

6 Innovate Edge Overview

WLEP BOARD RECOMMENDATION

The WLEP Board is asked to:

- Note the national Innovate Edge programme which provides bespoke support to grow and scale innovative businesses;
- Consider how Worcestershire better leverages national business support programmes and interventions;
- Consider their own experience of national and local business support programmes; and
- Consider and agree the principles of a business engagement strategy as part of the Growth Hub's 2021/22 business plan.

6.1 Context

- 6.1.1 The LEP Review will clearly have an impact on the future role and remit of LEPs. Through the Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund announcements, future funding for strategic infrastructure schemes will be routed through Local Government rather than LEPs in the short to medium term.
- 6.1.2 We also are aware through Annual Performance Review discussions with BEIS, particularly over the last two years, that Government would like to see the operations of Growth Hubs and LEPs more closely aligned.
- 6.1.3 Worcestershire have already made changes to our local Growth Hub's operating model which has seen Worcestershire Business Central (WBC) transition from the Chamber of Commerce to WLEP, in early 2021.
- 6.1.4 Without wishing to pre-judge the outcome of the LEP Review, it would be safe to assume that LEPs will be less involved in large-scale strategic infrastructure schemes and more focused on business support, engagement and intelligence gathering to inform local and national policy/interventions.
- 6.1.5 Over the last 14 months WLEP have worked with partners to swiftly put in place a suite of interventions to support businesses and individuals across the LEP's geography in response to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union.
- 6.1.6 This paper and the subsequent discussion at WLEP Board meeting is intended to stimulate discussion on the type of business support required across Worcestershire, so that WLEP and WBC can begin to shape up proposals and engage effectively with Government.

6.2 Innovate Edge

- 6.2.1 Innovate UK have recently launched a new service called Innovate Edge which provides bespoke support that grows and scales innovative businesses.
- 6.2.2 Innovate Edge will present their service to WLEP Board and touch on their penetration into Worcestershire and the challenges and opportunities for the business base we have in the county.
- 6.2.3 One of the key reasons for inviting Innovate Edge to the WLEP Board is to showcase an existing national programme and to ensure we leverage these resources into the county to deliver on our refreshed Plan for Growth (2020-2040).
- 6.2.4 The Innovate Edge programme is a national programme which is a welcome addition to the support landscape and is part of a suite of programmes that the Growth Hub can refer into which meets a clear local need and demand.

6.3 Worcestershire's Wider Business Support Eco-system

- 6.3.1 WLEP and WBC have worked in partnership with local government partners to deliver the business support structure based on the EU programme across innovation, trade and export, low carbon, start up and growth.
- 6.3.2 We need the future business support system to be fit for purpose post-pandemic, focused on the adoption of digital-enabled and zero carbon technologies to achieve our strategic ambitions for the local economy. A support structure which is focused on need, learns from current practice, and moves our businesses from survival to recovery and into sustainable growth.
- 6.3.3 In order to achieve this, we need to reform the Growth Hub to be far more intelligence-led, gather communities of interest and provide regular knowledge and intelligence to make the business support system work for us.
- 6.3.4 We have already seen over the last 6 months that the Growth Hub have established national programmes at a local level, at pace, including Peer Networks, distribution of ERDF grants, and EU Transition initiatives using central government funding, with good success and high levels of business engagement:
 - 88 businesses benefitting from Peer Network support, with a 95% + reporting positive experience
 - 163 businesses accessing support from a specialist advisor (Jan-Mar)
 - 750 businesses surveyed (Jan- Feb) in response to EU transition and Economic recovery, response fed back into Economic Recovery group
 - 40 businesses accessing specialist EU transition support
 - Processing 142 ERDF Grants (£3k max) linked to Covid recovery

6.4 WLEP Board Discussion

- 6.4.1 We would like the board members to relay their experience of the business support programmes that they have accessed or been involved with, or their supply chain may have accessed; with a view to bringing about change and supporting delivery of the Worcestershire vision and strategy by doing three things:

- Maximising national programmes to spend and deliver in Worcestershire;
- Avoiding duplication on locally designed schemes or have schemes that work alongside and complement such programmes as Innovate Edge; and
- Consider and agree the principles of a business engagement strategy as part of the Growth Hub's 2021/22 business plan

6.4.2 We do face the risk of replicating national programmes by designing locally. However, we do need to consider the Worcestershire response to the recovery in the coming months and years.

6.5 Next Steps

6.5.1 This is intended as the start of a broader conversation around business support for the LEP Board over the coming months, in parallel with the LEP Review.

6.5.2 WLEP Exec Team are proposing to bring to the next WLEP Board meeting a Growth Hub report on progress to date, improvements made and reporting required now that it is under the direction of the LEP, along with an outline business engagement strategy for consideration incorporating feedback from today's discussion.

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