



## **LEP - Joint Scrutiny Committee**

**Private and Confidential: No**

**Date:** Wednesday, 24 March 2021

### **Boost Business Lancashire – Covid 19 Response**

**Report Author: Andy Walker, Tel: 01772 535629,  
andy.walker@lancashire.gov.uk**

#### **Executive Summary**

Boost is Lancashire's Business Growth Hub and sits at the heart of the business support landscape within the Lancashire LEP area.

Boost delivers around £2.5m worth of business support activity each year, supported by European Regional Development Fund grant (60%), Lancashire County Council funding (30%) and variable grants from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial strategy (10%).

The Growth Hub delivers the largest volume of publicly funded business support activity in the area working with around 1,000 each year.

This report provides some detail on the operation of Boost and in particular, how Boost has responded to support businesses impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic.

#### **Recommendation**

The LEP Joint Scrutiny Committee are asked to note this report and presentation.

## **Background and Advice**

Boost, the Business Growth Hub for Lancashire is one of 38 such organisations across England. Growth Hubs are local public/private sector partnerships led by the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). They join up national and local business support to make it easier for businesses to find the help they need.

Boost was formed in 2013 and since then has helped over 8,000 businesses. Boost operates using a combination of direct help for businesses and signposting to appropriate local and national sources of business support. It is resourced through a combination of ERDF, BEIS and Lancashire County Council funding, with an annual budget of around £2.5 million. Since its inception Boost has helped to launch over



800 new businesses and to create over 3,000 new jobs, whilst adding over £100million to the Lancashire economy.

Boost's direct services include:

- **Business Relationship Management** - matching businesses with the support they need;
- **Flying Start** - providing support for new, young and growing small businesses;
- **Growth Mentoring** - matching less experienced SMEs with experienced business mentors;
- **Boost Bespoke** - focussing on Scale Up businesses and those with the greatest growth potential;
- **Boost Marketing** - promoting the Boost services to the Lancashire business community and engaging with those companies and individuals who have not previously used Boost support.

In 2020 a new initiative – **Peer Networks**, was introduced, joining up groups of businesses to provide mutual support and learning.

In a normal year, Boost will typically support around 900 businesses with medium to high intensity support and around 1,000 businesses with light touch signposting and information.

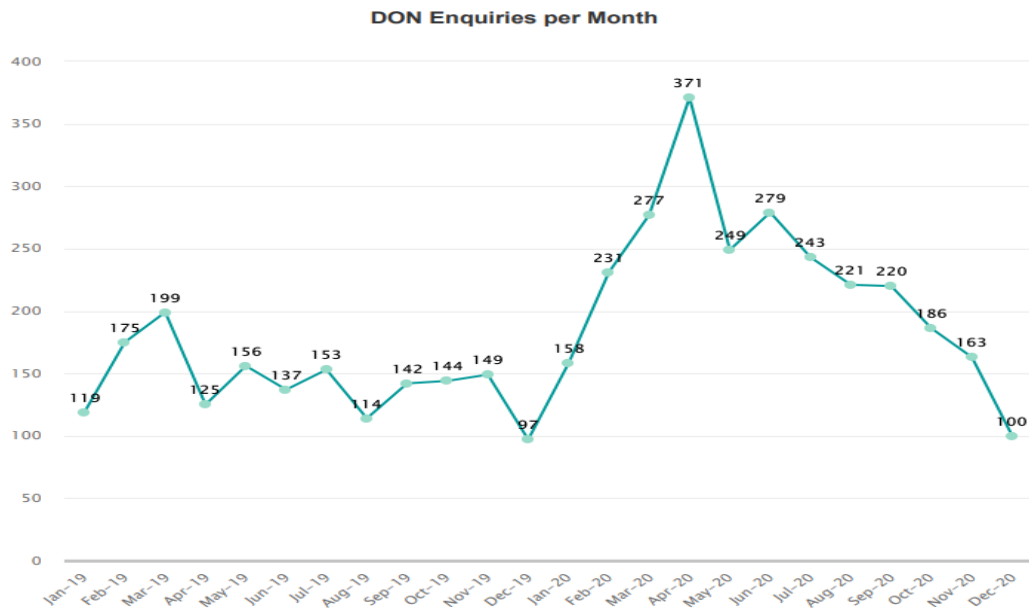
### **Boost's Response to the Covid Pandemic**

The past 12 months have been unprecedented in the history of business support in Lancashire, and Boost has been at the forefront of the County's economic response to the Covid pandemic.

In terms of Growth Hub delivery, there have had to be substantial changes due to the disruption to business brought about by the Covid-19 outbreak. In particular there was the need to provide an urgent response to the wide range of issues faced by local businesses caused by the national lockdown, from cash flow problems to supply chain disruption.

The need for social distancing from March onwards brought about a rapid switch to the online delivery of services, with use made in particular of platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to deliver both one to one support and group webinars on a wide range of subject areas.

Initially a significant effort was devoted to signposting businesses to the various national offers and support schemes announced by HMG and the local support via the local authorities. This included support for businesses in understanding and interpreting the various offers, and help in accessing the range of financial support that was put in place. Support with cash flow, accessing short-term capital and help with supply chains formed the bulk of the work during this period. The following graph shows the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on demand for Growth Hub services:



Much of Boost's funding is conditional and brings with it certain eligibility criteria regarding the types of businesses that can be supported. A decision was taken early on in the pandemic that no business would be turned away, regardless of funding eligibility, with the intention that a reconciliation exercise would be carried out in the latter part of the financial year, in order to match businesses supported with the funding streams available.

At the outset, there was the need to rapidly re-focus the activities of the Growth Hub in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and the national lockdown. We launched an **#AskForHelp** campaign, which supported Lancashire business owners through the coronavirus pandemic.

**#AskForHelp** transformed Boost into a support service for worried business owners and managers. The campaign was rolled out within a week, launched on the first day of the UK's national lockdown in March and has since helped more than 7,000 people by utilising Boost's helpline and online channels to manage the initial impact of coronavirus on their business operations.

Once the initial shock of the national lockdown had been absorbed, Boost launched a new campaign of support to help Lancashire businesses map out their long-term recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. In the period July-September, with many Lancashire businesses more looking towards recovery, Boost launched its **#BoostYourRecovery** initiative. The campaign was made available to all Lancashire businesses to help them understand the key challenges and opportunities in the current situation and develop a strategy for bouncing back.

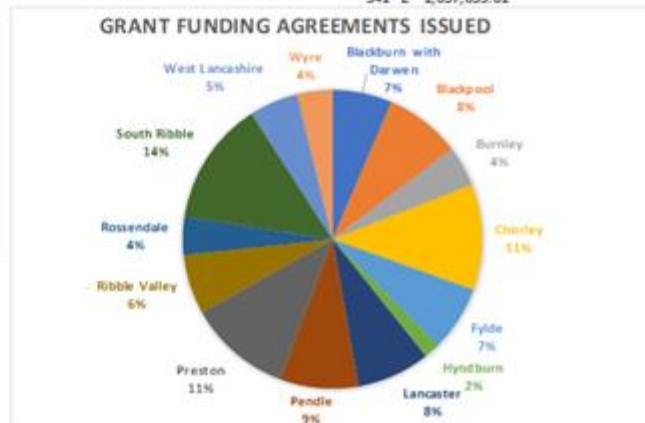
The support included webinars, video content, online coaching, peer learning, tips, other tools and advice focused on key aspects of recovery from coronavirus. A new Recovery Hub was launched on the Boost website supported by Boost's Helpline for advice.



The Tiered Restrictions from September 2020 and then the second national lockdown in December brought about renewed urgency to support those businesses most acutely affected. A new grant regime was introduced, offering financial support for businesses to adapt and reposition themselves to a post-pandemic environment, and this has helped 341 local businesses.

Area	Projects	Grant	Percent
Blackburn with Darwen	22	£ 71,982.45	7%
Blackpool	28	£ 95,068.37	9%
Burnley	15	£ 50,381.75	5%
Chorley	39	£ 112,568.57	11%
Fylde	24	£ 95,364.23	9%
Hyndburn	6	£ 16,528.17	2%
Lancaster	27	£ 98,589.61	9%
Pendle	29	£ 81,780.58	8%
Preston	38	£ 108,079.21	10%
Ribble Valley	22	£ 64,789.01	6%
Rossendale	14	£ 41,393.85	4%
South Ribble	46	£ 126,341.27	12%
West Lancashire	18	£ 53,152.54	5%
Wyre	13	£ 41,636.00	4%
	<b>341</b>	<b>£ 1,057,655.61</b>	

	Projects	Grant	Percent
Boost Your Recovery Grant	254	£ 684,212.40	65%
Kickstart Tourism Lancashire Grant	87	£ 373,443.21	35%
	<b>341</b>	<b>£ 1,057,655.61</b>	



Over the whole of the past year Boost has worked closely with Lancashire Local Authorities, to ensure that no businesses missed out on eligible support.

To provide additional support to help business weather the pressures placed on their operations by the pandemic, in late 2020 we introduced a new resilience programme to help business managers to deal with the many challenges they are facing.

Resilience Networks offers Lancashire business owners and managers a range of different support options delivered by some of Lancashire's most renowned private sector providers. They all focus on building resilience and include sales coaching, finance advice and mental wellbeing support for male leaders.

The programme is fully funded by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. Private sector partners include Forbes Solicitors, finance experts The F Word and Pink Link Ladies.

We are currently supporting an additional 300 businesses through the Peer Network programme where groups of 8-10 business meet (virtually) to work through business challenges and problems, supported by a facilitator using action learning techniques. The initiative has proved popular with local businesses who provide mutual support in managing issues such as disruption to production, supply chain problems, workforce, EU exit issues and cash flow.

Overall Boost has needed to significantly amend its programme of support over the past 12 months, working closely with other support agencies across Lancashire in the



public and private sectors. As the country emerges from the pandemic, the Boost core programmes will gradually be re-established, but we will continue to respond to local business need to ensure that Lancashire businesses have access to the help they need to re-build their operations and to grow.

### List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
-------	------	-------------

None		
------	--	--

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
---	--	--

N/A		
-----	--	--