

Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report 2021-2022 (1st April 2021 – 30th September 2021)

LEP Accountable Body:	Shropshire Council
Local Enterprise Partnership:	Marches LEP
Growth Hub name:	Marches Growth Hub
Date of Report:	28 September 2021
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Deadline for return to BEIS:	Friday 29 October 2021

Growth Hubs continue to play an important role in engagement with companies and the wider business community, including: delivering new schemes and services, working to provide business intelligence and working in partnership with government on Covid-19 recovery and ongoing EU Exit issues. BEIS remains keen to ease the reporting burden on Growth Hubs at the halfway stage of this funding year. Therefore, once again this year's Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report is a shortened version. The template has been developed with input from the Growth Hub Network Development and Delivery Working Group. With regards to future reporting years, BEIS reserves the right to return to a more detailed or amended Bi-Annual Report.

In line with the conditions of 2021/22 Grant Offer Letters the template consists of five elements:

1. Overview of progress against Section 3 of Grant Offer Letter;
2. BEIS Grant Spend Data for the 6 months (Q1 & Q2 2021);
3. Key Performance Outcomes Q1 & Q2 2021;
4. If applicable, details of any other funding obtained using the Growth Hub grant funding in leverage of satisfaction (in whole or in part) of any match funding requirements relating to such other funding, together with details of what it has been used for;
5. Growth Hub Highlights and Comments, including if applicable any changes:
 - a. in the nature or scale of the Project including an assessment of any change in the prospects of technical success; and
 - b. in the ownership of or beneficial interest in any asset provided for the Project.

BEIS requires information the network provided to ensure consistency and transparency and to help demonstrate the impact to HM Treasury and others that the higher level of core funding provided by BEIS in 2021-2022 is increasing the level of take-up of business support and is helping to drive business growth in local places. This information is therefore critical in helping to inform the future development of

Growth Hubs and in helping to shape future local growth and business support policy thinking.

LEPs are therefore requested to submit their Growth Hub Bi-Annual Report to BEIS as a Microsoft Word document (not as a pdf). Reports should be submitted to Growth.Hubs@beis.gov.uk no later than **Friday 29 October 2021** and copied to your CLGU Local Area Lead.

1. Progress of Growth Hub in 2021-22

High level overview of progress so far against Section 3 of the Grant Offer Letter:

Introduction

The Marches Growth Hub (MGH) offers a single point of access to national, regional and local information and guidance on business support (including business grants, loans and in-depth advice) regardless of sector or size. Its delivery model ensures that it is strategically integrated with the wider economic growth agenda led by the Marches LEP (MLEP) and delivered with local partners.

MGH 2021/22 Model

The MGH partnership model includes:-

- Centrally managed virtual hub including a website <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/> and a general enquiries e-mail address enquiries@marchesgrowthhub.co.uk
- Telephone enquiries are handled by the National Business Support Helpline (NBSH) since July 2018.
- The virtual hub is supported by three physical Growth Hubs situated in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire.
- West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster supports the delivery of West Midland wide projects.

Virtual Hub

The MGH virtual hub service is delivered in-house by two members of the MLEP team: 1 FTE Business Support Lead (BSL) and the MLEP Administrator, 1 day per week. The MLEP has also successfully recruited a temporary full-time Growth Hub Admin Officer to support the BSL in June 2021.

The BSL role involves managing the Growth Hub contract including the day-to-day operations. Responsibilities include:-

- Setting and managing the Growth Hub budget (completion of Schedule 1 and 3) as well as any additional Growth Hub funding received (via the LEP or WM Growth Hub Cluster).
- Managing the Virtual Hub including the MGH website, which was relaunched in June 2021. The redesign and upgrade project were managed by the BSL.
- Supporting the three physical Growth Hubs to ensure the growth hub service delivered is compliant with BEIS and MLEP requirements and the allocated grant funding spend is in line with Schedule 1 and Schedule 3.
- Working closely with the PR/Marketing consultants to prioritise MGH comms in line with BEIS/WM Growth Hub Cluster and local business support needs.
- Liaising with and reporting to/on Government and West Midland Growth Hub Cluster .
- Leading on Access to Finance Policy.
- Supporting the Marches Business Support (MBS) Steering Group Chair including setting the agenda and providing secretariat support (quarterly meetings).
- MGH progress reporting to the MLEP Board (6 monthly).

- Organising and chairing MGH Operations Group and MGH Campaign meetings (bimonthly).
- Supporting MLEP Access to Finance Group Chair (as required).
- Representing the MLEP, the BSL has been a member of the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) Regional Advisory Board (RAB) since 2017 and Chair since April 2019 (to date).

Physical Growth Hubs

Due to limited funding and resources, the MLEP works in partnership with the three Local Authorities (LAs) and the University of Wolverhampton who provide facilities and generic Business Support/Economic Development staff (7.5 FTE) to support the operation of the three physical Growth Hubs. The 7.5 FTE posts are funded by the LAs partners. The University of Wolverhampton provide premises, equipment and covers all rent, heating and lighting costs for MGH Telford & Wrekin.

The 7.5 FTE LAs staff host a programme of events (virtual and in-person) and work with individuals and businesses to identify their key needs to help signpost and make referrals to appropriate in-depth support (national, regional and local). In addition, they support a 1:1 specialist advisor framework which is funded by Growth Hub Funding.

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

MGH Shropshire Team

- 1 FTE Growth Hub Manager who oversees strategic and operational delivery, supports businesses and manages events programme.
- 1 FTE Growth Hub Officer who supports businesses and events programme delivery. This colleague has just returned to work part-time following a period of sickness leave since December 2020.

MGH Telford & Wrekin Team

- 1 Part time Growth Hub Manager who oversees strategic and operational delivery.
- 1 FTE Growth Hub Coordinator whose key tasks include data reporting, submitting spend claims, enquiry handling and online marketing.
- 1 Part time Business Support Officer whose key tasks include managing an extended team of consultants in the delivery of an events programme and 1:1 support.
- 1 FTE Project Officer responsible for the management and delivery of Marches-wide Growth Hub Project (Step-up Programme that supports start up and growth businesses).
- 1 FTE Business Support Officer who is a skills specialist that also supports start-up enquiries.

MGH Herefordshire Team

- 1 FTE Growth Hub Manager who oversees operations, supports businesses and manages the events programme.
- 1 Part-time Economic Development Officer who supports the Growth Hub Manager supporting business and admin tasks.

PR & Marketing

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

April 2021 to September 2021 high level overview of progress is detailed below:-

- A total of **8,588** business interactions took place through light touch, medium and high intensity growth hub support.
- A total of **293** individuals have received help to start a business.
- Through light touch engagement (less than 1 hour), a total of **1,614** referrals were made to partners including EU programmes (grants and loans), local authority business support and, where appropriate, private sector providers.
- Across the three physical growth hubs, there was a total of **91** virtual growth hub events (growth hub led and those held in collaboration with partners) with a total of **3,930** attendees of which **3,895** were businesses.
- MGH SME businesses had access to **15** EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support). Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue **until June 2023**. The four largest ERDF schemes (Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), Business Growth Programme 2 (BGP2), Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined **£2.95m** to Marches businesses between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of **98** jobs. The Marches has also benefitted from RDPE funding, with a total of **£9.3m** awarded over the three rounds of funding (2014 – 2020 with some Round 3 projects yet to be contracted).
- Light touch engagement with businesses continues to be provided through a user friendly and easy to navigate website www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk. The website received **16,406** website visits (**11,483** unique visitors) and **334** enquiries.
- The website featured **53** news releases and pieces of online content related to business support on offer, information pages and case studies. As expected, the increase in website visitors during the height of the crisis in 2020/21 has resulted in a dip in visitor numbers during the first two quarters of 2021/22. The reduction was magnified during the main summer holiday period. However, as a comparison, visitor numbers are still up **14%** on the same period pre-pandemic in 2019.
- **Three** digital newsletters were issued and sent to a mailing list of circa **1980** subscribers. These newsletters were supplemented by regular joint local authority/partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives delivered to in excess of **7,000** businesses.
- PR & communications focused on support available for businesses which had suffered adverse impacts from the Covid crisis and signposting to MGH services which could help recovery post-pandemic and post EU-exit transition period.
- There were more than **63** separate pieces of media coverage secured as a result of MGH PR campaigns, content, and news releases.
- Social media statistics show that both followers and reach for Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have **increased** since 31 March 2021.
- **Eight** case studies have been produced on businesses which have been supported by the MGH or one of the projects which the MGH has promoted to its businesses from 1 April – 30 September 2021. Links have been provided in this report. A link to all MGH case studies can be found here: <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/>.
- The National Business Support Helpline (BSH) handled a total of **274** Marches calls.
- Funded by the Growth Hub, the MGH has access to a framework of **53** business/specialist advisers (contractors called upon when required) that are currently supporting 1:1 business engagement with **157** businesses. Of which **47** businesses are currently receiving **12 hours support**.

- Our 2021/21 Peer Networks programme is underway with the first cohort commenced in September. Two further cohorts are scheduled later in the Autumn. <https://peer-to-peer-networks.com/themarches>.
- The West Midlands Made Smarter Adoption Programme was launched by the West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster in July 2021 [Made Smarter Press release](#). The BSL hosted an introduction to the Marches Digital Expert, Barry Jones, on Thursday 10 June with Growth Hub leads and EU project managers. Barry also presented to the MGH Operations Group in July. As of 30 September, 21 Marches business have expressed an interest in the programme with 9 to date being assigned to a technology expert to meet as their next step.
- West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster 1:1 EU advice clinics in partnership with Department for International Trade (DIT) were delivered during Q1 and Q2 providing Marches SMEs access to specialist advice around VAT, Importing and specific advice for the service sector. 87 Businesses in total were supported across the cluster of which 14 (16%) were Marches businesses (11 VAT and 3 Importing/Supply Chain support).

2. BEIS Growth Hub 2021-2022 Grant Spend Position

Please confirm details of the financial position in respect of your 2021-2022 BEIS grant.

Total BEIS grant for 2021-2022 awarded	£ 462,000.00
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Please state how much of your 2021-2022 grant has been spent by end of quarter 2

Funding spent in Q1 and Q2	
Q1 – 1 April to 30 June 2021	£ 27,840.24
Q2 – 1 July to 30 September 2021	£ 79,261.03
Total funding spent at 30th September 2021	£ 107,101.27

Breakdown of monies spent to 30th September 2021 per activity

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

Activity as shown on your Schedule 1 form	Q1 and Q2 Spend
(e.g. marketing, advisor salaries etc)	£
Marches Growth Hub Operation Costs:	
- Payroll including NI and Pension	£28,959.20
- Agency staffing cost	£13,645.80
- Travel related costs (mileage and expenses)	
- Telephone line rental	
- Equipment costs	
- Legal costs	

- Mobile costs	£50.40
- IT Service Level Agreement & Liability Insurance	
Marches Business Support Steering Group	£3,463.20
Information Database licence	£5,767.20
PR/Marketing Contract	£18,000.00
Physical Hub Allocation	£25,215.47
Growth Hub website maintenance & hosting	
Skills Site maintenance & hosting	
Virtual Hub CRM Licence	£7,800.00
Evaluation of Growth Hub	
West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster Activity	£4,200.00
Strengthening Marches Growth Hub Model	
<u>Review of all activities in S1 form and the individual spend amount given the ongoing COVID-19 working environment</u>	
<p>It would be helpful to understand any changes to activities such as staff costs, T&S spend, accommodation costs, Council flat fee charges, etc, given the ongoing COVID-19 working environment. Therefore, please detail any potential variations to your original S1 spend profile and the reasons for these.</p> <p>The Business Information Licence renewal due on 31 December 2021 will not be possible as licence providers renew for a minimum of 12 months and not 3 months.</p> <p>The CRM IT licence can only be taken out on a 12 month agreement, current licence starts October 2021. A full 12 month cost is included in 2021-22 funding spent, until further grant period is agreed.</p>	
Given any changes noted above are you estimating any underspend in your 2021-2022 funding award? No	£NIL

3. Overview of Key Performance Outcomes

Key Performance Outcomes. Provide information on the key outcomes of your Growth Hub linked to the requirements of the 2021-2022 'Metrics and Evaluation Framework'. **Please note that we are collecting key metrics below, the full figures will be required for the annual report.**

Indicator	Local KPIs (where set by the LEP)	Six Month Total (1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021)
Number of businesses that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)		8,302

Number of individuals ¹ that have received 'light touch' triage, information and/or signposting support (excluding website traffic)		8,365
Total number of unique visitors to Growth Hub website		11,483
Number of businesses receiving 'medium intensity' information, diagnostic and brokerage support		233
Number of businesses receiving 'high intensity' support e.g., account management / intensive support directly provided by the Hub or partner organisation	81 annual target linked to funded 1:1 support	53 (45 linked to funded 1:1 support)
Number of businesses receiving 'Medium' and 'High intensity' support that, have the opportunity, ambition and greatest potential to grow (including Scale-Ups)		117
Total number of individuals who been helped to start a business		293
Number of businesses referred to a mentoring programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		52
Number of businesses referred to a skills or training programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)		42
Number of businesses referred to a finance and/or funding programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only)	40 referrals linked to funded 1:1 high intensity support.	174 (7 referrals linked to funded 1:1 high intensity support)
Number of businesses referred to an innovation and/or R&D programme (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only).		5
Number of referrals to an export/import support programme (e.g. DIT) (combined figure for 'Medium' and 'High' intensity interventions only).		1

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

4. Additional (non-BEIS) Grant Funding Sources

Please confirm what sources of additional funding and/or **resources** have been leveraged in by the LEP and/or Growth Hub in 2021-2022.

¹ Number of businesses and individuals are both required as (for example) several individuals from the same business may attend an event.

Amount of funding	Source	Comments on how funding has been used
Estimated worth £130k per year	Shropshire Council	Council provides 2 x FTE dedicated staff resource at MGH Shropshire. Also includes premises and associated costs.
Estimated worth £242k per year	Telford and Wrekin Council	Council provides 4 x FTE dedicated staff resource at MGH Telford & Wrekin.
Estimated worth £50k per year	Herefordshire Council	Council provides 1.5 FTE dedicated staff resource at MGH Herefordshire.
Estimated worth £18k per year	University of Wolverhampton	The university provide premises, equipment and covers all rent, heat and lighting costs for MGH – Telford & Wrekin.
Estimated worth £2k per year	University Centre Shrewsbury	University provides free access to rooms to support events and conferences.
£45k	BEIS Peer Networks	Three cohorts in total will be delivered. The first cohort commenced in September 2021 with a further two scheduled later in the Autumn. Peer Networks
£48k	Department for International Trade	Account management of foreign owned businesses to support the realisation of investment and growth plans.
£75k	Department for Education	Delivery of Skills Advisory Panel responsibilities including the development of the Local Skills Report outlining an evidence-based approach to addressing skills needs across the LEP's business communities.
£217k	Careers & Enterprise Company	Delivery of Marches Careers Hub, including encouraging business and school engagement to support local careers development.
£15k	Midlands Energy Hub	The MLEP has been successful in securing funding from the Midlands Energy Hub to fund a number of local authority-led Green Zone events, during the COP26 fortnight, 31 October – 13 November. The Marches Regional Green Zone will showcase local activity, projects and the case studies that aim to inspire

		<p>the public, business, and investors to join the race to net-zero and cut their carbon emissions. Each day of COP26 will be a different theme. Where possible, the Marches Regional Green Zones will mirror the theme of their chosen event date. A programme of events will be released shortly, but it is hoped that events could include an EV demonstrator day, tour of community energy scheme, youth debates, city cycling promotions, and free-tree promotion.</p>
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5. Growth Hub Highlights and Comments

Summary of Growth Hub Highlights and Comments;

- **Please provide details of any governance changes**

The MLEP has operated as a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) since February 2019 and the [LEP Board](#) (comprising both public and private sector partners) is the ultimate decision-making authority.

The MLEP can confirm that all appropriate LEP governance, transparency and accountability arrangements are in place and compliant with the National Local Growth Assurance Framework.

Gill Hamer, former LEP Chief Executive Officer (CEO) stepped down on 30 July 2021. The Marches LEP welcomed Rachel Laver who started as CEO on 14 September 2021. Rachel worked part time before moving to full time on 4 October 2021.

The MLEP Board oversees the setting of the strategic direction for the MGH and receives six monthly progress updates from the Chair of the Marches Business Support (MBS) Steering Group. The last update to the MLEP Board was provided in July 2021. Shropshire Council acts as the MLEP Accountable Body.

The MBS Steering Group is a sub-group of the MLEP Board and meets quarterly. This group has a very important role to play with regards to governance and provides guidance on key issues such as policy, partnership working, objectives, budgetary control, marketing strategy and resource allocation. To reflect this broader role, the terms of reference were updated in 2020/21.

The election of the MBS Steering Group Chair takes place every two years. Following open advertisement, a new private sector [Chair](#) was appointed in January 2021. The Chair of the MBS Steering Group is also the MLEP Small Business Champion. The new Chair is encouraging strategic collaboration between partners to maximise the effectiveness of existing provision and to identify new opportunities to support economic recovery. MBS Steering Group agendas and minutes are prepared in line with its Terms of Reference (TORs).

On joining the MBS Steering Group, each member (excluding local authority partners) is asked to complete the former Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (now Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Register of Members' Interest Form and this is reviewed on an annual basis by the MLEP CEO and Chair of the MBS Steering Group, in line with the MLEP Conflicts of Interest Policy. Register of Members' Interest Forms

were last updated in April 2021, covering the period February 2021 to February 2022. In addition, members are asked to declare any interests with any relevant agenda items at the start of each meeting.

The TORs are reviewed annually with the last review taking place in April 2021. The MBS Steering Group TORs have been broadened to incorporate a more strategic view of business support in anticipation of BEIS' Business Support Reform programme and changes to funding, including the impending end of EU funding for business support projects.

The MGH governance is outlined in the Accountability & Assurance Framework [MLEP-Accountability-and-Assurance-Framework](#) including its [TORs](#).

The MGH Operations Group is an officer level working group which meets every two months to ensure that activities are co-ordinated effectively across the MLEP-managed Virtual Hub and the partner-led three physical Hubs in Shrewsbury, Telford & Wrekin and Hereford. The group reviews business support services from all partners in order to manage referrals, monitor outputs and share information. Its membership includes:

Local Partners:

- Herefordshire Council
- Shropshire Council
- Telford and Wrekin Council
- University of Wolverhampton
- MLEP
- PR/Marketing consultant

National:

- Department for International Trade
- Economic Growth Solutions (Deliver Manufacturing Growth Programme)
- British Business Bank

The MLEP team meets with the Accountable Body (finance team) monthly to review spend against profile and to discuss any concerns. The information from this meeting is used to inform the Performance Risk and Monitoring Committee (PRMC) which meets every 2 months and is a sub-group of the MLEP Board comprising four MLEP Board members (currently one post is vacant), the Section 151 Officers from each of the three LAs and the MLEP CEO.

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

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

This [link](#) sets out how the MBS Steering Group reports into the MLEP Board, the reporting structure plus the area's three Business Boards. The Business Boards help to provide direct links to private businesses testing the effectiveness of the service, provide a route to publicise the service and enable the LEP to gather intelligence from the business community.

- **Changes to delivery mechanisms**

MGH Delivery Update

Virtual Hub

The MLEP welcomed a Growth Hub temporary admin resource (FTE) on 1 June 2021 to support the BSL.

Below are just some examples of work which have been possible as a result of recruiting the additional resource:-

- Support with the weekly MLEP business and economic intelligence gathering report for Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, enabling reporting on from wider stakeholders.
- Full audit of the MGH website following the recent re-design and upgrade in June 2021 to identify further opportunities to improve the user experience.
- Support with MGH meetings (MBS Steering Group and MGH Operations Group) and other ad hoc meetings.
- Data analysis for MLEP board reporting to enable deeper understanding of MGH users and identify any 'cold spots' where enhanced engagement could encourage take up.
- Compilation of an internal case study bank to demonstrate positive impact and encourage take up.
- Audit/Review of all programmes listed on MGH website support finder to ensure the accuracy of information.
- Creation of Growth Hub stakeholder list to further develop and enhance engagement activities.
- A review of the Growth Hub PR & Marketing report presented at Growth Hub meetings. The new improved template will present and help inform both activity and impact. In addition to this, an internal tracker has been set up to monitor monthly website and social media statistics around activity/impact.

Physical Hubs

During the first six months, the physical Growth Hub teams have been busy in continuing to deliver the Growth Hub service including procurement of 1:1 business adviser framework and planning/delivering an events programme. In addition to this, the Growth Hub teams have supported their wider economic development teams with the delivery of government funding in response to COVID 19 and the shaping/delivery of new Business Support Programmes funded by local authority Additional Grants Funding (ARG). The latter support is in response to Local Authority economic recovery plans all of which is being promoted via the MGH.

Outreach activity and drop-in sessions in public places have started to resume in Shropshire. Herefordshire and Telford are both working towards an outreach plan. All three Growth Hub teams have exhibited at their local Chamber of Commerce Business Expo events in October.

MGH Events

Across the three physical Growth Hubs, there was a total of **91** Growth Hub events (Growth Hub led and those held in collaboration with partners). The number of events decreased compared to the number of events delivered during the same period last year (total of 121). There was a total of **3,930** attendees of which **3,895** were businesses. Attendee numbers were up 75% compared to the same period last year (total 2,238). MGH events are attracting very good numbers and receiving very positive feedback. Events are being delivered both virtually and more recently in-person.

The MGH teams have been delivering suites of events rather than one off events and have created hubs with various themes/sectors in response to business demands and trends (start-up and business recovery/resilience). The teams are very mindful of webinar fatigue and are continuing to carefully plan themes/topics and timings of events to ensure events are not being duplicated and remain interesting/relevant with good attendance.

The MGH are working with partners, including the Chambers, FSB and other business representative organisations to avoid duplication and to promote all scheduled on-line events. <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/calendar/>.

In addition to the national and regional events, below is a list of the local MGH events delivered between April to September 2021 inclusive.

MGH Shropshire Events
The Friday Hub - MGH and Good2Great – (delivered every Friday)
The Power of Mindset - MGH and NatWest
Responding to Change - MGH and NatWest
Building a Resilient Business Model - MGH and NatWest
Pivoting your Business Model - MGH and NatWest
Setting Goals to keep Growing - MGH and NatWest
Reopening Hospitality - MGH and Shropshire Council (SC) Public Protection and Shrewsbury BID
Managing Unexpected Growth - MGH and NatWest
Understanding Your Customer - MGH and NatWest
Reaching New Markets - MGH and Nat West
60 Second Pitching - MGH and NatWest
Continuity Planning and Resilience - MGH and NatWest
Restarting Events in 2021 – MGH, Shropshire Council and BID
Meres and Mosses Business Environment Network (MMBEN) event - SWT and MGH - 4 Rs
MMBEN and MGH - MMBEN Annual Corporate Day Event at Fordhall Farm (in person)
The Business Leaders Breakfast - MGH and SC
Tech Severn - 2 day conference – MGH and SC
The Importance of a Clear Brand - MGH and Buy-From
Launching a Brand Digitally - MGH and Buy-From
Be Better with Words - Building a Brand Voice and Personality - MGH and Buy From
How to Plan and Create a Month's worth of Content - MGH and Buy-From
Understanding Content Pillars and marketing funnels - MGH and Buy-From
Social E-commerce - set up an Instagram shop - MGH and Buy-From
Instagram's latest trends and features explained - MGH and Buy From
Understanding the Rise of Influencers - MGH and Buy From
Business Strategy for Success - MGH and FragglesWorks
Marketing Strategy in a Digital World - MGH and FragglesWorks
Digital Marketing Strategy for 2021 - MGH and FragglesWorks
Taking Control of your data - MGH and FragglesWorks
Social Media Strategy in a Digital World - MGH and FragglesWorks
Using LinkedIn to build your online digital brand - MGH and FragglesWorks
Using Twitter to build your online digital brand - MGH and FragglesWorks
Websites and Advertising Online - MGH and FragglesWorks
Mental Health First Aid Awareness Course - MGH and Shropshire HR
How to Build and Retain a Resilient and Connected Team - MGH and Shropshire HR
HR for Office Managers – Principles and Practice - MGH and Shropshire HR
Tax Reliefs and allowances your business could benefit from right now! MGH and CATAX

Managing Stress and Anxiety - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Building Confidence and Assertiveness - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Building Emotional Intelligence - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Managing wellbeing during Change - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Building a Positive Mindset - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Perfectionism and imposter syndrome - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Beating Performance Anxiety - MGH and Inspired Mindset
Biochar webinar: Challenges, benefits, and applications - MGH and EBRI
VIP Zebra Day - Goal Setting - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR (in-person)
VIP Zebra Day - Show your Stripes Day - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR (in person)
Time to Make it Happen - Goal Setting Masterclass – MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR
Time to Make it Happen - Mastering your Mindset - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR
Time to Make it Happen - Audit your Offer - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR
Time to Make it Happen - Relationship Marketing - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR MGH
Zebra VIP Series 1 Day 3 Mindset and Marketing - MGH and Zebra Marketing and PR
Protecting your Business from Cyber Criminals - UK GDPR & Home Working Risks – MGH and Aversus
Need for Cyber Security & Cyber Threats – MGH and Aversus
Protecting your Business from Cyber Criminals - Cyber Security Measures – MGH and Aversus
Protecting your Business from Cyber Criminals - Cyber Essentials – MGH and Aversus

MGH Telford & Wrekin Events

Social e-commerce- selling on Instagram
Sales Workshop - How to convert more enquiries into orders
Get Creative with Canva
Marketing strategy in a digital world
LinkedIn
From mate to manager
Blogging for beginners
Social Media Strategy in a Digital World

MGH Herefordshire Event

Herefordshire Business Summit – Herefordshire Council supported by MGH
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- **High profile activities**
- MGH Shropshire supported the delivery of two high profile events namely Shropshire Business Leaders Breakfast 2021 in May ([news link](#)) and a 2 day Tech Severn conference in June ([Showpiece Shropshire Climate Conference](#)).
- MGH Herefordshire supported Herefordshire Council’s Business Summit in September which included the re-launch of the growth Hub ([Herefordshire Council news release](#)).
- MLEP Virtual Careers Fair - The Careers Fair, held virtually on 8 July 21, attracted 48 exhibitors from across the Marches employer network and almost 600 students. The event supported our schools and colleges in enhancing their provision of meaningful employer encounters by providing the opportunity for students to engage with local

employers as well as receiving valuable information from colleges, training providers and universities. It also offered employers an opportunity to engage with the future workforce and share what they are seeking in an employee, what school subjects have particular significance to roles within their sector and the types of opportunities available. The event was actively supported by our Cornerstone Employers and NCS, all of whom contributed to activities on the day.

- **New services offered**
- Telford & Wrekin Council launched their [Telford Growth & Recovery Programme](#) (funded by ARG) which is being promoted through the MGH. This includes grants of between £2,000 and £10,000 to eligible SME Telford and Wrekin businesses as well as 1:1 specialist support. The funding programmes includes:
 - Growth Fund - Targeted at businesses looking to grow or expand as they continue to recover from any negative impacts associated with trading during the pandemic. Sectors prioritised will be manufacturing, engineering, professional services, logistics, wholesale, construction and environmental.
 - Exceptional Fund - For businesses that operate in the leisure, retail and hospitality sectors. Businesses must demonstrate that they have either experienced, or continue to experience, a severe and demonstrable negative impact as a result of on-going COVID restrictions, or indeed the continued effects of the pandemic upon trading.
 - Social Enterprise Development Fund – Aimed at Social Enterprises that are looking to diversify, grow or expand as they continue to recover from any negative impacts associated with trading during the pandemic. Businesses operating within this field are expected to have a social or environmental mission that brings wider benefit to the local area.
 - 1:1 Specialist support - dedicated 1:1 business consultancy support to navigate recovery out of the pandemic. Business consultants can assist all sectors to develop plans for growth, business planning, diversification mapping, introducing new product lines, independent financial assessments through to the development of new websites. This is an extension to the MLEP funding to deliver intensive 1:1 support.
 - Grant support for Manufacturing businesses to become more greener is currently being explored.
- Shropshire Council have launched the following business support/programmes (funded by ARG funding) all of which are being promoted through the MGH:
 - Access to free general business support and the Business Boost Programme (offline workshops) – To support business during the ‘Restart and Recovery’ phase of COVID 19 the MGH is working with start-ups, early stage and growth businesses to access general business advice and support through business 1:1 sessions. Also, a suite of webinars (Business Boost programme) is being developed to aid businesses with their learning and development which can be accessed offline through the Invest In Shropshire website. This follows feedback from Retail and Tourism sectors and will allow the businesses to access a series of webinars covering different business disciplines at the time and place of their choice and not when we are running them in real time. This will be launched in March 2022.
 - Intensive 12 Hours Specialist Business Support – 15 expert advisers and consultants are providing free intensive support to help Shropshire businesses to grow and prosper as the county recovers from the impact of the Covid pandemic. Specialist support will cover a range of business issues from access to finance, sales and marketing, HR, Health and Safety and much more. This is an extension to the MLEP funding to deliver 1:1 intensive support.

- The Digital Hub – This hub hosts a range of support which is centred around ‘Digital Revolution’ and adopting new technologies in response to COVID 19. The programme of support includes various webinars, 15 hours specialist support towards addressing cyber security and attaining Cyber Essentials certification, 12 hours specialist support towards adopting digital technologies and improving digital presence. The delivery of the highly successful Tech Severn two-day Conference in June 2021 was included in this package of support.
- The Silverpreneurs Programme – This programme has been created to inspire and empower the over 50’s who are wanting to start up their own business or grow their micro or small business as part of a fun and collaborative business community. The programme includes three months of support delivered through a combination of 1:1 support and group sessions where delegates can learn, grow and share their unique skills and experience with the group. Three Cohorts of 14 delegates will be delivered through the lifespan of the programme. Silverpreneurs.
- Social Enterprise Conference – Spark Social is scheduled for 16 November 10.00 – 13.30. This conference will be delivered during Social Enterprise week and will be centred on celebrating everything Social in Shropshire. The conference will be delivered virtually through Yarrington who have a purpose-built studio and virtual platform to host the event. Spark Social Conference 2021
- MGH Shropshire is currently looking to develop a debt recovery programme which will tie in Access to Finance support.
- Herefordshire Council have launched the [Revive and Thrive Fund](#) which is part of their economic and wellbeing recovery plan funded by ARG funding. The fund is being promoted by the MGH and has three different strands:-
 - High street retail premises grant –The grant will fund a business moving from a residential property, garage, lock up, market stall, or pop up space into a full retail unit.
 - Commercial premises grant – The grant can fund a business moving from a residential property, garage, lock up, market stall, or pop up space into a commercial unit or a business retaining their existing premises and expanding into another commercial premises.
 - Start-up trial grant - the grant offers the opportunity to test out a business idea with a high street or commercial pop up.

In addition to the above, Herefordshire Council await the outcome of the eight projects to be funded by the Community Renewal Funding. These projects are currently being assessed by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Delays in approval will impact on the success of their delivery, bearing in mind that they are scheduled to be completed by end of March 2022.

- **New Partnerships**

The MGH Operations Group was introduced to and received informative presentations from the **Made Smarter** Marches expert (July meeting) and **Innovate UK Edge** Marches contact (September meeting). This will help support signposting and referral to the programmes as well as promotion to Marches intermediaries and businesses.

Better Business for All (BBfA) is a government scheme designed to create partnerships between businesses and regulators with one key aim – to help businesses get regulation right first time. The BSL is supporting the Office for Product and Safety Standards Local Regulatory Delivery Manager link into local authority partner regulatory teams and MGH teams to support this programme.

Help to Grow: Management supports senior managers of SME businesses to boost their business performance, resilience, and long-term growth. The 12-week programme, which combines online sessions with face-to-face learning, is 90% funded by the Government and has been designed to allow participants to complete it alongside full-time work. The MGH is actively promoting this programme and signposting to the various delivery partner universities. The BSL is working closely with university contacts to ensure alignment of comms.

Help to Grow: Digital In September, the MGH supported the opportunity of becoming a vendor for this programme. The programme will offer free impartial advice on how technology can boost your business, delivered through a new online platform which is to be launched in the Autumn. SMEs can also claim a discount of up to 50% on the costs of approved software, worth up to £5,000. Vouchers are initially expected to be available for software that helps businesses:

- build customer relationships and increase sales.
- make the most of selling online.
- manage accounts and finances digitally.

- **Developing Existing Partnerships**
- **Partnership working** – this has continued to be encouraged through the MGH governance and meeting structures, i.e., through the MGH Operations Group (bimonthly) and MBS Steering Group (quarterly). These continue the sharing of best practice and encourage alignment of provision.
- **Business Boards** – The MLEP continues to work closely with three Business Boards in Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire and Herefordshire. The Business Boards help to provide direct links to private businesses which helps both publicise and test the effectiveness of the MGH service. Each Business Board has a representative on the MBS Steering Group.
- **DIT and Export Agenda** - MGH further developed the excellent working relationship with local DIT team and West Midlands wide DIT team (further details including outputs/outcomes are provided in this report).
- **West Midlands Cluster** - The BSL continues to work closely and supports the work of the West Midlands Cluster. Activity includes EU clinics during Q1 and Q2 and supporting the promotion and delivery of Made Smarter.
- **Collaborative events** - Success continued with collaborative events and workshops with both existing partners and newly developed partnerships across the Marches. Examples have been provided in Section 5 of this report.
- **Network Groups** - All three Growth Hubs are very supportive of the FSB, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, Business Boards and Women In Rural Enterprise (WIRE) activity and events that take place across the county.
- **Innovate UK (part of UK Research and Innovation)** - In the Marches, using competition year 2020/21 (i.e., the year the grant is from) Innovate UK have awarded the following up to July 2021:-

	Number of individual company awards (and not projects)		Sum of Award Offered (£)
Academic	3	£	424,688.00
Large	3	£	7,837,088.52
Micro/Small	20	£	1,597,945.17
Grand Total	26	£	9,859,721.69

All innovate UK funded projects published as part of freedom of information can be here: [Innovate UK funded projects since 2004 - GOV.UK](#).

- **Innovate UK Edge** – The Marches Innovation & Growth Specialist delivered an informative presentation to the MGH Operations Group on 16th September 2021. The programme is being promoted on the MGH website and via comms. Collaborative working is being explored with the Growth Hub teams.
- **Be the Business - The Mentoring for Growth Programme** - The MGH website and Growth Hub teams have been kept informed on the recent eligibility changes.
- **ScaleUp Institute** – Work continues with the institute to support their 2021 Annual Scaleup Review report and promotion of the Annual Scaleup survey.
- **Intellectual Property Office (IPO)** - The online IP Master Class Bitesize course has continued to be promoted to Marches business advisors. The masterclass enables advisors to develop a detailed understanding of all aspects of IP and its relationship with business, culture and the economy. In addition, the webinars aimed at businesses continue to be promoted on the MGH website.
- **Midlands Energy Hub** – MGH continues to help raise awareness of new projects/programmes available through the hub. The Energy Hubs have now received confirmation from BEIS that funding for the Regional Energy Project Officers is secure until March 2023. Additional roles in the core team at Nottingham City Council have also been created to support the expanding remit of the Midlands Energy Hub. The additional roles have been created to support the delivery of a number of projects in the Marches. Details have been provided below:-
 - COP26 - The UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow from 31 October to the 12 of November 2021. This is an important event for everyone. Specific support is on offer for businesses through the climate hub - <https://smeclimatehub.org/>, but it is all under the UK Government banner of “Together for Our Planet” branding (<https://together-for-our-planet.ukcop26.org/>). The Midlands Energy Hub is helping support the conference through a number of specific channels.
 - Hosted four flagship events across the Midlands, which were visited by the Blue Battle bus.
 - Four Regional Roadshows will take place across the Midlands during COP26. In the Marches, each of the 3 LAs are hosting some promotional events to coincide with the themes of the main COP26 conference in Glasgow.
 - Case Studies from across the UK are being collected to showcase projects that meet the objectives of COP26 and look to encourage others to take action. (These

can be found at <https://carboncopy.eco/initiatives> - the Midlands Energy Hub will also be including these case studies on its own website). Case studies include schemes from across the Marches region.

- Parish Council Carbon Footprint Calculator - This has now been launched. You can view this at <https://impact-tool.org.uk/>. Additional funding has been secured from BEIS to ensure that the impact-tool can work with a wider range of community groups.
- Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) - This scheme is coming to an end in its current format. 200 community groups have approached the MEH for RCEF funding indicating the level of interest, and to date 18 Feasibility studies (stage 1) and 3 Development Grant (stage 2) applications have been successful. In the Marches, two have so far received funding; both now complete.
- Wem Town Council – swimming pool and associated buildings.
- Ludlow21 – investigate the potential cost and carbon savings of a shared-loop ground source heat pump (GSHP) to supply heat to rural off-gas-grid homes.
- Green Homes Grant LAD2 / Home Upgrade Grants (HUG) - Through LAD 2 delivery, the hub has provided each LA in the region an allocation enabling 55 projects with 63 LA's. There is customer journey support in place to assist LAs with LAD 2. LAs are responsible for delivering their allocation including submitting a proposal and identify areas for the customer journey support to target. The MEH has also submitted a regional bid for the Sustainable Warmth Competition to access funding as part of Phase 3 of the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) and HUG (Home Upgrade Grant) which will run from January 2022 to March 2023. All 3 LAs in the Marches have been given an allocation for this funding. An outcome is expected in Mid-October.
- Green Homes Grant Skills Training Competition - The Midlands Energy Hub Regional Energy Team has worked with BEIS to develop and launch the Green Homes Grant Skills Training Competition. The Skills Training Scheme will support the GHG LAD2 programme. All 18 providers have now been on boarded.
- PRS Enforcement Competition - The Private Rental Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES) Compliance and Enforcement Competition is open to LAs in England and Wales, who are invited to apply for funding to support them to ensure compliance and enforcement of the MEES Regulations. 59 LAs (including the 3 in the Marches) have been successful and awarded funding under this competition.
- Horticultural Waste & Energy Mapping - The MEH consultancy fund is being used to manage 2 work streams aimed at increasing the understanding of the links between energy and the agri-food sector. The first is a report to highlight emerging technologies and practices and present a vision of how farming might adapt to the wider challenges posed by climate change. The MEH has also just released an Invitation to Quote (ITQ) for a consultant to undertake a mapping study to highlight the opportunities for the development of low-carbon horticulture by understanding the potential for working with the agri-food sector to deliver local heat and power.
- Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) and Low Carbon Opportunity Fund (LoCOP) -These grant schemes are still open to SMEs in the Marches Region. Both are EU funded and are on-track to meet their respective targets.
- **British Business Bank** – The MGH has actively promoted BBB funding including MEIF on the MGH website, via the e-newsletter and through social media platforms. MEIF Impact to date is detailed on page 22.
- **Marches Experts in Residence** - NatWest events have been delivered in partnership with the MGH. Further activity is currently being planned.

- **EU Project/Programme Development** - MGH SME businesses had access to **15** EU funded business support projects (including grants and consultancy support). Funding and support through the current and planned programmes will continue **until June 2023**. The four largest ERDF schemes (Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP), Business Growth Programme (BGP), Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Broadband Grants) awarded a combined **£2.95m** to Marches businesses between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2021. The EU investment will lead to the anticipated creation of **98** jobs. The Marches has also benefitted from RDPE funding, with a total of **£9.3m** awarded over the three rounds of funding.

These projects/programmes provide in-depth business support for SMEs and are focussed on SMEs with a desire/capacity to grow including creating new jobs. Some of the high-growth/scale-up programmes that are delivered/promoted via the MGH are detailed below and include impact information where it has been provided: -

- **West Midlands Chambers of Commerce (WMCC) summary of DIT and ERDF contracts**

DIT Core performance - Performance across the Marches to the end of September 2021 continued to be strong. International Trade Adviser (ITA) teams received more export focused enquiries with a move away from transition enquiries, although they were still handling these as changes continued to impact businesses.

With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, ITAs saw an appetite from some businesses for physical meetings although most client engagements continued to be undertaken virtually. ITA teams have settled into working a hybrid mix of office and home working. Since the last update, DIT have extended our contract again to the end of June 2022.

Brexit and the UK's exit from the Single Market and Customs Union have brought the most fundamental shift in our long term trading relations with our single biggest trading partner (the EU) but also with the rest of the world as the UK now seeks to negotiate bilateral trade deals with key markets globally. DIT teams were at the centre of this providing the necessary support to businesses to navigate their way through the changes.

Such unprecedented challenges and their impact were still being worked through, but DIT worked to provide the necessary support and developed their offer to ensure that they provided the relevant support businesses need to maintain and built their export portfolios. Moving forward, DIT are proposing to focus on the following key areas:

- Supply Chain, Customs and Logistics.
- Supporting the next generation of exporters.
- Support Our Exporters to Identify and Tap into New and Emerging Export Markets.
- Raise the Profile of the Region on the Global Stage & Increase Inward investment.

ITA teams in Shropshire and Herefordshire remained generally ahead of profile in virtually all target areas, currently standing at 177% over the Export Win volume target. Note: the targets have changed from previous updates, this is primarily due to contract extensions and offer changes.

Output measure	Team Target	Actual
Export Win Value	£121m	£83m (68%)

Export Win Volume	48	85 (177%)
New to Export	16	14 (69%)
Unique Companies supported	63	35 (55%)

When compared to other West Midlands regions the Marches ranked as follows (out of six):

DIT Target	Position
Export Win Value	3 rd
Export Win Volume	1 st
New Exporter Volume	4 th
Unique Exporter Wins	4 th

The Marches Export Academy performance to end of September is shown below:

Export Academy Output	Target	Achieved
Workshop Attendance	80	50 (62%)
Business Engagements	122	140 (115%)
Significant Assists	61	24 (39%)
Export Wins	15	0
EA Referrals	37	12 (32%)

The work of the Export Academy in the Marches has not been without its challenges. Business engagement remained difficult but the ongoing work with the MGH has elevated and stimulated greater knowledge transfer and cross referrals and work continued to develop and ramped up DIT work with the Growth Hubs going forward:

ERDF Enhanced Export Growth Project - The Enhanced Export Growth Project closed on 30 September 2021 having supported over 500 SME across the West Midlands. Given that the project has been delivered 100% via online means project performance has been remarkable. With all output areas being met or exceeded.

In the Marches the project has engaged with 147 SMEs and collected SME Declaration forms from 96 of these and has managed to achieve the following progress:

ERDF Output	Target	Achieved
C1 Number of Businesses Assisted	21	28
C4 Number of Businesses receiving 12 hr assists	21	28

P13 Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage support	11	31
C5 Number of New Enterprises Supported	1	0
C8 Number of New Jobs Created	2	1.5

Whilst in the Marches, the programme did not quite achieve all of the outputs as profiled, DIT were proud of the performance and the final position given the challenges and impact that Covid-19 has had on the project.

ESIF Internationalisation Fund (IF) - The ESIF IF offers grants to SMEs of between £1,000 and £9,000 for internationalisation activities offered on a match funded basis with a 50% intervention rate for Herefordshire and 60% for Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. To the end of September 2021, the project has seen nine applications approved from SMEs in the Marches:-

- Herefordshire x 6.
- Shropshire x 2.
- Telford x 1.

With a combined value of £69,896 of ERDF being requested.

New LEP Strategic Relationship Manager (SRM) Role - This new role has been introduced as part of the Levelling Up agenda and is intended to build on DIT's relationships with the regions LEPs. John Wigley has been appointed as LEP SRM covering the MLEP, he also has responsibility for Worcestershire LEP and Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP. His remit is to work closely with LEPs to increase the volume and/or capability of exporters within their respective areas. This role will support this agenda by:-

- Ensuring that LEP level strategic priorities for export development are reflected in DIT activity and reporting back to LEPs on the impact and outcomes of that activity .
- Working with the LEPs and wider partnerships to ensure that they are fully engaged with DIT activity.
- Effectively connecting LEPs and LEP International Strategy into the wider DIT services offer by raising awareness of all aspects of the service including digital content, ITAs, overseas services and events/missions as appropriate to their needs.

Work is already well underway in the Marches with John connecting with the MLEP Partnership Manager with a view to working up and agreeing a local trade strategy approach. The MBS Steering Group will support the sign off of this strategy in order to confirm alignment with current and planned international trade activity.

West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster EU Business Support Project - DIT West Midlands continues to work closely with the West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster which includes the Marches. DIT has supported the extension of the EU Business Support offer during Q1 & Q2 ensuring that this complements the support offered by DIT.

DIT are further building on this great work in support of Growth Hubs and held a virtual half day DIT Export Academy and Growth Hub workshop on 28 September which provided clarity and detail on the DIT offer. DIT have also scheduled quarterly team meetings going forward to enable teams within DIT and the Growth Hubs to better support businesses across the West Midlands.

The next phase will be a series of Export Academy workshops offered in the evening and an opportunity for the Growth Hubs to pitch back to DIT ITAs and Export Academy Advisers.

DIT and WMIT value the partnership we have with the Marches LEP/MGH and proactively seek to further introduce innovative ways to build and strengthen our work. As the teams move back to office working, there will be more opportunities to share space through hot desking.

- **Marches Renewable Energy Project** – This is designed as a straightforward grant scheme allowing any eligible applicants to apply for a 50% grant for the installation of eligible renewable technologies on their premises. This scheme is now closed to new applications. The scheme is fully allocated and is expected to exceed all its targets. A number of projects are still at the implementation phase, with defrayal of the remaining funds expected before the end of 2021. The project supported the deployment of 2.12MW of renewable energy generation at 40 sites across the Marches, which will reduce carbon emissions by around 650tonnes.
- **Business Growth Programme 2 (BGP2)** - Effective from April 2019, BGP2 offers grants of £2,500 - £1,000,000 and is designed to strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and help businesses grow. The programme is available to:
 - Start-Up B2B Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) moving into or located in the MLEP Partnership area only.
 - Existing B2B SMEs moving into or located in The Greater Birmingham & Solihull and the MLEP Enterprise Partnership areas.

Part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and managed by Birmingham City Council, BGP2 builds on the successful delivery of the £33m Business Growth Programme which closed in December 2018. Between 1 April 2021 to 31 September 2021, 14 BGP applications were approved totalling project costs of £1,977,188.00, grants allocated of £1,011,902.00, which will help to create 108 jobs. Private sector match totals £674,936.00 with private sector leverage £290,350.00.

- **Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF)** - Current MEIF Fund of Funds position at the end of August 2021 is £135.57m invested and loaned in 618 investments/loans in 446 SMEs of which, £4.2m invested and loaned in 35 investments/loans in 26 SMEs was in the Marches.

MEIF Fund of Funds position for the financial year (1 April 2021 – 31 August 2021) is £18.86m invested and loaned in 78 investments/loans in 54 SMEs of which, £1.0m invested and loaned in 5 investments/loans in 2 SMEs in the Marches.

The MGH continues to work closely with the 5 fund managers to help promote the funds available. The MEIF Senior Relationship Manager Ryan Cartwright is a member of the MGH Operations Group.

MLEP Board member and Access to Finance Champion Paul Kalinauckas joined the MEIF Strategic Oversight Board (SOB) in April 2021 and provided the MLEP Board with an update at the September 2021 Board meeting.

The MLEP BSL has been involved with the MEIF Regional Advisory Board (RAB) since it was set up in March 2017 and was elected as Chair in April 2019 (to date). The BSL together with the Chair of the East & Southeast Midlands RAB presented RAB feedback to the MEIF Strategic Board on 2 July 2021.

Case study link - Cardboard Bedding Ltd, trading as Green Mile, is relocating to Prees in Shropshire after securing £180,000 from the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF).

- **The Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP)** – This programme has been operating since October 2016 and is now working across 18 LEP areas. Delivered by Oxford Innovation, the programme supports SME Manufacturers to grow by identifying, understanding and removing barriers to growth and enabling sustainable business improvement. The project provides free advice and support to manufacturing SMEs to help them: -
 - Identify opportunities and create plans for growth and improvement.
 - Work with the best external experts to implement those plans.
 - Cover 33% and 43% (Transitional) of the cost of implementing the plans through a growth/improvement grant.
 - Connect to wider support to maximise opportunities for growth.
 - Grant to support small capital purchases (up to 25K project cost) Covering 33% and 43% (Transitional) that support productivity improvement with the business.

Progress in the Marches from 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021 includes work conducted with 16 clients (Strategic Business Reviews) with grants offered to the value of £45,506 to businesses. Delivery of the current programme will continue until March 2023.

A representative from this programme is a member of the MGH Operations Group.

<http://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/>.

A list of case studies and market intelligence can be found below: -

- Motor Design <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/advice-and-support/case-studies/motor-design/>
- White Heron Drinks <https://youtu.be/bHybnlQnTCY>
- Hitherbest <https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/energised-shropshire-manufacturer-defies-brex-it-uncertainty-with-20-sales-increases/>
- Fabdec Limited - <https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/an-ellesmere-manufacturer-has-seen-a-jump-in-productivity-after-gaining-external-support-and-grant-funding/>

Program performance October 2016 – August 2021

https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/market-data/The-Marches-MGP-Insight-Report_08-2021.pdf
(www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk)

Manufacturing Barometer Reports 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2021

<https://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/SWMAS-National-Barometer-Q1-2021-WEB.pdf>

- **Innovate UK EDGE** - In helping innovative businesses to grow, scale and go international, Innovate UK EDGE is a key part of Innovate UK's Business Growth agenda. Innovate UK EDGE offers core expert-led innovation and growth support, provided in conjunction with a number of other Innovate UK initiatives. The Innovate UK EDGE team helps businesses to identify the most effective strategy to accelerate business growth and maximise their potential. In doing so, the advisor team aims to give access to the necessary resources to deliver, from investor networks to IP expertise and international partnerships.

Since April 2021, Innovate UK EDGE has engaged with 9 companies in the Marches area. Over the last few months, there have been some changes to the team which has seen an overall net increase in the number of advisors. The team has been in contact with the MLEP BSL to update relevant information on the website and to agree on closer collaboration in use of social media. Furthermore, details regarding Innovate UK EDGE events, activities and services have been shared. This includes content concerning the Global Business Innovation Programmes (GBIPs), Global Incubator Programme, Pitchfest and new funding calls, which the MGH have promoted on their website. Lawson Coombes, Senior Innovation & Growth Specialist has presented to the MGH Operations Group and a number of testimonials have been provided as part of a follow up. Since September, some five referrals have been received from the MGH Shropshire. Building on this relationship, Innovate UK EDGE is now a member of Midland Cyber. We are committed to working with the MGH to ensure that Marches-based businesses benefit fully from the full range of support. This will be further encouraged with regular dialogue and cooperation with the MGH. [Innovate UK EDGE](#)

- **Marches Buildings Investment Grant (MBIG) and Small Equipment Grant (SEG)** - In September 2019 Herefordshire Council secured a further £3m of ERDF funding for the Marches Business Investment Programme.

This programme contains two schemes, the extended MBIG and the SEG. MBIG was launched in November 2019 and provides an improved offer to businesses under this programme. Businesses can access grants of up to £150,000 (maximum 50% contribution) to extend /reconfigure commercial properties and can now also access funding for new build developments.

The Small Equipment Grant (SEG) went live in March 2020 and provides funding for capital equipment purchases up to £10,000 (50% contribution).

The programme since launching has received 701 enquiries (of which 133 between April and September 2021). A total of £2,246,146.82 has been allocated to businesses to date, of which £548,130 has been approved between April 2021 to Sept 2021.

Grants have been approved to 73 businesses to date who aim to achieve 157.80 jobs (15 business and 32.55 jobs between the period April 2021 to September 2021) . The programme has also secured an additional £500k ERDF in November 2020 and the programme delivery period has been extended to June 2023. The private sector leverage for the 73 businesses that have secured funding equates to £2,457,420.97.

Press Releases:-

EMS, MBIG, Herefordshire, April

2021 <https://yourherefordshire.co.uk/all/business/business-grant-helps-company-expand-new-city-offices/>

Planet Doughnut, MBIG, Shropshire, May 2021 [Planet Doughnut scales up production following £115,000 grant | News | British Baker \(bakeryinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Finer by Nature, SEG, Herefordshire, June 2021 [Finer By Nature | Midlands | Business News | Insider Media](#)

Pedicargo, SEG, Herefordshire, August 2021 [Pedicargo gets on its bike for glass recycling scheme | TheBusinessDesk.com](#)

- **Agri-tech Growth and Resources for Innovation (AGRI)** - Aston University and Harper Adams University have been part funded by the European Regional Development Fund to support the delivery of AGRI. AGRI initiative assists Marches based SMEs to innovate and develop new products and services in order to exploit

growing market opportunities; particularly in agri-tech, food and drink manufacture and specialist food and drink logistics, as well as to break into new agri-food markets.

Having met its initial output targets, the AGRI project has been successfully extended and will now complete in October 2022, supporting 173 SMEs in the region over 5 years. The extension support from March 2020 will be delivered in the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin transitional area of the Marches LEP region, and to date has worked with 126 companies, 109 of which have completed and 17 are currently in progress. Helping to develop new products and services with both short one-to-one assists and longer-term innovation development collaborations - 30 of these companies have moved on to longer term innovation development support, of which 24 have now completed and 6 are in progress. AGRI has also supported 10 of the 11 start-up business support target. In addition to the project's delivery of 7 specialist workshops: covering areas such as precision agriculture, logistics, innovation in food and drink production and measuring and sensing in food processing using photonics, AGRI has also delivered a further 7 online business support workshops in response to the changing requirements brought about by the pandemic.

<http://www.agri.org.uk/>

Twitter: [@agritechsupport](https://twitter.com/agritechsupport)

Facebook: [@agritechsupport](https://www.facebook.com/agritechsupport)

https://www.instagram.com/agri_project/

- **Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology @ University Centre Shrewsbury (CREST @ USC)** – In partnership with Reaseheath College and the ARLI Project at University of Chester, CREST@UCS offers free support to SMEs across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin to reduce their environmental impact or innovate and develop new products or services.

During April to September 2021, a total of 67 SMEs have received standard package of support under ERDF, which is a minimum of twelve hours support. Of these 67, 16 have been start-ups less than a year old.

33 enterprises have received, or are in the process of receiving, longer term research and innovation support.

Officially, this has resulted in 3 new jobs being created, 1 new product to market and 3 new products to firms. However, from feedback received we believe that more jobs have been created within businesses that have been supported.

Some examples of recent impact of business support:

- Capturing drone imagery in RGB (Red, Green and Blue) and NIR (Near Infrared) to allow mapping of the carbon storage based on the vegetation index NDVI.
- Laboratory testing was done to estimate the carbon content of samples from these different locations.
- Research into alternative fuels and their suitability to be used either alongside or as a replacement for a standard diesel combustion engine.
- Evaluating the conformity of a new product linked to treating storm water.
- Field trials into the success of biochar on plant growth and associated milk yields.
- Research into current use of acids on slurry to reduce ammonia emissions.
- Support to evaluate the commercial viability of new products derived from Earth Observation.
- Building networks and contacts for start-up companies.
- Business model canvas and value proposition on a product linked to carbon sequestration and carbon trading.
- Literature review into use of aggregates as plant growth material.

- Facilitated the collaboration agreement between University of Chester, Shropshire Council and Evora Edge on the development of the Pump House Knowledge Hub.
- One of the businesses supported has officially launched a new product.
- Successful applications on behalf of 4 businesses to Low Carbon Innovation Fund. £174,000.00 awarded at 60:40 intervention (£70,000).

Other Activity:-

- Hosted fifth Smart Rural event in April, on the topic of Water and the Environment.
- Held a second talk on Living Walls, a follow up to the first talk in February 2021.
- The Geospatial Group re-launched their events with one on 'How 5G could be used the Benefit the Environment'.
- Support and information provision to Shropshire Climate Action Partnership provision (Resource group – Plastics).

All events are available to watch via YouTube -

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxqMRiXijlKBBFTK-9DJfYA>

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

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

- **Advanced Materials Characterisation and Simulation Hub (AMCASH)** - AMCASH is a part-ERDF funded initiative established to support SMEs across five Local Enterprise Partnership areas: Black Country, Greater Birmingham and Solihull, Coventry & Warwickshire, Stoke & Staffordshire, and The Marches. AMCASH is supporting West Midlands-based SMEs to improve and create new products and processes, with a specific focus on materials. The programme supports SMEs at any point within the product development process. Support ranges from desk research to understand markets and investigate suitable materials, through to evaluation and testing of new products, and assessment of product failures. Working across all industry sectors, programme expertise covers metallurgical characterisation, microscopy, mechanical testing, polymer science, ceramics engineering, thermal monitoring and computational modelling. Through the AMCASH programme SMEs can accelerate improvements in quality; reduce waste; and manage the risks associated with new product and process development. The programme aims to support 40 SMEs in The Marches (Transition area). AMCASH has delivered 5 SME outputs (C1, C4 and C26) during the period April to September 2021. This represents a positive upturn, compared to delivery of 4 SME outputs in the full financial year 2020-2021. www.amcash.co.uk



AMCASH - Case
Study - Polymer - Coa

- **Digital Solutions (DS)** – DS at University Centre Shrewsbury is funded through ERDF as a Priority 1b project promoting digital research and innovation, initially to December 31, 2020, and now extended until June 2023. The project builds on existing expertise and resources to deliver targeted support to SMEs, aligning with the MLEP growth plans for its digital and related sectors, particularly how digital developments can be used to unlock growth in the health sector. Innovation activity in areas such as health and digital advancements are positioned as focus areas that will drive productivity.

The project activities address digital innovation from two angles:-

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

Although the project started in January 2018, delays and issues with recruitment resulted in the project only becoming fully active towards the end of 2018/early 2019. The team have been working remotely since March 2020 due to COVID 19 restriction and continue to work from home.

The combined Phase 1 (ended December 2020) and phase 2 outputs are listed below.

	Total 2018-2023		Remaining to claim to June 2023
OUTPUTS	Target	Claimed to September 2021	All
C1/C4 Business support	73	57	16
C5 - New businesses	7	14	-7
C8 - New jobs	8	0.5	7.5
C26 - Collaborations	32	16	16
C28 - New products to market	5	4	1
C29 - New products to Firm	11	19	-8

Output achievements during 1 April 2021 to 30st September 2021:-

- A total 189 SMEs have expressed an interest in support.
- Of those, 20 have or are currently, receiving/received innovative support.
- Of the 20, 12 have completed their support package.
- Of the 12 completed 8 are currently receiving or about to engage in long term collaborative support from University Centre Shrewsbury.
- The project has already exceeded both the 'new product to firm - C29' target by 8 (19 claimed, target 11) and 'new businesses - C5' by 7 (14 claimed, target 7).
- Due to Covid19, the New job (C8) output has not been met, however, catch-up is anticipated by June 2023.
- Collaborations C26 – We anticipate meeting this target by June 2023.

Other achievements:

- Assistance to support Innovate UK bids.
- Successful delivery of 3 DING's (Digital Innovation Networking Group).
- Delivery of Webinars detailing product development by SME's receiving support from Digital Solutions.
- Events Calendar of Digital Solutions Webinars, Digital Innovation Networking Group and High profile event all pencilled in for 2022.
- In the process of launching a new Digital Solutions website in October with new podcasts and case studies. Existing case studies can be found here <https://www.digitalucs.co.uk/case-studies>.

- **European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI)** – This project supports businesses to apply for collaborative research funding to develop new products, processes and technologies and take them to market. The Marches results are detailed below both actuals and prediction for Q3 based on pipeline. MGH will be helping to promote an upcoming Masterclass in the Marches to help target drinks industry businesses with specific interests in Biochar and brewing waste [Masterclass](#)

	Claimed in Quarter Q2 (1st April- 30th June)		Eligible to Claim in Quarter Q3 (1st July- 30th September)	
	More Developed	Transitional	More Developed	Transitional
Enrolled	1	1	0	3
C1	1	1	0	1
C26	0	0	1	0
C29	0	0	0	0

www.bioenergy-for-business.org / <https://bioenergy-for-business.org/case-studies/>

- **UK Centric Supply Chains** - This project provides SMEs in the MLEP transition area with access to short-term collaborations with university academics. It focusses on supporting companies in the food, automotive and manufacturing sectors to gain a better understanding of their supply chain in terms of geography, location and relationships with suppliers and customers. The aim of the project is to support businesses to improve their operations and turnover, and to develop their risk management strategies with respect to their supply chains, with the view to growing maximising the UK content of their supply chains.

The project delivers the following support for businesses: -

- Diagnosis and assessment of the current maturity of companies' supply chain in terms of their capabilities and ability to upscale.
- Proposes a plan for addressing the identified gaps.
- Supports the SME in implementing the proposed plan.

Phase 1 commenced on the 1 of October 2018 and completed on the 30 September 2021. The project has now been extended with Phase 2 from 1 October 2021 to 30 June 2023 in the Marches from £470,838 to £832,090.

Phase 1 of the project exceeded the forecast and completed support to a total of 29 SMEs within the MLEP (transitional area), four of which are start-up companies. Phase 2 of the program in the Marches will support a further 20 SMEs of which 5 will be start-up businesses.

Supply chain challenges faced by many manufacturers and food and drink producers is particularly relevant and has been accentuated by the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit and shown a need for programs such as UK-Centric Supply Chains to help address issues and build resiliency.

The summative Assessment produced to evaluate phase 1 of the project conducted a survey of the businesses supported and informed that their involvement with the project had given them a better understanding of their supply chain and were overwhelmingly positive about the support that they have received through the project.

www.ukcentricsupplychains.co.uk/

- **Marches Step-Up Programme** - Telford & Wrekin Council, along with partners Herefordshire and Shropshire Councils, are utilising £303k of further ERDF and council funding to continue a highly successful coaching & mentoring scheme aimed at supporting both business start-ups and businesses with growth aspirations across the MLEP area.

The Marches Step Up programme builds on the successes of an earlier phase of the scheme. The start-up strands offer a mix of 1:1 support and access to workshops to help aspiring entrepreneurs get off to the best possible start whereas bespoke consultancy support is available to trading businesses in aiding their growth aspirations. The intention is that the business will use the support as a catalyst to deliver an improvement or growth project.

Following a tendering process, Good2Great deliver across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Council and IBD Ltd in Herefordshire. With 10 months of delivery, so far, demand for the scheme has been high particularly in the start-up strands where 105 individuals have completed 12 hours of support. There is also firm interest in starting a business as we emerge from the pandemic and the economy begins to recover. Furthermore, so far in the growth strands, 24 businesses have completed support.

Link to a good news story can be found here: [Flower farming firm is flourishing in Ludlow](#)

University of Wolverhampton (UoW) ERDF Project/Programme Development -

Some projects are delivered in other areas as well in the Marches and their data is included as it is difficult to split out. The information below relates to Q1 2021/22 for ERDF projects and Q1 2021/22 for Local Growth Funded projects.

- **Built Environment Climate Change Innovations (BECCI)** – BECCI benefits SMEs in the Black Country and MLEP areas of the West Midlands, by providing free support in the development of products and services that reduce carbon usage.
 - Supports inventors to get their products and processes adopted by industry.
 - Linking academic research into business, driving innovation in areas such as smart grid, battery storage, heating and cooling controls, social landlord engagement and property developer support.
 - Testing and measuring of products, with access to a variety of technology including thermal comfort sensors, energy loggers, air tightness kits, ventilation measuring kits and a portable weather station.
 - Hosting technology showcases, challenges and workshops, providing SMEs with exhibition opportunities.
 - Strategic research in energy efficiency with social housing providers, developers and commercial organisations.

www.wlv.ac.uk/BECCI

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	11
C5. No. of new enterprises supported	0
C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	4

C29. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	1
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- **Composite & Additive Layer Materials Engineering Research & Innovation Centre (CALMERIC)** – this project supports SMEs to carry out research & innovation projects in the field of advanced engineering materials, in collaboration with specialist staff and resources in the Centre.
 - Composite materials.
 - Additive manufacturing (3D printing).
 - Engineering, Research and Innovation.
 - Industrial Research Collaborations.
 - Product optimisation (using less or lighter weight materials)
www.wlv.ac.uk/Calmeric

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	5
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	5
C25. Number of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities	0
C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	0

- **Smart Concept Fund** – this project offers a Proof of Concept grant designed to support the commercialisation of new technologies.
 - Product Development
 - Prototyping
 - Testing
 - IP Protection
 - Market research
www.wlv.ac.uk/smartconceptfund

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	6
C2. Number of enterprises receiving grants	0
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	6
C5. Number of new enterprises supported	2
C6. Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (£)	£0
C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	0
C28. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new products to the market	0
C29. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	2

- **SPEED** – this project is the extension to the Enterprise Action project and is being delivered in Shropshire & Telford from January 2019 – December 2021. SPEED supports

entrepreneurs to start up their own business through one to one support, workshops and an opportunity to apply for a grant up to 50% of the total cost.

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	10
C2. Number of enterprises receiving grants	6
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	9
C5. Number of new enterprises supported	8
C6. Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (£)	£8,419.65
C8. Employment increase in supported enterprises	8
P11. Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready	8

- **Science in Industry Research Centre (SIRC)** – this project supports companies in the West Midlands to develop new science-based products.
 - IP Review and guidance
 - IP Grants
 - Scientific Research
 - New product design
 - Laboratory testing

www.wlv.ac.uk/SIRC

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	5
C2. Number of enterprises receiving grants	2
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	5
C6. Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (£)	£4,122
C25. Number of researchers working in improved research infrastructure facilities	1
C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	0
C28. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new products to the market	0
C29. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	0

*This project is working in multiple LEP areas of which the Marches is one but a breakdown by LEP area is not available.

- **Cyber Quarter** – This project acts as a Midlands Centre for Cyber Security, a Police RCCU Hub and proactive network facilitation service.
 - Provides a Cyber Range designed to immerse the business in a real-world customer network that can be used for educational training and for testing response procedures to known or simulated threats.

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

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	9
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	9
C5. No. of new enterprises supported	0
C8. Employment increase in supported enterprises	0
C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	2
C28. Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	0
C29. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	0

- **Elite Centre for Manufacturing Skills (ECMS)** – this project offers SMEs in the manufacturing and engineering industry short courses and training to up skill the ageing workforce.
 - Hire of facilities and rooms for meetings, events, conferences, training etc.
 - Manual & Commercial training and short courses
 - Material testing and analysis
 - Specialist training provision at the National Foundry Training Centre
 - State of the art equipment (Labs, Foundry workshops, CAD IT Suite)
www.theecms.co.uk

<u>Businesses Assisted</u>	0
<u>Apprenticeship Starts</u>	10
<u>Learner Assists (Bite size)</u>	14

This project is working in multiple LEP areas of which the Marches is one but a breakdown by LEP area is not available.

- **Solutions for Digital Enterprises (SOLVD)** – this project helps accelerate growth in digital businesses through opportunities, challenges and innovative solutions.
 - Assist digital leaders with their technology, digital & security strategies.
 - Solving commercial problems through digital technologies.
 - Accelerating digital and technology companies by accessing new markets.
 - Consultancy and support to enable the development of products or services and bring these into their business or to market.
www.wlv.ac.uk/solvd

C1. No. of enterprises receiving support	4
C4. Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	4
C8. Employment increase in supported enterprises	1

C26. Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	0
C28. Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products	0
C29. No. of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products	0

- **The Marches Centre of Excellence in Healthcare, Allied Health & Social Care** - the aim of the project is to create a nationally recognised centre of excellence in Health, Allied Health and Social Care at the University of Wolverhampton Telford Campus (Priorslee). This will be achieved through the development and refurbishment of state-of-the-art teaching and office space within the Angad Paul building and in doing so provide specialist facilities and technologically enabled infrastructure.

Jobs Connected to the Intervention	3.5
Refurbished Training/Learning Space (Sqm)	1236.09
New Learners (Students Enrolled)	64

- **Best practice or innovative approaches**

A new KPI interactive dashboard report is being developed using Power Bi. This report is presented at Growth Hub meetings and will better inform activity and impact.

- **Please also use this space to flag if you have any concerns or challenges.**

Payment of VAT

Following incorporation of the MLEP (Company Limited by Guarantee) in February 2019 and following legal advice, the MLEP is now required to pay VAT on goods and services. LEP Core funding previously was able to cover the cost of MGH VAT incurred (unrecoverable VAT). During 2020/21 (Supplementary Grant allocation) and 2021/22, BEIS Growth Hub funding was/is being used to pay for MGH VAT incurred (unrecoverable VAT). BEIS Growth Hub Funding will need to be used to cover MGH unrecoverable VAT moving forward.

The ongoing LEP Review and uncertainty over funding will potentially impact on the delivery of MGH support. Management of the MGH team, and financial reporting support provided by the LEP's accountable body, Shropshire Council, is funded using the LEP core budget. The LEP is currently working without the full allocation of core funding which is untenable. BEIS Growth Hub funding will need to be used to ensure full cost recovery in the future.

Uncertainty over future funding (Growth Hub and core) means that there is a risk of losing key personnel (currently employed on fixed term contracts). A longer term funding settlement would also enable a strategic review of the Marches operating model to be undertaken to ensure that MGH is meeting the needs of the business community in the most effective way. Understanding the status of the BEIS Business Support Reform Programme would also support this.

The plethora of new business support initiatives currently offered (nationally and regionally) is leading to confusion for the business community. There also a risk that some initiatives are duplicating support already on offer locally. The MGH has a key role to play here as the “gateway to business support” to guide businesses to the most appropriate support that they are eligible for.

Confirmation of the scale and availability of successor funding to ESIF would be welcomed. As detailed in this report, the Marches business community currently has access to a number of in depth innovation and business support projects. There will potentially be gaps in provision appearing as these projects draw to a close.

Telford & Wrekin Council are currently going through a restructure exercise of their Economic Development Team. The outcome is to be shared in March 2022. There could be possible impact on the delivery of the MGH service.

The current operating model is dependent on the on-going commitment of our 3 LA partners. This is dependent on local funding in addition to future Growth Hub funding.

- **Increasing Engagement and Awareness**

MGH communications April 1, 2021 – September 30, 2021

The PR & communications activity this period has focused on support available for businesses which had suffered adverse impacts from the Covid crisis and signposting to MGH services which could help recovery post-pandemic and post EU-exit transition period.

The strategy aimed to inform businesses about the range of support available to them, with a particular focus on access to finance through recovery grants and loan funding and specialist 1:1 support via the physical hubs.

MGH comms supported Government messaging on recovery and resilience, support for businesses returning to the workplace safely and sharing best practice, case study and webinar content.

The MGH has continued to support activity being led by local authority partners, the West Midlands Growth Hub cluster and EU programme managers.

The strategy to align more closely the communications of the MLEP and its business support service has resulted in an increased awareness of the work the LEP delivers to help business growth, evidenced through increased engagement on both organisations’ social media channels.

The success of the MGH since launch was highlighted as part of the MLEP’s Decade of Delivery campaign, which reported on the 53,000 businesses helped by the growth hub since 2016.

Specific communications activity has focused on:

- Availability of grants and business support measures to help businesses via gov.uk and through partner initiatives.
- Launch and delivery of communications around the Marches Small Business Recovery Grants.
- Working with finance and funding partners, including the British Business Bank, to signpost to loans and grants.
- Working with the West Midlands Growth Hub Cluster to support EU Exit, the end of Transition and new trading arrangements.

- Encouraging sign up to the Peer Networks programme and the Made Smarter programme for manufacturers. Initial promotion for the new Help to Grow programme has also begun, with the first Marches cohort starting in October 2021.
- Case studies illustrating the success of funding and support schemes available through the MGH as a vehicle for marketing messages about the hub being the 'front door' to wider business support.
- Support for employers aiming to recruit via the Marches Careers Fair.

Media relations, PR & press online and offline coverage

At least 63 separate pieces of media coverage highlighting the work and impact of the MGH were secured during this period. These have appeared in the key print titles for the region, including the daily Shropshire Star newspaper, the Midlands News Association weekly titles and other Shropshire and Herefordshire weekly titles, including the Hereford Times.

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

BBC local radio headlines, breakfast and drivetime shows have covered the work of the MGH with MLEP Chair, Mandy Thorn and Marches Small Business Champion Dave Courteen both being interviewed on a number of occasions. Mr Courteen also recently appeared on Shropshire Business Live television in an interview focusing on growth hub support.

As always, the MGH news which sparks most interest in the media and engagement on social media are the non-promotional real-life business stories which are case study examples of the impact of growth hub support. These stories are used as vehicles for wider MGH messaging, with calls to action to visit the website or contact the physical hubs for information about the breadth of support available.

Campaigns

The introduction of West Midlands Growth hub cluster-led marketing for initiatives being delivered to Marches businesses, such as Made Smarter and the EU Transition support, plus the direct Government funding to local authorities to develop their own recovery initiatives, has resulted in a shift in the approach to MGH campaigns.

Although the themes of access to finance and recovery have been a priority for both PR and social media communications, no single MGH owned campaign ran during the period with the MGH preferring to focus on the range of individual EU programmes and nationally-supported help and advice available such as Peer Networks, Made Smarter, EU Transition via the WM cluster.

Q3 and Q4 will see a new Here to Help campaign developed to both build awareness of the business support offer among the business community and signposting to the MGH, specifically to help businesses start, grow and access funding.

Website

In the last six months, 53 news releases and pieces of online content related to business support on offer, plus information pages and case studies, have featured on the MGH website.

As expected, the increase in website visitors during the height of the crisis in 2020/21 has resulted in a dip in visitor numbers during the first two quarters of 2021. The reduction was

magnified during the main summer holiday period. However, as a comparison, visitor numbers are still up 14% on the same period pre-pandemic in 2019.

	1 October 2020 – 31 March 2021	1 April 2021 – 30 September 2021
Website users (unique visitors)	16,672	11,483
Total web visits	24,196	16,406
Page views	64,542	46,407
Average time spent	2 min 20 sec	2 min 13 sec
Return/new visitors	16%/84%	15%/85%
Most visited pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and funding - grants • Tenders and vacancies • MGH Shropshire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance and funding - grants • MGH Shropshire • Finance and funding - BGP

Social Media

Platform	Followers/Likes	% change since March 31 2021	Reach/impressions
Twitter	4267	+2%	2.7m (potential)
Facebook	820 likes/1,113 follows	+3%	11,129 (average monthly reach, organic 7,262)
LinkedIn	1346	+12%	4,014 (average monthly impressions)
Instagram (set up in January 2021)	377	_95%	314 (average monthly)

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

Newsletters

Three MLEP/MGH e-newsletters have been issued to a mailing list of circa 1980 subscribers between April and September 2021.

- <https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/import-vat-clinics>
- <https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/marches-careers-fair>
- <https://mailchi.mp/marcheslep/what-support-do-you-need>

The distribution list for the newsletter has reduced during this period. This is not as a result of unsubscribes, but of hard bounces from email addresses no longer in use. This could be in part due to the number of people on furlough who have not returned to their role however a campaign to boost sign ups is planned for Q4.

These newsletters are supplemented by weekly joint local authority partner/MGH e-shots promoting events, availability of advice and support and promotion of new grants and initiatives, delivered to in excess of 7,000 businesses. MGH updates are also promoted within the dedicated Skylon Park e-newsletter, which is distributed to nearly 200 businesses on the MLEP's Hereford Enterprise Zone.

- **Press releases issued April to September 2021**

[New programme launched to support Marches businesses - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses across the Marches are being invited to take part in the Help to Grow 12 week-programme delivered by leading business schools across the UK. 17 September 2021

[Herefordshire companies urged to apply to travel grant scheme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses in Herefordshire are being urged to take up a funding scheme which could meet the cost of implementing sustainable travel options. 16 September 2021

[Recycling company launches new glass recycling project - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A Herefordshire company is using pedal power to launch a new glass recycling scheme for the city – with help from a grants programme supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. 15 September 2021

[Heroes of Net Zero competition open for entries - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Marches businesses taking innovative steps to cut greenhouse gas emissions are encouraged to enter the Heroes of Net Zero competition. 13 September 2021

[£1m Telford Growth and Recovery Programme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Telford & Wrekin Council is gearing up to boost local businesses with a fresh round of coronavirus recovery grants worth up to £10,000. 13 September 2021

[File accounts early and online to avoid delays - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Marches businesses are being urged to file their accounts to Companies House in plenty of time before the end of September deadline. 8 September 2021

[Spaces still available as new Peer Network programme gets under way - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A new programme which brings businesses together to learn from each other and expert professional advisers will launch in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin next week. 7 September 2021

[Virtual workshop to help businesses create social media strategy - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses across the Marches are being offered expert help with their social media strategy at a virtual workshop later this month. 6 September 2021

[New home marks new era for Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Herefordshire's highly-successful business support service is entering into an exciting new era – by moving to a brand new home. The Marches Growth Hub Herefordshire is moving to new premises at Hereford's newly-renovated Shell Store – placing it at the heart of the county's business community. 3 September 2021

[Fast-growing companies urged to make their voices heard - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Fast-growing companies across the region are being urged to make their voices heard in a national survey of scale-up businesses. 2 September 2021

[Digital expert appointed to help Marches businesses embrace digital tech as part of Made Smarter - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A digital technology specialist has been appointed for the Marches region to help manufacturing and engineering businesses boost productivity and growth as part of a £1.9m programme. 1 September 2021

[Businesses given more time to apply new product safety marking - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses will have an additional year to apply new product safety markings for most products placed on the market in England, Scotland and Wales, the government has announced. 31 August 2021

[Webinar series to help protect against cyber criminals - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses across the Marches are being offered expert help with their cyber security as part of a webinar series offering an insight into the cyber threats and risks faced by

organisations across all sectors and the security measures that can be taken. 13 August 2021

[Grants of up to £25,000 available for Electric Revolution challenge - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin are being urged to throw their hats into the ring for a new grants scheme from Innovate UK. The Driving the Electric Revolution challenge, part of UK Research and Innovation, will invest up to £250,000 in projects building talent for the future. 13 September 2021

[Marches Growth Hub helps 52,295 businesses, new figures show - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The Marches Growth Hub – the one-stop home for business support and advice across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford – has helped more than 50,000 businesses achieve their ambitions, new figures show.

The hub has helped a total of 52,295 businesses with some form of support since it was established six years ago, the figures reveal. 10 August 2021

[Action required – submit your July claims and prepare for changes to the Job Retention Scheme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

HMRC is urging businesses in the Marches to submit their July Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) claims by the August 16 deadline to avoid missing out. 9 August 2021

[New Peer Network programme to help Marches businesses help each other - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A highly-successful programme which brings business leaders together to share their knowledge and help each other's companies grow is returning to the Marches. 6 August 2021

[Problems with imports and VAT changes? We can help... - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Special clinics to answer businesses' VAT and import queries. A series of one-to-one clinics will help businesses in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin navigate new VAT and import rules in the wake of the UK's exit from the European Union. 6 August 2021

[Employers urged to back vaccine push - Marches Growth Hub](#)

NHS England and Public Health England have launched a new campaign to support employers in encouraging staff to get their Covid-19 vaccinations. 3 August 2021

[Traders and hauliers urged to get up to speed with Border guidance - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Traders and hauliers across the Marches are being urged to make sure they are up to date with regulations covering how the UK border with the European Union operates. 2 August 2021

[Mayor opens Ramfoam's new headquarters as company embraces digital - Marches Growth Hub](#)

One of the first companies to sign up to a programme to improve the digital capabilities of smaller businesses has officially opened its new company headquarters and factory. 30 July 2021

[Still time to make the most of Commonwealth Games opportunities - Marches Growth Hub](#)

There's still time for businesses across the Marches to play their part in delivering the 2022 Commonwealth Games. The Games are coming to Birmingham next year and a host of tenders for businesses to supply materials, goods and services are still open. 29 July 2021

[Delivering Our Future Together - The Power Of Local Enterprise Partnerships - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The chair of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership has hailed the work of the groups across the region as new figures show the huge impact they have made in the ten years

since they were formed. Leaders of the Midlands' local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) say they should be central to the delivery of the economic recovery and levelling up. 26 July 2021

[Equine and animal bedding business relocating to Shropshire following £180,000 investment - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Cardboard Bedding Ltd, trading as Green Mile, is relocating to Prees in Shropshire after securing £180,000 from the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF). 21 July 2021

[Save money while going green - Marches Growth Hub](#)

As the UK gears up for the COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow in November, now is the chance to commit your business to reducing carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. 9 July 2021

[Shropshire's silver entrepreneurs offered exclusive business support programme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Shropshire's older generation of entrepreneurs is to get a helping hand thanks to a new initiative to help the over-50s set up their own businesses. Silverpreneurs® is a co-operative of business experts with funding from the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire. 7 July 2021

[Herefordshire business urged to sign up to new loyalty scheme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses in Herefordshire are being invited to sign up to a new loyalty scheme to help support economic recovery in the county, by encouraging people to stay, shop and spend locally. Herefordshire Council, in partnership with the award-winning place promotion app, LoyalFree™, have introduced the app, that is completely free for everyone to use including all businesses and retailers. 6 July 2021

[Marches businesses invited to cyber security workshop - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses in the Marches are being given the opportunity to learn how to boost their cyber security at a special event later this month. 5 July 2021

[Manufacturers need to switch from CE marking by 2022 - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Manufacturers in the Marches are being urged to be aware of changes around the marking of goods for the GB market. 5 July 2021

[Dog food company expands thanks to grant programme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A Herefordshire company which specialises in high-quality dog food and treats is expanding after buying new equipment thanks to help from a grants programme supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. 30 June 2021

[Showpiece Shropshire climate conference hailed a huge success - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A showpiece Shropshire conference investigating the way technology can help tackle the climate change crisis has been hailed a huge success. Shropshire Council's two-day Tech Severn 21 event attracted experts from across the country – and a global audience – as it shone a light on the ways innovation can help protect the environment. 24 June 2021

[£1.9m Made Smarter scheme launched to drive digital skills push - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Made Smarter has launched a £1.9 million digital adoption push to drive growth in West Midlands manufacturing and engineering SMEs and help them boost productivity. Digital experts will provide advice to businesses on how to switch to advanced and automated technologies as well as working to improve employees' overall digital skills. 23 June 2021

[Billions for businesses and communities to support local growth - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has launched a new UK Infrastructure Bank to help businesses and communities support local growth and tackle climate change. 18 June 2021

[Help to Grow your business - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A new scheme of expert help to fire up growth in small and medium sized businesses has been launched by the Government. The Help to Grow programme will help small and medium sized businesses across the UK learn new skills, reach new customers and boost profits. 17 June 2021

[Businesses invited to exhibit at virtual Marches-wide careers fair - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Employers were today urged to sign up for the first ever Marches Careers Fair giving young people across the region a chance to explore future careers and job roles. The fair, being held virtually on July 8, follows the successful launch of the Marches Careers Hub in April, which brought together businesses and schools. 9 June 2021

[Senior Government figure to open showpiece Shropshire conference - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A senior Government politician will give the keynote opening address at a major conference examining the way technology can help tackle the climate change crisis, organisers have revealed. Andrew Griffith MP – the Government’s UK Net Zero Business Champion – will launch two days of debate around ways technology can protect the environment at Shropshire Council’s Tech Severn 21 event later this month. The free conference, on June 16 and 17, brings together some of the country’s leading technological and environmental experts and has already attracted hundreds of registrations. 8 June 2021

[Marches SMEs invited to join the fight against climate change - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The UK government has partnered with business owners and respected climate groups to help businesses across the UK to cut carbon emissions and protect the planet. 26 May 2021

[Conference to highlight how cutting-edge technology will help fight climate change - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A major Shropshire conference examining the way technology will help tackle the climate change crisis has sparked interest from around the globe. More than 350 people have already signed up for Tech Severn – a free two-day event organised by Shropshire Council on June 16 and 17 – with registrations coming from across the UK and further afield. 25 May 2021

[£50m invested in businesses as MEIF and NPIF focus on net-zero - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The British Business Bank’s regional funds – the Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF) and the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF) – have enabled more than £50m of investment, including from the private sector, into small businesses in the Midlands and North of England to reduce their carbon footprint and develop innovative solutions to tackling the climate emergency and reaching net-zero. 25 May 2021

[Planet Doughnut enjoys great taste of success - Marches Growth Hub](#)

One of Shropshire’s best-known bakeries is creating new jobs after receiving nearly £115,000 from a grant programme supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. 24 May 2021

[Coronation Day launch event revealed for Queen’s Awards - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The Queen’s Awards for Enterprise – the most prestigious business honours in the country – will be launched in Shropshire on Coronation Day, it was revealed today. 24 May 2021

[Marches Careers Hub launches to unify careers support - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The new Marches Careers Hub was officially launched in April at an online event watched live by over 160 people. 21 May 2021

[Marches businesses urged to consider employee mental health - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Midlands employers are being urged to check on their staff's mental health while many begin returning to work during and after Mental Health Awareness Week. 12 May 2021

[Businesses urged to support ScaleUp Week - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses from across the Marches are being urged to support ScaleUp Week – a week-long series of free virtual debates about the crucial issues and opportunities facing growing businesses. 12 May 2021

[Last chance to book for Explore Export event - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses from across the Marches are being urged to sign up for a special free event to help them break into new overseas markets. The Department for International Trade's virtual Explore Export event – running from May 18 to 20 – will feature 62 advisers representing more than 40 markets around the world. 12 May 2021

[Marches LEP chief executive Gill Hamer to step down - Marches Growth Hub](#)

The chief executive of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership is stepping down at the end of July, she has announced today. 11 May 2021

[Businesses urged to fly the flag in Queen's Awards - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses across the Marches were today urged to apply for one of the country's most prestigious awards – and build on the region's proud track record of success. 10 May 2021

[Travel company on road to green future thanks to Marches grant scheme - Marches Growth Hub](#)

A Shropshire travel company is on the road to a greener future after installing new solar panels thanks to grant help from a scheme supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Longmynd Travel, based at Lea Cross near Shrewsbury, received a grant from the Marches Renewable Energy Grant Scheme (MarRE) to meet half the £9,852 cost of installing the panels at its base. 30 April 2021

[New Marches Career Hub set to launch with live event - Marches Growth Hub](#)

****Register to join the live launch of the Marches Careers Hub on April 28**** The new Marches Careers Hub is being launched this month with a live event featuring employers, schools, colleges and former CBBC Blue Peter presenter and award-winning author, Radzi Chinyanganya. The former pupil at Haberdashers Adams Grammar School, in Newport, will be a special guest at the studio livestream on April 28, which has been organised by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, working with the Careers & Enterprise Company. 19 April 2021

[Maven launches series of funding clinics - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Regional fund manager Maven has launched a series of 1-2-1 support sessions for local businesses to help address funding and support needs. The sessions will be run by Maven's local investment team in the West Midlands, who have a dedicated fund manager for each sub-region they operate in. 14 April 2021

[Businesses urged to use new Rotherwas Covid-19 test site - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Businesses on a Hereford industrial estate are being urged to make full use of a new Covid rapid testing site – and to help keep it open beyond a trial period. Herefordshire Council says the new lateral flow test site at Block B, Skylon Court in Coldnose Road, Rotherwas, is being operated on a pilot basis until April 30. 9 April 2021

[Entries open for Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber's business awards - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Companies across Herefordshire are being urged to showcase their business in one of the region's biggest award schemes. Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of

Commerce has launched its 2021 Chamber Business Awards ahead of a planned black-tie event in September. The Chamber is encouraging entries from all businesses in the two counties, whether they are members of the organisation or not. 7 April 2021

[Extended opening hours to continue when non-essential retail returns - Marches Growth Hub](#)

Extended daily opening hours for non-essential retail will continue – helping people return to our high streets safely, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick MP has confirmed. This will help ensure the safe re-opening of non-essential shops by giving people greater flexibility to avoid peak times and easing transport pressures. When they reopen from 12 April at the earliest, shops will have the flexibility to open until 10pm Monday to Saturday. 1 April 2021

- **Case Studies issued April to September 2021**
- Martin & Jones Marketing, Shropshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/case-studies/marketing-company-recruits-new-faces-after-peer-network-support/>
- M3 Consulting, Telford <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/case-studies/peer-network-programme-a-huge-success-says-telford-businessman/>
- RJ Joinery and Equestrian Services, Herefordshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/case-studies/peer-network-support-praised-for-fresh-insight-into-herefordshire-business/>
- Pedicargo, Herefordshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/recycling-company-launches-new-glass-recycling-project/>
- Cardboard Bedding, Shropshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/equine-and-animal-bedding-business-relocating-to-shropshire-following-180000-investment/>
- Finer by Nature, Herefordshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/dog-food-company-expands-thanks-to-grant-programme/>
- Planet Doughnut, Shropshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/planet-doughnut-enjoys-great-taste-of-success/>
- Long Mynd Travel, Shropshire <https://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/travel-company-on-road-to-green-future/>
- **Testimonials relating to 1:1 Specialist Support**
- I just wanted to thank you for putting me in touch with Ian Preston. His understanding of LinkedIn and social media is second to none and he was superb in helping me to improve my profile and how to maximise its use to highlight just what a difference the services I provide to clients make. His enthusiastic and friendly style served as a massive confidence boost to me, particularly after a period of cancer treatment. His involvement was very welcome and much appreciated. He has left his door open for me to make contact anytime.
- I have been attending my 121 sessions with Hollie Whittles and as a complete novice, I learnt so much in such a short space of time. I was extremely impressed with Hollie's vast knowledge of the subject, and she is also an adept and considerate mentor and made each session enjoyable. I would highly recommend Hollie and her company for anyone who wants to learn more about social media.
- Just a quick email to say thanks for the 12 hours support. The sessions are very helpful and informative and has allowed me to follow up my sales leads and get things together my end to move my business forward and gain new clients.
- I'd like to thank you for the free specialist support which I received from the MGH. The help which I received from Kim Gilmour was invaluable.
- Unbelievable – thank you very, very much. I absolutely can't wait to for my next 121 session on the marketing funnel and influencers.
- I just wanted to write and say thank you for the support that has allowed me to work with Vernon Hogg. . At the time we were really struggling to manage as a result of the

pandemic and were discussing whether it was time to close our business. Vernon gave us the confidence to remain focused on our ambitions and helped us recognise some of the pathways that we may wish to explore. A year on and we are in a completely different place, with a strong proposal that we are now sharing with investors. We would not have been able to do this without Vernon's help.

6. Growth Hub Highlights – Cluster Lead only

Please set out below how the LEP either directly, or via its Growth Hub, managed its responsibilities as a Growth Hub Cluster Lead in Q1 and Q2 of FY 2021/22. This includes:

- Cluster organisation, including resources dedicated to the Cluster Lead function, the Lead's engagement with cluster members, other cluster leads and BEIS (incl. protocols, structures, and processes).
- Economies of scale identified or exploited in service provision; advisory capacity; research; business intelligence; software and sector alignment (inc joint/delegated procurement Include any joint or delegated procurement within the cluster).
- How the cluster lead used their position to support: strategy and delivery for the wider network (e.g., Peer Networks, grant schemes, Net Zero etc); knowledge transfer and sharing of best practice; alignment of comms on national, regional, and local issues, advice and support; information requests from Government.
- Development and use of any formal or informal relationships with other public and private sector networks.

Please highlight any particular benefits stemming from the above activities

7. Growth Hub Highlights - Cluster Network National Co-Ordinator (Greater Manchester only)

Please set out below how the LEP either directly, or via its Growth Hub, managed its responsibilities as the Growth Hub Cluster Network National Co-Ordinator in Q1 and Q2 of FY 2021/22. This includes:

- Organisation – inc. resources dedicated to the Co-ordinator function, engagement with BEIS/cluster leads/the broader Growth Hub Network. This should include secretariat work and any other protocols, structures and processes developed or operated.
- Economies of scale identified or exploited in service provision; advisory capacity; research; business intelligence; software and sector alignment; joint or delegated procurement carried out by the Co-ordinator.
- How the National Co-ordinator used its position to: shape strategy and delivery for the Clusters and wider network, and key activities and programmes (e.g., Peer Networks, Net Zero, grant schemes etc); knowledge transfer and sharing of best practice; input to policy reviews and requests from Government.

- Use of formal or informal relationships with other public and private organisations to benefit the clusters or the broader Growth Hub network.
- How the Co-ordinator worked with BEIS and cluster leads to develop/implement intelligence gathering activities, analysis, and reporting.
- How the Co-ordinator aligned national, regional, and local business support and advice marketing and communication materials, messages, and media.