

## Minutes of Marches Business Support (MBS) Steering Group 24 November 2022

<b>Present</b>		
Dave Courteen	DC	MBS Steering Group Chair & Managing Director - Mosaic Group, Marches LEP Board Member and Small Business Champion
Rachel Laver	RL	Marches LEP CEO
Amy Bould	AB	Marches LEP PR and Marketing - Director Be Bold Media Ltd
John Wigley	JW	Department for International Trade – Strategic Partnership Manager
Robert Elliott	DH	Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce (standing in for Sharon Smith, Chief Executive Officer)
Matt Potts	MP	Head of Business Growth and Inward Investment, Shropshire Council
Alex Collins	OH	Marches Area Lead – Cities and Local Growth Unit, BEIS
Mike Goodall	MG	Federation of Small Businesses
Ruth Ross	RR	Deputy CEO, Shropshire Chamber
Colin Preece	CP	Executive Officer - Marches Skills Provider Network, Business Consultant - SBC Training
Nadine Kinsey	NK	Economic Development Manager, Herefordshire Council
Paul Kalinauckas	PK	Marches LEP Board – Access to Finance Champion, Midlands Engine Investment Fund Strategic Oversight Board Member
Frank Myers	FM	Chair of Herefordshire Business Board, Director - MCP Systems Consultants Ltd
Hugo Russell	HR	University of Wolverhampton (standing in for Richard Nicklin)
Stephanie Jones	SJ	Marches Growth Hub Project Support Officer
<b>Apologies:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elwyn Turner – Director, Dyke Yaxley</li> <li>• Graham Guest – Telford Business Board, Principal Telford College</li> <li>• Kathy Mulholland – Telford &amp; Wrekin Council</li> <li>• Kathryn Jones – Marches LEP</li> <li>• Sharon Smith - Herefordshire &amp; Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce (Robert Elliott standing in)</li> <li>• Richard Nicklin - University of Wolverhampton (Hugo Russell standing in)</li> </ul>		

ITEM		ACTION
1.	<p><b>Welcome and Introductions</b></p> <p>DC welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave an update on changes to membership of the Group.</p> <p>The post of Growth Hub Programme Manager had been made redundant and Yasmin Sulaman had left the LEP. DC put on record his thanks to Yasmin for her hard work and contribution to the Group and work of the Growth Hub over previous years.</p> <p>DC welcomed new members of the Group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alex Collins replacing Ollie Hindle as Marches Area Lead, GLGU, BEIS</li> <li>• Ruth Ross replacing Maisy Owen to represent Shropshire Chamber</li> <li>• Nadine Kinsey replacing Nick Webster to represent Herefordshire Council</li> <li>• Mike Goodall replacing Hollie Whittles to represent the FSB</li> </ul> <p>DC thanked previous members for their contributions to the Group.</p> <p>Apologies were given.</p> <p>Members agreed for the meeting to be recorded to support minute taking.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Declarations of Member Interest</b></p> <p>None received. DC asked for hands to be raised should any conflicts arise during the meeting.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Minutes of the last meeting held on 28/4/22</b></p> <p>The draft minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
4.	<p><b>Review of MBS Steering Group</b></p> <p>DC introduced the item saying he would like to review the role of the Group and invited feedback on where the group could focus its work to be more effective and have an impact.</p> <p>Various comments and ideas were discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a discussion about whether membership of the group is right or if it should be opened to other private sector representatives to strengthen the voice of business in line with Government's remit for LEPs. There is a two-way process, to feed information up to Government and to cascade information down to businesses. It was noted that the Shropshire Business Board has merged with the Shropshire Economic Taskforce reducing private sector representation from Shropshire on the Steering Group. It was suggested intermediaries / trade bodies / sector representatives could be useful to engage with the group as members or be invited to present to the group. It was agreed that private sector representatives would be invited to future meetings.</li> <li>• It was noted that some funds (e.g. MEIF, Internationalisation Fund) are undersubscribed in the Marches and more needs to be done to maximise uptake.</li> <li>• In terms of the LEP acting as 'the voice of business' to Government, questions were asked about how this happens and what value it has when there are plenty of channels (e.g. FSB, Chambers, Midlands Engine) already feeding regular intelligence to BEIS. RL explained that the LEP Network and LEP Chairs meet with Ministers to feed in and the LEP submits a monthly intelligence report to BEIS with feedback from the Growth Hubs and to amplify messages from other organisations. RL noted that the LEP does not want to duplicate activity of other organisations but to support and add value.</li> <li>• Ideas were discussed as to how the Group could focus work to make feedback to Government more meaningful and targeted, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The use of case studies and testimonials – it was agreed that case studies are a powerful tool for demonstrating impact and for driving business engagement. There could be a focus on gathering case studies on underperforming funds.</li> <li>○ Analysis of what's working well, what's not going so well (such as take up of MEIF) for example why rural areas don't have as much take up as cities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lessons on why micro and small businesses fail to access funding to inform the design of future schemes. It was noted that schemes need to be as simple as possible – small barriers make a big difference.</li> <li>○ Explore opportunities for demonstrator projects in the Marches – for example around food or energy technologies – so that the Marches becomes an ‘ideas’ platform for Government.</li> <li>○ Implementing ideas would take commitment from partners on the group.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It was discussed that the case for funding needs to be made to Government to ensure the Marches does not lose out against the WMCA or other areas. There were mixed views on whether the Marches should align with the West Midlands to provide a consistent message or focus on articulating its local growth needs to lobby for funding.</li> <li>● There was a discussion about flows of information and how the LEP/partners could share information for members of the group to promote through their own networks.</li> <li>● The importance of building a relationship with the Growth Hubs was noted to increase referrals for businesses to be helped to navigate the complex funding landscape.</li> </ul> <p>Any further ideas or suggestions should be emailed to RL after the meeting.</p> <p><b>Actions</b></p> <p><b>DC, RL, FM, PK to discuss feedback and carry forward actions for the next meeting</b></p>	DC/RL/ FM/PK
5.	<p><b>LEP Update</b></p> <p>RL provided the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The team has been restructured in line with the 50% reduction in funding enabling more funding to be allocated to local authority partners for direct support.</li> <li>● An Access to Finance Event for intermediaries has been arranged in Telford on 1 December with a view to holding a similar event in Herefordshire. £2.5k has been contributed to a clean growth event in Shropshire. RL would welcome ideas for events that the LEP could support that wouldn’t happen otherwise.</li> <li>● The LEP Board has agreed £1.5m funding for the Marches Energy Grant scheme, managed by Worcestershire Council, delivered by the 3 local authorities, match funded by UKSPF subject to confirmation, to provide energy audits and grants for businesses in the Marches. There is already a healthy pipeline of businesses, with a further £500k funding in reserve. Net Zero information on the website has been improved.</li> <li>● The Strategic Economic Plan is being developed and should be live on the website soon.</li> <li>● Mandy Thorn has stepped down as LEP Chair. Sonia Roberts will take on the role subject to approval by the Board on 29 November.</li> <li>● Nationally, six devolution deals are going through Government with a further three in pipeline. AC noted that there have been high level early-stage discussions about how the three Marches local authorities could align. RL noted the Marches local authority leaders are meeting next on 19 December.</li> </ul>	
6.	<p><b>Cities and Local Growth Unit Update</b></p> <p>AC provided the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Autumn Statement – a focus on stability and Levelling Up White Paper Missions.</li> <li>● Future of LEPs - a decision is still awaited on the future of LEPs</li> <li>● UKSPF investment plans - the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) is finalising the validation of UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment plans and will be notifying lead local authorities of the outcome in due course. The Government remains committed to levelling up all parts of the UK and empowering local leaders to drive growth, including through the UKSPF or by extending devolution deals to all areas of England that want them by 2030. The Government will deliver on manifesto commitments to match EU funding across all four nations through the UKSPF.</li> <li>● Investment Zones - the Investment Zones programme will be refocused to leverage the UK’s research strengths and build high potential clusters for our growth industries. More information on this soon.</li> <li>● Levelling Up Fund - the Chancellor has confirmed that the second round of the LUF will allocate at least £1.7 billion. Results of Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund will be</li> </ul>	

	<p>announced before the end of 2022. The Government will announce more detail on future plans in due course, after the second round is complete.</p> <p>AC will take comments from the Chair back to BEIS on the critical and urgent need for businesses to have clarity on support with energy costs beyond March 2023.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Marches Growth Hub Update</b></p> <p>In addition to the reports circulated with the agenda, RL provided the following update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend is on track to the end of Q2. Herefordshire is ahead of their spend profile from funding 1-2-1 provision in Q1/Q2. Activity in Q3/Q4 will be funded internally.</li> <li>• Further cost savings are being explored with savings already identified on Power BI. Any further savings will be put into direct business support.</li> <li>• Enquiries peaked in August in response to the energy campaign.</li> <li>• The Bi-Annual report has been submitted to BEIS. Feedback is awaited.</li> </ul> <p><b>Herefordshire update (NK)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth Hub funding supported 1-2-1 provision in Q1/Q2, additional internal funding has been secured to extend the provision to the end of March 2023.</li> <li>• Some UKSPF has been provisionally allocated to business support, subject to approval by Government and governance processes.</li> <li>• Current focus on manufacturing – an event is planned at the Shell Store to promote MGP, BGP, SEG and other legacy ERDF funds, in conjunction with the Cyber Centre and dovetailing with Made Smarter to encourage technology adoption.</li> </ul> <p>There was a discussion about barriers, especially for self-employed, micro and small businesses, in accessing grants and funding, for example difficulty in meeting job output grant criteria. NK suggested a role for the Group to compare referrals with success to understand blockages and the relevance of schemes to local businesses. The results could be fed up to Government and inform the design of support services and future schemes.</p> <p><b>Shropshire update (MP)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy remains the key issue for businesses as it is nationally</li> <li>• Events are really well attended and gaining traction</li> <li>• Focus on UKSPF and getting ready to hit the ground running when plans are approved. Delays in approval are creating issues with gaps in provision as other funds come to an end. Helpful if AC can feed this back to BEIS.</li> <li>• In response to comments from MG about Shropshire's investment strategy focussing on large businesses, MP replied that the larger infrastructure projects sit alongside projects to develop SMEs, for example smaller business units in Market Drayton and Bishops Castle. As the plan progresses it will look attracting inward investment and bigger scale opportunities alongside working with local SMEs and startups and attracting new smaller businesses from across the region.</li> </ul>	
8.	<p><b>PR/Marketing Update</b></p> <p>In addition to the report circulated with the agenda, AB highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy campaign in Q2 did well with an increase in views of energy webpages and an uptick in enquiries coming through the website for energy support (BEEP, LOCOP)</li> <li>• Focus in Q2/Q3 on promoting remaining ERDF funds. SEG has been publicised and the next focus will be on BGP including through case studies.</li> <li>• New case studies have been used to publicise Growth Hubs, BEEP, SEG and BGP, including one from a start-up to show that BGP can support start-ups. One was picked up by the BBC which is good for brand awareness and helps bump the Growth Hub up domain rankings. As discussed earlier, case studies are used as an effective way to engage businesses.</li> <li>• Current priorities are the Access to Finance event and launch of the Marches Energy Grant scheme.</li> <li>• The social media strategy is doing everything possible to reach Growth Hub business audience. Posts are tagged and shared with Shropshire Chamber to increase reach. If other partners could do the same that would help.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Earlier comments about the simplicity of messaging will be taken on board.</li> </ul>	
9.	<b>2023 Meeting Times and Dates</b> Meetings for 2023 will be at 3.30pm on 26 January, 27 April, 13 July and 19 October.	
10.	<b>AOB</b> None raised	