

## **GREATER BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL LEP (GBSLEP) REPORT TO BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL ECONOMY, SKILLS & SUSTAINABILITY OVERVIEW 7 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**11 March 2016**

### **Recommendation(s)**

1. Committee members are asked to note the report, particularly the progress of the Growth Hub in its first five months of operation
2. Committee members are asked to promote the Growth Hub to their networks, contacts and, especially, local businesses as the single point of contact locally for business support
3. Committee members are asked to feed in any ideas for Growth Hub partnership working with business networks in their localities
4. Committee members are asked to view the Growth Hub web site [www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk) to provide feedback to the delivery team and to give context to this report

### **Background**

5. Since the demise of Regional Development Agencies and Business Link during the last parliament it became clear at both a local and national level that while there is a great deal of publicly funded business support available, businesses were not aware either of its extent or how to access it
6. The UK Government, through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), has made funding available across all 39 LEP areas in England for each to establish its own Growth Hub as the single point of contact and a one-stop-shop for business support in its area
7. All Growth Hubs operate different delivery models, with different levels of funding and income (public and private). However, the vast majority are closely linked with the relevant LEP, which provides governance and strategic lead on their development in accordance with local need
8. GBSLEP Growth Hub operates on the core principles of an impartial, universal but tailored service free at the point of access, though its primary target is growing SMEs
9. The service is focused on information, diagnostic and brokerage, not programme delivery, which is done by partner organisations
10. Greater Birmingham & Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) launched its Growth Hub on 7 October 2015 following much planning and development work with business support organisations across the area
11. GBSLEP Growth Hub offers a personal service through qualified business advisers as well as a digital service through the Knowledge Bank (web portal), which is the repository for partner events, support and specific programmes

12. The Growth Hub aims, objectives, mission, targets and offer are all found at [www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk).
13. BIS has recently awarded further monies for all 39 Growth Hubs to ensure stability and consistency until 2018, at which point central UK government money will cease
14. GBSLEP oversees the operation of the Growth Hub but delivery of the adviser service is through a Birmingham Chamber of Commerce led consortium, including local universities, which was awarded through competitive tender
15. GBSLEP Growth Hub is currently applying (with the Chamber the accountable body) for European Regional Development Funding to match with BIS and partner monies to ensure a sustained and improved service through to 2019
16. GBSLEP Growth Hub has a key role to play in co-ordinating the wider business support offer among partners, as it acts as the central point in the ecosystem
17. Performance data for the Growth Hub to the end of February 2016 is listed at Appendix 1. This is a promising start but with much work still to be done.

## **Key Issue(s)**

18. GBSLEP Growth Hub's key challenge is to become known in the local business community as the first and single point of contact for any enterprise with business support needs
19. The Growth Hub's other main challenge is to secure ERDF funding through to 2019 to expand and enhance its current offer and also to look at long term sustainability

## **Policy Development/linkages with Existing LEP Strategy or Key Priorities**

20. The Growth Hub is a "game-changer" in the current Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and is the LEP's delivery vehicle for business support

## **Conclusion**

21. Growth Hubs are the UK government's policy response to enable a simplified, joined up offer of local support to businesses. GBSLEP Growth Hub is still evolving but has made good initial progress, with some key challenges ahead. This is particularly the case in terms of establishing itself as the "go to" place for business support within its target market of SMEs in the LEP area.

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## Appendix

1. Growth Hub Performance data to end of February 2016