

Appendix A

Marches Growth Hub Shropshire

Notes to Support MGH Operations Group Meeting

June and July 2021 activity

Engagement - General Overview

During June and July, the landscape continued to be exceptionally fluid as the businesses adapted to the 'Return and Recover' phase of COVID 19 restrictions and regulations. This has enabled us to guide our local business communities through the Growth Hub with further support from the Shropshire Council Economic Recovery Plan. It continues to be very challenging for everyone, including our amazing and valuable businesses in Shropshire and will be for many months to come. But the lifting of the COVID 19 restrictions on 19 July was welcomed and has given the businesses more confidence and hope for the summer months and beyond. The access and support through the Marches Growth Hub continues to be a lifeline and critical access point for general business support, but during these last two months, more importantly for accessing COVID 19 information and financial support for the local businesses through the Shropshire Council Discretionary Grant Scheme 5 (DARG 5). After the initial flurry of businesses re-routing their attentions to EU Exit, the level of enquiries has fallen dramatically with only one or two per month. Businesses are receiving support through their local DiT teams, the Export Academy and the West Midlands Cluster EU Business Support Programme, which has been invaluable.

We have continued to strengthen our position as a professional friend and familiar face (virtually) for so many businesses since lockdown and now through the return and recovery phase when they start to adjust, stabilise and grow. We have also connected and engaged with a vast number of businesses who would never have interacted with us, which has been extremely positive and made more Shropshire businesses aware of the level and type of support the Growth Hub can offer. We are now starting to see a greater spread of businesses across all parts of Shropshire, especially South Shropshire, Market Drayton and Cleobury Mortimer.

This was helped by the COVID 19 additional funding that has been made available to the Growth Hubs for this financial year. We are now working with 15 self-employed Specialist Business Advisers/Consultants, supporting local businesses who needed help in key areas of their business. The support was more targeted and bespoke to each business. This funding has enabled the businesses to have 12 hours intensive support and strengthened the Growth Hub's position in the 'space' of offering professional and longer-term support. The interest and take up of the Specialist support, once again, has been very strong. **48** businesses accessed the 12 hrs support in June and July.

To support the 2021-2022 funding from the LEP, the Shropshire Council-led ARG Economic Recovery Fund has awarded the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire **371k** additional funds to support the delivery of **5** programmes. The funds are required to be spent and delivered by 31 March 2022. A suite of programmes were launched which were either an extension to existing LEP programmes, addressed gap in provision or potential market failure.

The Recovery Programme is a £3.2m series of projects, utilising Additional Restriction Grant (ARG) funding from Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to fund wider business support activities.

Please see below more detail of the 5 launched programmes:

Access to free general business support and the Business Boost Programme (offline workshops) – 50k

- To support business during the ‘Restart and Recovery’ phase of COVID 19 the Marches Growth Hub is working with start-ups, early stage and growth businesses to access general business advice and support through business 121 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 and will be a legacy for the SC Economic Recovery Funds.

Intensive 12 Hours Specialist Business Support – 80k

- We are working with a team of 15 expert advisers and consultants to provide detailed free intensive support to help our Shropshire businesses to grow and prosper as the county recovers from the impact of the Covid pandemic. The Hub is able to offer unparalleled support and our advisers bring expertise and knowledge across the full range of business issues from access to finance, sales and marketing to HR and Health and Safety concerns and more. This is an extension to the LEP funding for intensive support.

The Digital Hub – 150k

- The Digital Hub hosts a range of programmes which are centred on the ‘Digital Revolution’ and adopting new technologies in response to COVID 19. This is through various webinar programmes, 15 hours specialist support for addressing cyber security and attaining Cyber Essentials certification, 12 hours specialist support on adopting digital technologies and improving your digital presence as a business. Also, the delivery of a highly successful Tech Severn two-day Conference in June, where 809 businesses logged in and the development of a digital media programme, with Media Insiders.

The Silverpreneurs Programme – 71k

- The Silverpreneurs® programme has been exclusively 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. Silverpreneurs® is more than just a place to find business support, it’s a space for like-minded people who want to show just how good life is after 50! The programme includes three months of support delivered through a combination of 1-2-1 and group sessions where you can learn, grow and share your unique skills and experience with the group. The Silver Experts will share their business knowledge, experience and networks with you, whilst the community of Silverpreneurs® will be there to share the highs and lows of running a business, supporting and celebrating with each other along the way. Three Cohorts of 14 delegates will be delivered through the life of the programme.

Social Enterprise Conference – Spark Social – 20k

- We are currently developing a Social Enterprise Conference as part of Social Enterprise week in November. The Conference will be centred on celebrating everything Social in Shropshire, especially given we have Social Enterprise Place status and CSR amongst the private sector ‘Purpose to Profit’ and how we build that bridge between the Private Sector and Social Enterprises. The conference will take place on 16 November from 10 – 1.30p.m. and will be delivered virtually through Yarrington who have a purpose-built studio and virtual platform to host the event. Please save the date!

Many of our businesses have been exceptionally creative and innovative in their approaches to COVID 19 and found new ways of working and doing business. They have embraced change to make their businesses stronger and more resilient. It has forced businesses to take time out, reflect and review their business and make the necessary positive changes they have been considering, but never had the time to move forward. We are now working with many Pre-Starts and Start-Ups ‘Born out of COVID 19’ and existing businesses who wish to diversify or launch new products and services or embrace new adaptive technologies ‘Grow your way out of COVID 19’. The soft launch in January of the MGHEDF ‘Step Up for Business programme’ has been crucial in supporting new starts and very timely given the current landscape. The momentum has grown and intensified over this period, with a vast number of individuals and businesses registering and attending the two programmes. Shropshire will reach a critical milestone in the early autumn when we will have reached our full allocation of registrations for the Start-Up aspect of the programme. Discussions are already taking place about an extension, for Shropshire, either through the ERDF programme or a stand alone ‘Solopreneurs’ programme funded by the SC Economic Recovery Fund.

Great news on the Start-Up front but we are seeing some business casualties throughout Shropshire and with more subsequent closures over the coming months, as furlough is phased out. Our help and support will become even more vital.

As part of the Employment and Skills Sub-Group at SC, benefit claimants through the Job Centres have now stabilised and the percentage of unemployed in Shropshire levels out. We may see a further peak once the Furlough Scheme ends. Self-employment may be a potential option for some of these individuals as an alternative to seeking employment in the local area. We know there is huge demand for any recruitment that is taking place, as the marketplace is flooded with individuals looking for jobs. However, the hospitality, agriculture and horticulture sectors are struggling to find appropriate recruits for their available positions.

There has been a positive increase in businesses looking for ERDF funding through the existing programmes. The actual drawdown of grant applications has now improved but many are still uncertain about the recovery phase. Local intelligence also shows that many businesses are concerned about paying back their existing CBIL and bounceback loans as many still haven’t been able to return their businesses to profit and have cashflow problems.

During June and July the Growth Hub has continued to help businesses access the DARG 5 grants through Shropshire Council. The Growth Hub and wider Economic Development Team continued to administer the scheme. The Growth Hub became very busy again with queries and signposting.

Overall, the number of emails and phone calls has reduced by 50% from April and May, due to the reduction in COVID 19 schemes available locally. I am sure this trend will continue unless we have a Lockdown 4!

Good mix of sectors and combination of B2B and B2C engaging with the GH which is partly due to COVID 19. Business Enabling/Service/Professional Services – 30%, Retail – 30%, Food/Hospitality – 15%, Engineering/Manufacturing – 15% Leisure and Tourism – 5%, Other 5%. The figures fluctuate each month depending on what local grant programmes are available, relative to certain sectors and eligibility.

The Growth Hub resourcing pressures continue as Anna Sadler has been on long term sick since mid-December, which will be reviewed again late August. The support from the 15 Specialist Support advisers has been invaluable in delivering professional support to our local business community.

The Growth Hub continues to deliver online events which are working well. In June and July we delivered **31** online events with **1906** attendees. This was another very strong performance. Many businesses view the events as an ability to keep connected, upskilled and develop their respective businesses. The two-day Tech Severn Conference created huge interest and we hosted 809 businesses.

With delivering online events the reach is far greater, so we are engaging with businesses who have never touched us before. Also, we are attracting businesses from outside of the county as online events do not create boundaries. We have been working in partnership with our suite of trainers and delivers to bring a topical, varied and interesting programme of event for our audiences. Also, our trainers and deliverers are bringing new audiences with them too. Many of the businesses which have only just started to engage with us, are now serial event attendees which is extremely encouraging. We have also promoted some of the events as Marches wide to increase take up and visibility of the Growth Hub network.

Some of the best supported events were:- Tech Severn 2 day Conference = 809, Buy From Marketing and Branding series = 106, Fraggelworks Digital Marketing series = 155, Tax Relief and Allowance Catax = 24, Inspired Mindset = 27 and 21, HR for Office Managers = 47, How to build a strong and resilient team = 34, The Friday Hub = 552

The Friday Hub weekly virtual network still goes from strength to strength, still attracting between 60 – 80 businesses every Friday.

Chas Warren from Landau commented:

‘Just wanted to say what a fantastic networking group you have created for Shropshire. It really is awesome.

Just this week I have had really positive meetings with Heather, Jenna, Katie & Kelly, Neville & David as a direct result of meeting them on the Friday hub.

I have attended many similar events, but never found them as effective as the uniquely friendly and supportive group we have every Friday.’

Output and Stats June and July 2021

E-mail enquiries	716
Telephone enquiries	152

Face to Face interventions	50
Number of startups supported	66
Number of businesses supported	907
Number of GHUB events	31
Number of businesses at GHUB events	1906
Number of referrals made	332 or 189
<p>The larger figure includes COVID 19 referrals to schemes. The lower figure just relates to ERDF programmes and other.</p>	

31 events delivered purely by the MGH in partnership with other organisations such as :- Tech Severn 2 day Conference = 809, Buy From Marketing and Branding series = 106, Fraggelworks Digital Marketing series = 155, Tax Relief and Allowance Catax = 24, Inspired Mindset = 27 and 21, HR for Office Managers = 47, How to build a strong and resilient team = 34, The Friday Hub = 552 and more. **Good mix and sectors.**

- **Learns** – We have been delivering suites of events and workshops rather than one offs in a scattergun approach. Creating Hubs for various themes and sectors. We find we retain greater numbers and the businesses also have time to network and collaborate. Also, we are conscious of webinar fatigue, so we are considering the topics and timings of events very carefully to keep businesses interested and attending. Also considering evening webinars.
- **332** actual referrals for June and July. However, **143** were COVID 19 related and **189** for ERDF programmes and other support. Largest numbers of referrals for ERDF programmes were **Transmit Start Up Loans, Step Up for Business, BGP2, SPEED, MBIG and MSEG.**

The Marches Growth Hub also promotes, supports and administers the Shropshire Council, Market Drayton Grant Scheme. Please see below the current position of the scheme.

Total Scheme value	£443,100.00
Value of Grants Awarded	£386,563.57
Value of Grants claimed or waiting to be claimed	£379,854.77
Private Match	£386,563.57
Number of Grants Awarded	5
Value of Grants left to award	£ 63,245.23
Number of jobs created	29

Number of jobs safeguarded	83
Business relocating and investing into the area	2
Prospects in the pipeline and application received	1

Customer Satisfaction

85 customer satisfaction surveys were completed during June and July which were a combination of business 121s and 31 events/workshops. Many events were delivered jointly where the partner feedback forms were completed. 100% were satisfied/very satisfied with the service they received from business 121s and the table below shows the individual responses against the question “In the absence of Growth Hub Support how likely are you to access the same activity?” (1 being very Likely and 5 being very Unlikely)

The strong level of feedback for the business 121s show businesses value the support from the Growth Hub. However, due to the rapid shift to online events we have not been able to gain the level of feedback which we normally do from our face 2 face events. We have been capturing comments from attendees through the deliverers but not in the format that we usually gain the intel. However, we have now set up the feedback on Survey Monkey which we have reported, but the responses are still lower than what we use to report.

1. Very Likely	2
2.	10
3.	44
4.	18
5. Very Unlikely	11

Referrals

The table below gives more detail on which programmes were referred through the hub. **Transmit Start Up Loans** is one of the highest referrals followed by **Step Up for Business, BGP2 and SPEED**. I have not included COVID 19 schemes as part of this narrative.

COVID 19 Grant and Loan Schemes & other Govn Support	143
Transmit Start Up Loans	45
Step Up for Business	35
BGP2	29
SPEED	21

MBIG	15
MSEG	11
Art Business Loans	9
Ladder for Shropshire	4
Silverpreneurs	4
BEEP	2
DiT	2
Shropshire Council Assets team	2
Digital Solutions	1
SOLVD	1
UK Centric Supply Chain	1
Market Drayton Grant Scheme	1
Cooper Green Pooks	1
Landau	1
MSPN	1
Matrix – Tern Valley Development	1
MGP	1
BCRS/MEIF	1
TOTAL	332

- **332** actual referrals for June and July. However, **143** were COVID 19 related and only **189** for ERDF programmes and other support. Largest numbers of referrals for ERDF programmes were **Transmit Start Up Loans, Step Up for Business, BGPG2 and SPEED.**
- Created a database of all professionals, intermediaries, fund managers etc for the Growth Hub and wider economic Growth Team.

Spend for 2021-2022

The Growth Hub has been allocated **20k** for CORE funding and a further **54k** for Additional support through Specialist 12 hr 121 sessions.

To support the 2021-2022 funding from the LEP, the Shropshire Council-led ARG Economic Recovery Fund has awarded the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire **371k** additional funds to support the delivery of 5 programmes. The funds are required to be spent and delivered by 31 March 2022.

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The Quarter 1 LEP Claim

The spend that was claimed for Quarter 1 = **£12,910.47**

Operational

Marches Growth Hub Shropshire Physical Growth Hub – Due to COVID 19 and lockdown, the Marches Growth Hub have been working remotely at home and have not had a presence in the Growth Hub. The management and delivery of the MGH offering has continued, but virtually.

However, there has been a phased return to the Growth Hub one or two days a week and the Business Growth and Inward Investment Team are sharing the space on a rota basis.

Unfortunately, Anna has been off from work on long term sick since mid-December. Emma has been managing the GH on her own with support from the 15 Specialist Advisers to deliver the service. A further review of resource will take place in August.

Evolutive – Referral and signposting lists have been updated. Further reports have been added to cover all the current programmes through the LEP and ARG monies to make output reporting straight forward and correct.

Communications

Aim to be more visible and strengthen the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire Brand and Personality across Shropshire:-

- **Tech Severn 2021 to focus on how technology can help tackle climate change**
- **<https://www.shropshirelive.com/business/2021/06/25/shropshire-climate-conference-hailed-a-huge-success/>**
- **Supercharge your business with free digital webinars**
- **Planet Doughnut creates jobs with move to new production site**
- **Shropshire's silver entrepreneurs offered exclusive business support programme**
- **Fast track grants in support of Shropshire's wider economic recovery launched**
- **Back by popular demand! Free business-boosting webinars will help you hit new heights**
- **£160 million paid out to help Shropshire businesses**
- **Social media coverage of events being delivered.**
- **Strong comms from the Shropshire Council team on all events and programmes.**
- **Articles appeared in Love Shrewsbury.**
- **Visibility through our e-newsletters which have been more frequent.**
- **Articles appeared in Councillor's bulletin at Shropshire Council and staff newsroom.**
- **Sending out partner Blogs to gain more interest from our businesses with relevant topics. This is working well and at times we send out themed newsletters.**

- Oswestry and Shrewsbury BID, Buy From Shropshire, Shrewsbury Business Chamber and FSB are promoting our events regularly.
- **Guest Blogs**
- Created a screen saver page with Shropshire Council comms team to promote the Marches Growth Hub and raise awareness internally.
- All press articles have been sent round the Council newsroom
- Regularly write news articles for internal Staff newsletter and Councillor's bulletin.
- GovDelivery reach now **4789**.

Outreach

Drive to be more accessible and visible across Shropshire for the local business communities. A move away from being deemed Shrewsbury centric:-

Growth Hub 'On the Move'.

All physical activity/presence is on hold due to COVID 19 and lockdown restrictions. However, we have been extremely visible through our virtual/online events/workshops/activities and regular Zoom and Teams meetings with delivery partners and intermediaries.

It's vitally important that we keep connected with our network and not lose momentum as much as possible.

Emma has now been invited to virtually attend various network groups around the county to raise the profile of the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire.

We also delivered our first outreach activity at the end of July at Shropshire Wildlife Trust and will then arrange our monthly schedule with the Libraries around the county. A virtual meeting has taken place to agree a forward plan.

Also attending the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Business Expo on 14 October at the Shrewsbury Town Football Club.

Events

Working more closely with partners, funders and intermediaries to deliver a relevant, timely and informative programme of events and workshops. Either initiated and organised directly by the Growth Hub or working collaboratively with partners. For the benefit of the business and charity communities:-

- Our 2021/2022 events programme is constantly evolving and looking for new partnerships and different workshops for delivery, given the recent changes and a shift to online/virtual workshops and seminars. We have been trying to make the webinars interactive and engaging given the nature of delivery.
- We have also delivered our first outreach activity at the end of July at Shropshire Wildlife Trust as full day Marches Growth Hub Shropshire VIP events. These continue throughout the rest of 2021/2022.
- The Growth Hub moved to online events which are working extremely well. In June and July we delivered **31** online events with **1906** attendees. With delivering online events the reach is far greater, so we are engaging with businesses who have never touched us before. Also,

we are attracting businesses from outside of the county as online events do not create boundaries. We have been working in partnership with our suite of trainers and deliverers to bring a topical, varied and interesting programme of event for our audiences. Also, our trainers and deliverers are bringing new audiences with them too.

- We have also promoted some of the events as Marches wide to increase take up and visibility of the Growth Hub network.
- We have been delivering suites of events and workshops rather than one offs in a scattergun approach. Creating 'Hubs' for various themes and sectors. We find we retain greater numbers and the businesses also have time to network and collaborate. Also, we are conscious of webinar fatigue, so we are considering the topics and timings of events very carefully to keep businesses interested and attending.
- The Friday Hub continues to be a great success with on average 60-80 Businesses attending each week. The attendees like the informal approach connecting with other local businesses, learn new skills and knowledge, share best practise and act as a 'peer to peer' support group.
- Some of the best supported events were:- Tech Severn 2 day Conference = 809, Buy From Marketing and Branding series = 106, Fraggelworks Digital Marketing series = 155, Tax Relief and Allowance Catax = 24, Inspired Mindset = 27 and 21, HR for Office Managers = 47, How to build a strong and resilient team = 34, The Friday Hub = 552

Partnerships

Taking a more collaborative approach to benefit the business communities:-

New for June and July 2021

- **Continue to build a 'Hub' of specialist support from different sectors and disciplines. Have 15 working with the GH – with 3 more to join.**
- **Working with or forging new alliances with many new trainers and deliverers to bring new and refreshed events for the local business community. Such as:-**
- **Arranged quarterly catch ups with Dyke Yaxley from the Professional Services sector to share information on funding and understand the local landscape and any pain points. Invited other partners to attend to share knowledge.**
- Zebra Marketing and PR Ltd
- Landau
- Marie Speight Consulting
- Purple Frog Ltd
- Julie Bricknall ACC – Inspired Mindset
- Ed Nell – The Media Insiders
- Shane Stark – Business Doctors Shropshire
- Recruited 15 Specialist Business Advisers/Consultants from various backgrounds and subjects.
- **Continue to work with the local DiT team with referrals in both directions. Also conduct joint meetings when and where appropriate and attend DiT catch up meetings on a quarterly basis. Also promote DiT opportunities through the e-newsletter.**

Future Plans – next three months

- Events programme is currently evolving with many new topics and speakers, with events mainly online but starting to introduce face to face VIP days. Lots of new trainers and

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Emma Chapman

Prepared September 2021

deliverers with innovative and creative subjects. Also addressing stress, anxiety and health and wellbeing amongst the business community, Digital, e-commerce, Cyber Security/Cyber Essentials and GDPR/Data, Zebra PR VIP Days, Podcasting and addressing the media, Making it Happen and more.

- Continue to create more Hub events such as 'The Business Health and Vitality Hub', 'Access to Finance Hub', The 'Friday Hub' 'Digital Hub' which creates a bubble of themes and not so generalist. This will also tie in with the extension funding to support capacity building around Specialist support. It will potentially create a pipeline of businesses wishing to access the support available.
- **Spark Social online Conference booked for Social Enterprise week 16 November. Have arranged a working group to design the conference and Yarrington appointed to run the digital conference. Strap line 'Purpose to Profit'.**
- **Working on suite of offline webinars covering all topics to be housed on the Invest in Shropshire website as many businesses are unable to attend our organised webinars. Legacy of ARG funding. Programme has been branded Business Boost Programme. Again working with Yarrington.**
- **Exploring the possibility of delivering a Debt Recovery programme for Ltd Companies as part of the SC ERF.**
- **Due to the high demand of referrals to the ERDF Step Up to Start aspect of the wider programme, exploring the possibility to top up the programme or launch 'Solopreneurs'.**
- **Revisiting, revising and refocusing the Friday Hub. New brand launched in August.**
- **Attending the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Business Expo on 14 October at Shrewsbury Town Football Club. Have also booked a VIP box that day for the first face to face Cohort 1 get together as part of the Silverpreneurs Programme.**
- Have contracted with fifteen external business advisers/consultants to deliver the Specialist Support for 2021-2022. In discussions with three more advisers to join the group.