



## **LEP – Sub Committee**

### **LEP - Business Support Management Board**

**Private and Confidential: No**

**Date:** Thursday, 27 August 2020

### **Peer to Peer Business Support - COVID Recovery**

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#### **Executive Summary**

This report sets out the award of grant to Boost – Lancashire's Business Growth Hub to deliver a new peer to peer business support intervention as part of the COVID-19 Business recovery packages and the process being undertaken to commission delivery partners who can run these peer to peer groups.

BEIS have now identified this type of activity as both cost effective and impactful in terms of the outcomes for business and are keen to use the peer to peer process to share COVID-19 recovery ideas.

In Lancashire there has been a long tradition of Peer to Peer delivery and we can build on this with this new award. The form and content of this programme will be set out in a national "play-book" devised by BEIS but we are looking to ensure we have a wide range of potential providers who can deliver in key locations and sectors.

#### **Recommendation**

The Business Support Management Board is asked to note the report and provide views on how this initiative can be delivered effectively in Lancashire.

## **Background and Advice**

Over recent months, in response to the economic disruption brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, the government has introduced a range of measures aimed at helping businesses to adapt and respond to the many challenges they face. Focus is gradually changing from helping businesses to survive through the difficulties to helping them move on and becoming more resilient.



## **The Peer Networks Programme**

The latest initiative, announced on 31<sup>st</sup> July involves the roll-out of a programme of Peer Networks. It is envisaged that these will provide support, advice and training to assist businesses to navigate the challenges facing them in relation to COVID-19. The initiative involves businesses working together, supported by a facilitator, identifying and working through barriers to their growth with peer actions and solutions.

The government is making funding available to each LEP area in England for Growth Hubs to deliver Peer Networks support over the period August 2020 to March 2021. It will be open to businesses that:

- have been operating for at least one year
- are SMEs with between 5 and 249 employees
- have a turnover of over £100,000

The funding is being made available for each Growth Hub to deliver support to an agreed number of groups (cohorts) of businesses. Each participant will receive a minimum of 18 hours 'action learning' support in a group setting plus one half day of individual support.

Lancashire has been allocated £345,000 to deliver 23 Peer Network cohorts, to be delivered by the end of March 2021.

## **Growth Hub Supplementary Funding 2020-21**

As detailed at the previous BSMB, in August Boost, the business Growth Hub for Lancashire, was allocated supplementary funding of £208,500 for 2020-21. In recognition of the short-term pressures faced by Growth Hubs as a result of COVID-19, 25% of the Supplementary Grant is available for spend on activities and solutions to alleviate immediate pressures on businesses caused by COVID -19 (together "the Project") during the period April-September 2020. The remaining funding is to be used to help promote business resilience and growth in businesses outside the scope of existing Growth Hub programmes.

## **Delivery and Procurement issues**

It is envisaged that Growth Hubs will use their existing delivery networks and teams to roll out the Peer Networks Programme. In Lancashire all Growth Hub delivery is contracted out and this gives rise to the issue how the delivery will be allocated and procured.

The cost of each cohort would be a maximum of £15,000. The Head of Business Growth has already sought expressions of interest from local suppliers and to date 26 organisations have shown interest in delivering the support.

Following a usual procurement practice to select and award contracts to partners could delay the delivery of this initiative by up to three months. Given the immediate need amongst businesses and the short window to deploy these funds, the Growth Hub is



seeking approval for an alternate, truncate award process to advance delivery of this initiative.

### **Suggested Lancashire Approach**

Whilst the BEIS "playbook" will set the minimum requirements for the activity and curriculum delivered within each peer to peer cohort, in Lancashire we are looking to use this resource to commission a more nuanced and business responsive delivery style.

We have a range of expressions of interest from business thematic and sectoral organisations, all of whom can readily identify a cohort of businesses keen to work with them. Whilst these different providers will need to adhere to the playbook standards our aspiration is that they will bring their own strengths to the process and to the immediate needs of the businesses they are working with.

### **BSMB Input**

As Boost begins to move forward with this initiative, we would very much welcome the input of those Business Support Management Board members not involved in delivery to take an overview of delivery and impact, to maximise the impact of this initiative and to celebrate good practice across delivery partners.

### **List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		