

WORCESTERSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE
PARTNERSHIP

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2021 - 2022

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Introduction and context

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities that pursue economic growth and job creation, improve infrastructure and enhance workforce skills. Chaired by a local business leader, LEP Board members include leaders from local councils, representatives from the business community, university, and further education institutions. Worcestershire LEP works closely with public, private and voluntary-sector partners and with government to achieve the best outcomes for business and communities across the county, the region and the UK as a whole. Our vision for Worcestershire is a *'Connected, Creative, and Dynamic Economy for all'* and to achieve this, we have recently developed a refreshed plan for growth for the county that will become a guiding framework for the next 20 years.

We have identified four strategic objectives:

- Improving Worcestershire's strategic connectivity and infrastructure.
- Stimulating investment in research and development and innovation to create a dynamic Worcestershire business environment.
- Supporting a creative future-fit Worcestershire workforce.
- Revitalising our city and town centres.

This business engagement strategy supports the successful delivery of the fifth pillar in our identified foundations for productivity- the Business Environment. However, none of our overall objectives can be achieved without business investment and job creation and therefore a large part of our role is providing the confidence or incentives for the businesses to invest.

The Business Environment (The Fifth pillar)

For our Local Enterprise Partnership to be effective we require broad and consistent partnership working as well as commitment from and collaboration across multiple stakeholder groups and individuals. The Local Industrial Strategy and Plan for Growth provides the framework for economic development and investment priorities for the Worcestershire area. It provides a long-term economic vision and sets out how the local area will contribute to UK productivity improvements and the UK's global competitiveness. This business engagement strategy outlines WLEP's aim, its principles and what successful business engagement means for us. It sets out how WLEP intends to refine our engagement approach for 2021/22 to best fulfil our role, achieve the aims of the Local Industrial Strategy/ Plan for Growth and to enhance our efforts so that WLEP is open, transparent and inclusive in our work. Worcestershire LEP will deliver this in partnership with its Growth Hub.

Worcestershire businesses benefit from joined up support offered through the county's Growth Hub. Worcestershire's Growth Hub is a collaboration of information and support services funded and delivered by WLEP, working with and supported by partners including all seven Worcestershire local authorities, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the European Regional Development Fund. The Growth Hub supports businesses at all stages of their business journey, from pre-start through to large SME and Strategic businesses. Over the past seven years the Growth Hub has engaged with more than 10,000 Worcestershire

businesses, provided Start up advice to over 1200 individuals and intensely supported over 750 businesses to start their scale-up/growth journey. Worcestershire Growth Hub provide and sign-post businesses to grants, funding, specialist advice and guidance, support for upskilling and training staff, and practical support and advice to innovate. The support provided through the Growth Hub helps businesses to develop their internal capability to improve their productivity, grow and create jobs. The GH 2021/22 targets are tabled in Appendix 1.

Worcestershire is a great place to do business. It has a growing stock of businesses and business densities have been consistently higher than the UK average for the last five years. Business survival rates for Worcestershire compare well with the regional and national averages, particularly over the longer term. Worcestershire's business mix is a key strength. Its diversity makes a positive contribution to current economic performance and is an important basis for long-term sustainable growth. Its cornerstone sectors, as identified by WLEP, are business administration and professional services; construction; and health and care. It retains a competitive advantage in a number of manufacturing industries and the growth sectors identified by WLEP – advanced manufacturing; cyber security, IT and defence; and horti/agricultural technology. These sectors typically have higher concentrations of employment compared with the national and regional averages or potential for growth. There is more information on this in Worcestershire's Key Sectors.

Our aim:

What success means to us -

To be the recognised Business Champion and deliver a strong, credible, and collective voice for Worcestershire businesses – in the LEP and for the region

Mission:

“To support all Worcestershire businesses to achieve the success that enhances the economic sustainability and increases productivity of the County. This will be delivered by providing impartial, tailored support, advice, guidance and relationship management to help local businesses grow”.

The changes to the business environment wrought by the pandemic have been severe, and the first half of 2020 saw Worcestershire LEP and its Growth Hub focusing upon enabling businesses to survive, by sharing intelligence and supporting businesses to apply for, and receive funding from, government support schemes. As the situation begins to stabilise, the focus has shifted to enabling businesses to adapt and diversify within the new conditions.

Principles

A SWOT analysis has enabled us to understand the requirements and core principles which make up the Business Engagement Strategy and which will support WLEP, in partnership with its Growth Hub, to deliver on the aim,

To be the recognised Business Champion and deliver a strong, credible and collective voice for Worcestershire businesses – in the LEP and for the region

SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government -funded (and backed) • WLEP is led by business. Business talking to business. • Growth Hub has a good reputation locally with predominately micro businesses • WLEP has good reputation amongst larger SME and Strategic businesses • WLEP and WGH have strong links to Business Representative Organisations • WLEP has good reputation with Professional & Business Support Sector • Growth Hub is respected and works closely with regional partners in cluster 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-year funding cycle • Brand recognition - Growth Hub and LEP brands not synonymous with each other • Growth hub's ability to flex and change at pace (public sector limitations) • Engagement with all sizes of business, corporate, SME and Micro • Getting to key influencers and those with expertise
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise reputation of LEP and Growth Hub to build brand locally • Growth Hub becomes route for LEP to communicate with businesses • Upskilling of Growth Hub staff • Utilise intelligence to support local, regional and national support, policy and delivery • Export Support • Inward Investment • Influence Property and land use • Workplace skills support • Not just grants but advice and guidance and creating communities of likeminded individuals. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One year funding cycle • Reliance on grant funding as only method of business support • Confusion over name and delivery • Shift in Government policy • Fragmentation – Local Authority delivery, programme brands, duplication of schemes across county so business switch off • Businesses who experience a bad service (or don't get what they want) don't come back and tell their business colleagues.

Actions

Considering Worcestershire LEPs vision for Worcestershire and the aim of its Business Engagement Strategy, the following actions will support businesses to Stabilise, Grow and Thrive over the next 12 months.

Stabilise	Grow	Thrive
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilise Worcestershire Growth Hub to gather business intelligence and real-time evidence of impact, to inform government schemes and local policy 2. Signpost businesses to relevant government support and schemes 3. Through account management, support businesses in applying for relevant government schemes 4. Signpost businesses to other forms of funding and wider support, therefore maximising the investment in the county 5. Hold webinars (Making Connections) focused on overcoming specific COVID-related issues, in partnership with specialists 6. Work with partners and stakeholders to implement support if our region or parts of our region go into more stringent lockdown measures 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government funded Peer Networking to help businesses to plan for recovery and success 2. Working with District and County Council partners: support scale-up and pre-scale-up businesses with navigating the crisis one-to-ones, masterclasses and recovery grant support 3. Maintain support for businesses seeking documentation, VAT and other advice and guidance because of the changes of due to the UK exiting the EU. 4. Work with DIT and other local partners through the Growth Hub to continue to actively attract inward investment and support further exporting 5. Embed equality, diversity and inclusion reporting in Growth Hub processes 6. Prioritise support and job creation activity towards sectors and places disproportionately impacted by the pandemic 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to promote and provide, through Worcestershire's Growth Hub, a single access point for business support in the WLEP area 2. Provide support for start-up and scale-up activity 3. Work with partners to support an extensive and balanced pipeline of employment land and premises in the area, which takes account of any pandemic-induced structural changes to the property market 4. Account managing the high growth and large companies to invest in new products and business models to achieve greater business growth and productivity improvements.

Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)

In order to achieve these, the following *objectives* and *key results* have been identified

Working with Key Partners

- Work closely with Business-Representative Organisations
- Monthly LEP -led conversation roundtable with BRO's as 'One Worcestershire'
- Sharing of intelligence on opportunities and issues – fed into Monthly reporting to BEIS, WLEP Board, Growth Hub Board and LA partners
- WLEP to utilise opportunities to communicate with more businesses via the Growth Hub

Working with Stakeholders

- Bi-monthly Growth Hub led session with banks, accountants, property service, professional services, and recruiters via 'Advised in Worcestershire'
- Commercial property requirements via the WLEP Panel and its sub-groups
- Monthly sessions with DIT Export and Investment teams
- Collaborate with other LEPs and their areas business organisations to give a joined-up business view in to wider regional initiatives

Openness and Targeting

- Regular WLEP (Virtual or face to face) forums
- Newsletters (WLEP and Growth Hub), websites, social media
- WGH Surveys
- WGH Account management reports
- Growth Hub led 1 : 1 and 1 : many meetings and sessions (via specialist business advisers) to understand specific issues
- Growth Hub led support of large/strategically important businesses (identified with support from District Councils)
- Business engagement platform

Monitoring

Reporting and monitoring on the OKRs will form part of WLEP regular written report to Board

Appendix 1 – Breakdown of Key delivery targets

Activity	Target
Account management of 4+ employee businesses by locality	160
KAM Account management of (non-DIT managed) FDI businesses	19-25
Account Management visits	750
Pro-active calls	1500
Peer Network cohorts	8
ERDF 3 hour assist target	67