

4 Worcestershire Business Forum series feedback

WLEP BOARD RECOMMENDATION

The Board is asked to:

- Note the feedback gathered from the September Business Forum event;
- Attend, support and promote the upcoming Worcestershire Business Forum event series; and
- Where invited, participate in the Forum events as a speaker or panel member.

4.1 Review of the previous Worcestershire Business Forums

4.1.1 The inaugural Worcestershire Business Forum event was held in May 2022, with 50 businesses attending a dinner at Sixways Stadium. The audience had businesses of varying sizes and sectors and discussed the economic landscape.

4.1.2 Survey data was gathered and presented to fuel discussion and this data was later shared across the LEP team to support project delivery.

4.1.3 There were three themes that came out of the initial Business Forum event and these topics identified opportunities for the LEP and Growth Hub to continue growing the momentum and engagement with the business community by delivering similar forums on those themes. The findings were:

- Skills and recruitment is still a big challenge for businesses.
- Innovation, how can we enable more innovation in the county.
- Commercial properties, there were concerns around the types of premises being built and did that reflect the types of businesses being attracted to invest in the county.

4.1.4 The following structure was approved for the forum events going forward:

- Gather research and business intelligence.
- Present the existing solutions and support schemes available to raise awareness/engagement.
- Instigate discussions around new ideas and opportunities.
- Present these findings to local boards and report into central Government.

4.1.5 The second Business Forum event was held in September and picked up on the findings from the previous forum with a focus on skills and recruitment support for businesses. We had 45 attendees for the event which was hosted in Redditch.

4.1.6 The decision was made to have a more engaging activity for attendees around the weaknesses, opportunities and threats businesses face in relation to skills and recruitment to drive the conversation.

4.1.7 Discussion points from the event were captured to ensure the LEP and Growth Hub could follow up and further support businesses. This will continue the engagement across our team and align to the objective set for the forum events to support being the voice of business.

4.1.8 The discussion points were:

- Businesses need to work to be recognised as an employer of choice, they need to think about culture, branding and employee value. **Various support is on offer via the Growth Hub on this to directly help businesses develop these areas.**
- Businesses have become aware of the importance of workforce planning to overcome future challenges. **The Growth Hub is offering Workforce planning support as part of the Specialist Professional Advisor Programme and there will be future support for**

businesses coming into 2023.

- Ideas were discussed around work experience packages and could working with colleges and universities allow students to be released more regularly to build more impactful work experience. **The LEP skills team are already engaged with the colleges and local University with work ongoing about pushing and promoting more regular work experience.**

4.1.9 Feedback was extremely positive from the event with businesses enjoying the more direct activity-based structure which allowed them to collaborate and feedback, whilst also brainstorming potential solutions. Numerous immediate benefits were also felt across the team with the following outcomes:

- New leads for Growth Hub account manager meetings generated
- Increased business support via pledge cards submitted to support the Inspiring Worcestershire employer engagement programme.
- Attendees learnt about the current support available and referrals were made onto several partner programmes, like Seetec Plus.

4.1.10 As part of the review for the September Business Forum event, the LEP and Growth Hub have created a new delivery timeline to ensure the best engagement and attendance with future forum events, recognising the role of amplifying the events via local leaders, community groups and more.

4.1.11 Alongside the skills and recruitment forum event, the LEP team has also created a Commercial Property Forum, brining senior developers and commercial property agents from across the county together to discuss and shape the direction of developments.

4.1.12 The Commercial Property Forum has already met this year and going forward will meet on a bi-monthly basis.

4.2 Upcoming forum events

4.2.1 With more positive feedback gathered from the Business Forum event, the focus has been to plan and deliver 2 more forums before the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

- January 2023 – Business Leaders forum event
- March 2023 – Innovation & International Trade forum event

4.2.2 The January forum event has been altered to work as a business leaders forum event. Considering the Autumn Statement and ongoing pressures on businesses, the proposal is to have senior leaders from Worcestershire County Council feature as a panel, directing questions to businesses.

4.2.3 This will build up a bigger evidence base of business intelligence whilst also supporting developments to future local support provision.

4.2.4 Business representation groups and community networks will be targeted for the event, with each bringing a number of attendees along to support the event.

4.2.5 There are two benefits to this approach with the LEP and Growth Hub being better engaged with the business representation groups and networks to encourage sharing of our support messages, and it will help to grow the forum communication list with new businesses attending and being engaged with the LEP and Growth Hub.

4.2.6 The WLEP board are asked to support, attend and promote all the forum events where possible. All board members will receive the details of the upcoming forum events shortly.

Alex Price

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