

Summary

- This item is to inform TES about a proposal which will be taken to the SELEP Strategic Board on 12 Jun 2020 regarding use of *ERDF/SEEDA legacy funding*, which is available for SELEP to use within the previous SEEDA Region (i.e. Kent, Medway and East Sussex).

Background

- SELEP was informed last year that £349,000 of ERDF legacy funding was available to be spent on business support activity within the previous SEEDA area. In Dec 2019 the SELEP Board agreed that this funding is to be spent on 'growth hub type' activities in Kent & Medway and East Sussex, on the condition that proposals on how to spend the funds would be brought to the SELEP Board for agreement at a future date. At the time of writing the exact figure for East Sussex is yet to be confirmed.
- Prior to the current crisis, a proposal was being developed by SELEP in collaboration with Kent and East Sussex to use this funding to build on the successful 'Scale Up' programmes run initially in Kent and then piloted in East Sussex in 2019/20.
- Both these programmes have demonstrated the tangible economic impact that these intensive support programmes can deliver, over and above that which is available through core Growth Hub activity and the limitations of ERDF funded programmes.

Covid-19 and current proposals

- In light of the current Coronavirus pandemic, however, there is a need to amend this approach to take account of the current economic conditions facing businesses. There is still a demonstrable need for high quality business support and there are businesses which, with such support, will be able to adapt their models to survive and thrive in the current climate.
- SELEP is working with East Sussex and Kent to support the development of programme models which will be responsive to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the intention of enabling business to change and adapt to the "new normal" through intensive specialist advice. The proposal to SELEP on 12 Jun will be to endorse this process and to set out the criteria for these programmes to be signed-off and implemented. It is recognised that we are in a rapidly evolving landscape and that some flexibility will be required, and that final proposals should be agreed between East Sussex and SELEP before a deadline of Dec 2020. Should this deadline not be met, proposals will need to go back to the SELEP Board for review.

Recommendation to TES

- ***The TES Board is recommended to support the SELEP proposal as it will increase the support available to SMEs within the County.***