



Attendees	Paddy Bradley (PB), SWLEP CEO Rachel Finlay (RF), Wiltshire Council TEN Ruth Lambert (RL), FSB Alison North (AN), SWLEP Board Director (Chair) Jane Purdy (JP), BusinessWest Chris Stevens (CS), Growth Hub Manager Chris Parsons (CP), Swindon Borough Council Mirabelle Stobbs (MS), Swindon Borough Council
Guests	Tim Burghes (TB), Growth Hub Debby Skellern (DS), SWLEP
Apologies	Claire Alexander (CA), SWLEP Charlotte Boole (CB), Greenway Training Alison Edgar (AE), Sales Coaching Solutions Julia Stuckey (JS), Swindon Borough Council Christopher Thompson (CT), TechB
Chair	Alison North (AN)
Minutes	Deborah House (DKH)
Venue	Via Microsoft Teams Meeting

Item	Narrative	Deadline
1.	Welcome	
	AN welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2.	Minutes / Matters Arising / Conflicts of Interest	
	Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2020 were read and approved. Matters arising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CS to provide summary of information on ERDF grants programme completion. CS circulated information in December. An update to take place later in the agenda. For further assurance, the Growth Hub team to issue additional comms via social media for applicants to get in touch if they were not sure if their applications had been received. COMPLETED If attendees knew of businesses which could offer placements in the Kickstart scheme, to put them in touch with the Growth Hub. ONGOING Conflicts of Interest The meeting was advised that both SWLEP and FSB were Gateway organisations for the Government's Kickstart scheme.	
3.	Growth Hub Update	

3.1

General update from Growth Hub Manager, Chris Stevens

CS outlined the funding streams within the Growth Hub and referred attendees to the paper for more detailed information.

Previously, Growth Hub funding was received via BEIS or ERDF from core funding and supplementary Covid-related funding totalling £450,000. This year, the funding would be coming in one pot as core funding. This would help with planning and claims procedures and would total between £400,000-£450,000, although still yet to be confirmed.

SME Competitiveness Programme

Two more years left within a three-year programme.

Covid-19 response – This Way Up programme

This programme would be wrapped into the core offer and retained.

Peer Networks

An extension to Peer Networks had been secured for a further year. It had been very successful, in no small part due to the tenacity of the Project Manager, Brea Woods (BW). There had been seven cohorts in total; six being sector specific and one being “Women in Business” which was non-sector specific. The 8-9 businesses per cohort recruited to the programme had been retained throughout the duration. BW and TB had personally engaged with business leaders to get them on board with the programme. (Other LEPs had engaged a telephone marketing service for this function.) We believe this personal touch had been effective with the retention of participants. For this success, BW had been invited to a broader consultation on delivery of the programme going forward.

The Chair wished to pass on her congratulations to BW for the success.

ERDF grants

These grants were using the underspent funds from ESIF, which were held centrally by the managing agents, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. A small one-month extension had been secured, so we had until the end of June to pay the grants, although the Growth Hub was aiming to have all beneficiaries paid ahead of that new deadline.

Progress was being made, although there had been challenges along the way, including technical issues with submissions, compliance, and engagement with businesses once applications had been approved. This had been compounded by the Programme Co-ordinator’s recent illness. Resources within the Growth Hub had been re-deployed to continue processing the claims to move forward to ensure the grants were paid. Thus far, 37 payments had been made to businesses totalling £97,000 from a total budget of £300,000, £164,000 of which was ringfenced for the visitor economy.



The question was raised as to whether any trends had been demonstrated for businesses looking for support with these grants. The grant eligibility had been for the purchase of equipment to adapt or adopt new technology, or for a service like HR or finance etc, but the main trend had been for purchasing hardware and software to improve digital capability, moving paperwork into a digital format.

Impact Measure Report

The Impact Measure Report had been commissioned (title still to be decided). The Growth Hub was aiming for it to be journalistic in nature reporting on the trading climate over the past year and how Swindon and Wiltshire businesses had adapted in the circumstances demonstrating resilience, and in some cases, pivoted their offering. Added to that would be where the Growth Hub had provided support. The report was intended to be a static document with a summary as a visual piece to accompany it. The Hub was also working with Create Studios to produce a piece showing the year in pictures.

The Growth Hub was in the throes of several evaluations:

- the independently commissioned evaluation with Wavehill;
- the contribution to the national Growth Hub organisation via Technopolis; and
- the deep dive evaluation via SWLEP's own Joint Scrutiny Panel.

3.2

Financial Report

CS spoke to the paper and explained the detail of the management accounts.

Key points were:

- set to revive £1.4m total grant funding;
- £150,929 to carry in into next financial year; and
- since publication of the paper £178,973 had been received into the account.

The question was raised as to whether the Growth Hub had encountered any issues with cashflow, as the Covid grants had to be funded up front and claimed retrospectively. As the Hub was sitting within SWLEP, SWLEP could absorb any pressure on spend. Paying in advance could have been a problem, but in the end SWLEP's assistance was not needed.

3.3

Marketing update

TB presented to the meeting and outlined the key highlights of website traffic. The presentation can be accessed via the following link.

	<p>https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/gh-governance/online-reporting-ghg-feb-21.pdf?sfvrsn=98bc22f2_4</p> <p>TB also advised that the site for the Higher Futures programme had been moved to sit within the skills page of the Growth Hub so information could still be accessed.</p> <p>The Growth Hub Governance Group: HEARD ABOUT the Growth Hub’s work in economic recovery and in general business support; and PARTICIPATED in the broader discussion around ERDF Recovery Grants.</p>	
4.	<p>Update on Joint Scrutiny Panel review of Growth Hub</p>	
	<p>PB spoke to the meeting and outlined the set-up of the Joint Scrutiny Panel. The Panel had been in operation with the SWLEP for the past six years and formed an important part of the SWLEP’s policy on openness and transparency. Previously the Panel had been set up with four backbench councillors from both Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council.</p> <p>Since incorporation, SWLEP Limited wanted to continue this process of transparency and the make-up of the Panel was now:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • three local business leaders, including one SME; • three backbench councillors of Swindon Borough Council; and • three backbench councillors of Wiltshire Council. <p>A fee is paid to Wiltshire Council’s Democratic Services to coordinate and manage the process.</p> <p>The Panel would perform a deep dive each year on an area of the SWLEP business and this year the Growth Hub had been chosen. A smaller Working Group of the Panel had been established and had already received performance information, financial information, and an overview of the programmes.</p> <p>Interviews would be set up with Claire Alexander, the SWLEP Programme Director, and Chris Stevens, the Growth Hub Manager, and three businesses which had received support. A report would be produced for the Scrutiny Panel which would then be submitted to the Board.</p> <p>Action: promote through the Business Intelligence & Network Group (BING), to ascertain if there are other businesses which wish to become members.</p>	TBA
5.	<p>Update on Growth Hub strategic focus 2021/22</p>	

	<p>CS spoke to the meeting and outlined the strategic focus for the coming year.</p> <p>Over the past year, the Growth Hub had mainly offered support to businesses in response to the pandemic; it had been reactive. Looking ahead now to the recovery phase, the Growth Hub would continue its work proactively.</p> <p>The This Way Up programme of webinars would continue, but with themes in line with the recovery and pervading climate. These would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills – with the furlough scheme due to end, there could be substantial redundancies, so there would be significant skills-related activity, aligning with the SWLEP’s Skills Plan. The Hub was also looking to bring in another business navigator to bolster the work of Amanda Peach; • digital capability, such as ecommerce and businesses’ digital footprint; and • access to finance. <p>Digital capability was high on the Hub’s agenda. Jason Gray had already been delivering webinars and digital advice service on a 1:1 basis and it was a service the Growth Hub was keen to retain.</p> <p>It did not appear that there would be an extension to the EU transition support, but the Growth Hub was looking to retain an element of this support within the service. Once we knew the level of funding available, the Growth Hub would be able to shape that offering. In the meantime, the Growth Hub had improved the digital support offer with EU Transition articles on the website and the specific webinars available On Demand. The Growth Hub would employ a specialist navigator if funding allowed.</p> <p>The question was raised as to what benchmarking was available to compare the Swindon & Wiltshire Growth Hub to others in the area such as WECA or Gfirst. Although all Growth Hubs contributed to a national evaluation study, this information was not collated by Government into a publicly available report. The SWLEP Growth Hub was in frequent discussion with other Growth Hubs as the model of delivery varied considerably around the country.</p> <p>To the question whether there would be any funding within the Growth Hub to deal with the green agenda, the response was that it was a strong message and theme that could be delivered through the existing network. TB added that the green economy received a lot of interest through the website.</p>	
6.	SWLEP Governance Arrangements	



	<p>DS spoke to the paper detailing the rationale behind the changes to the Governance structure. The presentation can be accessed by following the link below.</p> <p>https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/sub-groups/business-development/gh-governance/governance-feb-21-final.pdf?sfvrsn=d7ace972_4</p> <p>This would be the last meeting of the Growth Hub Governance Group. From May 2021, the Business Environment Subgroup would be in operation, and the work of the Growth Hub would then be reported at that Subgroup. The Growth Hub Governance Group was the longest-standing group within SWLEP and had been very successful, but there was a need to rationalise and reshape the governance structure. However, SWLEP wanted to maintain the strong links forged and asked attendees to consider SWLEP membership for their organisation by completing the form contained in the pack.</p> <p>The Chair would like to pass on her personal thanks for contributions from members of the Group to the success of the Growth Hub and for their participation in the Growth Hub Governance Group.</p>	
7.	AOB	
	None	
	Actions	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote through the Business Intelligence & Network Group (BING), to ascertain if there are other businesses which wish to become members. 	TBA
	Date of next meeting	
	NA	
	The meeting closed at 4.06pm	