



SOUTH EAST BUSINESS HUB

Minutes of the South East Business Hub Steering Group held on Wednesday 17 March 2021

Attendees:	Ellie Clow	South East LEP
	Paul Chapman	Essex County Council
	Ian Smallwood	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
	Ioni Sullivan	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
	Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer	South East LEP
	James Wilkinson	South East LEP
	Jo Simmons	South East LEP
	Jon Birkett	BEST Growth Hub
	Julian Gibbs	Anglian Ruskin University
	Kate Thompson	BEST Growth Hub
	Mark Jones	South East LEP
	Tudor Price	Kent & Medway Growth Hub
	Zoe Gordon	South East LEP

1. Welcome and apologies

The attendees were welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Amy Bernardo, Billy Masters, Emma McCulloch, Emma Lindsell, Lorna Norris, Rachel Evans, Ryan Jagpal and Suzanne Bennet.

Ioni Sullivan and Sue Berdo joined the meeting late.

2. Approval of the minutes and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 December 2021 were approved by the steering group members as a true record.

The action points arising from the meeting of 15 December 2020 were cleared and noted below:

- Zoe Gordon had attended the Kent and Medway Steering Group meeting on 10 February 2021 and would continue being invited to all forthcoming steering group meetings. A standing item on Communications had been added to the SEBH Steering Group meeting agenda.
- The contact details for those involved in the Growth Hub communications had been shared with Zoe Gordon and Ellie Clow.

3. Communications

Zoe Gordon noted that having a standing agenda item on Communications at the steering group meetings was a direct outcome of earlier conversations that took place at the Communications Strategy Workshop and the last steering group meeting and would aid the sharing of information between SELEP, and the areas represented at the meeting

and between the areas themselves. She then outlined the activities already undertaken by SELEP and those that were planned in the coming weeks/months:

Past events/activities

- Launch of the [Brand Ambassador](#) for SELEP
- Editorial pieces in [Business Time in Essex](#) and [South East Business](#) on statement of intent for SELEP which set out the focus for the year ahead
- Nation Apprenticeship Week and launch of the new skills website – social media campaign
- [Freeports](#) press release
- Kent and Medway Medical School press release as part of ongoing LGF/GBF project announcements
- Google Digital Garage events
- International Women’s Day – promoting of local businesswomen
- £20m SME Brexit support fund from Government

Future events/activities

- Launch of the new Recovery and Renewal Strategy
- Thinking Business Magazine – low carbon focus and Clean Growth South East project
- Garden Communities Conference
- Lower Thames Crossing impact study
- Continuing to promote local Growth Hub and Cluster led events
- Brexit podcasts – promotion
- Case studies – new section in the newsletter and on-line
- Sector Support Fund – support for social enterprises
- Potential joint meetings around Town Centres and High Street Funding
- Ongoing LGF/GBF project announcements

Areas to work together

- COVID-19 Funds
- Case studies – continue to develop these; please share good news stories
- Growth Hub events – please share these so that we can promote them
- Vuelio – expert comment opportunities; happy to share these with the Growth Hubs where relevant
- Updates to the website – ongoing

Upcoming influences

- [COVID-19 Roadmap out of lockdown](#) and what it means to businesses
- Reduction in social distancing requirements
- Businesses returning to their usual office space

Furthermore, Zoe Gordon asked how the upcoming changes especially around the COVID-19 Roadmap out of lockdown were going to influence the local Growth Hubs’ planning and what activities were going to take place to inform the planning i.e., surveys and/or seeking direct feedback from businesses.

In response to the question raised, Tudor Price informed the steering group that the Kent and Medway Growth Hub had been collaborating with Trading Standards on regular events for local SMEs. The events were in a format of Q&A and the next one was scheduled for 9 April 2021. The Kent and Medway Growth Hub was also tapping into national resources on COVID-19 for all local promotion and information sharing.

Tudor Price also mentioned that the Growth Hub was involved in forming the local Recovery Strategy and was running a series of events with the local authorities to coordinate the local and regional activity including the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) funding provided to local authorities by Central Government to support businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how this was going to link to the business support offer locally.

Jonny Birkett advised that BEST Growth Hub would be continuing to deliver its BEST Big Business Briefing (BBBB) on a regular basis as part of its commitment to keeping businesses well informed. He also confirmed that the theme for the next BBBB event was going to be high street revival.

Moreover, the steering group members were reminded of the forthcoming [ExSE 2021](#) – three-day festival taking place between 11 and 13 May 2021.

Kane Tudor representing the Business East Sussex Growth Hub informed the steering group that the team had not planned any specific events yet. Ian Smallwood, the Growth Hub Manager, added that although there were no planned events, the Growth Hub team had been working closely with Trading Standards on a possibility of forming some sort of calendar for businesses outlining various topics they should consider during the year. He noted that this idea was still in its early stages and needed further consideration.

Paul Chapman representing Essex County Council informed the steering group about the collaborative work of the Wider Essex Intermediary group and the support offered through the local EDOs. He noted the value in the cross referrals, information sharing and working together to achieve the same goal.

It was noted this network developed over the time and now plays a role of a critical friend in important discussions.

In summary, Zoe Gordon suggested putting together a news piece around Growth Hubs to celebrate their work and positive impact on the local business community. It was thought that the news piece could touch on some of the collaborative work taking place and form part of the annual report submission to BEIS.

Moreover, Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer noted that some of the more detailed conversation around local comms could take place on a regular basis by involving the comms representatives from each Growth Hub. The idea was that the Growth Hubs could share thoughts and information on a more informal basis and leave the strategic conversation for the quarterly steering group meetings.

It was agreed that a SEBH Comms Group should be established.

Action: *Zoe Gordon and Ellie Clow to organise the first SEBH Comms Group meeting.*

4. CRM development

A short update was provided by Mark Jones.

It was noted that the improvements to the CRM originally started as a mini project to ensure that the Growth Hubs were collecting at least the minimum required data and that any additional data gathered was not only of a value to BEIS but also to the Growth Hubs, SELEP and other stakeholders.

To date the working group had completed the redesign of the light touch and medium intensity forms. A considerable amount of time was spent on discussing what data should be collected – nice versus crucial. The new forms went live on 8 March 2021.

Mark Jones advised that the working group agreed and made use of mandatory fields and drop-down boxes to get the minimum information required and to make the whole process of collecting data more efficient whilst cutting down on human error and making the analysis of data simpler.

He also mentioned the addition of customer satisfaction and referral surveys. The customer satisfaction surveys would be used on a six monthly basis mainly with medium and high intensity level businesses to inform the bi-annual and annual report to BEIS; and the referral survey would help with establishing whether referrals to business support providers and/or specific programmes were taken up by the businesses and if so, how satisfactory the process was.

From an efficiency perspective the CRM had two new functions added - the Companies House look-up and postcode look-up. It was noted that the new functionality should allow for consistency across the Growth Hubs and further eliminate any human error.

In summary, Mark Jones advised that once the diagnostic stage was also completed, there should be over 100 business information dimensions and over 500 data points that could in theory be used when reporting and/or responding to queries on data.

Furthermore, the steering group members were advised that even though the changes were welcomed there was a real struggle to achieve them in a timely manner despite many conversations and agreed timescales with the CRM provider.

In response to a question raised around the delay in implementing the diagnostic 'tool', Mark Jones advised that it was a universal decision taken by all three Growth Hubs to split the project into clear stages to avoid confusion, delays, and any unnecessary challenges.

It was confirmed that the 'kick-off' meeting with Alcium around diagnostic would take place on 23 March 2021.

In summary, it was agreed that the proposed developments to the CRM should tie up with the Business Support Reform, any steer coming from BEIS and our own strategic direction.

5. Funding update

The steering group members were provided with an update on the following funding streams.

- a) **Core Growth Hub Funding** – Q4 grant claim had been received from BEIS and payments to the Lead Authorities would be processed shortly
- b) **Supplemental Growth Hub Funding** – similarly to Core Growth Hub Funding, Q4 grant claim had been received from BEIS and payments to the Lead Authorities would be processed shortly

Regarding Growth Hub funding for 2021-22 financial year, the steering group members were advised that a letter of comfort had been received from BEIS outlining the allocation. It was confirmed that SELEP would receive the original core funding of £656,000 and an additional uplift of £234,000 under one Grant Offer letter.

- c) **Peer Networks Programme** – the first claim for funds had been submitted and it should be paid by BEIS within 10 working days of the date of submission. It was noted that the second claim was due at the end of March 2021.

The steering group members were advised that SELEP had entered into the Peer Networks 2.0 Grant Agreement. The next step would be to draw up individual 'back-to-back' Grant Agreements. Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer confirmed that the work had already been initiated with the ECC Legal Services.

- d) **EU Transition Business Readiness Growth Hub Funding** – Period 1 grant claim had been received and Period 2 was submitted to BEIS for payment. It was noted that the Grant Agreement for EU Transition Business Readiness had been shared with the Lead Authorities for signature.
- e) **COVID-19 Business Support Fund** – the tender process had now closed; the outcome would be communicated to the successful winners in the coming days and the names of the providers of the three programmes would be communicated to all stakeholders.

6. Growth Hub Delivery Model Engagement and Appraisal Exercise

Jo Simmons outlined the background and reasons for the project. It was noted that this project would be looking at the Growth Hub delivery model. The objective of the project was to assess what worked well, what didn't, what could be done better, how best good practice could be shared, how communication could be improved, how the funding could be managed better including administration and management of any new funding streams.

It was noted that this project was a relatively quick exercise, approximately 8 weeks. The provider had been procured and the Growth Hubs and the steering group members including additional stakeholders should have received information from both Jo Simmons and [Commercially Public Ltd](#) about the forthcoming engagement exercises.

7. Growth Hub Website Optimisation

The steering group members were informed that this project was currently slightly delayed. Jo Simmons set out the reasons and objectives for the projects and would provide an update as and when the provider had been appointed.

8. Annual Evaluation of the Growth Hub

The steering group members were advised that the procurement for the external Annual Evaluation of the Growth Hub was underway. The initial deadline for submission of bids did not yield any interest therefore an additional expression of interest exercise would be undertaken to find a potential supplier.

The steering group members were asked to forward through names of potential suppliers that could be approached directly.

Action: *To forward through names of potential suppliers for the external annual evaluation.*

Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer advised that the Growth Hubs would be kept informed on appointment of a provider and next steps for the annual evaluation.

9. Cluster update

Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer informed the steering group that the first year of the South East Growth Hub Cluster **proper** collaborative working was coming to an end. It was noted that despite earlier promises made by BEIS the terms of reference for the Cluster did not materialise however an additional section was added to the Cluster Lead Schedule 3.

In summary, the steering group was advised that to date the South East Growth Hub Cluster delivered a number of Knowledge & Information sessions which were opened to all navigators and advisers across all 5 Growth Hubs, had planned and delivered a business support event with Google and a telemarketing campaign with Blueberry Marketing that directly supported the outreach work Growth Hubs were undertaking around EU Transition and created referrals to specialist and more generic support offered by the Growth Hubs.

Additionally, the steering group members were informed of two forthcoming events organised in collaboration with ICAEW and Hatch Enterprise and a series of three Brexit related podcasts. Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer advised that the topics for the podcasts were VAT, workforce, and supply chain.

Thanks were expressed to Kent & Medway Growth Hub and BEST Growth Hub for help with sourcing businesses and specialist advisers to aid the production of the podcasts.

10. Skills update

Jim Wilkinson shared an update on Skills and the Digital Skills Partnership (DSP).

- Skills Report – Department for Education (DfE) new requirement; would be considered by the Strategic Board on 19 March 2021

- New ESF call out for tender in SELEP area – pathways for employment
- Commissioning a report on skills which would be added to the Skills website
- New section on Major Projects would be added to the [South East Skills website](#)
- Virtual Career Fair – to take place on 15 July 2021
- Next meeting of the DSP would take place on 30 March 2021
- Google Digital Garage events – good uptake
- Evaluation of the DSP had been scheduled as further funding had been approved
- DSP prospectus (first reiteration) on the [South East Skills website](#)

A conversation ensued around working more closely together across the Skills, Digital Skills Partnership and Growth Hubs to ensure information flow and avoid duplication. It was decided that this conversation should continue outside of the steering group meeting, with any proposals/solutions to be reported as appropriate.

Action: *To report on any proposals/solutions for working together across skills and business support.*

11. Any Other Business

There was no AOB to discuss.

The steering group meeting closed at 12:30pm.

Action points arising from the steering group meeting – summary

Minute	Action	Completed by
Minute 3	To organise the first SEBH Comms Group meeting.	Zoe Gordon/Ellie Clow
Minute 8	To forward through names of potential suppliers for the external annual evaluation.	All
Minute 10	To report on any proposals/solutions for working together across skills and business support.	Jim Wilkinson/Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer