

SOUTH EAST BUSINESS HUB

Minutes of the South East Business Hub Steering Group held on Monday 7 March 2022

Attendees:	Amy Bernardo	Essex County Council/Accountable Body
	Ben Raby	DIT
	Debbie Dacombe	DIT
	Gareth Tancock	DIT
	Gary Street	DIT
	Ian Smallwood	Business East Sussex Growth Hub
	Ioni Sullivan	East Sussex County Council
	Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer	South East LEP
	Jacqui Stimson	BEST Growth Hub
	Jo Simmons	South East LEP
	Julian Gibbs	Anglian Ruskin University (U9)
	Kane Tudor	East Sussex County Council
	Kerrie Reynolds	DIT
	Mehvish Shah	DIT
	Nick Brown	Southend City Council
	Sean Atkinson-Henry	Medway Council
	Susan Berdo	Kent County Council
	Thinley Topden	DIT
	Terry Regan	Thurrock Council

1. Welcome and apologies

The attendees were welcomed to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Adam Brian, Chris Seamark, Ellie Clow, Emma Lindsell, James Wilkinson, Kazadi Mwamba, Lorna Norris, Louise Aitken, Rachel Evans, Saliha Cinar, Tudor Price and Zoe Gordon.

2. Internationalisation Fund – South East

The discussion was opened with an overview from Gareth Tancock on the progress of DITs ERDF Internationalisation Fund project, and the number of applications submitted and offers made to date to businesses in the SELEP area against the SELEP areas notional ERDF allocation. He identified several challenges facing the Fund in the coming month. These were:

- In-housing of ITAs (International Trade Advisers)
- Summer break – slower months ahead
- Recent dipped performance leaving funds still to be allocated in some LEP areas

It was confirmed that the Dashboard for the Internationalisation Fund was shared with the SELEP Business Development Manager by the project group on quarterly basis and then subsequently forwarded to the Growth Hub leads and other interested parties to make links with other projects in the areas such as the SEED project.

The DIT colleagues recognised that a lot of work had already been undertaken by themselves and various teams in the wider SELEP area but recognised that there was still a lot of work to be done. It was noted that the team in the South East had been running regular events to promote the Internationalisation Fund and made available a toolkit to help generate the pipeline of interested business. The question that was posed to the steering group was around what else could be done in order to generate a further interest and to accelerate the take up of the Fund and/or what steps could be taken in relation to the underspend.

Discussion ensued around what other activities could potentially be undertaken in order to give the programme one last push. The members were informed that the last SELEP event was scheduled for 29 June 2022 which was going to be promoted via usual routes such as social media channels and a short telemarketing campaign.

Colleagues in the East of England noted that despite several telemarketing campaigns they were seeing a considerable drop in those interested to benefit from the Internationalisation Fund. They also implied that the programme was running out of time especially when international travel was concerned.

DIT suggested that any future campaigns should not be restricted to any geographical area i.e. just SELEP and all businesses should be considered on first come first served basis to ensure that the funds were drawn upon, irrespective of notional ERDF LEP allocations.

Following a further discussion it was thought that the event on 29 June 2022 should be heavily promoted by all colleagues on the steering group, money still available in the SELEP region should be managed carefully and/or potentially reallocated to other geographies.

An idea was put forward to the steering group members around reallocating of the remaining funds to other LEP areas and how they felt about it.

The overall feedback from the steering group members was positive with no objections being raised for the remaining funding to be allocated outside of the SELEP area. The project was asked to confirm, with DLUHC, the process for deploying ERDF outside of the LEP area that it was notionally allocated to.

In her summary, Jo Simmons reiterated that the Steering Group was in support to extend any campaign planning across other geographies subject to discussion and agreement from DLUHC.

Action: *Growth Hubs to promote the Internationalisation Fund event on 29 June 2022.
DiT to start a conversation around the reallocation of funds to other LEP areas,
as appropriate.*

DIT colleagues left the meeting at this point.

3. Approval of the minutes and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 March 2022 were approved by the steering group members as a true record.

The action points arising from the meeting of 7 March 2022 were cleared and noted below:

- The steering group members were informed on the proposed funding allocations for both the LEP and its Growth Hub
- A copy of the mapping exercise undertaken by the Kent & Medway Growth Hub was shared with the steering group
- A written update on both the COVID-19 Business Support Fund and the website optimisation project was shared with the steering group members

4. Funding update

The following update was provided on Growth Hub funding for 2021-22FY.

- a) Closure of FY2021-22 Core Growth Hub Funding – completed, all assurance letters had been submitted to BEIS. Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer expressed her thanks to Growth Hub colleagues for submitting of their last claims and ensuring the audit process went smoothly.
- b) Closure of Peer Networks programme – all claims had now been submitted with the last one being currently processed by BEIS.
- c) Growth Hub Annual Report 2021-22 – the annual report had been completed and submitted to BEIS by the agreed deadline. Iwona Bainbridge-Dyer thanked everyone for their contributions.

5. LEP and Growth Hub Funding Update 2022-23

Jo Simmons reported that after a challenging year, SELEP and the Growth Hubs had been presented with yet another challenge of the Growth Hub funding being cut by 50% meaning that the funding envelope for 2022-23 had gone down from £890,000 to £445,000.

This would mean that the Growth Hub service would have to be delivered differently in order to comply with the conditions of the funding.

Jo Simmons outlined the timeline SELEP and its Growth Hubs had been working towards to complete the Schedule 1 and Schedule 3 that would eventually form part of the Grant Offer Letter.

It was noted that an alternative proposal had been developed to allocate the funding for this year. The principles of the alternative model were modifications to the existing model that would deliver less of navigation and advice than in previous years, looking at improving the digital offer through optimising of the websites, streamlining of the resources i.e. providing a single resource for marketing and communication.

The steering group members were reassured that the benefits of the proposed model would strengthen the digital offer and enable the Growth Hub service to either scale down or expand should further funding become available in the future, be more responsive to national funding decisions when necessary.

Furthermore, Jo Simmons advised that these proposals would be going to the Strategic Board on 24 June 2022 for information.

Post-meeting note: these proposals will be going to the Strategic Board on 24 June 2022 for agreement.

6. SELEP COVID-19 Business Support Fund

Jo Simmons advised that the Business Support Fund had been running successfully for a year now with all three programmes delivering as planned. Starting and Succeeding in Business and Adapting with Digital would be completing their activities at the end of June 2022 and the Supporting the Visitor Economy programme would be running place reboot campaigns through Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of 2022/23 to reinvigorate the visitor economy by increasing consumer confidence, footfall and spend.

An update on the COVID-19 Business Support Fund would be presented to the Strategic Board on 24 June 2022.

It was also noted that the impact evaluation of the programmes would be undertaken shortly after the programmes closure and be delivered no later than June 2023.

7. Cluster and BEIS Working Groups Update

The steering group members were advised that no BEIS Working Groups meetings had taken place since December 2021. This was mainly due to the uncertainties around funding.

8. Skills update

It was noted that neither Louise Aitken nor Jim Wilkson was available to join the meeting to provide an update.

The steering group members were reminded of the forthcoming Major Projects webinar on 8 June 2022.

9. Future Meetings

The suggested future dates for steering group meetings were shared with the participants. It was noted that the diary invitations would be sent out in the coming days.

- 5 September 2022 – 10am
- 5 December 2022 – 10 am
- 6 March 2023 – 10am

10. Any Other Business

There was no AOB to discuss.

The steering group meeting closed at 11:15am.

Action points arising from the steering group meeting – summary

Minute	Action	Completed by
Minute 2	To promote the Internationalisation Fund event on 29 June 2022.	All
Minute 2	To start a conversation around the reallocation of funds to other LEP areas, as appropriate.	DIT