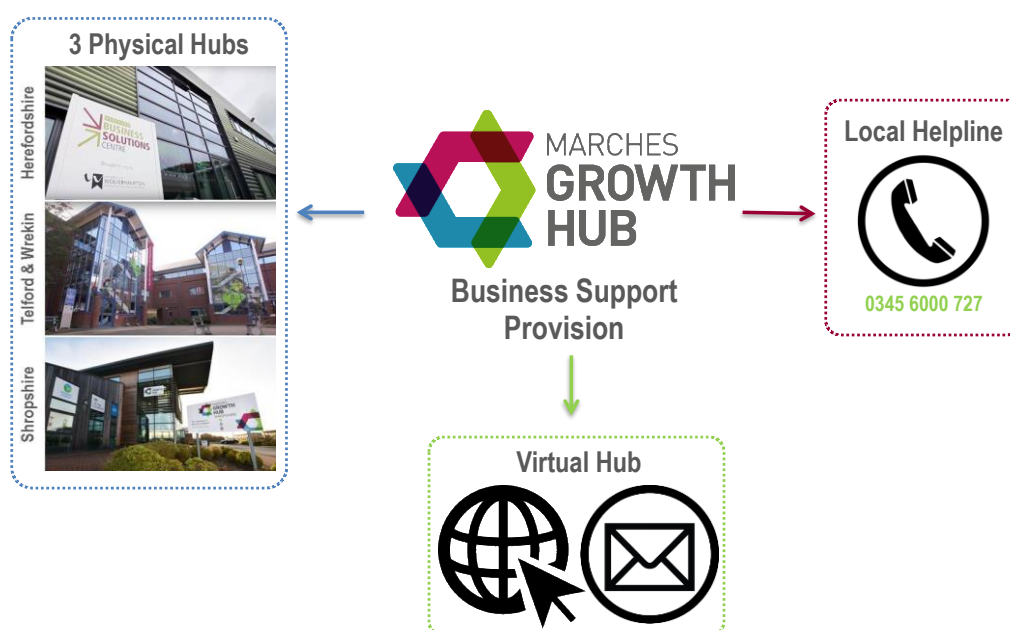
Overview of the Marches Growth Hub Structure

- 2.1. The Marches Growth Hub offers a single point of access to information and guidance on business support available to enterprises **across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development**. The overarching aim of the Marches Growth Hub is to deliver a key Strategic Priority for the LEP, that of Supporting Businesses and thus, as set out in the LEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), *"create an exceptional business support environment for aspiring growth businesses through access to finance and incentives to innovate, promote the Marches as a business investment location and support both new and established businesses"*.
- 2.2. The Growth Hub's main partners are the three Local Authorities of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, the Department for International Trade West Midlands and the University of Wolverhampton. Other strategic partners include two Chambers of Commerce (the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce), the Federation of Small Businesses, the Marches Skills Provider Network, the University Centre Shrewsbury, Harper Adams University, Herefordshire Business Board, Shropshire Business Board and Telford & Wrekin Business Board who also link into multiple private sector-led business network groups.
- 2.3. The Marches Growth Hub capitalises on the capabilities and capacity of its major partners, thereby enabling them to cover a large geographical area whilst ensuring efficient use of resources and avoiding duplication. The Marches Growth Hub financial model is relatively low cost providing a virtual hub (based in the Marches LEP office) that is funded 100% by the BEIS annual funding, with three Physical Hubs, supported by both staff and financial resources from the three Local Authority partners and the University of Wolverhampton. The three Physical Hubs are located in buildings either owned or leased by the University and one Local Authority and they bear the bulk of the cost of these well-appointed facilities.
- 2.4. The Marches Growth Hub focuses on linking businesses to support from both national and local providers, thereby avoiding reinventing the wheel or duplicating effort and enabling the hub to respond to specific sector and/or local business needs over time as well as changing policy priorities. The Marches Growth Hub has effectively built an extensive network of business support delivery partners, including three Local Authorities, three universities, two Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, three area Business Boards which link into multiple private sector-led business network groups, and DIT, all of which are key to the Marches Growth Hub success.
- 2.5. The Marches Growth Hub are also working with neighbouring LEPs and Growth Hubs and the Growing Mid Wales Partnership, including the following activities:
 - The Marches Growth Hub staff attend the Midlands Business Support Network meetings, which takes place four times a year. The network includes West and East Midlands Growth Hubs along with several national business support providers. Opportunities for cross-border working are explored as well as sharing best practice and coordination of events to ensure value for money is achieved across the wider area.
 - The Marches LEP is a key partner in the Midlands Engine (which represents a long-term strategy for economic growth for the wider region). The LEP has been working with other LEPs to develop this plan. The Growth Hub team are supporting the strategy and delivery of

the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) and business engagement in DIT Export Trade Missions.

- Collaborating with Birmingham City Council, Greater Birmingham & Solihull and Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEAs to deliver Business Growth Programme (BGP) grants, via ERDF. BGP is a £33m fund that consists of four strands of business support:
 - The Business Development Programme;
 - The Business Innovation Programme;
 - The Green Bridge Supply Chain Programme; and,
 - The HS2 project.
 - The LEA and the Growth Hub are also working with the Growing Mid Wales Partnership to develop opportunities around shared priorities including transport and skills.
- 2.6. The Marches Growth Hub signposts to both the www.gov.uk website and the Government's Business Support Helpline, which offer free advice about starting up a business and can direct business to more support. At local level, in the Marches, as shown in Figure 2.1, business support and advice offered through the Marches Growth Hub is delivered by:
- A virtual hub;
 - A local helpline (0345 6000727); and,
 - Three Physical Hubs in Telford & Wrekin, Shrewsbury and Hereford.

Figure 2.1: Marches Growth Hub - Business Support Provision



- 2.7. This model (virtual and physical) ensures that businesses can easily access 24-hour information as well as opportunities for face-to-face support, attend local events and have direct access to national service providers as well as European funded business support schemes.
- 2.8. The online virtual hub is available to start-ups, SMEs and large businesses, offering a search facility for services and signposting to advice and support. It offers information about finance and funding, start-up support, networking and events, and employment and skills. It provides links to various initiatives and programmes and information about the area, along with case

studies of Marches businesses that have used the Growth Hub services. The virtual hub is fully funded by the BEIS annual funding (and it therefore has a relatively low cost to run).

- 2.9. Another feature of the Growth Hub website is a Skills Employer portal, which enables employers to find training to support the upskilling of staff. The content of this portal has been developed in partnership between the Growth Hub team and the Marches Skills Provider Network.
- 2.10. Alongside the virtual hub, the Growth Hub has a helpline that businesses can phone during normal office hours. A monthly newsletter is issued for the users of the Growth Hub to keep them up-to-date with existing and new products and services as well as promoting events. The Growth Hub also uses social media to raise awareness of the hubs services.
- 2.11. In terms of physical presence:
 - The two Physical Hubs of the Marches Growth Hub in Hereford and Telford & Wrekin are situated within buildings operated by the University of Wolverhampton. The aim of the co-location of the Physical Growth Hubs at the University sites is to improve links with graduates and the wider business community, encouraging innovation and helping universities to understand the needs of the local business community:
 - The Marches Growth Hub - Herefordshire operates from the Hereford Business Solutions Centre at Skylon Park¹. It is worth noting that that Hereford Office of the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce is also based at the Hereford Business Solutions Centre².
 - The Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin is based at the Telford Innovation Campus of the University of Wolverhampton.
 - The third one, Marches Growth Hub - Shropshire, is co-located with the Chamber of Commerce and DIT within the Shropshire Council owned building on Battlefield Enterprise Park.
- 2.12. All three Physical Hubs offer a place where businesses can find face-to-face advice and support, meeting rooms for hire along with larger rooms for events, and a place for networking. Hot-desking is also offered at the Growth Hub in Telford for members/on a monthly fee. The Physical Hubs are part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), along with support (both financially and through staff) by the three Local Authorities and the University of Wolverhampton. All three Physical Hubs have a regular DIT presence and the Marches Growth Hub have organised two training sessions to the Marches Growth Hub support staff to date in order to provide an update on DIT products/services, share ideas and information and increase referrals to encourage companies to start exporting or to export more.
- 2.13. The Marches LEP also supports several ERDF projects (18). A full list of these is provided in **Appendix A** and includes Innovative Product Support Service (IPSS), Knowledge Exchange & Enterprise Network (KEEN) and Built Environment Climate Change Innovations (BECCI). These are delivered across the Black Country and the Marches LEP areas, with some delivered in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton.

¹ Hereford Enterprise Zone is currently the only Enterprise Zone in the UK with a defence and security focus and aims to attract new companies to invest in Skylon Park.

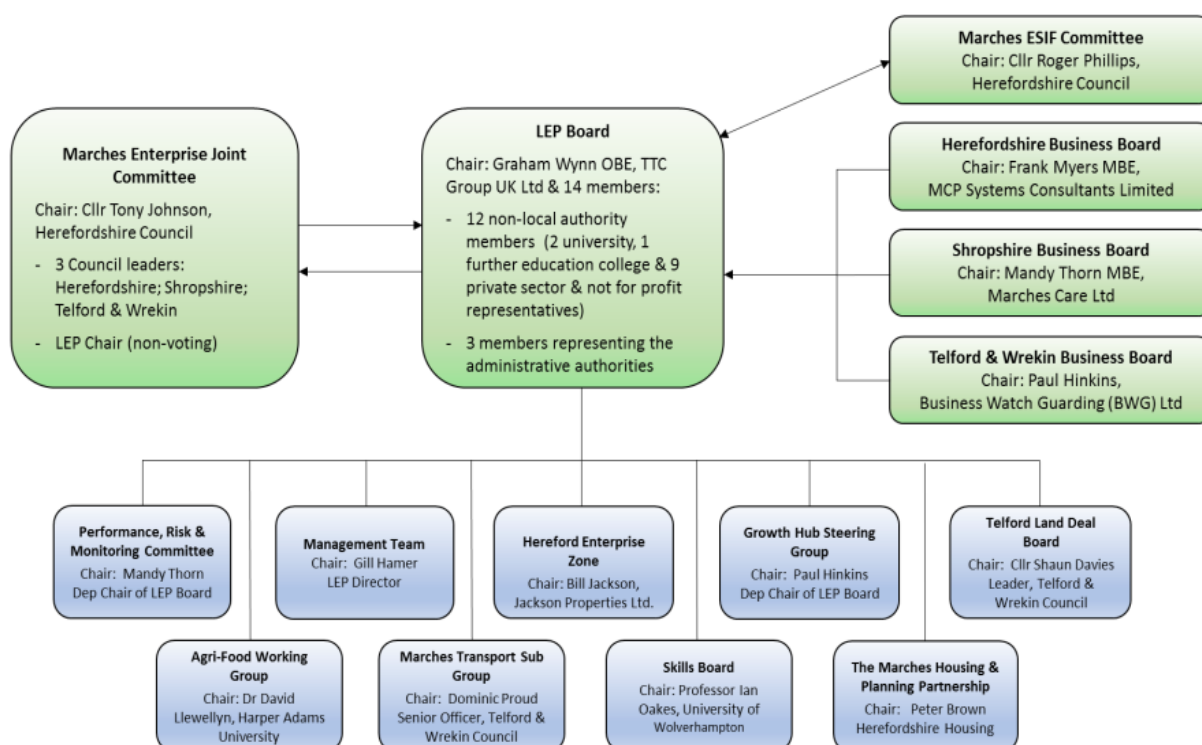
² <http://hwchamber.co.uk/contact>

Staffing and Governance

- 2.14. The Marches Growth Hub has two full time members of staff: the Marches LEP Business Support Officer and a Helpline Manager, who manages the helpline, e-mail and maintains the website. The three Local Authorities and the University of Wolverhampton provide tier one Business Support/Economics Development generalists to support the operation of the three Physical Hubs and provide a signposting service.
- 2.15. A service level agreement (SLA) and data sharing agreement (DSA) are in place with core partners (Councils and DIT) to ensure that direct referrals to partners are responded to within 48 hours, data protection protocols are followed and information on the website is maintained and kept up-to-date. However, information regarding the outcome of referrals is limited so the central team is unable to see an overview of the entire customer journey.
- 2.16. Recently, with ERDF funding support, the Marches Growth Hub has also recruited a skilled team of advisors to deliver the Building Business Confidence (BBC) Programme, which is a mentoring scheme for both start-up and growing businesses.
- 2.17. The Marches LEP manages the Marches Growth Hub through a Growth Hub Steering Group, which meets on a quarterly basis. The Steering Group provides guidance on key issues such as policy and objectives, budgetary control, marketing strategy and resource allocation. The aims and objectives of the Steering Group are set out in the Terms of Reference included in the Marches LEP Accountability and Assurance Framework. The group is a sub-group of the LEP Board and the membership comprises senior representatives from the three Local Authorities, representatives from the Area Business Boards (see paragraphs 2.19-2.21 below), a representative from WiRE Member (private), a Chamber of Commerce representative, a representative from the Federation of Small Businesses, a skills representative and a local BEIS representative in addition to Growth Hub and LEP officers. The group is chaired by the Deputy Chair for the Marches LEP, Paul Hinkins who is also the Chair of one of the three Business Boards.
- 2.18. There is also an Operational Group, which meets every two months. This manages the referrals and outputs from the virtual hub and the Physical Hubs. The membership of this group includes both local and national partners. The Operations Group is also chaired by the Chair of the Growth Hub Steering Group, Paul Hinkins.
- 2.19. There are three private sector Area Business Boards that operate in the Marches area covering Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin. These represent businesses across various sectors, with two-way communication with the LEP through the Chairs of each Board, who sit on the LEP Board. Also represented on the Area Business Boards are:
 - the relevant area Chamber of Commerce;
 - FSB;
 - other business sector networks;
 - the voluntary, community and Social Enterprise Sector;
 - larger, strategic business across the area; and,
 - Universities and Colleges.
- 2.20. The Area Business Boards are not LEP Sub-Groups. Instead, they have their own independent function and remit to provide a strategic role in supporting growth across their areas. Their role is to ensure that the voice of local business is heard and provide local intelligence and experience to support LEP decision-making.
- 2.21. The inclusion of the three Area Board Chairs in the LEP Board aims to:

- Provide strong communications on business needs with the SME community;
- Inform strategic business development; and,
- Engage with SMEs, sector champions as well as large employers through direct communication undertaken by the LEP with the wider business base.

Figure 2.2: Marches LEP Group Structure



Comparison with Other Growth Hubs

- 2.22. As part of the evaluation, the set up and business models of eight other Growth Hubs have been reviewed, as follows:
- Swindon & Wiltshire
 - Cumbria
 - Lincolnshire
 - Enterprise M3
 - York, North Yorkshire and East Riding
 - Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire
 - Gloucestershire
 - Worcestershire
- 2.23. These Growth Hubs were chosen due to the similar geographical areas covered. However, the operational models and levels of funding for each of these Growth Hubs vary significantly and they operate in different local economic contexts. Furthermore, Growth Hubs have adopted different methods to record and report different types of data including financial and management information but also outputs and outcomes e.g. business assists. It is clear that within a relatively short period of time, the Marches Growth Hub is operating on a par with more resourced/longer established Growth Hubs. However, given the lack of consistent and comparable data across all Growth Hubs, it is not possible to draw any meaningful comparisons

in terms of impact and value for money at this stage. All Growth Hubs that have been reviewed have a central online presence through which business support is co-ordinated and accessed. Five of the Growth Hubs also have a local helpline, whilst 3 utilise the national Business Support Helpline. Half of those reviewed do not have a physical presence, whilst one (Cumbria) has 14 Physical Hubs that utilise existing enterprise centres and Rural Growth Network hubs. Those hubs with a physical presence utilise Growth Deal or ERDF funding to enhance their offer.

- 2.24. Given that the Marches Growth Hub covers one of the largest geographical LEP areas in the country, the Growth Hub has made good progress in terms of improving the awareness of business support and providing a single point of access and signposting to information and guidance on business support available to enterprises across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development.
- 2.25. The website is clear and easy to use in comparison with some other Growth Hub websites. It also includes a Skills Employer portal, which enables employers to find training to support the upskilling of staff.
- 2.26. The Marches Growth Hub also links to both the www.gov.uk website and the Government's Business Support Helpline - although there is potentially some duplication in relation to this approach, in terms of similar content and business support finder tools as well as the role of the local helplines.
- 2.27. The combined model (virtual and physical) ensures that businesses can easily access 24-hour information as well as opportunities for face-to-face support, attend local events and have direct access to national service providers as well as European funded business support schemes. The Marches Growth Hub has made good use of ERDF funding to provide support to businesses.
- 2.28. By utilising the three Physical Growth Hubs in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford & Wrekin and working with partners across the region, the Marches Growth Hub has fostered collaboration and co-ordination focusing on linking businesses to intensive support from partners rather than delivering business support themselves. This approach has a number of advantages including efficient use of resources. It also enables engagement with business support providers as and when needed.
- 2.29. However, this approach also poses a number of challenges including:
 - Fragmented messaging about what the Growth Hub is, which can lead to confusion for businesses. The various communication channels used by the three Physical Hubs and partners need to be better coordinated and streamlined with a clear, shared message and plan amongst the partners. Although media protocols, core descriptors, and branding guidelines for the Marches Growth Hub are in existence and shared with Physical Hubs, there are still differences between the Physical Hubs and partners in terms of messaging.
 - A range of CRM systems operating to meet the primary objectives of delivery organisations alongside data and monitoring requirements of the Growth Hub – leading to significant data gathering fatigue among partner organisations. Other Growth Hubs have invested in shared CRM systems to enable a 360 view of the customer journey/support provided and enable seamless referrals. The Growth Hubs in Cumbria, Stoke and Staffordshire and Gloucestershire are all good examples in this area.
 - Co-location with the University of Wolverhampton improves links with graduates and the wider business community, encourages innovation and helps the universities to understand the needs of the local business community. However, this approach contributes to some

branding-confusion. The fact that one of the Physical Hubs is not co-located with the/a University also presents a clear variation of the offer within the Marches area.

2.30. Considering a few approaches adopted by other Growth Hubs could also enhance business reach. These include:

- Partnering with larger/major private sector businesses and corporates. For example, the Growth Hub in Gloucestershire is working with Lloyds Banking Group that is delivering the Business Connectors Programme in collaboration with BITC.
- Increasing the use of established business networks' communications channels and events or exploring combining resources with more localised events with partners e.g. the York and North Yorkshire Popup Business Cafes for low-cost/high-impact.

2.31. A high level summary of the approaches adopted by these Growth Hubs is presented in Figure 2.3 and a more detailed overview of each model is included in **Appendix B**.

Figure 2.3: Overview of Provision by Other Growth Hubs

Growth Hub	Model	Funding	Service Overview
Swindon & Wiltshire <i>Launched in March 2014</i>	Consortium formed through the LEP, funded by central and local Government and led by "Inspire by Wessex Chambers" in partnership with Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Business West.	£450,000 p.a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online portal • Events calendar • Local helpline • Access to advice from specialists • High Growth programme and funding • About to launch a new online community/collaborative platform
Cumbria <i>Launched in May 2013</i>	Partnership led by Cumbria Chamber of Commerce The Growth Hub operates from 14 Physical Hubs that include business/enterprise centres; Rural Growth Network hubs; and business Growth Hubs. (https://www.cumbriagrowthhub.co.uk/home/aboutus/physicalhubs)	Not published	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online "one-stop-shop" • Funding tool • Events calendar • Employs Growth Hub Business Advisers • European/Local Growth funding • Peer to-peer networking • Sector networks • 50% subsidy up to £2,500 towards the cost of consultancy • Local Helpline

Growth Hub	Model	Funding	Service Overview
Lincolnshire <i>Launched in July 2015</i>	Developed and managed by Lincolnshire County Council and the Greater Lincolnshire LEP	£250,000 BEIS funding plus £6m ERDF programmes (to 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online information portal • Advice and grant scheme finder • Events calendar • National business support helpline • 5 business advisers • Growth diagnostic and growth plans. • One to one General and Specialist Advice • Business workshops, briefings and events • Access to outreach 'spokes', e.g., enterprise, innovation and incubation spaces
Enterprise M3 <i>Launched in April 2015</i>	Contract model, delivered by BE Group in partnership with SETsquared, Business South and the County Councils of Hampshire and Surrey	£450,000 p.a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online portal/Information Bank • Events calendar • Business Network • National Business Support Helpline • Growth Service for priority sectors/high growth (aligned currently to the Strategic Local Plan and in particular, Aerospace & Defence, ICT & Digital Media, Pharmaceuticals, Professional Services and Innovation) • Associate Growth Champions
York, North Yorkshire and East Riding <i>Launched in July 2015</i>	Local Enterprise Partnership run	£250,000 p.a.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online one stop shop • Funding finder • eBooks • Events calendar • Pop up cafes • Events • Local business networks

Growth Hub	Model	Funding	Service Overview
Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire <i>Launched in April 2014</i>	Run by the Chamber of Commerce	Not published	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online gateway • Events calendar • Local helpline • Start-up support • Business finance • Shared CRM
Gloucestershire <i>Launched in October 2014</i>	Partnership between GFirst LEP and the University of Gloucestershire 1 Physical Hub at the moment - The Growth Hub, Oxstalls Campus, Oxstalls Lane, Longlevens, Gloucester GL2 9HW. The University is planning to open the new Business School and The Growth Hub in September 2018.	£10m (operating with the University of Gloucester Business School – funding for new building/Business School from HEFCE and the LEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online portal • Events calendar • Local helpline • Diagnostics • Sign posting, • Bespoke Navigator and Guide service • Mentors • Training • Access to incubation centres • Work space/physical premises • Shared CRM used by the LEP, the core Growth Hub staff and partners for the delivery of the Growth Hub • Other partners include the Lloyds Banking Group (Business Connectors Programme)
Worcestershire <i>Launched in June 2014</i>	Collaboration led by Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, working with Worcestershire County Council	£250,000 BEIS funding £250,000 from Worcester County Council funding £450,000 ERDF funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advised in Worcestershire, a free online business directory • Online Guidance • Funding tool • Events calendar • Local helpline • Physical premises • Team of 9

3. Marches Growth Hub Delivery to date

- 3.1. As stated in the BEIS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Growth Hubs should be collecting a range of data to achieve sustainability by maximising their performance and impact, and also to capture “what works”. This information should be collected for three levels of intervention:
- **‘Light touch’** – interactions which do not consume significant dedicated resource e.g. interaction at conferences or events, website traffic, telephone and signposting.
 - **‘Medium intensity’** – interactions which use moderate Growth Hub resource, broadly aligned to the EU 3 hour metric for ‘Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage support only’ e.g. business diagnostic with Growth Hub advisor, referral to business support schemes; and,
 - **‘High intensity’** – interactions representing sustained support and using significant Growth Hub resource, aligned to the EU 12 hour metric for ‘Enterprise Support’.
- 3.2. To respond to these requirements, the Marches Growth Hub central team/virtual hub holds some significant amount of information in two key CRM databases. Tractivity³, which is used by the Marches Growth Hub central team, holds information on company-registered name, full address, contact name and contact details (phone and email). Additionally, the Growth Hub holds aggregate information for enquiries by: referrals to partners, signposted to third parties, trading status, source, Local Authority, enquiry type and company sector. The three Local Authorities also use a separate database, Evolutive⁴. This holds information on the name of SME or individual, full address, contact name and details (telephone / email), Company House number, sector SIC, year of business registration, last available turnover, number of employees prior to intervention, maturity of business, intervention type, level of support intensity, date of intervention, intervention focus, Growth Hub time spent, cost of intervention and number of jobs created in four different salary bands. In 2015, the Marches Growth Hub undertook a full CRM review prior to committing to their current system Tractivity.
- 3.3. At the time, it was accepted that the three Local Authority partners were using the same CRM (Evolutive) but in differing forms. With no certainty from Government on the future of growth hubs, the Marches LEP and virtual growth hub was not in a financial position to change all of the CRMs to Tractivity. It was agreed that Tractivity was a far superior system and more suitable to the needs of both the Marches LEP and Virtual Growth Hub. Although differing CRM systems are being used, the three Local Authority partners agreed to develop the same data capturing fields. The SLAs require all partners to provide updates on their service area and level of activity in the Marches area. This data is collated by the LEP hosted virtual hub helpline coordinator for discussion at every operational meeting (bi-monthly). However, information regarding the outcome of referrals is limited so the central team is unable to see an overview of the entire customer journey and therefore the impacts of the support provided. Reports are also submitted to BEIS on 6-month reporting basis on the following KPIs (covering mainly light touch support):
- Average customer satisfaction score.
 - Number of attendees at events.
 - Number of events held.
 - Number of face-to-face appointments.
 - Number of telephone calls.
 - Number of web based contacts.

³ <http://www.tractivity.co.uk>

⁴ <https://www.evolutive.co.uk>

3.4. Drawing upon this information, this section presents:

- Profile of businesses that have received light touch support – drawing upon information provided by the Marches Growth Hub central team that covers data relating to: a) the light touch activities of the virtual hub; and, b) relevant/light touch KPIs provided by the three Physical Hubs including information relating to events that have taken place to date (September 2017) and attendance.
- Profile of businesses that have received medium intensity support – drawing upon information provided by the Marches Growth Hub central team.
- Profile of businesses that have received intensive support – drawing upon information provided by the Marches Growth Hub central team.
- PR and Marketing.

Light Touch Support

Virtual Hub Data

3.5. As of September 2017, the virtual hub had:

- Received a total of 1,019 **light touch enquiries (by 973 companies)**; and
- Provided **246 referrals** to key partners, providers and various events.

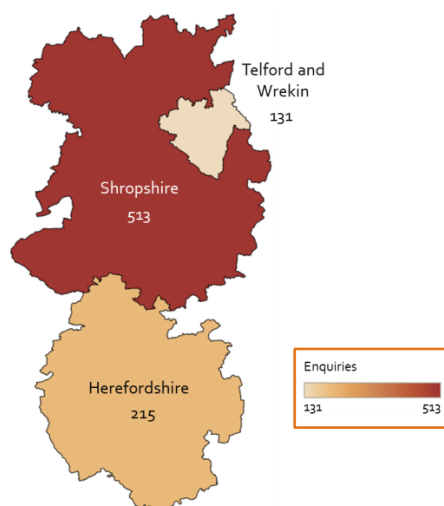
3.6. As shown in Figure 3.1, the largest number of light touch enquiries came from Shropshire (53%), followed by Herefordshire (22%) and Telford & Wrekin (14%). Nearly one in ten (12%) have been outside the area. The map in Figure 3.2 shows the concentration of businesses that sought / received light touch assistance from the Marches Growth Hub by Local Authority.

Figure 3.1: Light Touch Enquires by Location

Area	No of companies assisted	% of companies assisted
Shropshire	513	52.7%
Herefordshire	215	22.1%
Telford & Wrekin	131	13.5%
Outside of Area	114	11.7%
Total	973 unique companies	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

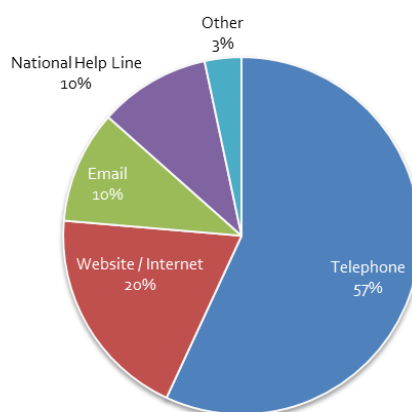
Figure 3.2: Light Touch Assists/Companies by Location



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

- 3.7. The most common way to engage with light touch supported businesses was through telephone calls with over 55% of the enquiries using this method. A further fifth (20%) was through the Growth Hub's website; 10% was through emails; and, a further 10% was through the National Business Support Help Line.

Figure 3.3: Activity for Assistance Provided - Light Touch Assists



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

- 3.8. As shown in Figure 3.4, businesses that received light touch support by the virtual hub are mainly in the **Service sector** (21%), followed by businesses in **Manufacturing & Technology** with 18% and the **Retail sector** with 14%.

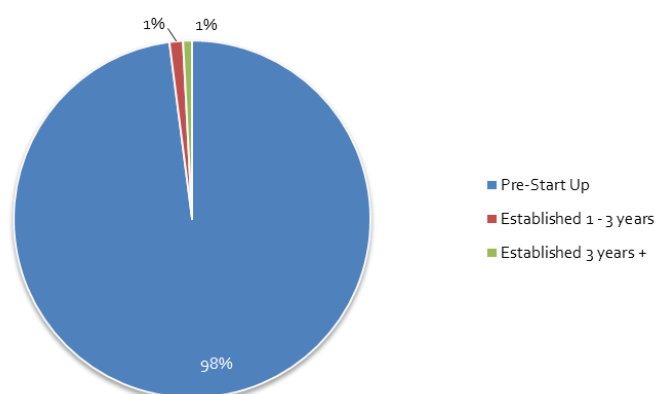
Figure 3.4 Enquiries by Sector - Light Touch Assists

Sector	No of Companies	% of Companies
Services	154	20.6%
Manufacturing & Technology	135	18.0%
Retail	102	13.6%
Tourism & Leisure	66	8.8%
Creative & Media	51	6.8%
Financial & Business Services	43	5.7%
Agriculture	39	5.2%
ICT & Software	38	5.1%
Food Manufacturing and Processing	23	3.1%
Automotive	20	2.6%
Life Sciences & Healthcare	19	2.5%
Construction	17	2.3%
Environmental Technologies	17	2.3%
Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering	14	1.9%
Ports & Logistics	6	0.8%
Local Authority / Council	5	0.7%
Total	749	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

- 3.9. Figure 3.5 shows the composition of light touch enquiries based on the company status of the company that received light touch support. 98% of all enquiries were from pre-start-up businesses, a further 1 are established businesses trading for 1 – 3 years and 1% of are established businesses having been trading for more than 3 years in a steady state.

Figure 3.5: Enquiries by Company Status - Light Touch



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

- 3.10. The database also contains information for a total of 246 referrals among the light touch support enquiries. As shown in Figure 3.6, the highest number enquiries received by the virtual hub were referred to the three Physical Growth Hubs – The Marches Growth Hub Shropshire (37%), The Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire (18%) and The Marches Growth Hub Telford (14%).

Figure 3.6: Referrals Made - Light Touch

Organisation	Referrals Made	% of Referrals
Marches Growth Hub Shropshire Growth Hub	91	37%
Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire Growth Hub	44	18%
Marches Growth Hub Telford & Wrekin Growth Hub	37	14%
Shropshire Council	21	9%
Herefordshire Council	21	9%
Economic Growth Solutions	11	4%
DIT	10	4%
Telford & Wrekin Council	9	4%
Green Shoots Plus Fund (University of Wolverhampton)	2	1%
Total	246	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017 - Based on virtual hub enquiries only.

Physical Growth Hubs KPIs

- 3.11. According to the KPIs collected by the Physical Growth Hubs, the three Physical Growth Hubs are also involved in a range of light touch activities including face-to-face appointments, events and telephone calls, as summarised in Figure 3.7. Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell from the data how many individual companies were supported or whether these are additional to the businesses supported by the virtual hub. In summary, between October 2015 and September 2017:

- There were a total of **1,910 face-to-face appointments**:
 - Two-thirds of these (67%) were in Telford & Wrekin;
 - 20% in Shropshire; and,

- 13% in Herefordshire,
- There were a total of **2,185 telephone calls**:
 - Over half (52%) were in Telford & Wrekin;
 - 28% in Shropshire; and,
 - 20% in Herefordshire.
- There have been a **total of 8,975 attendees to events undertaken to date**, with:
 - Half of these (50%) attending events in Herefordshire;
 - 37% in Telford & Wrekin; and
 - 13% in Shropshire.

Figure 3.7: BEIS KPI Report

KPIs	Herefordshire	Shropshire	Telford	Total
Attendees at events	4,491	1,203	3,281	8,975
Face to face appointments	243	390	1,277	1,910
Telephone calls	442	616	1,127	2,185
Total	5,176	2,209	5,685	14,081

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

3.12. As shown in Figure 3.8, **1,283 events have taken place under the umbrella of/including the Marches Growth Hub between October 2015 and September 2017**. In addition, 49 events are planned from October 2017 onwards. Review of the information relating to events that have been undertaken to date (September 2017) shows that:

- Almost a third (32%) took place in Telford & Wrekin;
- Over a quarter (28%) of the events were in Herefordshire;
- Around a quarter (26%) of the events were located in Shropshire;
- 6% of the events have been delivered online through Webinars; and,
- The remaining events were in other locations in the UK (7%) and a relatively small number (1%) overseas including in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and the Middle East.

3.13. **Appendix C** provides examples of these events.

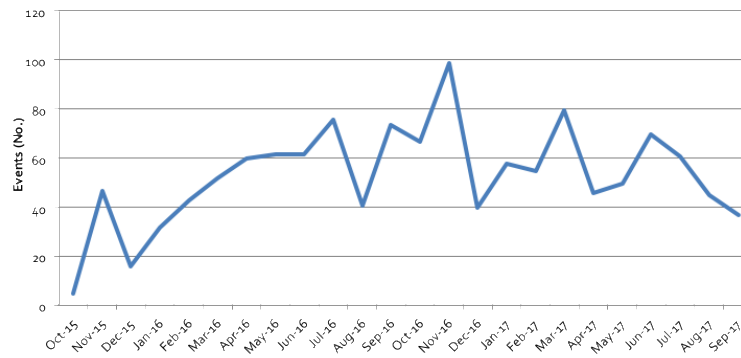
Figure 3.8: The Marches Events by Location

Location	Events (No.)	Event (%)
Telford & Wrekin	416	32.4%
Herefordshire	356	27.7%
Shropshire	328	25.5%
Webinar	79	6.2%
Other UK Local Authorities	88	6.9%
Outside UK	10	0.8%
Unknown	6	0.5%
Total	1,283	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017

3.14. Figure 3.9 depicts the distribution of events held by the Marches Growth Hub from October 2015 till the end of September 2017. From October 2015 there was a steady increase with some fluctuations in the number of events per month peaking at 99 in November 2016.

Figure 3.9: The Marches Growth Hub Events



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

Medium Level of Support

Virtual Hub Data

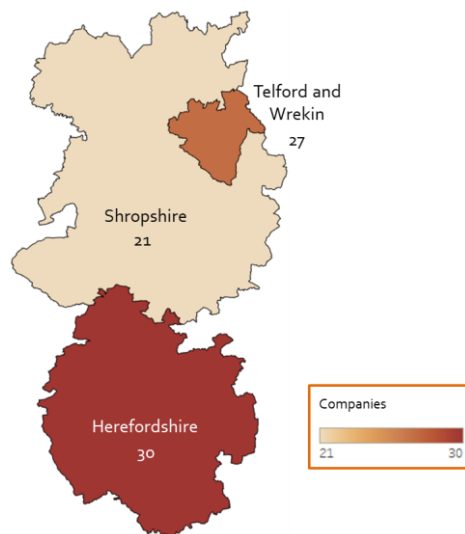
- 3.15. Information provided by the Marches Growth Hub central team shows that as of September 2017 there had been a total of **89 medium level assists to 81 unique companies** (i.e. some companies have been assisted more than once). As shown in Figures 3.10 and 3.11, the number of medium intensity assisted companies is split across the three areas, i.e. 37% located in Herefordshire, 33% in Telford & Wrekin and 26% in Shropshire.

Figure 3.10: Medium Intensity Assists by Location (Unique)

Area	No of companies assisted	% of companies assisted
Herefordshire	30	37.0%
Telford & Wrekin	27	33.4%
Shropshire	21	25.9%
Other	3	3.7%
Total	81 unique companies assisted	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

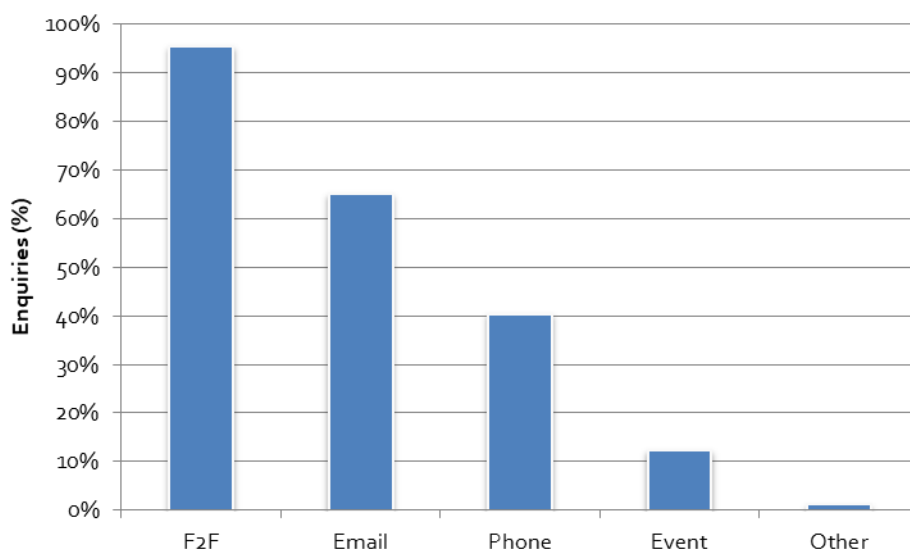
Figure 3.11: Location of Companies Receiving Medium Intensity Support (Unique)



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 3.16. As shown in Figure 3.12, face-to-face support was the most popular way through which support was received by medium intensity assisted businesses with over 95% requiring this. The next most popular type of support was via email with 65%, followed by 40% for phone and 12% for events. Data also kept by the hub indicate that the **average time spent on medium level assists by the Growth Hub is 4.7 hours**.

Figure 3.12: Level of Support – Medium Intensity Assists



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 3.17. Sector information was available for 24 out of the 81 (30%) businesses that received medium intensity support. As shown in Figure 3.13, **Manufacturing is the dominant sector** for the medium intensity support with 29% of assisted businesses in this sector. This followed by **Information and Communication (17%)**, **Wholesale and Retail Trade (17%)** and **Construction (13%)**.

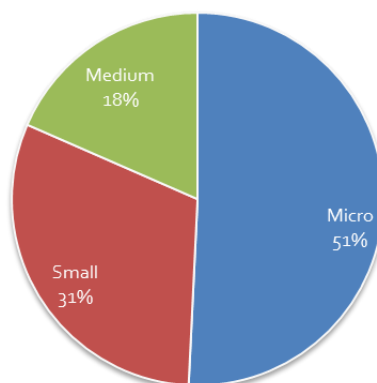
Figure 3.13: Medium Intensity Assists by Sector

Sector	No of Companies	% of Companies
Manufacturing	7	29.20%
Information and Communication	4	16.66%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	4	16.66%
Construction	3	12.50%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	2	8.30%
Administrative and Support Service Activities	1	4.16%
Professional, Scientific and Technical	1	4.17%
Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	1	4.17%
Real Estate Activities	1	4.17%
Total	24	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.
(Based on companies for which information is available).

- 3.18. Figure 3.14 shows the proportion of businesses based on their employment size.⁵ Over half (51%) of the businesses fall into the micro category, an additional 31% are small and 18% are medium size enterprises.

Figure 3.14: Companies by Size (Employment) – Medium Intensity Assists



Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 3.19. Annual turnover information was available for 51 (63%) out of 81 businesses who received medium intensity support. As shown in Figure 3.15, three out of 10 businesses supported (29%) have an annual turnover range of between £1 million and £3 million. Around 39% of businesses have an annual turnover of above £3 million. Around a third (31%) of the businesses have a turnover of less than £1 million.

Figure 3.15: Turnover - Medium Intensity Assists

Turnover Range	Companies (No.)	Companies (%)
Less than 100k	4	7.8%
Between £100k-£500k	6	11.8%
Between £500k-£1m	6	11.8%
Between £1m-£3m	15	29.4%
Between £3m-£10m	11	21.6%
More than £10m	9	17.6%
Total	51	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.
(Based on companies for which information is available).

- 3.20. The database provides information for a total of 31 referrals (18 companies) made to various events and organisations for the medium intensity support enquiries. The top 4 referrals were: the Business Growth Programme (32%), the Building Business Confidence (23%), the Department for International Trade (16%) and the Marches Building Investment Grant (13%).

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en. According to the European Commission guidelines micro enterprises are companies with an employment of less than 10, small sized enterprises have an employment of less than 50 and medium sized enterprises have an employment size of less than 250.

Figure 3.16: Referrals – Medium Intensity Assists

Organisation/Programme	Referrals (No.)	Companies (%)
Business Growth Programme	10	32.3%
Building Business Confidence	7	22.6%
Department for International Trade	5	16.1%
Marches Building Investment Grant	4	12.9%
Business Energy Efficiency Programme	3	9.7%
Fastershire	1	3.2%
Knowledge Exchange & Enterprise Network	1	3.2%
Total	31	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.
(Based on companies for which information is available).

High Intensive Assistance

- 3.21. As of September 2017, the virtual hub held information only for a total of 8 intensive level assists to 8 unique businesses. Key characteristics of this support are summarised as follows:
- 7 out of the 8 (88%) are in Telford & Wrekin and the remaining 1 is in Shropshire.
 - Of these businesses, 3 have a turnover range of between £100,000-£500,000; 2 have a turnover between £1 million – £3 million; 1 has a turnover between £3 million - £10 million; and 1 has a turnover of over £10 million.
 - 3 out of the 8 are micro size businesses, 3 are small sized and 1 is a medium sized enterprise.
 - All 8 interventions had face-to-face contact with the Marches Growth Hub.
 - 2 supports were referred to the Marches Building Investment Grant, 1 was referred to the Business Development Programme and 1 the Business Growth Programme and the Department for International Trade.
 - The average Growth Hub time spent on a business receiving intensive assistance has been 16.7 hours.

PR and Marketing

- 3.22. The Marches Growth Hub has developed a marketing strategy to support successful outreach and to continuously improve how the Growth Hub engages with key audiences. The Marches Growth Hub marketing plan aims to build the profile of the Growth Hub as a single point of access for business and skills support across the LEP area. This plan is a living document and is refreshed regularly.
- 3.23. The website is user friendly and easy to navigate. It has received more than 43,000 visitors (24,000 unique visitors), who viewed pages over 154,000 times since its launch in October 2015. The most popular pages after the Home Page are the Events Calendar (7,638 views since launch); Directory (5,595 views since launch); and Start-up Support (3,612) views since launch)⁶. A monthly digital news digest is issued to a growing number of users keeping them up-to-date on existing and new products and services as well as promoting achievements and events.

⁶ Information provided by Amy Bould of Be Bold Public Relations, who is responsible for delivering a programme of strategic public relations and communications across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin on behalf of the LEP partnership (<https://beboldpr.com>).

- 3.24. The Marches Growth Hub is supported by an active programme of communications, delivered as part of a cross-platform strategy. Activity includes online marketing, events to complement Government and regional business support campaigns backed by a media relations strategy and activity, including PR, editorials, and a sustained digital campaign via e-marketing, e-newsletters and social media to ensure viral reach and recognition of both the brand and the Growth Hub support on offer. The Marches Growth Hub is active on Twitter, Facebook and Linked In, offering businesses multiple channels to engage with the business support on offer.
- 3.25. From the start of 2017, the focus has been on specific #campaigns to encourage use of both the physical and virtual hubs, including Get Digital, Get Started, Industrial Strategy, Manufacturing, and Midlands Engine. There has also been an ongoing campaign to promote Access to Funding as schemes go live such as the Marches Business Investment Grant (MBIG), MIEF and EU funding calls.
- 3.26. The focus for 2017/2018 is likely to be based around the Government's scale-up narrative and therefore a #GetGrowing campaign is being developed to support regional activity and business support programmes aimed at helping these growth potential SMEs.
- 3.27. This activity has proved effective and continues to raise awareness of the Growth Hub, increasing brand recognition and the profile of the Marches Growth Hub. Feedback from stakeholders shows that businesses are beginning to recognise the Marches Growth Hub as the single point of access for business support in the region. The brand and services of the Growth Hub are starting to embed in the local business support landscape and local stakeholders and businesses are acknowledging the benefits of these services alike. Whether this has resulted in an increase of the Marches Growth Hub service take-up is difficult to demonstrate at this stage.
- 3.28. The Marches Growth Hub currently has a good following on Twitter and a significant number of website users:
 - 17,000 website users this year alone
 - 2,280 Twitter followers
 - 278 followers on Facebook
 - 78 followers on Linked In (2 October 2017)
 - 10 subscribers on YouTube
- 3.29. For comparison, Figure 3.17 shows the reach in 2016/17 of the Growth Hubs reviewed as part of this evaluation. Key conclusions drawn from this information are summarised below and relevant recommendations are made in section 6 of the report.
 - The Marches Growth Hub currently has a good following on Twitter and a high number of website users in comparison with other Growth Hubs. However, the number of users on Facebook and Linked In are comparatively low at this stage.
 - The Marches Growth Hub also has a YouTube Channel⁷ (which could be better utilised). New content has been developed for the channel but consideration should be given to how to drive traffic to the You Tube channel as well as Facebook/the Marches Growth Hub website in order to reach a wider audience.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVYguUBbMCtogTT1wV4VmLAo>

Figure 3.17: Social Media Reach of Growth Hubs

Growth Hub	Facebook	Twitter	Linked In	Google Plus	Website
The Marches Growth Hub	278	2,280	78	N/A	17,000
Swindon & Wiltshire	131	1,465	277	16	4,535
Cumbria	325	4,878	584	500	Unknown
Lincolnshire	499	4,425	N/A	N/A	29,234
Enterprise M3	37	1,922	273	N/A	11,000
York, North Yorkshire and East Riding (How's Business)	2,307	1,930	88	N/A	4,768
Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire	No separate GH page – general Business Hub page for South Staffordshire run by Staffs LA 169 followers	No separate GH page – LEP page has 2,214 followers – COC twitter account. 7387 followers	No separate GH page – COC account 514 followers	N/A	Unknown
Gloucestershire	N/A	5,477	426	Also has YouTube (24 subscribers) and Instagram	20,000
Worcestershire	N/A	3,386	348	N/A	Unknown

Source: WECD Research.

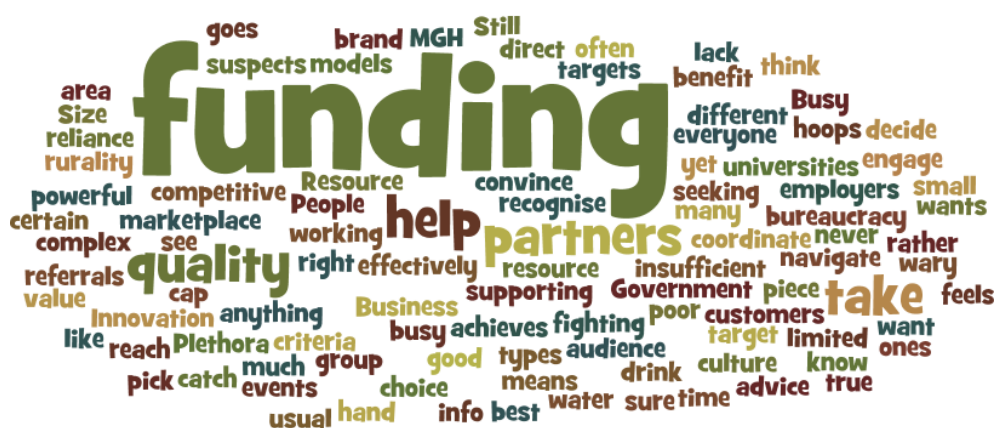
4. Marches Growth Hub Operations and Delivery – Feedback

- 4.1. As part of the evaluation, 27 key stakeholders have been interviewed using a structured questionnaire. A list of stakeholders interviewed to date and a copy of the questionnaire are included in **Appendix D**.
- 4.2. Key messages from these interviews are summarised under key stakeholders' feedback on:
 - Business Support Needs;
 - Key issues in relation to Business Support Provision in the area; and,
 - The Marches Growth Hub – achievements, strengths and areas for improvement.

Main Business Support Needs

- 4.3. Key stakeholders were asked about business needs in the area based on their knowledge/work. The vast majority highlighted that business needs vary by sector and stage of their life/business planning. In general, however, businesses need **clear signposting** – help to navigate/understand what they need to do in relation to specific requirements they may have. At the same, most stakeholders agree that this support cannot be offered just online as businesses, and in particular SMEs, do not have the time (nor the resources or knowledge) to search for the information they need.
- 4.4. Key stakeholders have also highlighted that business often do not know what they want/need and therefore they do not see the benefit of seeking support. There is therefore a need to help them recognise that there is free quality support available for them and/or convince them to take time out of their business to work with advisors/mentors to refine and/or take their plans forward.
- 4.5. Other specific issues that appear to be of concern to businesses according to key stakeholders include:
 - Finance and funding (mainly capital, grants to expand/get to markets, gap funding i.e. one off costs)
 - Start Up support – basic business guidance
 - Events / networking/contacts (at the same time it is noted that businesses need help to navigate/pick through the minefield of events and decide which ones are relevant/best value to them)
 - Skills/training
 - Marketing and social media
 - Business planning
 - Intellectual Property
 - Digital and ICT development/hosting (web, systems, use of social media)
 - Connectivity – broadband and physical connectivity
- 4.6. Figure 4.1 summarises the main business needs as perceived by key stakeholders.

Figure 4.1: What key stakeholders think that businesses need



Business Support Provision in the area

- 4.7. A number of common issues were highlighted by stakeholders as still posing challenges for a cohesive business support provision infrastructure in the area. These are summarised below:
- The size of the area and the economic/business structure of the area requires multiple types of intervention and coverage, and hence a range of resources. For example, Shropshire has a lot of micro businesses⁸ and lifestyle businesses so the Growth Hub/business support providers there may see a large quantity of inquiries but support offered may have less impact. There is less support available for these groups. On the other hand, Telford is home to manufacturing/larger SMEs⁹ (more likely to be eligible for assisted area status and hence more funding).
 - Government funding. This is still too complex – too many hoops/criteria/bureaucracy means that funding is only available to certain types of businesses. Furthermore, most current ERDF and Government funding is not appropriate for businesses in Shropshire.
 - Innovation focus. For some, business support funding is too focused on innovation with relatively more resources going direct to universities rather than business.
 - Lack of real targeting. Key stakeholders highlighted that most business support providers tend to work with the same companies and the key challenge is how to widen and enhance reach. Furthermore, a few questioned whether targeting all SMEs is wise and whether a more targeted/informed approach is needed.
 - Competitive market. Despite the SEP, the three Local Authorities have different priorities and this makes collaboration difficult. Furthermore, providers/delivery partners are fighting for customers/referrals and each has different models/targets/funding and effective coordination remains a real issue.
 - Employer engagement and achieving impact. While recognising that some employers will never engage to explore available solutions for their needs and most importantly may not implement the advice provided to them as they are too busy working in the business (as one interviewee stated, *'You can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink'*), most interviewees highlighted the need for selective business intensive support in order to deliver growth and transformation.

⁸ 90% of all Shropshire businesses are micro sized enterprises (NOMIS 2017).

⁹ 8% of all manufacturing companies located in Telford are medium sized compared with 5% in Herefordshire and 4% in Shropshire (NOMIS 2017).

The Growth Hub

- 4.8. All key stakeholders recognise that the main achievement of the Growth Hub to date has been in terms of improving co-ordination of business support across an area where the business structure and priorities of Local Authorities are quite different. The Growth Hub has also fostered greater collaboration among various partners.
- 4.9. In terms of the operational model i.e. the virtual and three Physical Growth Hubs, most stakeholders thought that in general the model was right due to the large area and diverse needs of the business population and a virtual hub alone would add no value. The Marches Growth Hub virtual hub helps by acting as a one-stop-shop (for businesses at point of entry), providing breadth in a cost effective way. However, the Physical Growth Hubs are important, as they target specific sectors and type of businesses across their respective localities. In general, 'what works' with the Growth Hub can be summarised as follows:
- The fundamental concept of the Marches Growth Hub as the signposting of contact/gateway to business support provision is welcomed as it is seen to bring everything together and streamline access point for businesses. Furthermore, the virtual hub is a welcome support (administrative and signposting) where Local Authority resources are constrained.
 - Local delivery/presence is welcome with people on the ground/face to face business engagement/relationship management seen as integral to supporting businesses locally, in particular where the hub offers space for people to meet and work but also feel part of a business community.
 - Events have enabled more start-ups/micros to benefit from support – providing a place to meet people/join events/network. Joint events among organisation/partners are seen as relatively more successful and effective.
 - Brand awareness /PR is good and in particular the themed activities #GetGrowing #getstarted, with good links to LEP and national promotion.
 - A good website that is helpful with enabling self-service. It also gives advisers a good base to refer people to. Visits have been growing with returning users and new users.
 - The dedicated local helpline has been in general seen as a useful and cost effective way of addressing breadth of advice and signposting (however, messages have been mixed in terms of its value in providing relevant and in-depth diagnostic service).
- 4.10. Figure 4.2 also summarises what works for the Marches Growth Hub to date.

Figure 4.2: The Marches Growth Hub – What Works



4.11. Key stakeholders have also raised a number of issues for consideration now and in the future. These are summarised below:

- The role of the Growth Hub should remain around a signposting service – and avoid becoming a membership organisation and/or be involved in provision of diagnostic advice and support that is publicly funded, thus driving existing organisations out of the market.
- On the contrary, its focus should be on lead generation/stimulating demand for business support – particularly amongst medium/larger local businesses. The Growth Hub could also do more in terms of managing stakeholder/partner relationships in order to improve the information flow between the core Growth Hub team and partners (and vice versa). Many organisations are still working in silos – this needs to be better joined up in order to enable better marketing and signposting. Stronger partnerships are key to reaching more businesses and helping more business get the support they need.
- In order to deliver these objectives, the Growth Hub (and the LEP) will need to be very clear about both industrial/economic strategy and inward investment priorities for the area as a whole.
- The Growth Hub could usefully map out what funding/programmes are available to what business – and keep that information and the team/partners up to date so that everyone knows what is available.
- The Physical Growth Hubs are individually good but need better alignment/co-ordination. Some also commented that more physical facilities would help - there is a need for short-term office facilities, meeting space, particularly in Shrewsbury.
- Due to its lack of resources, the Marches Growth Hub is strongly reliant on Local Authorities and the Universities for funding and delivery. Although the contribution and commitment of resources by the Local Authorities is recognised/appreciated, it is also highlighted that their approach is not always business-led. Some suggested that there needs to be a better balance between private and public sector interests as there was too much public sector representation. On the other hand, there is some mixed branding between the Wolverhampton Business Solutions Centre/Council/LEP/ Chamber/DIT and the Growth Hub. According to key stakeholders, businesses get confused and do not understand how it all fits together.
- The area is lacking real grant funding/finance for start-ups. As stated by one interviewee, *'Grant schemes are focused on existing businesses and many of the business support programmes available are ERDF funded with eligibility restricted to Business-to-Business (B2B) – leaving a gap in support for start-ups focused on Business-to-Consumer (B2C), and particularly retail, which is a key sector in the area'*.
- Demand also tends to be for smaller amounts to help with one-off purchases/costs (e.g. for equipment/ICT systems) for increasing median growth/scale. There is also lack of awareness locally amongst businesses of alternative/equity finance (e.g. venture/business angels).
- The website is good but at this stage it does not seem to translate into a significant number of enquiries/referrals. Whilst it could become less busy it could allow space for clearly/well-signposted local events. As one interviewee stated, current pages *'can cause a bit of confusion and room for error for a local business booking an event in the wrong area'* i.e. a business booking on an event which they assume is local, only to find out they have to drive 2 hours to get there.

- Some stakeholders questioned whether the Marches Growth Hub helpline was a useful and cost effective way of providing a diagnostic service beyond signposting. Some felt that it simply placed another hurdle/barrier in the way of business reaching the support they need more quickly as the Physical Hubs already have their own phone numbers. For others, and in particular partners with limited resources, the Marches Growth Hub helpline offers a welcome support.

5. Business Benefits and Impacts

- 5.1. Customer satisfaction surveys sent out by the virtual hub and the three Physical Hubs represent a key KPI for the Marches Growth Hub.

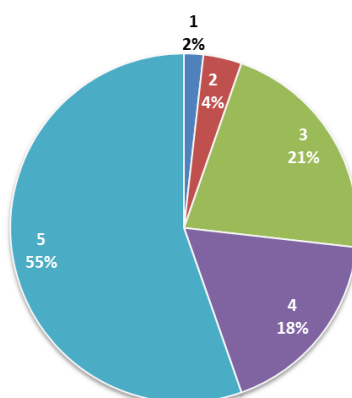
Virtual Hub

- 5.2. A copy of the questionnaire sent out by the virtual hub is provided in **Appendix E**. Questions cover issues relating to:
- Knowledge of the Marches Growth Hub;
 - Satisfaction with the service provided; and,
 - Likelihood to recommend the Marches Growth Hub to others.
- 5.3. Businesses often also provide overall comments about the support they have received by the Growth Hub.
- 5.4. A summary of the responses received to date by the virtual hub (56 businesses) is presented in this section under the above headings. The section also presents direct feedback from businesses supported based on consultations undertaken by our team. It needs to be recognised that it is too early for the full impacts of business support to materialise, given that the Marches Growth Hub has been operating for less than two years and the number of businesses that have received medium and intensive support are still relatively low (the Marches Growth Hub also only started to report medium/high-intensity data to BEIS from April 2016). Nevertheless, there is evidence that medium and intensive support are delivering results as measured by the number of jobs, which are also presented in this section.

Knowledge of the Marches Growth Hub

- 5.5. Businesses were asked to rate the knowledge of the Marches Growth Hub on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent. As shown Figure 5.1, out of 56 responses: over half of the businesses (**55%**) **rated the knowledge of the Growth Hub as excellent (5)** and **around a fifth (18%) rated the knowledge at 4**. 21% rated 3, 4% rated the knowledge at 2, and only 2% rated it as poor (1).

**Figure 5.1: Knowledge of the Marches Growth Hub
1 to 5 Scoring (1=poor and 5=excellent)**

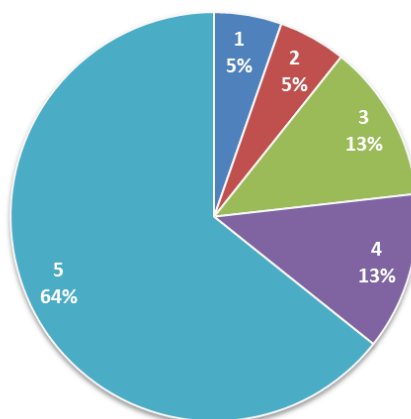


Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

Satisfaction with the service

- 5.6. Asked to rate the overall service provided on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent, out of 56 responses: **65% rated the overall service provided as excellent (5)**, 13% rated the overall service at 4, 13% rated 3, 5% rated 2, and only 5% rated the service as poor (1).

**Figure 5.2: Overall service provided
1 to 5 scoring (1=poor and 5=excellent)**



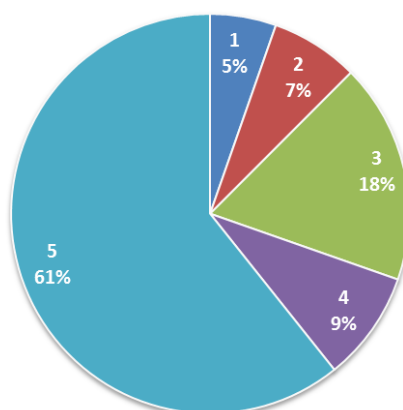
Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey, (data up to 30th September 2017).

- 5.7. In addition, as part of their KPIs, the Physical Growth Hubs collect information on overall customer satisfaction – analysis of this information shows that **the average customer satisfaction score across the area has been relatively high** as follows:
- 5.0 in Herefordshire;
 - 4.8 in Telford & Wrekin; and,
 - 4.5 in Shropshire.

Referrals

- 5.8. Businesses are also asked how likely they are to refer the service to another business or colleague on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unlikely and 5 is very likely. As shown in Figure 5.3, out of 56 responses, **61% said they are very likely (5) to refer the service to another business or colleague** and only 5% of the businesses said they are very unlikely (1) to recommend the service.

**Figure 5.3: Likelihood of referring the service
1 to 5 Scoring (1=very unlikely and 5=very likely)**



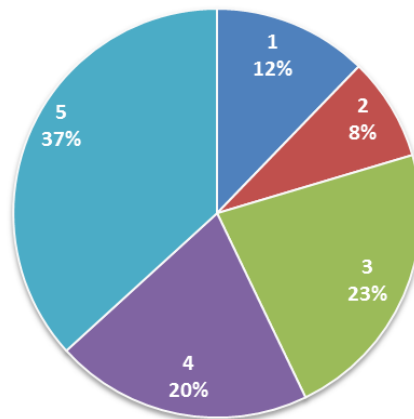
Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

Additionality of Advice

- 5.9. Businesses are also asked whether they are likely to have undertaken the same activity in the absence of the Marches Growth Hub support - on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very unlikely and 5 is very likely. Out of 56 respondents, 7 did not answer this question. As shown in Figure 5.4, of the 49 responses: 37% of the businesses said they were very likely (5) to have undertaken the

same activity in the absence of the Marches Growth Hub support. A fifth (20%) provided a rating of 4. It could be argued that both these ratings together constitute deadweight of the advice/support provided (57%). On the other hand, around a quarter of businesses (23%) provided a rating of 3. 8% provided a rating of 2 and another 12% said they were very unlikely (1) to have undertaken the same activity – together these figures represent full additionality of 20%.

Figure 5.4: Likelihood of undertaking activity without the support of the Growth Hub 1 to 5 Scoring (1=very unlikely and 5=very likely)



Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

- 5.10. Out of 48 comments about the Growth Hub helpline, just over 70% (34) were positive. Examples of feedback provided are listed below and summarised in Figure 5.5.

"As a small, but rapidly expanding business it is great to have 'one point of contact' that can provide a wealth of information on what's out there with regard to training, advice, financial resources, networking events, etc."

"Excellent facility and very efficiently run"

"Service was very good. The advisor listened to my questions and gave good feedback and has continued with this approach since the first conversation"

Figure 5.5: Overview of Business Feedback - Helpline



Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

- 5.11. Just fewer than 30% (14) provided less positive feedback - the main message being that they do not see the point of a service, which only offers signposting and referrals. Others felt that their questions had not been answered correctly or that the hub had not got back to them at all. One respondent also identified one more sector that could be supported by the work of the Growth Hub as follows:

*"By limiting your services and sources of grant solely for private enterprises you are totally ignoring the potential of **the co-operative and community sector** to contribute to the growth of the Marches economy."*

Another respondent commented that the website is out of date:

"The website is out of date (e.g. still mentions innovation vouchers no longer available) and incomplete since it omits EU funding possibilities."

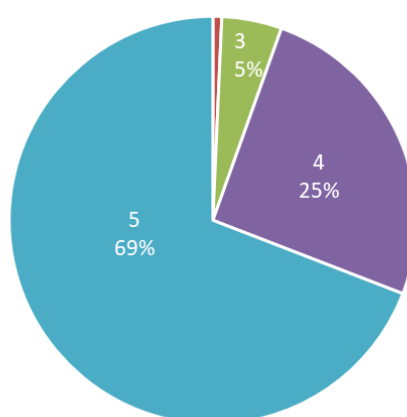
Physical Hubs

- 5.12. Surveys sent out by the Physical Hubs ask only 2 questions: 'How Satisfied Were You With The Service Received?'; and, 'In The Absence Of Growth Hub Support How Likely Are You To Undertake Same Activity?'. A summary of the responses received to 30th September 2017 is presented below (570 businesses responded out of 1070 surveys issued).

Satisfaction with the service

- 5.13. As indicated by the survey responses, the majority of customers are very satisfied with the service they have received from the Physical Hubs. Asked to rate how satisfied they were with the service received, on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied), as shown in Figure 5.6, out of 570 responses, **94% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied** (i.e. giving a score of either 5 or 4) **with the service received by the Physical Hubs**. Only 5% scored the service at 3, and less than 1% rated it as 1 or 2.

**Figure 5.6: Service received
1 to 5 scoring (1=very dissatisfied and 5=very satisfied)**

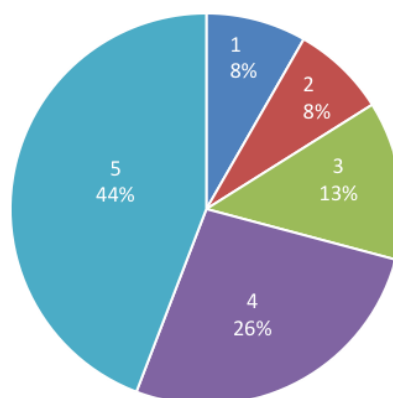


Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

Additionality of Advice

- 5.14. Businesses are also asked whether they are likely to have undertaken the same activity in the absence of the Marches Growth Hub support - on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very likely and 5 is very unlikely. Out of 570 respondents, 44% of the businesses said they were very unlikely (5) to have undertaken the same activity in the absence of the Marches Growth Hub support. 26% provided a rating of 4. Around 8% said that they would be very likely to have undertaken the same activity in the absence of the Growth Hub.

**Figure 5.7: Likelihood of undertaking activity without the support of the Growth Hub
1 to 5 Scoring (1=very unlikely and 5=very likely)**



Source: The Marches Customer Satisfaction Survey (data up to 30th September 2017).

Medium/Intensive Supported Businesses

- 5.15. Although it is too early for the full impacts of business support to materialise given that the Marches Growth Hub has been operating for less than two years and the Marches Growth Hub only started to report medium/high-intensity data to BEIS from April 2016), there is evidence that medium and intensive support are delivering results as measured by jobs created. As shown in Figure 5.8, companies supported through medium support have created a total of 102 jobs – this is based on 20 companies that have reported job creation as a result of the business support they have received. 30 of these jobs were created by 8 micro sized enterprises, 59 jobs were created by 9 small sized enterprises and 13 jobs were created by 3 medium sized enterprises.

Figure 5.8: Jobs Created by Enterprise Size – Medium Intensity Support

Type of Business	Jobs Created (no of businesses)	Average Job Created
Micro	30 (8)	4
Small	59 (9)	7
Medium	13 (3)	4
Total	102 (20)	5

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 5.16. In addition to the above, **four companies that received intensive support have created a total of 134 jobs**. All these jobs were created in Telford & Wrekin.

Figure 5.9: Jobs Created by Enterprise Size – Intensive Support

Type of Business	Jobs Created (no of businesses)
Micro	31 (2)
Small	3 (1)
Medium	100 (1)
Total	134 (4)

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 5.17. Based on additional information available for the medium intensive businesses (20 businesses that have created 102 jobs as shown in Figure 5.8 above), over half of the jobs created by these businesses are in Telford & Wrekin, 32% of the jobs were created in Shropshire and 17% of the jobs were created in Herefordshire.

Figure 5.10: Jobs Created by Enterprises that Received Medium Intensity Support, by Local Authority

Location	Jobs Created (No.)	Job Created (%)
Telford & Wrekin	52	51%
Shropshire	33	32%
Herefordshire	17	17%
Total	102	100%

Source: The Marches Growth Hub, September 2017.

- 5.18. It is estimated that these jobs cost around £2,800 to create on the basis of the Marches Growth Hub funding alone. However, if grant funding is also taken into account, the cost per job may be as much as £8,000. Given the lack of data regarding the support provided by partners and the outcome of referrals, it is not possible to isolate the impact of Growth Hub support and therefore the actual cost per job created. Also, given the variations in local economic conditions and the services provided by individual Growth Hubs, no meaningful comparisons can be made based on the available data to date and any comparative data should be used with caution and within appropriate context.

Direct Business Feedback

- 5.19. Five businesses were also interviewed by our team as part of this evaluation in order to verify customer feedback already collected by the Growth Hub. Key messages emerging are summarised below:
- For all these businesses it was too soon to be able to report any impact.
 - 4 businesses were happy with the service provided by the Growth Hub. All three would like to continue the conversation and collaboration with the Growth Hub and stressed the importance of ongoing collaboration and follow-up.
 - 1 business did not get the support they were hoping for from the Growth Hub and thought that they received conflicting information.
- 5.20. Feedback from these customers in terms of how to improve the Growth Hub offer going forward included:
- Follow-up is important – those that valued the support they were given (3) felt that there had been a lack of follow-up/ongoing engagement by the Growth Hub.
 - More face to face/networking events with a practical focus and engagement with business would be welcomed.
 - Some businesses were unsure whether there was any difference between the LEP/Growth Hub and councils.
 - The large area means that it is difficult to get to some events as they are too far away.
 - 2 respondents felt that there seemed to be plenty of funding for manufacturing companies but nothing available for new and emerging sectors e.g. services/digital/e-business.
 - The need for more clarity about what area the 'Marches' actually covers.

- 5.21. The following examples are provided to give a flavour of the support received by businesses through the Marches Growth Hub and business feedback from interacting with the Growth Hub. More detailed case studies can be found at <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/>.

Kite Rider Strategic Adventures Ltd

corncutter.games and Kite Rider - Strategic Adventures create bespoke computer based simulations and games for professional training and adult education often in collaboration with leading universities. They design virtual scenarios to create a safe place so that players can experiment and develop strategic thinking; the games can complement or replace traditional training methods.



Antonia Koop contacted the Growth Hub looking for export support. She was referred to DIT for export advice and support and now has an on-going relationship with DIT. Antonia described the Growth Hub as *"Lovely, friendly and professional individuals who were very supportive. Delegating to the right people when required"*

Kegsoft is a Herefordshire-based IT and Business services company, formed in 2016 in the UK by highly experienced IT and business professionals.



Capability
Versatility
Productivity

Kegsoft is launching KBL, a highly innovative IT language and platform specifically designed for business, aimed at improving productivity and capability for business users.

Peter Domanski, Co-Founder of Kegsoft, contacted the Growth Hub looking for funding to support their expansion. The Growth Hub suggested that Peter might be eligible for the Business Growth Programme and his enquiry was passed to Herefordshire Council. He was also introduced to the University of Wolverhampton and Good2Great. Peter was positive about the support he received from the Growth Hub. Although he has not yet had the time to pursue the funding application and needs to consider whether this is the right fund to apply for, he said he found the Growth Hub "helpful" and "worthwhile" and would recommend the service to others.

Ludlow Nut Company

The Ludlow Nut Company produces their own range of award winning luxury breakfast cereals, nut/seed butters, as well as a wide range of healthy snacks including nut, seeds and dried fruits. The company began trading in 2004.



Robert Graham, Director and co-owner of the company, contacted the Growth Hub as he was looking for help in funding the installation of energy saving solar panels on the roof of the new business premises currently being built for the company in Ludlow. He was also looking for support to separate their e-commerce site into a new company, all of which will help create jobs.

Robert found the Growth Hub helpful: "As a small, but rapidly expanding business it is great to have 'one point of contact' that can provide a wealth of information on what's out there with regard to training, advice, financial resources, networking events, etc."

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1. The independent review has shown that the Marches Growth Hub has delivered a range of business support activities since October 2015, capitalising on the capabilities and capacity of its major partners. The Marches Growth Hub has worked closely with a range of organisations including the Federation of Small Businesses, the Marches Skills Provider Network, other Higher Education institutions (e.g. Harper Adams University and the University Centre Shrewsbury) and several private sector-led business network groups.
- 6.2. Business support is available to enterprises across the region, regardless of sector, size or stage of development and business support activities undertaken to date include:
 - Light touch business support activities including interactions with businesses and key stakeholders at conferences or events, responding to email and telephone enquiries and signposting.
 - Medium intensity business support activities including provision of 'Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage' support such as business diagnostic by Growth Hub advisors and referrals to suitable business support schemes.
 - High intensity interactions involving intensive one-to-one enterprise support.
- 6.3. In terms of light touch activity, between October 2015 and September 2017, the virtual hub:
 - Received a total of 1,019 light touch enquiries (by 973 companies).
 - Provided 246 referrals to partners, providers and various events – with the majority being referred to the three Physical Growth Hubs: The Marches Growth Hub Shropshire (37%), The Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire (18%) and The Marches Growth Hub Telford & Wrekin (14%). Additional referrals were also made to the three Local Authorities (a total of 51 referrals including 21 to Shropshire Council, another 21 to Herefordshire Council and 9 to Telford & Wrekin Council).
 - Referrals have also been made to DIT and EU funding programmes (currently 18 programmes).
- 6.4. Within the same period, the three Physical Hubs of the Marches Growth Hub:
 - Undertook 1,910 face-to-face appointments;
 - Responded to 2,185 telephone calls; and,
 - Engaged in 1,283 events – attended by 8,975 individuals.
- 6.5. Light touch engagement has also been provided through a user friendly and easy to navigate website. This has received more than 43,000 website visits (24,000 unique visitors). A monthly digital news digest is issued to a growing number of users keeping them up-to-date on existing and new products and services as well as promoting achievements and events.
- 6.6. A total grant amount of £1,317,120 has been received by local businesses to date in grant funding, alongside expert support to develop new products, access new supply chains and export overseas. Information recorded shows that 236 jobs have been created by businesses that have received support of medium intensity (102 jobs) and high intensity (134). However,

the Marches Growth Hub only started to report medium/high-intensity data to BEIS from April 2016.

- 6.7. Information on type of sectors that have received support is relatively limited. However, it appears that key sectors supported to date include: Manufacturing, Information & Technology, Retail, Services and Construction. Just over half the jobs created (52%) appear to have been created by micro and small businesses.
- 6.8. Customer satisfaction with the service provided is relatively high (between 4.5 and 5 on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is poor service and 5 is excellent) across all modes of support i.e. both, virtual and Physical Growth Hubs.
- 6.9. The majority of key stakeholders recognise the need for the Growth Hub as the signposting of contact/gateway to business support provision, in particular in an economy and geography as diverse as the Marches.
- 6.10. The Marches Growth Hub has effectively built an extensive network of business support delivery partners. This approach has a number of advantages including efficient use of resources without reinventing the wheel. It also offers agility to resourcing and better engagement with business support providers responding to specific sector and/or local business needs over time as well as policy priorities (as demonstrated by various funding streams/targeted interventions).
- 6.11. This approach also poses a number of challenges including:
 - Fragmented messaging about what the Growth Hub is, which can lead to confusion for businesses. Although media protocols, core descriptors, and branding guidelines for the Marches Growth Hub are in existence and shared with Physical Hubs, it is not clear that these are well utilised as there are still differences between the Physical Hubs and partners in terms of messaging.
 - Increased likelihood of variable quality of services provided to enterprises – unless resources and systems are put in place to ensure consistency in provision of support.
 - Ensuring that the three Local Authority partners continue to support the Marches Growth Hub to capture the required common metrics data.
 - It takes time for young and diverse partnerships, like the one underpinning the Marches Growth Hub, to mature, in particular when the partners' parent organisations are undergoing organisational changes.
- 6.12. In terms of operational arrangements, the signposting role of the virtual hub is well received, particularly among partners where resources are limited/constrained. During this review, it has also become apparent that the type and volume of information and data required to demonstrate that the Growth Hub is reaching its audience and achieving impact requires intensive resourcing. The information available to date would not have been in place without the support of the Marches Growth Hub central team.
- 6.13. The Marches Growth Hub local delivery and presence is also seen as integral to supporting businesses locally, as it provides people on the ground for face-to-face business engagement/relationship management. The Marches Growth Hub support is seen as particularly valuable where it offers space for people to work and network, and also feel part of a larger business community.

6.14. Overall, the Marches Growth Hub operates a relatively 'low cost high return' model. The Growth Hub has capitalised on the capabilities and capacity of its major partners, thereby enabling them to cover a large geographical area whilst ensuring efficient use of resources. The Marches Growth Hub financial model is relatively low cost, providing a virtual hub (in the Marches LEP offices) that is 100% funded by BEIS, plus three Physical Hubs, supported by staff and financial resources from the three Local Authority partners and the University of Wolverhampton. The three Physical Hubs are located in buildings either owned or leased by the University or Local Authority – that bear the bulk of the cost of these facilities. It is also worth noting that the Marches Growth Hub was awarded £250k by BEIS in 2015/16 to set up the virtual hub website, helpline, CRM and pay for staffing and contribute to the set-up /marketing of the three Physical Hubs. In 2016/17 and 2017/18 the Marches Growth Hub was awarded £205k per annum. Nevertheless, in that time, the partner organisations have maintained the commitment to running the three Physical Hubs including staffing despite the decrease of BEIS funding and the uncertainty of any future funding or whether the government wished to maintain growth hubs.

Recommendations

6.15. A number of recommendations have emerged from the discussions with key stakeholders and businesses, and the review of other Growth Hubs. These are summarised below.

- More clarity is required around the remit and operations of the Marches Growth Hub to ensure that existing organisations involved in business support provision can clearly see the synergies and added value of the various functions of the Growth Hub and the engagement of specific partners. This will minimise fears of crowding out effects while bringing along to the Growth Hub additional support and partners.
- It is worth considering bringing major private sector organisations into the partnership to maximise business reach. For example, the Growth Hub in Gloucestershire is working with Lloyds Banking Group that is delivering the Business Connectors Programme in collaboration with BITC¹⁰.
- For effective monitoring and management, ensure SLAs are in place relating to data-sharing branding and publicity, referrals and other joint working. Consider investing in a form of shared CRM systems to enable 360 view of the customer journey/support provided and enable seamless referrals and consistent information about the outcome and impact of support. The Growth Hubs in Cumbria, Stoke and Staffordshire and Gloucestershire are all good examples in this area.
- The Marches Growth Hub has developed a marketing strategy to support successful outreach and to continuously improve how the Growth Hub engages with key audiences. The Marches Growth Hub marketing plan aims to build the profile of the Growth Hub as a single point of access for business and skills support across the LEP area. Although media protocols, core descriptors, and branding guidelines for the Marches Growth Hub are in existence and shared with Physical Hubs, it is not clear that these are well utilised as there are still differences between the Physical Hubs and partners in terms of messaging. More could be done to join up messaging in terms of alignment and coordination. The various communication channels used by the three Physical Hubs and partners need to be coordinated and streamlined with a clear, shared message and plan amongst the partners.

¹⁰ <http://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/Our-Purpose/helping-communities/connecting-the-dots/>

Success will require a unified communications programme and shared messaging, with all partners utilising the core messages, following the guidelines and supporting the plan - working towards shared goals and objectives.

- More efficiency (and effectiveness) could also be achieved by:
 - Clearly aligning support to key sectors/priorities of the Strategic Economic Plan and the Scale-up Plan.
 - Putting resources and systems in place to ensure consistency in provision of support and recording of outcomes/impacts.
 - Considering a more targeted/informed approach, rather than providing support to all SMEs.
 - Increasing the use of established business networks' communications channels and exploring new channels to reach target audiences, whether editorial in trade magazines, national publications, Chamber or FSB publications and/or taking exhibition space or speaking engagements at business network conferences and events.
 - Exploring combining resources with more localised events with partners e.g. the York and North Yorkshire Popup Business Cafes for low-cost/high-impact.
 - Refreshing the content on the website more regularly to ensure it is kept up-to-date, accurate and relevant.
 - Consideration needs to be given to how to better utilise the You Tube channel – greater prominence on the Marches Growth Hub and partner websites and links from social media would help to drive traffic and raise awareness and reach a wider audience.

Proposed Action Plan

6.16. Within the context of the above discussion, the following actions are also proposed.

	Proposed Actions	By Whom
	SHORT-TERM	
1	Review data and monitoring requirements with a view to reducing the burden on partners, whilst ensuring core KPIs, outcomes and impacts can be monitored.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
2	Provide clarity around the remit and operations of the Marches Growth Hub and partners.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
3	Review and develop Marketing Plan to ensure coordinated and streamlined approach.	Central Marketing
4	Review and refresh communications programme with partners, including core messaging about what the Marches Growth Hub is and does.	Central Marketing/Partners
5	Engage with the Marches Growth Hub Marketing Plan and	Partners

	Proposed Actions	By Whom
	utilise core messaging.	
6	Review website in collaboration with partners and users and put plans in place to ensure content is kept up-to-date, accurate and relevant.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
	MEDIUM-TERM	
7	Review partnership arrangements and consider bringing major private sector organisations into the partnership.	Marches LEP
8	Continue to use existing business networks' communications channels and explore new channels to reach target audiences.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team/ Marketing
9	Review helpline provision – local, regional and national – with a view to reducing duplication.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
10	Review social media strategy including whether investing time and resource in Facebook and Linked In is value for money; and how to utilise You Tube.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team/ Marketing
	LONG-TERM	
11	Put resources and systems in place to ensure consistency in provision of support.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
12	Consider whether more value might be added by targeting more intensive support specifically at businesses with scale-up potential, rather than providing lighter-touch support to all businesses.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team
13	Consider investing in a form of shared CRM system.	Marches Growth Hub/Central Team

APPENDIX A: ERDF Business Support Schemes Available in the Marches

Funding Stream	Funding Source	Description	Contact details	More information links
1. Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation	Aston University / Harper Adams	AGRI seeks to address barriers to growth in the agri-food industry by providing an innovation support service focussed on companies involved with agri-tech, food and drink manufacturing and food logistics in the Marches LEP area. The support will involve a combination of workshops and one-to-one business advice, which may include assistance with technology development or application.	m.grant3@aston.ac.uk Tel: Martin Grant on 01212044652 info@agri.org.uk	http://www.agri.org.uk Follow on Twitter at: @agritechsupport
2. Aston Programme for Small Business Growth	Aston University	<p>Shropshire and Telford only.</p> <p>Take your small business to the next level by joining the Aston Programme for Small Business Growth. Develop your leadership skills and build a targeted growth strategy for your own business in the company of other ambitious business leaders.</p> <p>It is free of charge (subject to a competitive application process) and offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops taught by experts in SME leadership and management. • One-to-one support to help you tackle your business challenges. • Networking with other early stage business owners from the Midlands. • SME case studies from business leaders talking about their growth journey. • Guidance through the various external finance options available to you. • The opportunity to pitch your growth strategy to external finance experts. • Time to explore the strategic growth opportunities for 	0121 204 5023 v.hogan@aston.ac.uk	http://www.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/business/centre-for-growth/aston-programme-for-small-business-growth/

		your business.		
3. BECCI (Built Environment Climate Change Innovation)	University Of Wolverhampton	<p>To promote sustainable economic opportunities and growth by working with SMEs to develop innovative climate change solutions within the built environment. It specifically focuses on products associated with the retrofitting of housing.</p> <p>Helping businesses develop new or improved energy efficient products, engage with housing providers in the region to support the use of more green products and give SMEs access to the latest information and knowledge on low carbon technologies. Additionally, high quality, technical support is available to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce companies to technology opportunities • Assess the company's route to technologically based progress • Provide links to other companies, supply chains and universities. • Enable a beneficiary company to identify the next steps 	BECCI@wlv.ac.uk 01902 32 1028	http://www.wlv.ac.uk/business-services/business-innovation/becci-project/
4. BGP (Business Growth programme)	Birmingham City Council	<p>The fund consists of four strands of business support; namely the Business Development Programme, the Business Innovation Programme, the Green Bridge Supply Chain Programme and the HS2 project.</p> <p>The package of support is designed to strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and grow existing SMEs and there are strict eligibility rules for businesses wishing to access the grants. To be eligible your business must operate 100% on a Business to Business (B2B) basis.</p>	shropshire@marchesgrowthhub.co.uk 01743 250525	http://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/finance-and-funding/business-growth-programme
5. Building Business Confidence – Start 2 Great and Smarter Growth	Telford and Wrekin Council	<p>Business support programmes delivered through a contracted provider, Good2Great, providing direct support through a range of mediums, including workshops, tool-kits, assessments and one-to-one meetings.</p>	info@good-2-great.co.uk 01746 330730	https://start2great.co.uk https://smarter-growth.com
6. Business Energy	Worcestershire	The Business Energy Efficiency Programme provides help to	01905 677 888 or email	http://www.business-energy-efficiency.co.uk

Efficiency Programme	County Council	<p>businesses to reduce energy costs and cut carbon emissions across Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Telford & Wrekin.</p> <p>Essentially businesses can receive a free energy efficiency assessment (worth two days of support) that helps to measure and manage energy consumption, and provide recommendations on how to make improvements.</p> <p>Grants of £2,000 to £20,000 are then available at 40% of total costs. These can be towards energy efficient lighting, heating, compressors, motors and drives, equipment, fast acting doors, insulation, renewables, feasibility studies, behavioural change studies and more.</p>	info@business-central.co.uk	central.co.uk/beep/
7. EBRI (European Bioenergy Research Institute)	University Of Aston	EBRI can support your company to apply for collaborative research funding to develop new products, processes and technologies and take them to market.	bioenergy@aston.ac.uk 0121 204 3430	www.bioenergy-for-business.org
8. Enterprise Action	University of Wolverhampton	Enterprise Action (part funded by ERDF) can support entrepreneurs to start up their own business across a wide geographical area that includes the Black Country (Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley, Sandwell) and the Marches LEP (Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin) areas of the West Midlands.	01902 518960	www.e-action.org
9. Focus Digital Project	Coventry University Enterprises Ltd	A project to help eligible SME's to 'step up' the digital ladder by accessing a range of workshops, 1 to 1 support and capital and revenue grants to help improve the use of digital technology and services within a business.	Graham Bayliss, GBayliss@cad.coventry.ac.uk 07557 42565	http://www.cuebusinessolutions.com/focus-digital/
10. Innovation Vouchers	Aston University	ERDF fund for SMEs which: Offers an Innovation Voucher, worth £2,500 to access external expertise with knowledge base organisations (research institutes) to support an innovation project.	innovationvouchers@aston.ac.uk	http://www.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/business/innovation-vouchers/

		Provides free support in the form of workshops so that participating companies become more competitive and manage growth effectively		
11. IPSS (Innovate Product Support Services)	University Of Wolverhampton	<p>The IPSS programme supports businesses through the early stages of developing a new product or process. The programme is specifically designed to support businesses developing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental technologies • Low carbon engineering and products • Digital technologies • Transport technologies • Electronics • Medical technologies <p>Businesses benefit from staged support, from an initial 2-day review through further more intensive stages of assistance with design, engineering and intellectual property where there is good potential for placing the new product on the market. For the most compelling opportunities, there is the possibility of a funded research collaboration to progress the development of the technology.</p>	ipss@wlv.ac.uk 01902 321105	http://www.wlv.ac.uk/business-services/business-innovation/ipss---innovative-product-support-service/
12. KEEN (The Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise Networks)	University Of Wolverhampton	KEEN works by putting a recent graduate into an organisation to work on a strategic growth project, with ongoing support from the university. Companies benefit from part funding by the ERDF, allowing them to recruit graduates and access university knowledge throughout the duration of the project.	keen@wlv.ac.uk 01902 321272	www.wmkeen.org.uk
13. Marches & Gloucestershire Business	Herefordshire Council	A business broadband grant scheme that helps eligible businesses to seek quotes to resolve their connectivity issues and to apply for a grant from the Marches and	info@mgbroadbandgrants.com	http://www.mgbroadbandgrants.com/

Broadband Grant Scheme		Gloucestershire Broadband Grant Scheme.	01432 260609	
14. Manufacturing Growth Programme	Economic Growth Solutions	<p>The Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP) provides free advice and support to manufacturing SMEs to help them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities and create plans for growth and improvement Work with the best external experts to implement those plans Cover 35% of the cost of implementing the plans through a growth/improvement grant Connect to wider support to maximise opportunities for growth 	catherine.bray@egs.live	http://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/
15. Marches Building Investment Grant	Herefordshire Council	<p>Capital grants are available for up to 45 percent of total eligible project costs (to a maximum £100,000) to reconfigure, extend and renovate premises for commercial use. Applicants can be owner-occupiers or tenants. Tenants must have a fixed-term lease with at least six years unexpired. Retrospective applications are not eligible and no work should start until written approval is received.</p> <p>Eligible projects must lead to the creation of at least one full time equivalent job within four months of the building completion works and the overall total number of jobs created will be taken into account when assessing the level of grant awarded.</p> <p>The grant is primarily available to businesses that trade with other businesses (i.e. Business-to-Business).</p>	mbig@herefordshire.gov.uk 0345 6000 727	https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200139/community/393/community_funding_advice_and_business_grants/8
16. Smart Concept Fund	University of Wolverhampton	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.	SmartConceptFund@wlv.ac.uk 01902 323911	http://www.wlv.ac.uk/business-services/business-innovation/

		<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>		
17. SME International Growth Project	West Midlands International Trade LLP	<p>Enhancing the core Department for International Trade export support to provide additional elements that will address SME needs.</p> <p>Three project elements will support SMEs in the West Midlands, including the Marches:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Grant Support – grants of between £1k and £3k match funded 2) Awareness Raising 3) Inward and Outward Missions <p>Project Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to raise awareness amongst SMEs that are based in the West Midlands of the opportunities presented by trading in overseas markets; 	<p>erdf@wmchambers.co.uk</p> <p>0121 6071770</p>	<p>http://www.wmchambers.co.uk/about-us/projects/current-business-support-projects/sme-international-growth-project/</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to increase the number of West Midlands SMEs that are considering trading internationally; • to address barriers to trading internationally that are faced by SMEs; • to increase the number of SMEs engaging with the UKTI service; • to enhance the international trade capabilities of SMEs based in the West Midlands; • to increase the number of SMEs based in the West Midlands that trade internationally, and; • to increase the value of goods and services exported from the West Midlands; • providing innovative routes to markets; • assisting women and BME groups. 		
18. RDPE Growth Programme	DEFRA	<p>Businesses involved in food processing or tourism can apply to DEFRA directly for capital grants relating to their set up or growth. There is also a general 'business development' fund which can support the capital investment in micro and small 'rural' businesses.</p> <p>Grants are available between £35,000 of £170,000 with some discretion each way depending on the nature of the business and investment. Funding of up to 40% of the total project costs is available.</p> <p>The tourism priority is for 'rural' businesses only, as explained on the website.</p>		https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rdpe-growth-programme

APPENDIX B: Growth Hubs Reviewed

Swindon & Wiltshire Growth Hub

Wiltshire Business Hub is a consortium formed through the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership, funded by central and local Government and led by “Inspire by Wessex Chambers” in partnership with Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Business West. The Swindon and Wiltshire Growth Hub offers:

- Free business guidance online - a gateway to national and local business support.
- Local helpline and online contact form.
- Free access and advice from specialists on Strategy, Planning, Customers and Markets, People and Skills, Finance, Assets, Innovation and Sustainable Environmental Protection, accounting and tax, administration and legislature, sales and marketing, innovation and business problem solving.
- High Growth programme and funding to accelerate business growth. The Growth Hub also provides an intensive support programme where businesses in the past have had up to a third of their costs covered when investing in growth that creates and safeguards jobs and improves their competitiveness.
- Swindon and Wiltshire Growth Hub portal provides guidance on various common topics. The portal can also provide access to speak to experts.
- Events calendar.

Delivery during 15/16 was in partnership with Inspire who managed the portal and marketing plus face-to-face service (through Wiltshire Business Support Service Contract). The hub has just launched a new interactive portal.

Funding - The LEP tops up the £250,000 from BEIS with £200,000 of Growth Deal revenue funding to strengthen the Swindon & Wiltshire Growth Hub. The Growth Hub also benefits from £37m of EU funding.

Cumbria Business Growth Hub

Partnership led by Cumbria Chamber of Commerce - The Chamber of Commerce acts as the lead body responsible for the management and co-ordination of the Growth Hub, reporting to the LEP Board via the Growth Hub Programme Board

Online “one-stop-shop” at <https://www.cumbriagrowthhub.co.uk/>, which includes advice/information/guidance; resources and training; an online forum and business directory; funding tool; events calendar- through which business can access: a free helpline; advice; training; events; funding; networking; start-up support; – some delivered directly through the Growth Hub.

The Growth Hub has a number of Physical Hubs and employs Growth Hub Business Advisers.

The Growth Hub provides Business Support through European/Local Growth Fund money, supporting both ERDF and non-ERDF eligible businesses and activity. Support available to any business includes a wide range of general, sector specific and thematic networking, forums, workshops, training, seminars and events (physical and online), as well as downloads and online tools.

Another key element is businesses supporting businesses peer to-peer through networking, advice, seminars and more.

Businesses looking to grow can arrange to meet with an adviser who will work with them to help review and understand their business issues, needs, opportunities and aspirations and put together with them a personalised action plan.

There are also 3 sector networks (Digital and Creative; Food and Drink; and Family Business).

To encourage businesses to understand the value of seeking support and use paid-for support a 50% subsidy is available up to £2,500 towards the cost of consultancy to support their action plan. An adviser can help the business to produce a brief and find and select a consultant, and can help to manage and monitor the consultant.

The Growth Hub also helps businesses access funding available through Cumbria LEP's Regional Growth Fund programme and Cumbria Infrastructure Fund (funded through Growing Places) – as well as linking businesses into other available options, whether commercial or public funding. Importantly the adviser can also wrap around a package of support to get the best from the investment, with advice, workshops, referrals and more.

Alongside the web portal, a Growth Hub specific CRM tracks and records all activity, capturing detailed activity by each business in forums, downloads, Facetime, Skype, Hangouts, online training, online events, etc.

Robust data-sharing and joint-working arrangements are in place, including around referrals and sharing of outputs. A shared CRM ensures effective central coordination. Partners operate under SLAs relating to data sharing (including sharing of client information and reviews), branding and publicity, referrals and other joint working. European Funding/Local Growth Fund contractual requirements and risks are transferred to partners, as part of contracting arrangements, for their elements of delivery.

Funding: Cumbria LEP benefits from £60m of Growth Deal funding as well as funding from the European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) programme, which includes the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub

Developed and managed by Lincolnshire County Council, Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub is an online information portal, which collates information. To complement the online information portal, the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub now has a team of business growth and skills advisers. Businesses now have the opportunity to receive a growth diagnostic and free impartial advice, helping them to formulate and implement their growth plans.

The Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub offer includes;

- One to one General Advice – fully funded, easy access to impartial business growth adviser who will undertake a Business Review and Action Plan.
- One to one specialist advice – fully funded specialist support around accessing finance, resource efficiency, supply chain development, digital, innovation, exporting as well as sectoral support such as for manufacturing and agri-food.
- Business workshops, briefings & flagship events.
- Online information portal – www.businesslincolnshire.com, providing:
 - Advice and grant scheme finder - information and access to local, regional and national business support - publically funded and private business support offers as well as grants and growth finance

- guides and self-help tools
- events calendar
- Information on business opportunities and skills
- Business Lincolnshire also provides a weekly roundup of local business news and events, and has searchable lists of local Contacts and Networking Groups and a new Supplier Portal.
- Access to National Business Support Helpline via phone or online webchat.
- Facilitated access to the national programmes including: Department for International Trade, Intellectual Property Office, Innovate UK, Enterprise Europe Network, etc.
- Access to outreach 'spokes', e.g., enterprise, innovation and incubation spaces across the county, which provide services such as virtual office, hot desk facilities, meeting rooms, networking events.

The Growth hub provides a tailored support service which encompasses generic growth advice as well as strategic growth, innovation, resource efficiency, supply chain, access to finance, digital, skills development and growth funding offers. There are also a number of ERDF grant pots that SMEs can access to enable them to bring forward growth and productivity improvement plans.

The Growth Hub is delivering a range of specialist ERDF funded support. This includes diagnostic, action planning and brokerage advice. It also covers a broad spectrum of provision around Resource Efficiency, Supply Chain Development, Finance Readiness and Digital Business Support.

This is supplemented with BEIS funding to enable them to offer diagnostic and action planning support to business types that are not eligible for ERDF, particularly tourism businesses, important in the GLLEP area.

Other ERDF funded projects are being delivered locally under the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub branding, including specific support for start-up businesses, Innovation, Exporting, high growth and manufacturing support.

Under the banner of the growth hub, they have developed joint events, annual aligned programmes and shared resources.

Funding: The Growth Hub is funded utilising a mix of BEIS and ERDF funding. The hub directly manages 2 ERDF programmes (a £1m digital programme and a £5m business support programme.) BEIS funding (£250k) is used to cover everything that ERDF can't fund e.g. CRM and marketing. The ERDF funding is in place until 2019. Another application is being submitted to extend the provision until 2022.

Enterprise M3 (EM3) Growth Hub

EM3 operates a contracted model, delivered by BE Group in partnership with SET squared, Business South and the County Councils of Hampshire and Surrey.

Support includes:

- Information Bank – information and guidance on starting, growing and innovating, including tax, marketing, exporting and training plus online events calendar and news
- Business Network - The Growth Hub aims to facilitate connections, collaboration and access to support via a range of resources
- Phone Support - The hub uses the National Business Support Helpline

- The Growth Service - For priority (Aerospace and Defence, ICT and Digital Media, Pharmaceuticals and Professional and Business Services) or “niche” sectors (5G Telecommunications, Cyber security, Advanced materials and Nano-technology, Satellite technologies, Advanced aerospace and automotive manufacturing, Animal health, Photonics and Computer games and entertainment technologies). This includes: dedicated Growth Champions; bespoke growth plans; and, expert services network.

Funding - £450k – using growth deal funding to top up BEIS funding.

York, North Yorkshire and East Riding/How's Business

The York, North Yorkshire and East Riding LEP covers the largest land area (covering over 3,000 square miles) and 98.5% of their business population is classified as SMEs. The Growth Hub is staffed by the Local Enterprise Partnership.

The How's Business Growth Hub has thought really innovatively about how to provide help for all businesses on their patch. By adopting best practices in digital marketing, and ruthlessly focussing on the needs and interests of business people, they have driven an incredibly cost efficient model. In 2017, they supported 4570 businesses at a cost of just £62 per business.

The service combines online information and advice, with events run with 23 local business networks:

- An online one stop shop – provides signposting to support and local networking events/peer to peer support. How's Business disseminates information and support to help businesses start and grow. All the experts, events and articles listed on this website are there on merit. No one has been paid to be featured.
- EU Funding - Since the launch of EU funded programmes (worth £27m), this year the service has also begun to support some larger and more growth oriented businesses. This includes loan and equity finance from the £400m Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.
- Let's Grow business grants programme, has been expanded with a further £2m from the Local Growth Fund.
- Funding finder – provided by Idox Solutions.
- Range of eBooks, which are free to download.
- Events calendar.
- Popup Business Cafes - one of the main ways they work with the area's 23 business networks is by organising Popup Business Cafes. These low-cost high-impact events see local business professionals providing free advice in an informal setting to the local network members. 98% of attendees rate Popup Cafes good or very good. The concept of Popup Business Cafes where you can meet local experts at no cost in a relaxed atmosphere with no sales pitches has been nationally recognised as excellent. All the featured experts are volunteers; no one is paid for their time at Popup Business Cafes.
- How's Business utilises the national Business Support Helpline.

Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub

The Stoke and Staffordshire Growth Hub is run by the Chamber of Commerce and offers:

- Free business guidance online - a gateway to national and local business support, guidance on various common topics (business debt, bankruptcy, employing staff, employee

benefits/training). The portal also provides an events calendar and is supported by a local helpline.

- Start-up business support (setting up, writing a business plan, running a Limited company, business premises/rates/tax/licences).
- Business finance: capital grants (from £1,500 to £10,000 available to SMEs for up to 53% of the total project costs), Staffordshire Business Loan Fund (loans of £10,000 to £150,000 for SMEs in Staffs with less than 50 employees), Staffordshire Leader Programme, Low Carbon Business Evolution Programme. Plus usual programmes: HS2 Supply Chain, Green Bridge Supply Chain, Business Innovation/Development Programme.
- Gap funding to accelerate business growth. The Growth Hub also provides access to Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Grants for Growth (part funded by the ERDF), delivered by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, to companies across Staffordshire to cover capital and revenue investment including: premises for expansion or the purchase of plant, machinery and equipment, product and process development, advice and consultancy (i.e. initial market development, technical feasibility studies and industrial property rights costs). Capital and revenue grants are available between £10,000 to £250,000 on a variable intervention rate of 10% up to 30% (which must be matched); project costs must be a minimum of £40,000 to qualify for a grant payment of £10,000.

Using shared CRM to bring together local advice organisations and individuals to collaborate as genuine partners, presenting a cohesive offer to potential Growth Hub client businesses. After 30 months of operation this has become a key resource to manage support for approaching 4,000 businesses. More than 200 local partners have subscribed and almost 13,000 referrals have been made. Built in automated quality management functionality (provided by Winning Moves, <http://www.winningmoves.com>), it oversees referral satisfaction and impact levels. This is incorporated into the flexible management information and reporting suite, enabling the creation of bespoke information and a dashboard to assist day-to-day management.

Priority sectors: advanced manufacturing (energy generation, applied materials, agri-tech, and auto-aero, medical technologies), tourism, and professional business services (including digital/creative sector).

Funding: The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire LEP has 2 Growth Deals, securing £93.51m and leveraging a further £144.07m of funding from the EU (£127.29m), private and public sectors - resulting in an overall investment of over £237.58m over the period 2015-2021.

Gloucestershire – “The Growth Hub”

The Gloucestershire local enterprise partnership covers a population of around 600,000 and represents over 25,000 businesses. The Growth Hub is a partnership between GFirst LEP and the University of Gloucestershire and supports all businesses in Gloucestershire, regardless of sector or size. It also offers a more in-depth service for businesses with high growth potential that are considering, for example innovating new products and services, recruiting new staff, upskilling.

The Growth Hub offers:

- Training and development tailored to business needs – including professional and work-based programmes.
- Export advice, sector-specialist knowledge, research and product development, support with innovation and business development, resourcing and expansion.

- Specialist assistance with consultancy and business planning services specifically designed for start-up businesses, including access to finance, local mentors, training, IP and access to incubation centres.
- Work-together rooms, Skype pods, drop-in clinics and social space - bright, modern and vibrant facilities at the University of Gloucestershire, in partnership with the University's Business School, allowing the opportunity to work closely with academics and students to help develop the next generation of talent, through placements, apprenticeships and graduate roles.

The Growth Hub is benefitting from £10m of capital investment from the latest Growth Deal:

- £5 million is being spent on the expansion of the Growth Hub at Oxstalls that includes the co-location of the University of Gloucestershire Business School. This will be delivered by the University of Gloucestershire.
- £5 million is being used to roll out a network of Growth Hub sites across the county supported and network by a comprehensive digital infrastructure. This will be delivered by GFirst LEP.

There are four key components to the development of Phase 2 Growth Hub:

- The Expansion of the Core Growth Hub at Oxstalls - the creation of a physical space that integrates the Growth Hub and the Business School, providing impartial business diagnostic and brokerage services that will support the whole Growth Hub Network.
- Following the initial diagnosis and sign posting, eligible businesses will enter the bespoke Navigator Service and receive a minimum of 3 hours of independent and impartial business support. The Navigator and Guide services will provide diagnostic and brokerage support free of charge for businesses in the county, The Navigator service provides one to one support to develop an Intervention Action Plan. Once the Plan has been delivered, the 3-hour intervention will close. Businesses, which are assessed as high growth may then be referred to the Guide Service for a further 12 hours of support. Throughout delivery of the Navigation and Guide Service and for up to 12 months after, the business can access a range of added value services offered to all businesses and individuals engaging with the Growth Hub. These include advice clinics, advice panels, access to the Knowledge Bank, networking, workshops, etc.
- The Growth Hub Digital Infrastructure - The Growth Hub launched a new website in April this year with a raft of new features designed to make business support more accessible and more effective. A dedicated local helpline has been also launched. An enhanced CRM, diagnostic and knowledge bank run from the core is used by the LEP, the core Growth Hub staff and partners for the delivery of the Growth Hub in order to support employer engagement, marketing and activity reporting. A central marketing function promotes Growth Hub activity – core services, events, workshops etc. - and delivers the digital infrastructure.
- The Growth Hub Network - the physical expansion of the Growth Hub at sites across Gloucestershire. The Growth Hub network is being delivered with a range of partners in strategic locations across the county. In return for capital investment partners will deliver a Growth Hub service to businesses in their locations and or specialist services for the Network. All network partners will work closely with the core Growth Hub to deliver a 'no wrong door' approach to business engagement across the county.

Funding: The LEP benefits from £106.63m through the Gloucestershire Growth Deal, £10m of which is allocated to the Growth Hub, and £41 million in European funding. The UoG has recently been awarded £1.7m of ERDF funding to deliver the Core Growth Hub Project. Alongside this the university has also been awarded 3 additional business support projects, which will contribute to the outputs of the Growth Hub expansion.

Worcestershire Business Central

Worcestershire Business Central is a collaboration co-located at Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, working with Worcestershire County Council and supported by partners including the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and local District Councils.

Worcestershire Business Central aims to bring all aspects of business support into one place online. It includes:

- Advised in Worcestershire, a free online business directory for Worcestershire.
- Guidance on setting up a business; running a business; growing a business; skills; property; networking; and finance.
- A funding finder tool.
- An events calendar.
- A dedicated local helpline.
- Physical premises.
- 6,000 proactive calls per annum.
- 600 company visits per annum.
- 2,000 referrals per annum.
- Team of 9 – 4 sector focused business relationship managers, 4 business engagement executives and 1 information executive.

Funding: The LEP has secured £54.2m of Growth Deal funding and is also responsible for a €68m EU programme, which provides specific grant funding to support business expansion and training with a focus on moving individuals into work. The Growth Hub receives £250k from the LEP.

APPENDIX C: Examples of Events

- Agents - Income from property, minimising risks for individuals
- An introduction to Workplace Wellbeing
- An Introduction to Xero Cloud - Based Accounting Software
- Apprenticeship Open Day
- Are you ready for BIM?
- Auto-enrolment Seminar in association with Aviva and BCC
- Business Finance Drop in Sessions
- Business Finance Drop-in Surgery
- Business Futures Forum
- Business Start Up Seminar
- Business Support Showcase
- Church Stretton Business Forum
- Craven Arms Rural Local Joint Committee " Network meeting
- Cyber Bytes: An Introduction to Cyber Security
- Digital Marketing Workshop 2015
- Exporting already or thinking of exporting? HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- Find out more about Code Club
- Free Business Growth Seminar
- Herefordshire Tourism & Leisure Forum
- How to become an 'INTRAPRENEUR' with James Bannerman
- i-Grow Business Growth Course for Women
- Importing and Exporting - An introduction by HMRC
- Introduction to Building Information Modelling (BIM)
- iStart- a digitally focused business course
- Lively Business Club - Federation of Small Businesses
- 'Marketing & Selling with Colours' Ludlow WiRE
- My Property Income and HMRC
- Oswestry Vision Business Expo
- Passport to Export Seminar
- PAYE expenses and benefits for employers
- Pensions & Auto Enrolment Rules Workshop
- Procurement Workshop - Is your business missing out on new business?
- Reducing your Carbon footprint
- Ross on Wye Networking Brunch
- Self - Employment & HMRC - Getting Started
- Self-employment and HMRC, Getting Started
- Shrewsbury Business Chamber Festive Dinner
- Shrewsbury College Open Evening
- Shrewsbury College, Year 11 Taster Week
- Shropshire Rural Business Advice Day
- Soil Alive!
- Successful Selling
- T Shrewsbury Business Chamber October networking eve
- Telford Breakfast Club - Shropshire Chamber of Commerce
- THINK BIG Shop Small
- Thinking Big for Small Businesses - Shropshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire
- What's Stopping You? Make a difference to your life

APPENDIX D: Consultations with Key Stakeholders

Organisations Consulted

Organisation	
1. Aaron and Partners LLP	Paul Bennett
2. Be Bold Media Ltd	Amy Bould
3. BEIS West Midlands	Michelle Kynaston
4. Black Country Growth Hub	Ian Oakes
5. Black Country Growth Hub	Gary Dimmick
6. Chamber Representative	Maisy Owen
7. Department for International Trade	Steve Havins
8. Economic Growth Solutions Limited	David Ledbury
9. Economic Growth Solutions Limited	Dean Barnes
10. Federation of Small Business (FSB) representative	Ray Hickinbottom
11. Growing Mid Wales	Claire Miles
12. Hereford Council	Nick Webster
13. IPO - Business Engagement Manager	Dave Hopkins
14. Marches Growth Hub - Hereford	Lyndsay Francis
15. Marches Growth Hub - Hereford	Charlotte Thomas
16. Marches Growth Hub - Shropshire	Amy Farley
17. Marches Growth Hub - Shropshire	Lisa Ashby
18. Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin	Claire Crithchell
19. Marches Growth Hub – Telford & Wrekin	Mandy Swain
20. Marches Skills Provider Network	Paul O'Neill
21. Shropshire Business Board Chair	Mandy Thorn
22. Shropshire Chamber of Commerce "In Business for Business"	Richard Sheehan
23. Shropshire Council	Gemma Davies
24. Steering group Chair; Telford Business Board Chair	Paul Hinkins
25. Telford & Wrekin Council	Kathy Mulholland
26. University Centre Shrewsbury	Paul Kirkbright
27. University of Wolverhampton	Marc Fleetham

Evaluation of the Marches Growth Hub - Stakeholder Consultation GUIDE




Role and Relationship to the Growth Hub

1. Please describe your relationship with the Marches Growth Hub (direct delivery, funding, strategic partner, management, etc.)

Context/Business Support Provision in the area

2. From your experience what are the main business support needs across The Marches area?
3. What are the main barriers/challenges to effectively supporting businesses?
4. Current strengths i.e. what works well in supporting businesses?
5. What could be improved?
6. Do you think there are differences in provision/coverage across the Marches area? Are there any gaps or overlaps in your specific area of provision or across the area in terms of business support provision?
7. Overall, what are the key ingredients to successfully supporting businesses across this area? Good practice
8. If there was one thing you would do or change to make business support services more effective in The Marches area, what would it be?

Marches Growth Hub

9. Do you think that the Marches Growth Hub is a success (in terms of remit/following areas):
 -  Improve the awareness and coordination of local and national business support
 -  Provide a diagnostic and signposting service to help businesses find the right support easily
 -  Improve the impact and value for money of business support
10. What (in your/your organisation's opinion) have been the key achievements of the Marches Growth Hub to date?
11. To your knowledge, has/is the Marches Growth Hub facing any challenges in delivery?
12. Do you think that the model of delivery i.e. the composition and structure of the Marches Growth Hub – virtual and three Physical Growth Hubs is effective? If not, why not?
13. Is the coverage comprehensive or should others partners/relationships be built? Have you used the website to date?

Yes/No

If yes, could it be improved in any way? (please describe...)

14. In your view, is the dedicated local helpline (0345 6000 727) useful?

Yes/No/Do not know

If yes/no, please describe why/why not.....

15. Has the marketing and promotion of the Growth Hub been effective? If not, how could this be improved?
16. How do you think the Marches Growth Hub could most effectively enhance business support services in the area in the future?

If speaking to providers/organisations involved in delivery of business support

- Are you planning to make changes to your business support programmes and services (e.g. size, nature or scope) in the next 12 months? Beyond?
- Do you have any other future plans? Opportunities?

Thanks and close.

APPENDIX E: Marches Growth Hub Customer Satisfaction Survey

Please note, the questions below refer to the support you have received from the Marches Growth Hub helpline.

Question 1

How would you rate the knowledge of Marches Growth Hub helpline regarding your enquiry?

Poor Excellent

Question 2

How would you rate the overall service provided by the Marches Growth Hub helpline.

Poor Excellent

Question 3

How likely are you to refer this service to another business or colleagues?

Very unlikely Very likely

Question 4

Any other comments about the Marches Growth Hub helpline?

Question 5

In the absence of the Marches Growth Hub support, how likely were you to have undertaken the same activity? 1 extremely unlikely, 5 very likely?

Very unlikely Very likely

Thank you for your cooperation.

[Submit Survey](#)