

Open Report on behalf of Executive Director for Environment and Economy

Report to:	Economic Scrutiny Committee
Date:	8 September 2015
Subject:	Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub - Progress and Next Steps

Summary:

This report provides information on the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub, activity to date and future plans.

Actions Required:

It is recommended that members:

- i) Comment on the role of the Growth Hub and how Lincolnshire County Council can ensure all businesses are aware of the support available.
- ii) Note the current progress.

1. Background

The Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) sets out Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) and the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (GL LEP) ambitious plans to create 13,000 new jobs, support 22,000 businesses and increase the value of the economy by £3.2bn.

Across the LEP area there are over 41,000 VAT/PAYE registered businesses; with a higher proportion of micro business and small and medium sized enterprises than in other regions. In order to ensure that businesses are able to grow we need to create an environment and culture of enterprise & innovation, with access to quality information, advice and support.

LCC has recognised the need for business support activity to be effectively co-ordinated, communicated and promoted. In January 2012 a mapping exercise was conducted creating an online web portal (www.businesslincolnshire.com - currently 40,154 unique users).

During 2014 the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) required LCC and the LEP to work with business support partners, local authorities and intermediaries to collaborate in the delivery of all business support services in

order to help increase the culture of enterprise and innovation amongst the business community.

LCC bid and secured £300,000 of revenue funding from BIS to further develop the web portal and provide an enhanced Growth Hub service for 2015-2016. This funding has enabled LCC to create the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub which will operate a one stop growth shop and support businesses from all sectors and growth stages. It provides a single access point to a targeted package of information, diagnostic, advisory, coaching, mentoring and development programmes.

The hub will also ensure that a 'single conversation' is facilitated with local businesses, raising awareness and uptake of both public and private sector support by improving co-ordination, marketing and signposting. There is also a requirement to map and simplify the local business support offer. As a result, all business support programmes that are currently running, and any future programmes, will be assessed in terms of strategic fit, coverage, impact, outputs, outcomes and customer satisfaction.

Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub Customer Service Focus

The Growth Hub seeks to adhere to the following principles;

- Simplify access to the RIGHT business support
- Raise awareness - challenge 'disengagement' because of past experience and engage new organisations
- Knowledge of business need, listening and tailoring support, importance of local knowledge and experience of business advisers
- Effective and efficient customer journey – effective account management/CRM
- Hide the wiring – provide businesses with the right growth solutions regardless of how that support is funded

Growth Hub business support includes the following:

- Online information webportal - www.businesslincolnshire.com
- Free of Charge (FoC) Business Growth Advisers and Skills Advisers
- Access to the National Business Support Helpline via phone and online webchat
- Facilitate access to the national programmes including the Business Growth Service

The 3 Business Growth Advisers are able to provide businesses with a;

- FoC Impartial Service
- Business Review and Action Plan
- Organisational needs analysis /training needs analysis
- Business Plan review/development
- Briefings, workshops, events and masterclasses

www.businesslincolnshire.com

With regard to the Growth Hub's webportal www.BusinessLincolnshire.com, the Advice and Grant Scheme Finder has the most page views with information about Events, Starting-up and Finance close behind. The average session duration is 3 ¾ minutes with 4 pages per session viewed. Referrals and direct traffic make up 50% of our users.

Future Activity

An internal detailed business support mapping process is underway and has already identified 95 business support schemes within the area. At least 50% of these are due to close during 2015 and whilst this may initially lead to gaps in delivery it will aid business support simplification process and will assist the Hub to commission business support to meet future growth needs strategically. In order to fulfil the BIS contract and ensure that there is a simpler coherent business support landscape a commissioning exercise will be undertaken to provide a detailed map of the business support offers and their outputs, outcomes, impact and client satisfaction.

Next Steps

- The 2015/16 Growth Hub marketing plan will continue to be executed.
- The Hub business support simplification mapping will be commissioned and continue to focus on what already works well as well as what could be improved or discontinued.
- Future GL LEP plans are to establish priority growth sector support for the Manufacturing, Renewables, Agri-Food, Tourism and Care sectors through accessing the new European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). Further support will also include Business Start Up and Access to Finance provision. The launch of the ESIF programme this year provides an opportunity for stakeholders to explore new and different approaches to collaborative working around the development of enterprise support.
- Existing support via the national programmes will be enhanced locally via the ESIF programme 2014-2020 to ensure that provision is tailored to support Lincolnshire's growth potential, which will include dedicated sector advisers, growth readiness programmes, supply chain cluster development, export taster programmes, sector development programmes, investor development and aftercare support etc.
- LCC has applied for £2,641,000 of ESIF funding to continue the growth, expand and meet market failure for 2016-2019. Access to growth finance will be supported through the continuation of the Lincolnshire Investment Network and the development work will continue to design a financial instrument; fund of funds and investment readiness support for businesses seeking growth capital via ESIF funding.
- In most cases the majority of business support will be delivered by the private sector or through existing nationally funded programmes. Where market failure prevails, enhancements will be commissioned via the ESIF Opt in/Open Call process and all provision will be aligned, promoted and accessed via the Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub.

Management Information

Appendix A provides management information to show how many businesses have been supported through the Growth Hub to date, the types of businesses that are using the service and which district they are located in.

Current Business Support Issues

The Business Growth Advisers are reporting that the current business issues include;

- Growing your business
- Access to grants
- Looking for new premises
- Utilising digital technology
- Becoming more resource efficient
- Using innovation to improve products, processes and services
- Improving skills of the workforce
- Exporting or accessing new markets
- Improving local supply chains
- Winning new business/contracts

2. Conclusion

The Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub is gaining momentum and business feedback to date is very encouraging, they are keen to access the 1 to 1 support. They also welcome the fact that business support services are aligned and acknowledge that it is far easier for a business to understand what is on offer when there is an impartial central coordination body bring together all the public and private sector support offers.

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Business Lincolnshire Growth Hub Adviser Update

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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