

Final report
South East Business Hub
Evaluation 2020 – 2021



Supporting the most
enterprising economy
in England

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 An independent evaluation of the South East Business Hub is required by BEIS as part of the annual monitoring and reporting activity. There are specific guidelines on what this evaluation should cover but in summary it has to assess what has worked well in Growth Hub service delivery and what the impacts of this have been on the local economy.
- 1.2 In undertaking the evaluation of the South East Business Hub, our approach has focused on engaging with all those involved in its development, delivery, management and governance, in addition to interviewing a sample of business beneficiaries who had received support provided by the Growth Hub.
- 1.3 We faced a number of specific challenges in undertaking the 2020/2021 evaluation. These included the following:
 - The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This made engaging businesses for the business consultation programme difficult as they were primarily focussed on survival and recovery rather than wanting to spend time talking with consultants.
 - In undertaking the economic impact assessment aspect of the evaluation, we would normally focus on the metrics of job creation and GVA growth. Because of the pandemic, there was very little of either in 2020-2021.
 - The South East Business Hub had to change its method of operation considerably as a result of the pandemic. Virtually all the focus of effort was on light touch support and triage, directing businesses to sources of grants, funding and advice. KPI achievement was therefore considerably affected.
 - Pressures on Growth Hub staff meant that less time was allocated to administration and therefore many interactions with businesses were not properly recorded or recorded at all. This made quantitative assessment of performance difficult.
- 1.4 Because of this, much of our evaluation of the South East Business Hub is qualitative in nature. Also, in recognition that a parallel study is being undertaken by Commercially Public into the strategic options for the future SELEP Growth Hub delivery model, we have ensured that our evaluation is 'lighter-touch' and focuses more on operational considerations.

Study deliverables

- 1.5 We have therefore structured the evaluation report findings into the following sections:
 - ✚ Growth Hub development and Governance
 - ✚ South East Business Hub funding
 - ✚ Service reach analysis
 - ✚ South East Business Hub service delivery review
 - ✚ Scale-up support and Peer Networks
 - ✚ Partnership working
 - ✚ Businesses feedback
 - ✚ KPI achievement

Recommendations

2. Growth Hub development and governance

Growth Hub development

- 2.1 By way of a recap, it is worth summarising that the national network of 38 Growth Hubs are local public/private sector partnerships led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Growth Hubs were introduced for two principal reasons:
- First, they aim to address a market failure of businesses not knowing where to go to access business support.
 - Second, they were designed to simplify what had become a confusing and fragmented picture of business support – the aim is to help join up national and local business support to make it easier for businesses to find the help they need.
- 2.2 The focus of Growth Hubs has changed significantly in recent years, with BEIS, their main funder, specifying that core Growth Hub services should be prioritised on those activities with the greatest impact on business growth, supporting delivery of local Strategic Economic Plans and the Government's Industrial Strategy along-side Local Industrial Strategies developed at a LEP level. The emphasis is very much on providing medium and high intensity support to businesses with real growth potential.
- 2.3 Clearly however, 2020-2021 was a very different year for Growth Hubs as a result of the pandemic and the focus was on light touch, high volume business support.
- 2.4 The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is the business-led, public/private body established to drive economic growth across East Sussex, Essex, Kent, Medway, Southend and Thurrock. It is one of 38 LEPs across the country set up by the government to be the key body determining strategic economic priorities while making investments and delivering activities to drive growth and create local jobs.
- 2.5 As well as being the biggest LEP outside of London, SELEP is also one of the most local. The LEP operates a fully devolved model with increased reach into local communities through local delivery partnerships in East Sussex, Kent & Medway, Essex and Thames Gateway South Essex.
- 2.6 On the basis of this federated model, each local area has also established its own individual Growth Hub whose development was driven through the learning and experience of the Southend Growth Hub (Business Southend) which was first established through the Regional Growth Fund as part of the Wave 2 City deals.
- 2.7 The most significant changes to the South East Business Hub operating model in the last year included the transfer of the Business East Sussex Growth Hub to an 'in-house' model, operated by East Sussex County Council. At a time when government is reviewing business support at a national level, moving the Business East Sussex Growth Hub in-house was deemed to enable the county council to promote greater collaboration amongst all its business activities and so enhance its engagement and services to SMEs.
- 2.8 Also, the South East Business Hub website has been redeveloped with a focus much more on coverage of the whole SELEP geography with the aim of simplifying the business landscape

across the SELEP area, improving the business customer journey and enabling resource sharing.

- 2.9 These changes were considered as part of our evaluation review.

Governance

- 2.10 Governance arrangements for the South East Business Hub are well established and are regarded, by everyone we interviewed as part of this evaluation, as working well. The leadership of the South East Business Hub ultimately sits with the SELEP Strategic Board with updates on performance provided on a regular basis and in line with the Strategic Board Forward Plan.
- 2.11 The established South East Business Hub Steering Group, which has an oversight role of the Growth Hub project, clearly set out in the terms of reference, also plays a key role in governance. The Steering Group comprises of the lead officer for the Growth Hub from each federated area of SELEP (local authority representative), Growth Hub Lead, member of the SELEP Secretariat and a university representative from the 'U9' group. Through this Steering Group the Growth Hub sub-hubs actively lead work with the Growth Hub lead to coordinate reporting, budget setting, financial monitoring and consistent marketing messages across the LEP area. The agendas and minutes of the steering group are published on the SELEP website.



- 2.12 As the SELEP Growth Hub model is designed to deliver services tailored to the requirements of the local geography, SELEP local Federated Boards (Kent & Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP), Success Essex (SE), Opportunity South Essex (OSE) and Team East Sussex (TES)) receive regular updates on progress from their local sub-hub. Each sub-hub operates its own local steering group with defined terms of reference. Any strategic decisions pertaining to the Growth Hub project are raised at the Federated Boards, considered by the South East Business Hub Steering Group and then taken to the Strategic Board where appropriate.

- 2.13 Each sub-hub has a local Steering Group whose membership is clearly defined in a set of terms of reference and typically comprises of representatives from local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), higher and further education, SELEP and Better Business for All (BBfA). The local Steering Groups provide healthy challenge and ensure a collaborative approach to business support and to maximise the offering to individual businesses. We included interviews with a number of the members of these groups as part of this evaluation.
- 2.14 The grant funding is managed by the Essex County Council, the Accountable Body for SELEP. All financial commitments are overseen by the Accountability Board – a formally constituted joint committee. This committee receives reports on spending and monitoring progress.
- 2.15 To ensure appropriate governance the following measures are in place:
- All operations of the SELEP are covered by the SELEP Assurance Framework (2020) which reflects the National Assurance Framework.
 - All SELEP Board members and members of the Federated Boards are expected to complete and/or review a register of interests on a biannual basis. The register is published on the SELEP website.
 - The members of the Strategic Board, Federated Boards and the South East Business Hub Steering Group are given the opportunity to declare any interests at the beginning of each meeting.
 - In case of potential conflict of interest, the representative is asked not to take part in the conversation and/or leave the room whilst the discussion takes place. The representative also has no voting rights in any decisions taken.
 - To ensure compliance with funding requirements there is a clear Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Accountable Body and each Lead Authority. The SLA provides for robust reporting on spend and appropriate reporting to BEIS.
 - The Accountable Body requires each sub-hub to provide evidence of defrayal alongside spend reports on a quarterly basis. There is a standing agreement with the Accountable Body's Internal Audit function to carry out the year-end audit.
 - The SLA in place, between the Accountable Body and the Lead Authority, requires the s151 Officer of the Lead Authority to undertake their normal stewardship role in terms of monitoring and accounting for use of the grant received, including assurance that it has been used in accordance with the grant terms and conditions.
- 2.16 All of these measures are in line with best practice operating across the Growth Hub network and are appropriate to the organisation.
- 2.17 As a result of the pandemic, all meetings have taken place virtually rather than face to face. This has worked well with an improvement in attendance along with a focus on business support driven by the impact of Covid-19. The local hubs have been instrumental in helping to lobby for Covid support changes through their knowledge and awareness of issues locally.
- 2.18 Moving forward, the local hubs believe that possibly too much information is disseminated by SELEP. A review should be undertaken on what is currently distributed and why and to identify

its value. The sub-hubs would like to see relevant information provided rather than lots of it and this should be discussed further with them.

3. South East Business Hub funding

- 3.1 For 2020/21, the South East Business Hub has been in receipt of funding from a number of sources; core funding from BEIS, local top-up funding, supplementary funding to support additional business support needs arising as a result of the pandemic and an EU transition grant to provide outreach and engagement with businesses on EU Transition issues.
- 3.2 The current core funding for the South East Business Hub was £656,000. East Sussex County Council provided an additional £13,000 per annum (plus they funded a three-year BES Growth Hub 'pivot' programme at an average cost of about £45,000 per annum), whilst Kent County Council utilised SEEDA legacy funding mostly for scale-up delivery.
- 3.3 Southend Borough Council secured further ERDF funding to ensure the continuation of the current enhanced Growth Hub offer through the South East Business Boost II. This programme comprises of business grants, 12 hours of 1-2-1 advice on a range of different barriers to growth including marketing, finance, strategic planning, people management and business skill workshops. The programme will be delivered across all three geographical areas.
- 3.4 Additionally, in kind resources are provided by the Lead Authorities (which include ESCC, SBC and KCC) in the form of officer support. This support includes undertaking research, communicating best practice, providing communication platforms and joint working. Southend Borough Council also offers accounting support, HR and IT services. The Lead Authorities also provide some complimentary use of partners' premises to hold events and workshops.
- 3.5 It should be noted that SELEP provides additional resource and management support via the Chief Operating Officer from within the Secretariat team which is not funded by the Growth Hub grant. Similarly, the Accountable Body support is not charged to the Growth Hub grant either and includes the quarterly return process and year-end audit of grant spend.

Supplementary Grant Funding

- 3.6 Supplementary Grant Funding of £234,000 was made available from BEIS during this financial year to further support the development of Growth Hub activity and, in addition, in recognition of the short-term pressures faced by Growth Hubs as a result of COVID-19, to be used on activities and solutions to alleviate immediate pressures on businesses caused by COVID -19
- 3.7 These immediate pressures manifested themselves as increased call volumes and emails and a high degree of triage required in all Growth Hubs. In the early days, businesses were faced with a myriad of issues including their understanding of furlough; how to access Government schemes; the eligibility criteria for schemes; demands being placed on them from landlords; banks not being particularly supportive; and definition of a key worker.
- 3.8 Business East Sussex Growth Hub used the funding towards marketing capability which meant they were able to use core funding to maintain their advisory staff at existing levels - they had originally planned to reduce navigator support from 1.6FTE to 1.2 FTE. They also developed a series of 12 short video in various languages to reach out to businesses from ethnic minority

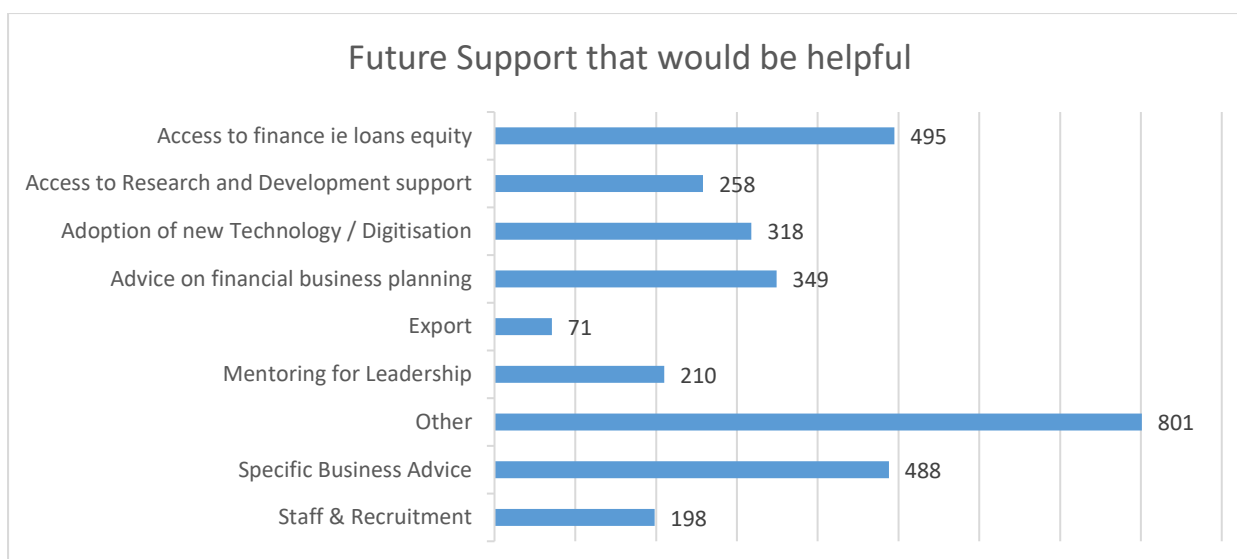
backgrounds. These were produced at the outset of the pandemic following lack of penetration of messages among business owners who are speakers of other languages.

- 3.9 The BEST Growth Hub used the funding for additional resource and allocated specialist areas to key team members. This coupled with a close working relationship with Essex County Council, acting as a conduit between local districts and the ECC, allowed the team to gather intelligence and map the economic position. The BEST Growth Hub also developed an App to support their new Business Assessment & Adaptation programme. The App (the Pivoting Assessment Tool (PAT)) can be utilised in other high growth programmes.
- 3.10 The Kent & Medway Growth Hub used the funding for recruitment of two specialist/sector advisers. Kent County Council together with districts also set up a dedicated COVID-19 Business Support Helpline delivered under the umbrella of the Growth Hub project. The helpline has alleviated the pressure that otherwise would have been placed on Local Authorities and possibly the national Business Support Helpline. The Growth Hub also repurposed its Live Chat and introduced a COVID-19 form/questionnaire.
- 3.11 The following table illustrates the demand for this helpline service during the pandemic and shows the additional calls received into the service compared to normal.

Achieved to date on via the HELPLINE which is in addition to the CORE:

PHASE 1 OUTPUTS	April + 1	May	June	To Date	Target
Inbound enquiries	2934	1402	975	5311	4000
Adviser Call backs	1535	788	626	2949	4000
Creation of Community Hub	0	1	0	1	1
Weekly report	5	4	4	13	12
Customer Satisfaction	96%	96%	96%		90%
PHASE 2 OUTPUTS	July	August	Sept	To Date	Target
Action Plans Created (inc abridged RAP)	0	461	419	880	840
Extended 1-1s	0	153	270	423	210
Survey follow up (attempt/completed)	-	-	-	5516/986	2000
Deep Dive follow up	-	-	-	0	200
Customer Satisfaction	0%	98%	98%	98%	90%
PHASE 3 OUTPUTS	Oct	Nov	Dec	To Date	Target
BSN Group Sessions completed	9	25	9	43	24
New 1-2-1s delivered	76	184	77	337	300
Confidence improvement	40	30	10	26.67%	30%
Customer satisfaction	96	96	96	96%	92%
Deep Dive follow up	-	-	148	148	200
PHASE 4 OUTPUTS	Jan	Feb	Mar	To Date	Target
BSN Group Sessions completed	22	20	61	103	24
New 1-2-1s delivered	64	145	303	512	300
Confidence improvement	25%	35%	42%	30.00%	30%
Customer satisfaction	96%	96%	96%	96%	92%
Business Support Facilitation meetings	2	5	4	11	3

- 3.12 The Kent & Medway Growth Hub also undertook a survey of business support needs that would be required after the initial impact of the pandemic had subsided. The following outcomes were identified and should be taken into account when planning future Growth Hub support activities.



EU Transition Grant

- 3.13 A grant of £203,550 was provided to the South East LEP to spend on agreed Growth Hub delivery activities to provide outreach and engagement with businesses on EU Transition issues to make as many businesses as possible aware of how they need to prepare for the end of the Transition, and to further improve business resilience at a local level for the ending of the EU Transition Period on the 31st December and during the period afterwards up to and including the 31st March 2021.
- 3.14 This funding was used to part cover the of the recruitment of additional advisers related to outreach, engagement, and advice to businesses during the transition period and for part providing specialist advice for businesses including events, enhanced business intelligence, monitoring and evaluation, and regional coordination and targeting during the same period.
- 3.15 The key elements of the programme were designed to involve the provision of additional advisory resources to undertake outreach and to fulfil the advice and guidance needs of businesses engaging with the Growth Hub; to provide specialist and more intensive support where needed, including via events and workshops; provide a local intelligence, analysis and monitoring function; and to provide a coordination function for regional and local activity, including effectively disseminating and targeting information on key developments quickly and simply to those who need it.
- 3.16 SELEP, via its Growth Hubs, agreed to take the following approach in use of this funding
- Engage a variety of specialist/private sector contractors in areas such as VAT, Data usage and GDPR, Accountancy, HR, Immigration rules, Export and Import, Health Certification, Rules of Origin and Food Labelling and Regulations on an hourly/day rates basis (specific SLA/contract) across the SELEP area
 - Increase the number of calls received by Growth Hub advisers/navigators and referred to a specialist as appropriate
 - Provide additional 1-2-1 capacity over and above the generalist service already provided by the Growth Hub

- Organise briefings/workshops/webinars for businesses across SELEP area that will address specific issues around EU Transition (targeted approach using industry speakers)

3.17 The funding allocation of £81,000 for Advisors for Outreach & Advice across the SELEP area was delivered in the following way:

Growth Hub	FTE	Activity
BEST	+ 1FTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outbound calls to business network • Inbound calls to sign post or book appropriate intervention (service provided by the Growth Hub as part of the specialist and general provision and/or other partners where appropriate including gov.uk) • 1-2-1 quick stop surgery (max 15 minutes telephone call with consultants to signpost to appropriate service within this provision or elsewhere). • In depth specialist 1-2-1 consultation of 1-4 hour + possible additional 12hr hour adaptation analysis and consultation (if qualifying for the programme)
Kent & Medway	+ 1 FTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outbound calls through liaising with Border Protocol and Delivery Group, DIT and the Chamber Export Teams to identify mailing lists that can be exploited for engagement. • Create an email campaign that will support the Government 'Check, Change, Go' campaign
Business East Sussex	+1.2 FTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outbound calls and answering inbound calls on EU Transition. • Engaging advisors from a local diversity organisation to undertake outreach with BAME led businesses on EU Transition, including providing support in community languages

3.18 All the work was supported by a telemarketing campaign procured by the South East Growth Hub Cluster out of the Supplementary Growth Hub funding. This work helped to support the programme's overall ambition of reaching 145,000 business nationally with approximately 5,000 interactions in Essex, 600 in East Sussex and 2,000 in Kent.

3.19 Specialist & General Advisors were also paid for by the EU Transition grant. This was achieved through the procurement of external services in various specialist fields obtained by each Growth Hub to the equivalent of 3 FTEs (1 FTE per Growth Hub). The funding for the 4th FTE was spilt equally between the hubs to deliver webinars/workshops on specialist topics to more

than one SME at the same time i.e. 1: many. The remaining funding for the 4th FTE was used to fund the EU Transition intelligence resource in the SELEP central team.

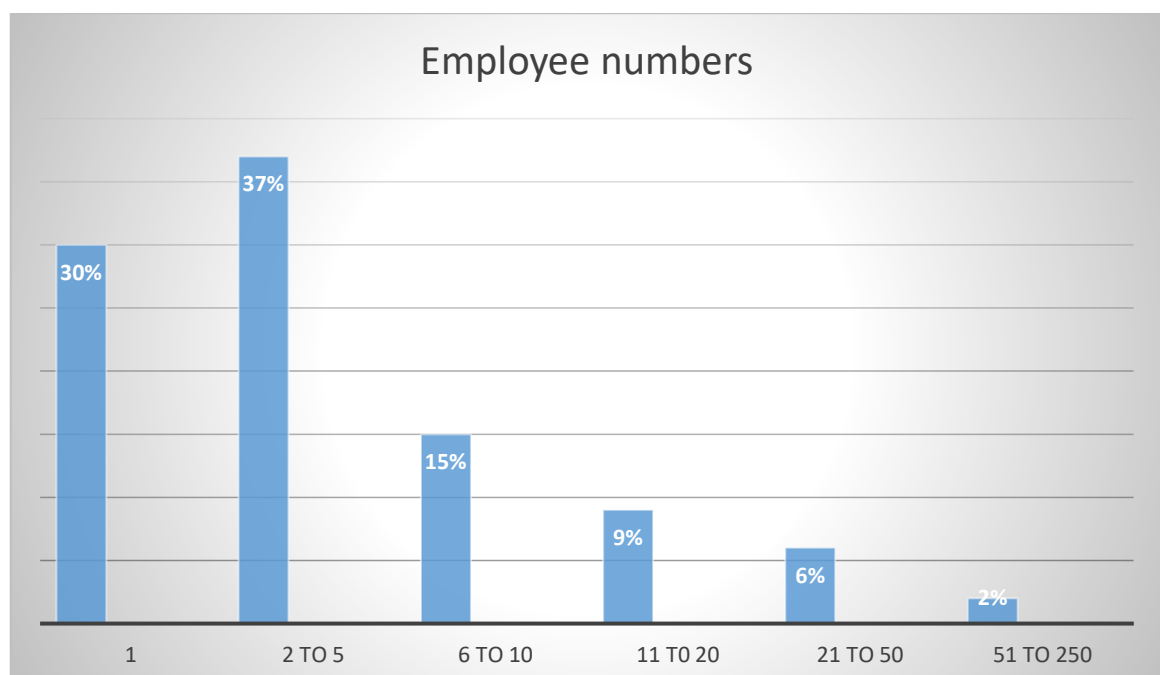
- 3.20 The funding was well received by Growth Hubs and allowed them to increase staff capacity at a time when demand was highest. The late notification of the funding was an issue. Earlier confirmation would have allowed for more considered planning and recruitment.

4. Service reach analysis

- 4.1 As part of the evaluation, we analysed the data and information recorded on the South East Business Hub CRM to assess the service reach of the Growth Hub in terms of size of businesses supported (employee numbers), the age of the business, the sector and the amount of support provided (hours).

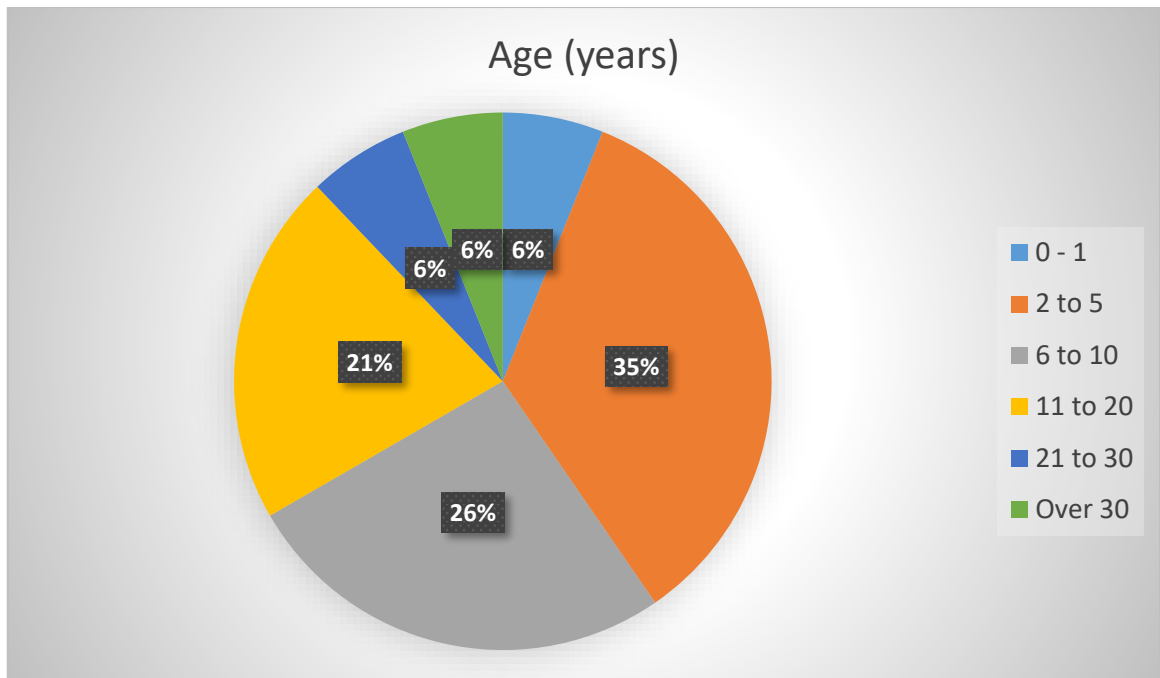
Size of businesses supported

- 4.2 As expected, the bulk (82%) of businesses supported by the South East Business Hub were micro businesses of 10 or fewer employees. This tends to be true for all Growth Hubs throughout the country and for the South East Business Hub this position has not changed much in the past 3 years – in 2018, 84% of the businesses it supported were in this category.
- 4.3 Very few (2%) of the businesses supported were medium sized (50 – 249 employees) and only 2 had over 250 employees. We have found, in undertaking Growth Hub evaluations throughout England, that larger businesses tend to have their own in-house functions that support their growth (e.g. finance, strategy, sales and marketing) and are therefore considerably less likely to seek external support.



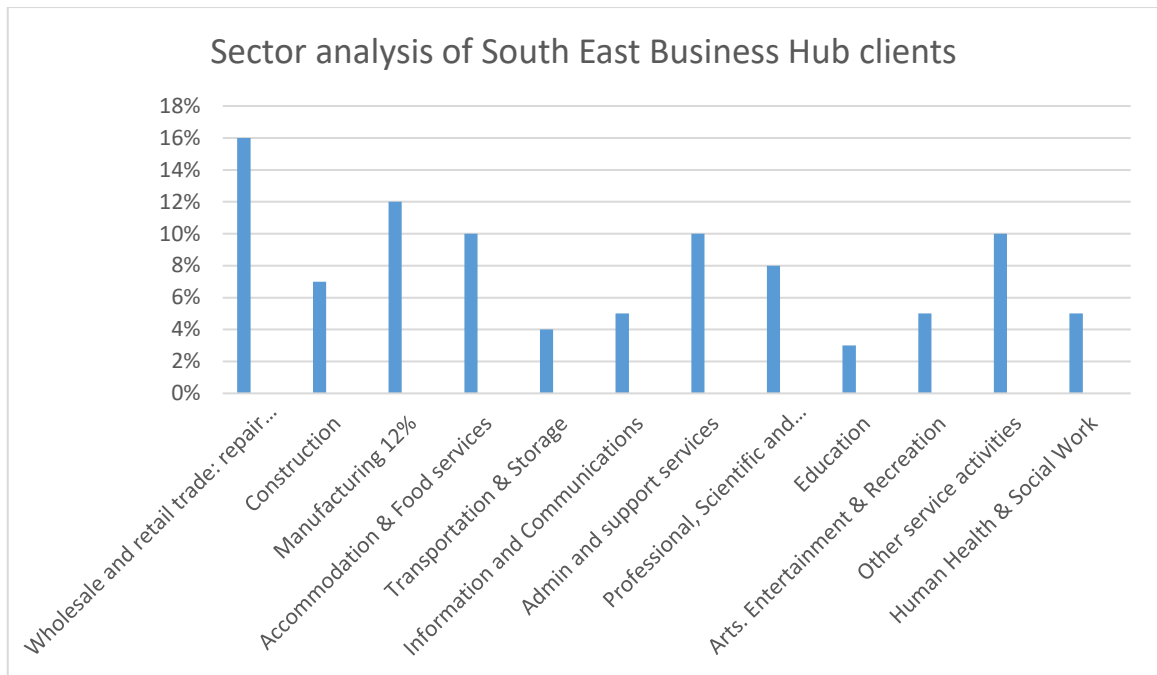
Business age

- 4.4 A relatively small proportion (6%) of the businesses supported by the South East Business Hub were in their infancy. This is relatively surprising as Growth Hubs traditionally provide early years support to large numbers of start-up businesses. Over one third of those supported were between 2 and 5 years old, which tends to be the key growth phases for small companies. And one third were over 10 years which perhaps highlights that a lot of well-established companies were seeking help in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.



Business sector

- 4.5 The South East Business Hub provided support to a wide variety of businesses and the profile of Growth Hub clients mapped against ONS data for the region and against data from the 2018 South East Business Hub evaluation highlights some notable patterns and changes. For example, in 2018 over 13% of Growth Hub clients were from the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation sector which makes up only 2.3% of the regional economy's employment base. This had dropped to just 5% in 2020/21. Considering this was one of the sectors worst hit by the pandemic this is relatively surprising. This corresponds to the number of Growth Hub clients in another sector hit particularly hard in the past 12 months, the Accommodation and Food service sector, which has seen its numbers double from 5% to 10% since 2018.
- 4.6 Similarly, the percentage of Growth Hub clients in both the Construction and Manufacturing sectors has also almost doubled over the past three years. The Wholesale/Retail and Repairs to Vehicles sector which employs 18% of the South East's working population has also seen an increase and now accounts for 16% of all South East Business Hub clients. Sectors which were under-represented include Human Health and Social Work Activities (5% of Growth Hub clients c.f. 14% of the local employment base).
- 4.7 The main sectors represented are summarised in the following chart.



Amount of support provided

- 4.8 2020-2021 was an unusual year in that there were high volumes of businesses seeking relatively low intensity support in the form of information and advice about issues associated with the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority (74%) of South East Business Hub clients, received only up to 2 hours of support.
- 4.9 Only 3% of South East Business Hub clients received medium intensity (3-6 hours) support and only 5% received more intensive support. This contrasts with previous years. For example, in 2018/19 almost half (48%) of South East Business Hub clients received medium intensity (3-6 hours) of support.

5. Service delivery review

5.1 As part of the South East Business Hub annual evaluation, we interviewed a number of stakeholders (see Annex 1) to gain their perceptions of the performance of the Growth Hub, in particular in relation to the economic situation created by the pandemic. This included holding phone and Teams calls with the following groups:

- Lead contacts for each sub-hub within the three local authorities of Kent County Council, East Sussex County Council and Southend Borough Council
- Representatives from key partner organisations including local district and borough councils, FSB, education, British Business Bank, Manufacturing Growth Programme, etc. Many of these are Steering Group members.
- Workshops were held with each of the three sub-hub teams
- A sample of businesses that received support were interviewed

5.2 The general consensus from all stakeholders was that the South East Business Hub, through its three sub-hubs, had delivered its services very well during the pandemic and had risen to the challenges presented. The following points represent the key findings from these discussions:

- All stakeholders and businesses we interviewed thought that the three sub-hubs all responded very well to the pandemic, in particular dealing with the extremely high volumes of calls. The overwhelming view of those interviewed was that, despite working in a time of constantly changing guidance, new funding streams, government updates, etc., the South East Business Hub teams still managed to deliver a high quality and timely business support service.
- The view was that the services provided by the three sub-hubs moved appropriately quickly and efficiently to an on-line delivery model and whilst many services were already being delivered virtually, it was a case of increasing this approach significantly. There was a major shift from face-to-face support to interactive webinar type activities, often working with businesses in a state of shock and panic.
- Each of the three sub-hubs has its own model with the BEST and BES hubs being delivered 'in-house' by staff working within the local authorities. Both local authorities (East Sussex County Council and Southend Borough Council) felt that having the Growth Hub in-house ensured it had flexibility to add the required resources during the pandemic - there were no external contractual issues to overcome. This gave them greater flexibility e.g. ESCC staff were able to support the Business East Sussex Growth Hub team in answering phones and also their Communications team was able to provide assistance.
- However, Kent County Council thought that having their Growth Hub service contracted out to Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce made it more agile to respond to the pandemic, in particular to set up a Covid-19 Business Hotline withing 48 hours. They thought that local authority bureaucracy would not have enabled this to happen at that pace. In total, they had 9 advisors working at the Helpline supported by

additional funds by KCC and the local districts councils. The team took 18,000 calls in the year and also had over 5,000 webchats in that period.

- The Business East Sussex Growth Hub was thought, by all those we interviewed, to have responded very well to the pandemic. They described the environment as fast moving with information provided from Government changing almost daily. It took a team effort to be able to respond quickly with the correct information. There was a massive increase in calls from 'desperate' people and lots of triaging. Many businesses expressed their appreciation of the support provided, which acted as a lifeline for them at a time of great uncertainty. The BES team rose to the challenge well in spite of being under-resourced at the start of the pandemic and having personnel changes as well as having just been brought in-house.
- The BEST Growth Hub ensured it had flexibility to add the required resources during the pandemic and the team was viewed by stakeholders as having done a "brilliant job" in responding to business needs. The team recognised that they themselves needed new skills, including empathy and counselling, when businesses were facing such severe challenges. As the year progressed, they report there is now more focus on helping businesses pivot and build resilience.
- Similarly, the stakeholder view was that the external provider for the Kent & Medway Growth Hub had very quickly adapted to the new situation. The Helpline was regarded as being very successful, although this did require substantial more funding by local authorities in Kent (approximately £400k).

5.3 There were some challenges also at this time. These included a huge volume of light touch interventions and high business demand. The Growth Hubs were restricted to short-term support interventions because of the volumes which did create an image that the Growth Hubs were just a grant awarding/advisory body. It was also challenging to respond to the many requests for information from Government along with keeping up to date with all the support schemes that were initiated. The sub-hub teams worked hard to deliver an excellent service at a time of business crisis.

5.4 Each of the three sub-hub teams had to develop new skills, including empathy and counselling, as well as keeping up to date with the ever-changing Covid-19 business support schemes available and changes to business regulations, in particular during lockdown periods. A number of Growth Hub staff received counselling support themselves - mental health and well-being were key issues for them also.

5.5 The view was that businesses tended to respond to the economic situation created by Covid-19 in three phases – shock response, pivot and adaption and future planning. There was an initial huge wave of digital connection by businesses with the Growth Hub in response to lockdown, but over the year businesses tended to have built up more resilience and there have been fewer enquiries.

5.6 Stakeholders interviewed highlighted a number of things they thought had improved with the Growth Hub over the past year as a result of the pandemic:

- Communication as a network and more efficient communication with businesses;

- Less need to travel – this was particularly important in the larger geographic areas of Essex and Kent;
- Many businesses feel more comfortable communicating remotely;
- Penetration levels increased during 2020 because of the pandemic and the Growth Hub has had resultant increased exposure - many new customers are now coming to the South East Business Hub because of the pandemic;
- They discovered that people can work more digitally than originally thought. Rapid adaptation and resilience of digital infrastructure were key.

6. Scale-up support and Peer Networks

- 6.1 The direction coming from BEIS in recent years has been for Growth Hubs to focus more activity on supporting potential high growth businesses, with the emphasis of light touch support more on the national Helpline. Clearly, this was not the case in 2020/2021 because of the pandemic but there was still some work done in this respect via the South East Business Hub Scale-up support and Peer Networks programme. Progress with this is summarised below.

Scale up support

- 6.2 Prior to the pandemic, a key focus of the South East Business Hub has been with Scale-ups; those businesses who can demonstrate rapid growth and who are more likely to drive job creation in the local economy. Each local Growth Hub supports these businesses via specific scale-up activity.
- 6.3 KMGH has delivered an exemplar scale-up programme and has been cited in a previous year's Scale-Up Institute Annual Report. The Scale-Up advisers work with scaleup businesses to link them to growth services, identify growth opportunities and constraints, facilitate the mapping of a 3-year strategic journey, and assist with development of a 12-month Action Plan. The ongoing development of this programme, from lessons learnt, has led to some amendments to the future delivery model. These improvements include a psychometric diagnostic, continued longevity of engagement but with added workshops around leadership and management. KMGH is introducing supply-chain development as part of the alumni networking.
- 6.4 Following the success of the pilot Scale-Up East Sussex (SUES) programme, ESCC intended to develop a successor programme and work with partners developing other programmes locally, notably the University of Sussex. In reality, this programme called Pivot was only tendered in February 2021 with activity just commencing. This is as a direct consequence of the pandemic.
- 6.5 BEST did continue to deliver the highly successful Scale-Up advice programme but again, this was scaled back due to demands of the pandemic. Typically, the programme allows for 12 hours of face-to-face consultancy with the scale up advisor. This type of advice is in high demand and provides BEST with an opportunity to explore the barriers to business growth for high growth businesses. The feedback that is gathered from these sessions also helps to inform events and workshops delivery for scale up businesses.
- 6.6 Each area Growth Hub has a referral system in place for businesses that display potential to grow. For example, businesses showing high growth in innovation are referred to Innovation UK (IUK). Additionally, for women entrepreneurs there is an availability of expert advice from the Expert in Residence (programme delivered in collaboration with NatWest).
- 6.7 The Growth Hub also worked closely with Be the Business and their delivery partner the Growth Company in promoting and creating of referrals to the Rapid Response and Mentoring for Growth programme.

Peer Networks

- 6.8 During 2020/21, funding was also made available from BEIS for the Peer Networks programme which was coordinated by local Growth Hubs.
- 6.9 The Peer Networks programme had the following key elements described by Government:
- Learn from your peers: Find solutions to the real issues your business is facing by working with other local business leaders facing similar challenges.
 - All it takes is your time: Peer Networks is a completely free programme. All it takes is a few hours of your time each month. You can join virtual sessions from the comfort of your home or office.
 - Varied delivery, real results: Activities take place in structured, small-group sessions, led by a skilled professional facilitator to make sure you see real results in return for the investment of your time. You will also benefit from access to 1:1 mentoring, coaching or advice depending on the support you need.
 - Non-competitive: Peer Networks brings together business leaders working collaboratively to find solutions to common problems. You will not be placed in a group with any competitors, so you can share your expertise and benefit from others.
- 6.10 It was anticipated that professional facilitators would be available to support small and medium businesses as they work together on important challenges, and the topics to be discussed, and come up with tangible solutions in a collaborative, non-competitive environment.
- 6.11 Business East Sussex Growth Hub out-sourced the peer networks programme delivery to MD Hub and Sussex Innovation Centre. Whilst there was a very tight timescale to get the programme up and running, feedback from all attendees has been very good.
- 6.12 4 cohorts were delivered in Kent (42 participants in total), run by New Level Results and Social Enterprise Kent. Again, feedback from attendees was extremely positive.
- 6.13 BEST Growth Hub delivered the Peer Networks in house and in total supported 40 businesses across 6 cohorts. 5 of these cohorts continue to meet and there is a testimonial video on the BEST Growth Hub website that highlights how highly regarded the programme was to attendees.
- 6.14 There were many challenges with the programme which included only a 6-month turn-around from programme inception to conclusion. Whilst the programme had huge benefit for businesses, it was administratively challenging for all Growth Hubs with greater reporting requirements even than ERDF. There was no clarity at the outset as to what was required and the late confirmation of the grant agreement delayed matters. The eligibility criteria and monitoring requirements are also deemed inappropriate for a programme of this type.
- 6.15 Further Peer Networks have been funded by Government for 2021/22 with all Growth Hubs seeking to make improvements on the last scheme based on experience and knowledge. The use of external agencies for marketing (to assist with onboarding) and running of the networks

will be part of this mix. Case studies will also be used to demonstrate the value of the programme.

- 6.16 The following outputs were achieved for the Peer Network programme, October 2020 to March 2021:

Growth Hub	Number of businesses registered and onboarded	Number of cohorts delivered	How many businesses completed 18h of networking and 3.5hours of 1-2-1 support	Dropouts	Notes
BES	18	2	16 [3 absences from Cohort 1 and 3 absences from cohort 2 – recording was sent to the businesses]	2	
BEST	120 registered/45 onboarded	6	40	5	5 out of the 6 cohorts scheduled further meetings to continue supporting each other. The male/female split was 50/50.
KMGH	42 registered/41 onboarded	4	37 [18h of networking] 36 [3.5 of 1-2-1 support]	5	18 female and 24 male
Total	180 – registered 104 - onboarded	12	92	12	

7. Partnership working

- 7.1 During the pandemic a greater emphasis was placed on partnership working, in particular exchange of information and intelligence and business referrals. The sub-hubs played a key role in keeping partners and intermediaries informed of developments and helping to lobby Government for new business support programmes and additional funding. This section of the report highlights how the pandemic increased local partnership working. It also summarises the relatively new cluster activity work being undertaken by the South East Business Hub.

Local partnership working and simplification

- 7.2 During COVID-19, the Growth Hubs found their niche in centrally gathering and controlling the flow of COVID economic and business-related information to partners across the region and Government. The aim should be to continue this function and build on the strong relationships developed so far in order to help mitigate flash points and challenges across the entire region while ensuring opportunities for prosperity and growth are highlighted.
- 7.3 The partnership working with the cluster Growth Hubs is well established and delivering visible outcomes through collaboration, information knowledge sharing and intelligence gathering. This will be further enhanced through co-designing of future offer, cross cluster working, developing partnership working with other national organisation and pursuing new marketing solutions. The Cluster was instrumental in the EU transition work and the appointment of Blueberry Marketing providing telemarketing support to this programme.
- 7.4 All Growth Hubs report strong partnership activity, in particular links with their district and borough councils over Covid. They have provided key business information and supported the development of local recovery strategies.
- 7.5 The move to virtual meetings has supported the development of partnerships. Attendance has been strong and input provided from all attendees. Lots of positive feedback has been received on their value and continuation during lockdown. Whilst virtual meetings can limit the opportunity for strong relationship building, momentum at least has been maintained over the year.
- 7.6 These closer relationships are helping to build a strong referral network as a direct result of Covid. In particular, relationships have been enhanced with grant awarding bodies. Whilst this is always more that could be achieved, the foundation is now very strong.
- 7.7 The Growth Hubs are also working closely with chambers, FSB, Universities, innovation centres and SELEP Digital Skills Partnership to collate a repository of online training and webinars on arrange of professional and digital services, which can assist businesses through this period of uncertainty and help with business continuity and resilience planning.
- 7.8 The stakeholders we interviewed had largely very positive views on how the South East Business Hub interacts with them and how they promote an inclusive partnership approach. Specific comments made during the interviews include the following:
- Links with the district and borough councils were strengthened during the pandemic

- For BES, strong sub-hub inputs to the development of the Covid Economy Recovery Strategy
 - For BEST, the Intermediary Partners Group meetings worked reasonably well and increased partnership coverage to include Public Health and Wellbeing (although the issue of lack of feedback on business referrals was raised a few times).
 - There were over 45 stakeholders at some Kent & Medway Growth Hub meetings. The partnership appeared to be strengthened and there was very positive feedback from lots of them.
 - Added value face to face activities including networking and relationship building fell off during the pandemic
 - Referrals amongst partners became more successful due to closer relationship, working, especially with grant awarding bodies.
- 7.9 The sub-hubs connected well with partners and became 'central to information dissemination'. The view was that they now much more clearly fit into the fabric of the local business support landscape.
- 7.10 This point was emphasised by our finding that in general, the sub-hubs are now more coordinated and connected as a result of the pandemic. They have much greater traction and leverage with external providers as they are able to pass more referrals to them due to increased business contacts.
- 7.11 Each of the sub-hubs has continued with the already established local steering group model, strong referral network and partner briefing programmes. These networks meet regularly and incorporate national and local organisations, facilitate knowledge sharing, provide updates on new and existing programmes, offer referral management across attendees and help to shape the on-going design and delivery of services. These networks and briefing programmes have been integral to forming relationships and partnership networks.
- 7.12 A significant value has been placed on the role of these groups in establishing the position of the Growth Hub project in the local community. The sub-hubs are a leader in the business support community in the terms of knowledge, expertise, quality of advice, and support.
- 7.13 The Growth Hub project continues using a range of data sources to evaluate the state of the local business support provision, and design programmes of support that meet the identified gaps in provision.

Cluster activity

- 7.14 Cluster activity partnership working is a relatively new activity for the South East Business Hub and progressed well during 2020/21. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Cluster is comprised of Hertfordshire LEP, LEAP and South East LEP (SELEP). Following Britain's exit from the EU, Government was seeking to conduct a research and outbound business engagement campaign seeking to gather insights into the impacts EU Exit on the businesses in the region and raise awareness of the business support available to help overcome any EU exit challenges. This was organised via the cluster.

- 7.15 Blueberry Marketing Solutions (Blueberry) were selected as the delivery partner to reach out to businesses in the region, gathering information on the key impacts that businesses were facing due to the EU Exit, directing them to available support and also raising awareness of the support available through the Growth Hub more generally. The calling activity commenced in January 2021, shortly after the post-transition trade agreement came into force.
- 7.16 The business outreach took place at a time when the impacts of the EU Exit were starting to emerge for many businesses, and the research therefore provides invaluable insight into how these impacts evolved over the months immediately following this. As well as the EU Exit, shortly prior to project commencement a national lockdown came into force as part of Government's response to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.
- 7.17 This lockdown affected the sample data across all sectors, as many businesses in the hospitality, leisure, consumer services and arts were temporarily closed or operating a reduced service. In addition to this, an increased level of homeworking reduced the number of key decision makers onsite and reachable by telephone.
- 7.18 The following outputs were achieved for the SELEP region as shown below

Outcome	BEST	Kent & Medway	East Sussex	SEBH
Number of completions	232	285	289	806
Number of referrals	99	113	97	309
Number of calls	2581	2308	2443	7332
Number of decision maker conversations	593	541	523	1657

- 7.19 These numbers exceeded targets and allowed data to be included in the weekly reports feeding into BEIS which in turn helped inform both regional and national efforts to formulate effective strategies to support businesses through this period. This activity also generated useful referrals for businesses needing support from the Growth Hubs.
- 7.20 The cluster also commissioned a series of podcasts (Brexit Ready - South East) on a variety of Brexit-related topics which was delivered by Fresh Air Productions. There were 46 downloads in total averaging 11 listens per week. The most popular episode was Episode 1: VAT.
- 7.21 This campaign provided another route to businesses with at least 50% of people having listened to the podcasts on the phone with the remaining via their computer. This demonstrates that short, information pieces that are easily accessible can attract new businesses into the services offered by the Growth Hub.
- 7.22 Two cluster business support events were also held which resulted in the following number of attendees

Partner	Attendees
Google	58
ICAEW	55

7.23 There was also a full range of knowledge and information sessions held over the course of 6 months with different organisations with the following outcomes achieved

Organisation	Outcome of relationship
British Business Bank	Featured on panel at South East/Hatch Event
Growth Hub Champions	Ongoing engagement with the champions
Peer Networks	Regular meetings to discuss progress
HMRC	Shared calendar of events
ICAEW	Events collaboration
Small Business Commissioner	Featured on panel at South East/Cluster event
Project	Outcome
Telemarketing Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4116 conversations across the 5 Growth Hubs - 1992 completed survey across the 5 Growth Hubs - 873 referrals across the 5 Growth Hubs - 44.1% of respondents didn't trade internationally or identify other EU exit exposures (supply chain, workforce etc). <p>However, of those that did, 74.88% flagged challenges from the EU Exit and 15.84% flagged opportunities (these stats include those flagging both)</p>
Brexit Podcast Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Podcast series featuring three episodes on VAT, Workforce and Supply Chain - Focused on three challenging topics – had expert speakers that led discussion well and SME who sharing practical experience of overcoming the challenges - Has set a platform that allows the cluster to carry out future activity around these topics, using these episodes as jumping-off points. - Detailed breakdown of analytics to come later this week.
Brexit Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The LBH produced 17 Brexit Factsheets after the transition in Jan 2021 - This was made available to the cluster

8. Businesses feedback

- 8.1 In undertaking a Growth Hub evaluation, we would normally provide an assessment of the net additional economic impacts of the Growth Hub in terms of FTE jobs created, which is largely regarded as the main indicator of the impact the Growth Hub is having on the local economy. However, given that the Covid-19 pandemic has been the dominant influence on the local and national economy throughout the whole of the 2020 – 2021, a change in our approach to assessing the impacts of the South East Business Hub has been required.
- 8.2 Usually, we would undertake an extensive business consultation programme to gain information that would enable us to undertake an economic impact assessment. This would take into account the gross number of jobs reported to have been created by businesses supported by the Growth Hub, adjusted for displacement, leakage, substitution and multiplier effects.
- 8.3 However, there were three major challenges in this process:
- Firstly, during the pandemic businesses were focusing on survival rather than growth so this would greatly reduce the numbers of jobs that we would usually see being created as a result of South East Business Hub support activities.
 - In addition, businesses were largely unwilling to engage in a consultation programme as, understandably, they were focusing on survival and recovery rather than wanting to spend time talking with consultants.
 - Also, due to the emergency nature of the support activities being delivered by the sub-hubs throughout the year, less emphasis and accuracy as placed on recording business interactions.
- 8.4 We have therefore had to focus this section of the evaluation more on qualitative considerations.
- 8.5 In total, we had 38 business contacts from the three Growth Hubs, and discussed a range of topics with them. Whilst this level of response is not statistically valid from a quantitative perspective, the qualitative comments received provided a great insight into the work of the South East Business Hub and its benefits to business customers.
- 8.6 A standard format was used for these interviews and we asked them about the following:
- Motivations for engaging with the Growth Hub
 - Views on your experience of the Growth Hub service
 - The impact of the pandemic on the business
 - How likely they would be to recommend the Growth Hub service to a friend or colleague
 - Satisfaction levels

Motivations for engaging with the Growth Hub

8.7 Not surprisingly, the motivations for businesses to engage with the South East Business Hub centred around the pandemic and the need for an immediate response to it. The four most popular reasons for this engagement were:

- Grant advice – money was needed to keep the business afloat
- Someone to listen to their issues/problems – often a ‘counselling’ approach was required
- Business reviews, including looking at diversification – many businesses wanted to look at how they could still trade but in compliance with lockdown measures
- More general, basic business support advice – many businesses identified that their business administration activities were not fit for purpose

8.8 These were clearly desperate times for many businesses and we have highlighted some specific comments from business owners and managers that reflect this situation:

*To help me get my
mojo back*

*I needed support on
the steps for
survival and a
general business
review*

*What grants are
available to help
my business
survive*

*I just needed someone to
listen and inspire me at
what was a very
challenging time*

*I wanted a sounding board to
respond to the crisis, how to be
Covid secure and to plan for
future growth*

*Excellent to receive
an outside
perspective*

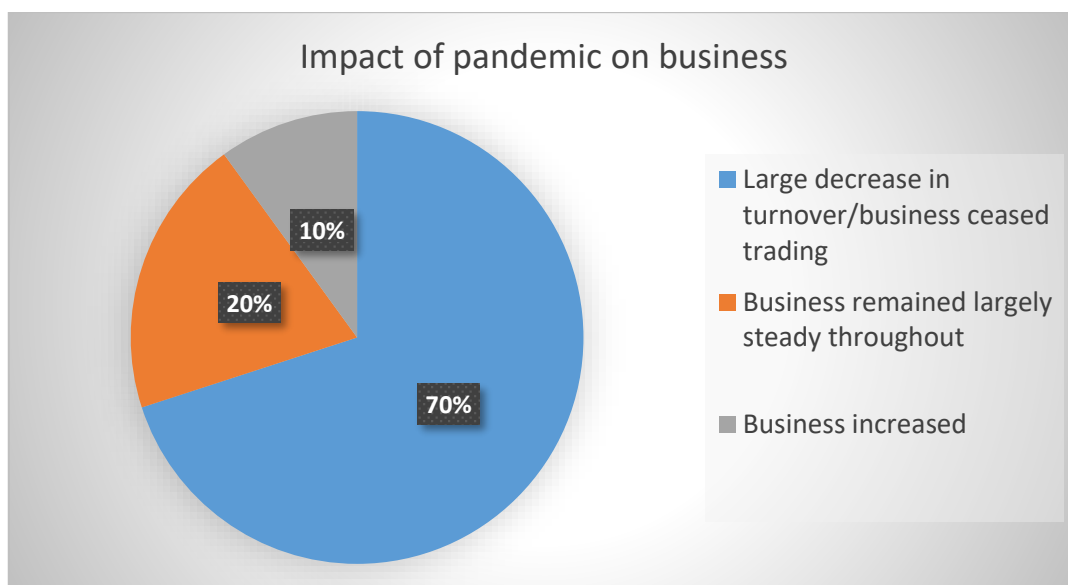
*Whilst there was a high level of
time investment from me, there
was an excellent return on
investment in terms of business
stability and improvement*

Experience of the Growth Hub

- 8.9 Virtually everyone we interviewed rated the support they received from the Growth Hub very highly. Comments included the following:
- *“There was a huge benefit to my business with clear direction provided”*
 - *“Help was provided throughout the pandemic with critical questions asked of me and my business. This provided a great platform for business stability and, ultimately, pivoting”*
 - *“The Growth helped my business and helped me at what was the most challenging time of my career. Thank you”*
- 8.10 Many individual staff members from each of the three sub-hubs were mentioned with specific and positive comments attributable to virtually all of them.

Impact of the pandemic

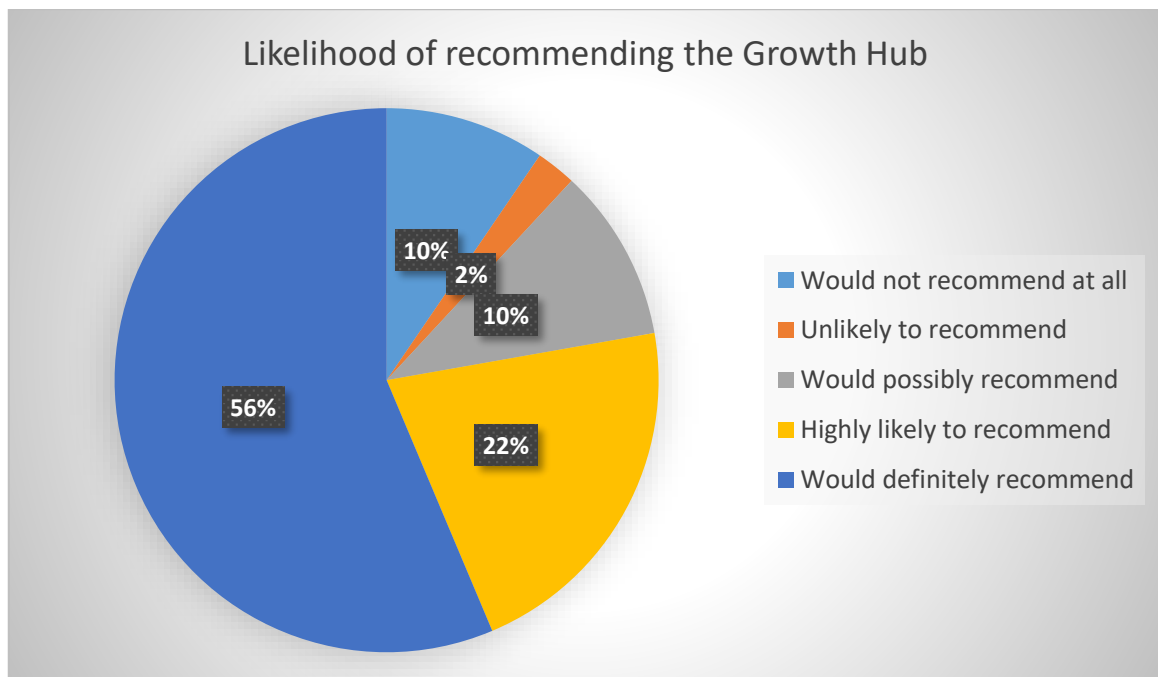
- 8.11 We asked business managers and owners what had happened to their business during the pandemic. Responses tended to fall into three main categories which we have summarised in the pie chart below.



Likelihood of recommending the Growth Hub

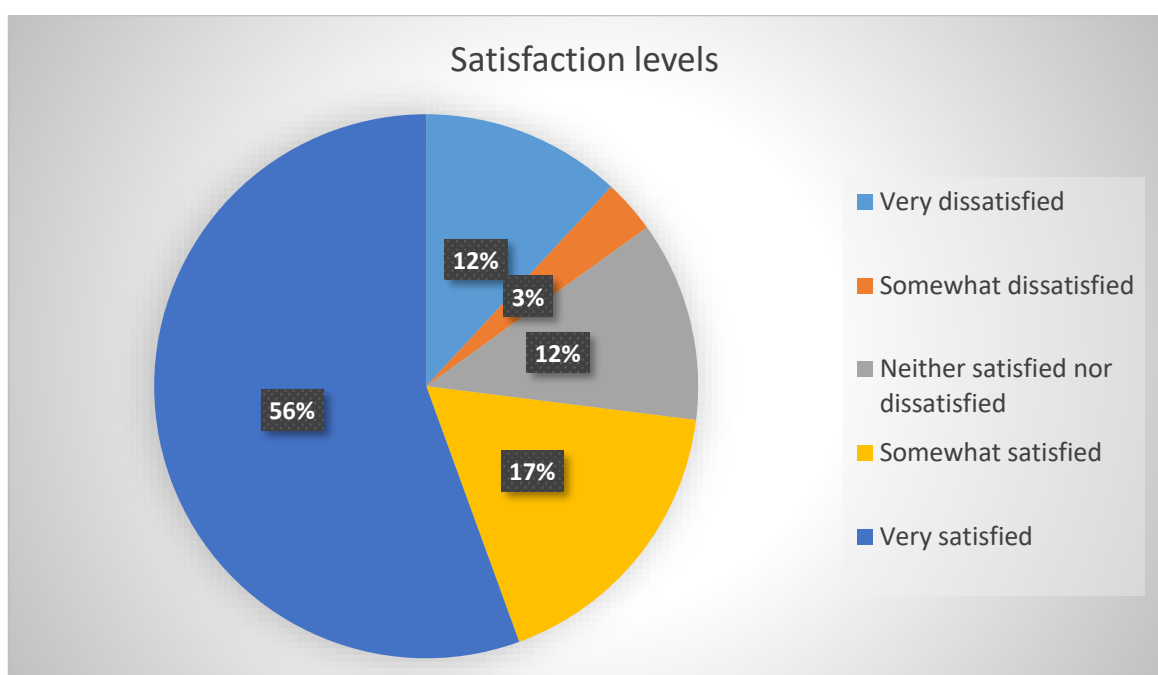
- 8.12 Every business we interviewed spoke very highly of the support they received from the South East Business Hub and the attitude and professionalism of the staff. Whilst there were some delays in getting a response from the sub-hubs on occasion, almost everyone understood the pressures on the service and accepted that support could not be provided instantaneously.
- 8.13 All the businesses we spoke to said they would recommend the SEBH to a friend or colleague and most of them already had done so during the pandemic.

- 8.14 The three sub-hubs carried out a survey of 126 business clients. This was done online (as opposed to the more detailed telephone survey we carried out). Almost 80% of businesses that completed the online survey said they would be *Highly likely* or *Would definitely* recommend the Growth Hub to a friend or colleague. This compared to 100% of the businesses that we spoke to who said they would recommend the Growth Hub (many had already done so).



Business satisfaction

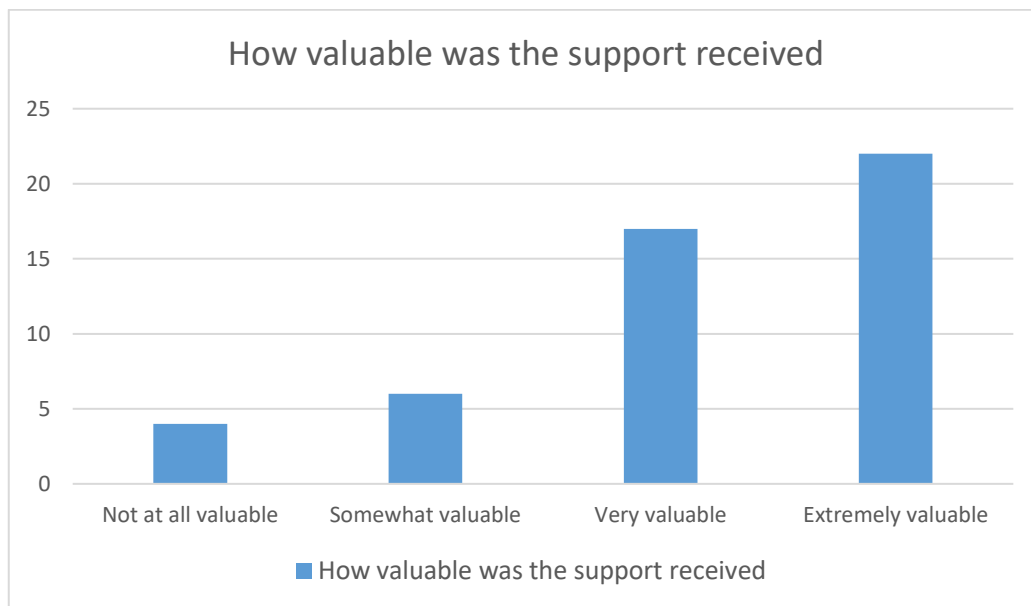
- 8.15 In the same online survey, businesses were asked about their level of satisfaction with the services received from the Growth Hub. Over 73% of respondents were at least *Somewhat satisfied*, with 55% *Very satisfied*. Just over 10% of clients were *very dissatisfied*.



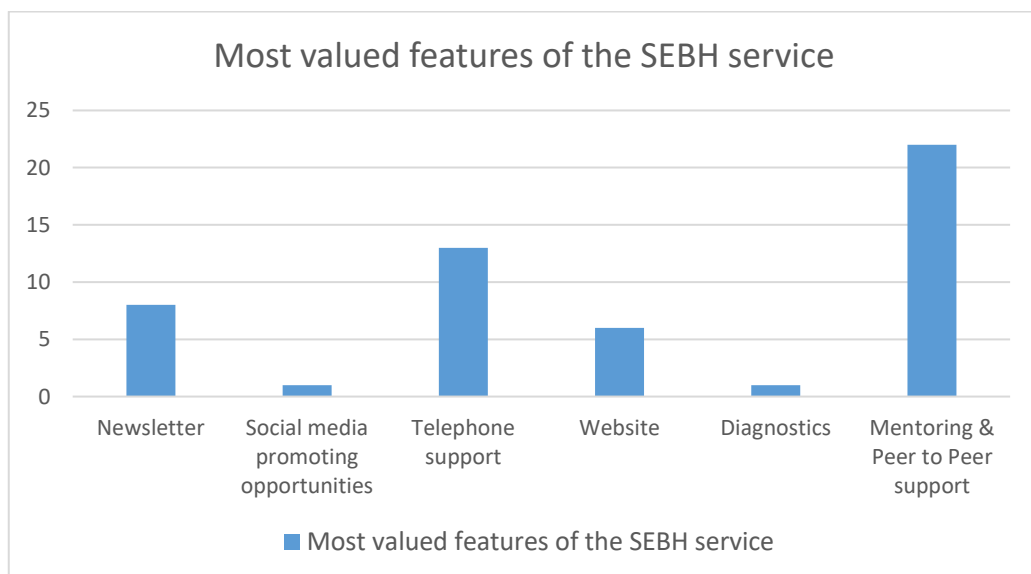
- 8.16 This compared to 100% of the businesses we interviewed who stated they were *Somewhat satisfied* or *Very satisfied*.
- 8.17 77% of the businesses that took part in the survey confirmed that the SEBH was the first place they contacted for support.

How valuable the support was to the business

- 8.18 Businesses that took part in the survey were also questioned about how valuable the support received was in helping them achieve their growth ambitions. The results presented in the chart below highlight that 80% said the support was either *Very valuable* or *Extremely valuable*.



- 8.19 The survey also asked businesses which features of the SEBH services were the most valuable to them. Respondents were given six options to choose from and the chart below highlights that it was the mentoring/peer network and telephone support that they most valued.



9. KPI achievement

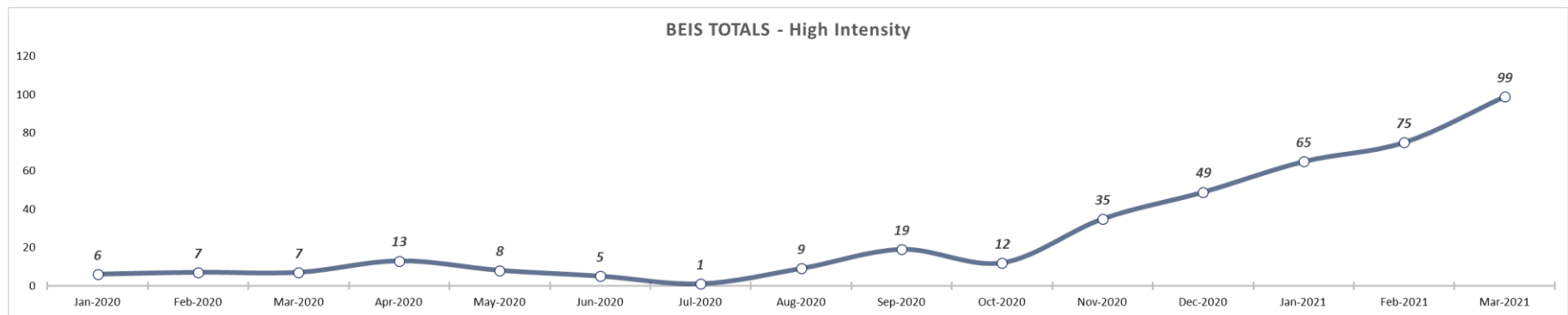
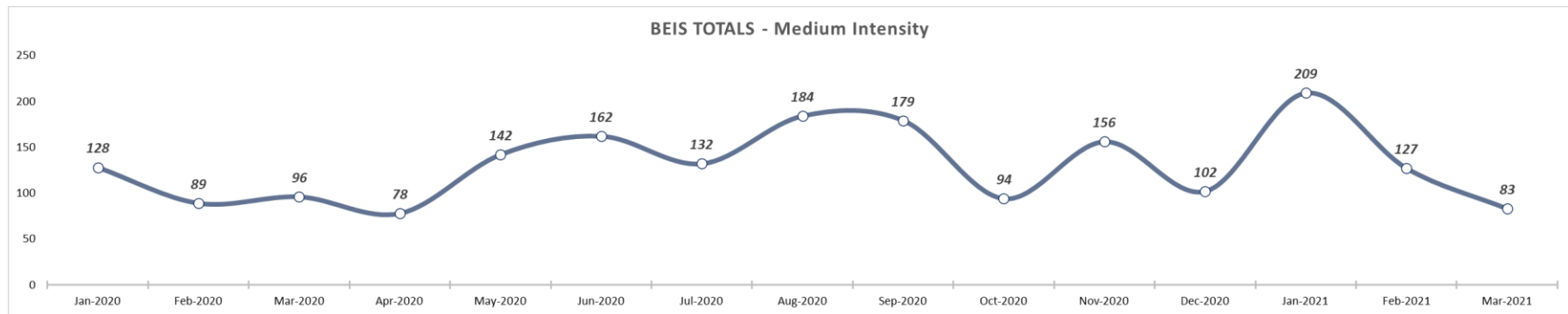
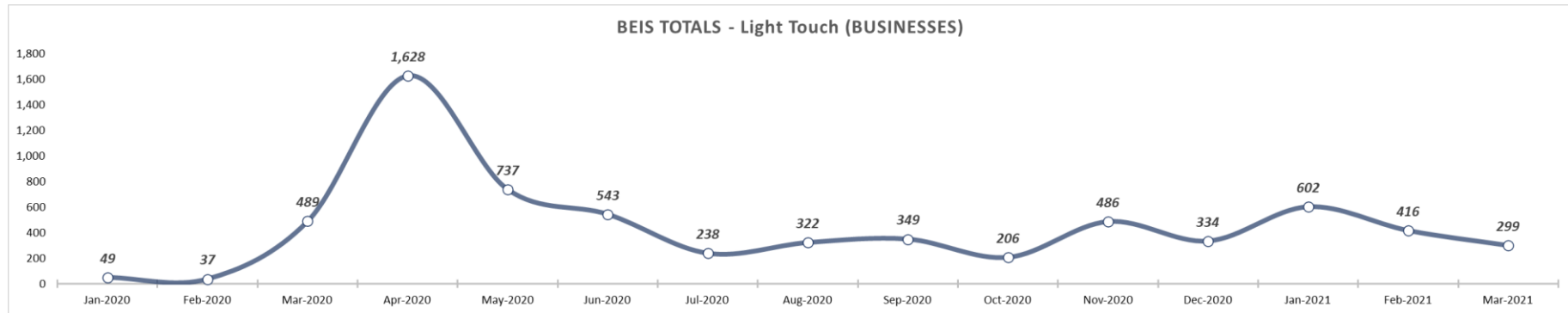
- 9.1 As highlighted above, KPIs were set and agreed with BEIS before the start of the year and the pandemic. Also, many interactions with businesses during the year were not recorded. The following figures are therefore just a record of performance against the key indicators for the year 2020/21 and do not reflect the actual success of services delivered by the South East Business Hub during this crisis period.

	Light touch	Medium intensity	High intensity	Unique businesses	Customer satisfaction ¹
BEST – target	500	550	135	1185	92%
BEST – actual	465	504	43	1020	76%
BES – target	500	150	8	658	92%
BES – actual	1875	114	27	2025	80%
KMGH – target	775	275	100	1150	92%
KMGH – actual	2476	378	90	2971	70%
South East Business Hub target	1775	975	243	2993	
South East Business Hub actual	4816	996	160	6016	

- 9.2 These figures, whilst perhaps not completely accurate, highlight the significance of light touch interactions over the course of the year as a direct result of the pandemic. Even the figures presented represents a massive overachievement with a slight knock-on and detrimental effect on the number of high intensity engagements undertaken – there simply was not enough time or capacity to devote significant number of support hours to individual businesses.
- 9.3 The number of unique businesses accessing the South East Business Hub has doubled, with businesses coming to the Growth Hub at a time of greatest need. This potentially lays the foundations for a future increased pipeline of Growth Hub clients.
- 9.4 The three graphs below plot the peaks and troughs of light touch, medium intensity and high intensity interactions by the South East Business Hub over the period from January 2020 – March 2021. This demonstrates the massive peak of light touch interventions during April 2020. In effect, interventions rose by a factor of more than forty-fold.

¹ Percentage of survey respondents reporting they were either 'somewhat satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the support services received

- 9.5 The third chart highlights the increase in high intensity support from October 2020 through to March 2021. This is largely due to the introduction of the Peer Network programme.



Data collection and management

- 9.6 Currently BEST and BES are using the SELEP approved CRM system, Evolutive, as their portal to collect information and store data. A data transfer protocol has been put in place for the Kent and Medway Growth Hub to ensure a smooth and accurate transfer of data into the SELEP CRM system. Appropriate Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs) are in place between the Accountable Body, on behalf of SELEP, and each Lead Authority responsible for the delivery of the Growth Hub project.
- 9.7 Following a considerable investment in developing the central and sub-hubs' portals the system is being currently tested by SELEP Data Intelligence & Insight Officer. The minimum data fields as set out in the Framework are mandatory and are always completed. The business navigators and advisers are aware of the importance of data collection when interacting with businesses.
- 9.8 Feedback on the CRM is not positive from the sub-hubs. It does not have good functionality and is not user friendly with lots of problems having been identified. The CRM is more a simple data recording system and is not adding any value to the local Growth Hub teams. To overcome the challenges associated with using the CRM, sub-hubs are either using spreadsheets as a recording system or are developing their own CRM locally that can connect to the SELEP CRM.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 The following recommendations arise from the work completed for this annual Growth Hub evaluation and reflect comments made by staff, partners and businesses who have used the service. These are provisional recommendations for discussion with the client. They are shown below by key group.

Operation of South East Business Hub

- 10.2 Staff across all three Growth Hubs are raising concerns over the Evolutive CRM. It is not user friendly and as a consequence, information is not typically uploaded in a consistent and detailed way (the sub-hubs reported that not all their business interactions were recorded).

Recommendation 1: A formal review should occur to identify best practice with uploading information and how best this can be shared with all. System improvements should also be considered.

- 10.3 Currently, marketing activity is undertaken by all three Growth Hubs at a local level.

Recommendation 2: Consideration should be given as to whether there is a benefit in this undertaken centrally with key skills and experience embedded within a central LEP marketing team for whom the Growth Hub is but one element of their role.

- 10.4 Many partners and businesses highlighted the need for more regular newsletters and that the South East Business Hub should maximise its use of social media as a communication tool.

Recommendation 3: Further discussion take place with the sub-hubs regarding communications.

- 10.5 It would help future assessments of the South East Business Hub if, when businesses first seek support, they are asked to 'sign-up' in some format to engage in evaluation surveys at the end of the year. This will make the business consultation phase of future evaluations much easier and more robust.

Recommendation 4: All businesses that receive support should be requested to agree to being involved in business consultation inputs to Growth Hub evaluations.

- 10.6 The Kent & Medway Growth Hub demonstrated an excellent Covid Helpline model (albeit at a considerable cost). Given that there may be future crisis associated with health, conflict, cyber-attack, etc., the potential to develop a SELEP-wide Helpline option when required should be considered.

Recommendation 5: A case study should be developed for the Kent Covid Helpline and contingency plans established should such a support mechanism need to be implemented in the future.

Partners

- 10.7 Virtual meetings, introduced as a response to the pandemic, have been excellent. These avoid unnecessary travel to London and the time required travel to attend meetings. Where

possible, virtual meetings should remain the norm even once social distancing measures have been relaxed.

Recommendation 6: Continue with virtual meetings but we do however recommend that some meetings are held physically, when pandemic conditions permit, as this personal contact can help relationship development and maintenance.

- 10.8 During the pandemic, the Growth Hubs found their niche in centrally gathering and controlling the flow of COVID economic and business-related information to partners across the region and the Government.

Recommendation 7: Partners should consider how best to continue this function and build on the strong relationships developed.

- 10.9 Several partners reported that the sub-hubs do not provide any feedback on businesses they refer to them.

Recommendation 8: A system should be put in place to ensure that feedback is provided to partners on business referrals.

Businesses

- 10.10 The Peer Networks programme has been excellent but there is no sustainability built into the programme. This is primarily a funding consideration for BEIS. We understand that the Peer Networks programmes throughout the country need to focus more on minority and under-represented groups.

Recommendation 9: The options for newly formed groups to continue beyond their end date should be investigated.

- 10.11 As many businesses change their operating model following their experiences during the pandemic, there may be more and continued demand for digital support service delivery. This clearly has significant implications for the sub-hubs in terms of issues such as costs, physical space development, geographical reach, environmental considerations and staffing.

Recommendation 10: The South East Business Hub and sub-hubs should consider the lessons learnt and opportunities for efficiency improvements as a result of their experiences of the pandemic.

- 10.12 With most events and workshop sessions moving on-line there needs to be considerable coordination amongst the three sub-hubs to ensure the market is not over-loaded. In this respect, the 'local' dimension of running courses and events is removed to a certain extent.

Recommendation 11: The potential for increasing SELEP wide programmes of on-line events and workshops should be investigated. Events and workshop sessions should be recorded to allow businesses to access them at their own convenience.

Annex 1: Stakeholders consulted

Sue Berdo	Kent County Council
Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer	SELEP
Ioni Sullivan	East Sussex County Council
Emma Lindsell	Southend Borough Council
Tudor Price	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
Linda Grave	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
Phil Galpin	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
Daniel Hodges	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
Nicola Mighall	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
Martin Small	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
Ian Smallwood	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
Mike Watson	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
Steve Piper	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
Kathleen Sinclair	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
Jon Birkett	BEST Growth Hub
Jacqui Simpson	BEST Growth Hub
Kate Thompson	BEST Growth Hub
Adele Hagan	BEST Growth Hub
Karen Hodgkins	BEST Growth Hub
Martin Searle	FSB
Susan Elliott	British Business Bank
Julian Gibbs	ARU Chelmsford
Paul Chapman	Essex County Council
Stuart Goudge	The Lighthouse
Floortje Hoette	Produced in Kent
David Shepherd	Business East Sussex
Pranesh Datta	Hastings Borough Council
Linda Howells	Uttleford Council
Sarah Goodwin	Manufacturing Growth Programme
Peter Sharp	Eastbourne and Lewes Councils
Emma McCulloch	Thurrock Council