

COVID-19 Business Support Programme Overview

Theme – Growth Hub Led Business Support

The Marches Growth Hub Shropshire offers a single point of access to information and guidance on business support to businesses across Shropshire, regardless of sector or size of development. As a well known and respected delivery body of business support activity across Shropshire, it was only natural that the Growth Hub team that sits within Economic Growth, were used as a key delivery partner for business support activity and programmes as part of the recover from covid-19. In total, £626,000 of funding was used by the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire to deliver a range of expanded and new programmes to businesses across the County. Details of these are provided below and alongside further information on outputs and case studies in appendices 1, 2 and 3.

Restart and Recovery – £35,600

To support business during the 'Restart and Recovery' phase of COVID 19 the programme helped start-ups, early stage and growth businesses to access general business advice and support through business 121 sessions and various topical business webinars and events.

Business Boost Programme – £25,000

A suite of webinars has been developed to aid businesses with their learning and development which can be accessed offline through the Invest in Shropshire website. This follows feedback from Retail and Tourism sectors and will allow the businesses to access a series of webinars covering different business disciplines at the time and place of their choice and not when we are running them in real time. This was launched on 31 March 2022 and is a legacy for the SC Economic Recovery Funds. We currently have around 70 webinars available for access.

Specialist Support – £124,000

Working with a team of 17 expert advisers and consultants to provide detailed free intensive 12 hours support to help our Shropshire businesses to grow and prosper as the county recovers from the impact of the Covid pandemic. The Hub offers unparalleled support and our advisers bring expertise and knowledge across the full range of business issues from access to finance, sales and marketing to HR and Health and Safety concerns and more.

Digital Hub – £180,000

The Digital Hub hosted a range of programmes which were centred on the 'Digital Revolution' and adopting new technologies in response to COVID

19. This was through various webinar programmes, 15 hours specialist support for addressing cyber security and attaining Cyber Essentials certification, 12 hours specialist support on adopting digital technologies and improving your digital presence as a business. Also, the delivery of a highly successful Tech Severn two-day Conference in June and working with Media Insiders to include a Podcast opportunity for 10 businesses to be showcased and released in the media sphere. This was called 'Marching On! We looked at businesses that had either been 'Born out of Covid 19' or 'Grown your way out of COVID 19'.

Silverpreneurs® – £71,000

The Silverpreneurs® programme has been exclusively created to inspire and empower the over 50's, who are wanting to start up their own business or grow their micro or small business as part of a fun and collaborative business community. Silverpreneurs® is more than just a place to find business support, it's a space for like-minded people who want to show just how good life is after 50! The programme includes three months of support delivered through a combination of 1-2-1 and group sessions where you can learn, grow and share your unique skills and experience with the group. The Silver Experts will share their business knowledge, experience and networks with you, whilst the community of Silverpreneurs® will be there to share the highs and lows of running a business, supporting and celebrating with each other along the way.

Spark Social – £20,000

Developed and delivered a Social Enterprise Conference for 2022. The Conference was centred on celebrating everything Social in Shropshire, especially given we have Social Enterprise Place status, and CSR amongst the private sector 'Purpose to Profit' and how we build that bridge between the Private Sector and Social Enterprises. This was followed up with a series of workshops to underpin the learning from the conference.

Start Up Shropshire – £50,000

Providing fully funded help and mentoring for anyone in Shropshire who is starting or planning to start a new business. The programme consists of 8 weekly masterclasses and includes mentoring meetings to meet individual needs. Seasoned, expert coaches are in place who have trodden the same path and will also introduce you to wider offerings as part of the programme. The 8 modules cover every aspect of starting a business: Setting goals & milestones - Understanding your customers - Marketing Strategy - Creating demand - Pricing Strategy - Finance & accounting - Time management - Good relationships - Legal obligations - Creating resilience & sustainability –

Business Support Programme – £25,000

This business support programme will help businesses that are co-working and hot desking in the Co-Working Centre, Hadleigh Works', in the Memorial Hall in Oswestry. 21 businesses will be supported with 12 hours specialist support and a Networking group will be formed to support Oswestry and surrounding areas. A 'wrap around' business support programme.

SBLTV – £95,000

To support Shropshire businesses to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic by providing a portal / depository / facility of useful business information and access that covers a wide range of topics, media uses and approaches. Created as an add-on to the established SBLTV, Shropshire Business magazine, and Shropshire Live and utilising the engagement of Shropshire Businesses who already interact with these to gain traction quickly.

Theme - Skills and Apprentices

Care Sector Work Experience and Internship Grant Scheme – £30,000

3 care homes Landona House allocated £10,000, Lymehurst allocated £10,000 and Vision Homes allocated £10,000 to. Offer paid work experience/training to young people to allow them to have real feel for how the sector works and the rewarding opportunities they can have through experiencing real tasks and scenarios. Work with schools and colleges to identify and select people who may like to try a career in care. Promote the care home sector in schools and colleges and job opportunities within from Admin to becoming a Registered Manager and beyond. Offer opportunities to young people who are currently Not in Education, Employment or Training who may not have considered a career in care.

Shropshire Ladder – £20,000

The Ladder for Shropshire is a one stop shop providing advice and support to organisations in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin to encourage growth in Apprenticeship. It is part of a national initiative overseen by the Ladder Apprenticeship Foundation. In Shropshire the main focus of the Ladder is to support and encourage local businesses in offering apprenticeship opportunities to local people and in so doing, generate new opportunities from both businesses that have offered apprenticeships in the past and businesses new to apprenticeships. This will be achieved by ensuring that the impartial advice on apprenticeships which the Ladder offers is promoted extensively via the media, including social media

campaigns and via business support agencies and other stakeholder. Employers have reported the lack of a single 'go to' local organisation for this support and are coming forward for help. All employers contacting or being referred to the Ladder will receive immediate telephone or email support followed by a face to face consultation, on site or on line as appropriate.

Results: 187 Enquires Shropshire only:

- **Social Media stats;**
- LinkedIn - 687 followers
- Twitter - 483
- Website analytics – 2.8k views of the website
- Facebook page – 1108

Apprenticeship and Work Experience Consultant – £21,000

The project aimed to increase understanding of apprenticeships in three Shropshire Schools Oldbury Wells, Thomas Adams and William Brookes by supporting young people choose their routes to employment and to provide individual support when applying for apprenticeship jobs within the Marches.

Programme content and structure:

Structure	Content
General Apprenticeship Talk to all Y12 & Y13 students	What is an apprenticeship and where to find them. Sectors, standards, levels, degree apprenticeship, duration, employers and recruitment.
Apprenticeship set up, preparation & research workshop for students unclear of their employment route and not going to university	How to setting up and register for an apprenticeship account, research apprenticeship jobs, structure a cv for specific jobs and how research employers and apprenticeship jobs using company find an apprenticeship service, company websites, social media (LinkedIn) and how to use the Institute for Apprenticeships to identify standards and requirements and link back to jobs on 'find an apprenticeship'.
A package of individual coaching & mentoring sessions both face to face and on-line	Tailored coaching to individuals needs. Students bring questions to the sessions they are struggling with e.g. finding the right apprenticeship, concerns, hope and fears. Through the process they develop confidence by working on their strengths.

Email support between sessions	Answering questions, reviewing and feeding back on cv's
Apprenticeship interview preparation & techniques.	What do expect during an interview, how to prepare for the interview and techniques to answer competency interview questions
One to one email support	Any follow question or support needed on the application and interview process

Apprenticeship talks by year:

School	Y13	Y12
William Brooks	18	20
Thomas Adams	18	15
Oldbury Wells	17	15
Total	53	50

For further information please see appendices 4.

Landau Job brokerage Building Shropshire – £135,000

Created a brokerage service to meet local employer skills shortage by connecting them with unemployed, economically inactive, young people, apprentices or customers looking at enhancing their careers to meet their vacancies needs. Landau will support at least 100 vacancies with the appropriate candidates to meet the employer's needs. Landau will endeavour to work with at least 27+ business to help with their skills shortage needs and support 2 new businesses. This project will not only give the chance to identify some of the challenges that employers are facing but will also give the chance to gather data why job seekers are not applying for certain roles this will allow us in the partnership (Landau and Shropshire Council) to make informed decision about what mind-set changes need to happen for us to meet the skills shortage. The Employer Engagement team worked with organisations to identify their recruitment needs and offer a bespoke service.

For final report please see appendices 5.

Theme - Co-working

Co-working Grant to increase co-working facilities across Shropshire - £552,399 allocated with grants to 13 providers

Two specific examples have been included below outlining both the digital infrastructure that has been put in place and focusing on the largest investment within the programme. Please see appendices 6 for full report and case studies.

Oswestry, Hadleigh Works

40 desks that can be rented out, meeting room, high-speed secure internet provision. Dedicated facility manager / coordinator to be the main point of contact for the businesses utilising it and the liaison with the Shrewsbury / Main Hub to ensure the location is an active member of the 'Shropshire Coworking Campus', including updated the Oswestry-specific webpages and monthly reporting and monitoring. Provided a separate security entrance to the coworking space to allow access via a key card or similar (and enable monitoring of the space utilisation back to the central team) and provision of a booking system for members to utilise the space in a fair and equitable manner based on their paid membership.

Shropshire-wide Digital Infrastructure – £70,000

Created a central digital portal that will support the management for a cluster of Shropshire co-working spaces, providing practical tools and guidance to each individual space and additional requirements to ensure there is a central communications portal to encourage local business networking and collaboration that will be operational for a minimum of 12 months.

Theme - Sector Development and Support

Shropshire Chamber Employee Upskilling Programme – £50,000

A total of 63 short courses were delivered benefiting 53 Businesses and 295 individuals.

Please see appendices 7 for full list of courses.

CREST/Evora Edge Environmental Project – £30,000

This was a series of seven workshops held over four days across the month of March at the Pump House Knowledge Hub. The Knowledge Hub is a collaboration between a Shrewsbury company EVORA EDGE and the University of Chester (University Centre Shrewsbury).

The workshops featured high quality speakers from both Shropshire and from across the UK sharing expertise and case studies. Facilitated discussions focused on practical actions to overcome the huge challenges of decarbonising existing buildings. Networking opportunities and discussions helped attendees to identify and capitalise on the potential business opportunities arising from the decarbonisation agenda. This included the formation of a 'green supplier list' from interested delegates for buyers to access. 125 tickets sold to 27 companies.

Please see appendices 8 for full summary of results and outputs.

Food Partnership Development – £50,000

The development of a Shropshire wide food partnership, involving the development of local food marketing hubs in market towns including: Oswestry, Market Drayton, Ludlow, South Shropshire and Shrewsbury.

A series of learning exchange events "Building the local food economy," promotion of local food producers and supplier and retail opportunity mapping. The hubs are now in place and working to coordinate the promotion of the Shropshire Food Partnership.

Please see appendices 9 for full final report and outputs.

Blue Remembered Hills – £50,000

The development of a promotional website and multiple tourism trails for the western borders of Shropshire to promote the area as a destination and the quality tourism businesses and attractions in the area.

The project will enable visitors to take in the wider area, off the beaten track, driving direct and indirect investment into rural areas of the county. The project includes photography, videography and marketing of the site and research into new, less frequented tourism options for visitors to Shropshire.

Please see appendices 10 for final report.

Shropshire Chamber Enhanced Export Audit – £20,000

The Project has provided a detailed customs compliance audit to existing exporters/importers using a highly skilled specialist consultancy along with a package of four international trade training courses designed to deliver clarity on the information and process to create compliant documentation.

Theme – Social Enterprise

Project 1, VCS Infrastructure/Business Support – £194,000

To offer VCS groups and organisations support in 3 main areas:

- Volunteer brokerage, recruitment and management
- Governance and growth (VCS 'business advice' and support)
- Small grants aimed at pandemic recovery

56 VCS groups and organisations offered business support

- 36 groups offered ongoing guidance
- 62 training courses offered
- 59 participants to end of April 2022
- 30 groups trained
- 50 external grants applications supported
- 1 grant scheme launched
- 3 jobs created

Volunteering Results:

- 19 different VCS groups and organisations received volunteers
- 106 volunteer roles supported
- 610 volunteer hours recorded
- Schools vaccination scheme supported
- 14 volunteer 'thank you' events held across the county
- 700 volunteers contacted and thanked for roles through pandemic

Project 2, Debt and Money advice – £50,000

- New forum and established partnership working with meetings every other month.
- Money Advice Strategy (draft) – presented to Social Task Force, Hardship & Poverty Group and Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance.
- Training on Housing Benefit and DHP online application system.
- Training on DWP Fitness for Work Assessments and PIP/AA applications.
- Information sharing on themes: digital exclusion, insolvency, sanctions, Household Support Fund.
- Research into local debt and money advice services (report published).
- 1 job created

Support Results:

- 943 debt clients
- 229 supported in employment
- 50 supported in housing need

Project 3, Community Asset Grant Scheme – £124,960

Grant funding was offered to support Shropshire's community buildings recover from the pandemic and make improvements to ensure they are sustainable and able to support the community for years to come.

Funding: £124,960 In total 48 applications were received by the closing date of 17th January 2022 with an average request of £10,798.08 each. These comprised of village halls, community interest companies, heritage trusts and outreach centres.

Please see appendices 11 for full report and case studies from across the three projects.

Theme - Tourism and Place Marketing

Commonwealth Game QBR Event – £100,000

The Queens Baton Relay (QBR) presented a unique opportunity to promote Shropshire's tourism offer, support economic recovery and engage with the Shropshire community in a positive initiative to improve health and wellbeing and encourage participation in sport.

The delivery of the QBR generated fantastic legacy relationships and provided a free event for underserved and lower socio-economic demographics. The multi partner working group was a very positive outcome of how partnership working can be carried out very successfully with town council, local organisations and private business. Regular meetings were held with Shrewsbury Town Council, Shropshire Council, Energize Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin fulfilling core delivery roles throughout the process.

Working in partnership allowed the council to extend the reach and depth to the QBR programme beyond what could have been achieved working alone. Shrewsbury Town Council were instrumental in supporting the event with their staff running road closures and the being instrumental in the smooth running of the event.

Over 50 volunteers were recruited and engaged throughout the process with 5 of those continuing to volunteer with Shropshire Festivals post event. Despite record breaking heat and weather warnings the celebration event was well supported at all stages of the baton relay. There was 6,000 people who enjoyed the celebration event in the Quarry Park.

100 people from across the community, dignitaries and military enjoyed a civic reception in the grounds of Shrewsbury Castle. 20 Community, arts

and military groups delivered performances, hands on activities and have a go sessions to the public. Ongoing musical and entertainment was located throughout the event representing a broad range of the arts offering within Shropshire from Morris dancing to musical theatre and drama workshops. The main stage allowed entertainment from local community music groups, schools and professionals. Specifically commissioned projects represented the story and the people of the Commonwealth adding diversity to the project.

22 sports groups were engaged within the event although some were unable to attend due to the severe heat warning. This allowed the public to have a go at sports they might otherwise not have engaged with. 49 businesses were supported through the delivery of the event.

Please see appendices 12 for full report and links to photos and video.

Tourism Sector Governance – £31,201.60

A programme of initiatives were developed to support a growth agenda for Shropshire's visitor economy and to address issues with fragmented destination management support, lack of coordination, limited marketing and low awareness of Shropshire as a quality tourism destination. The programme also underpins the need to help the sector recover from the pandemic and funding towards the Destination Marketing and Branding (see 8.77-8.79) has enabled the work to take place.

The programme was facilitated by Shropshire Council and external consultants who were appointed to lead the strategic governance development and sector consultation. Visit Shropshire was a key partner throughout and agreed all work associated with governance review, DMO business planning and the development of COVID-19 recovery marketing initiatives. The projects included:

- Review of current DMO governance including sector stakeholder consultation and DMO Action Plan
- Future DMO options appraisal
- Feasibility study for the development of a Shropshire Tourism BID
- Destination Management Plan 2022 – 2025
- Covid recovery destination marketing campaign (September 2021 – May 2022)
- Shropshire destination brand development project

Destination Marketing and Branding – £104,000

Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury BID appointed a consultant team to co-create and launch a compelling destination brand strategy and place narrative for Shropshire. The BID and council lead and facilitated this representative work on behalf of Shropshire businesses, private and public sector stakeholders from Shropshire's local economy.

As well as supporting our immediate visitor economy recovery from COVID-19, this project will be vital in facilitating longer term transformation - positioning and promoting Shropshire as an exceptional place to visit, invest, work, and live over the next five years. The agency demonstrated a strong emphasis on destination brand development - market positioning, audience development, brand proposition, visual identity, and narrative and marketing strategy - as well as research, intelligence, and stakeholder engagement.

Theme - Partnership work with Towns/BIDS

Oswestry HAZ Grant Top Up – £52,708.24

The Oswestry Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) was the initial result of a successful bid to Heritage England securing an initial budget of £1.25m including match funding and private investment. The programme is a place-based scheme designed to secure lasting improvements to historic high streets and the communities who use them through heritage led regeneration. The objective of the programme is to make the high street a more attractive, engaging and vibrant place for people to live, work and spend time, particularly in relation to the need to build back better for post-Covid-19 economic recovery.

Due to the exceptional demand seen for the HAZ programme, it was agreed to use a proportion of ARG funding to support the delivery of three applications, where funds were not available to support through the original HAZ funds.

Black gate was awarded £21,204.75 which is 60% of the total eligible costs which are £35,341.20. Total project cost is £64,417.28. The grant was used to bring a long term empty listed property called the Black Gate into use as the new home of Niche Patisserie.

Niche Patisserie is new and expanding business who have taken on a 10 year lease of the property. They are restoring it into a bakery to continue to supply orders but also to supply their new shop and tearoom which will

be established in the building. They will be carrying out an apprentice scheme. It will be a high-end business within the town.

20 Church Street was awarded £24,960.30 which is 60% of the eligible costs of £40,935.50 with a total project cost of £62,305.50 The grant was for a new business called Forage. It will be a zero-waste shop with refills, etc. This is an expansion to an already successful vegan café, Fat Rabbit, on Bailey Street. The owner bought the property after the previous owner removed, without permission, the historic shop front and internal walls in the on the ground floor. They have taken on the property and reinstating the shop front. This project will remove a blight on the landscape of Church Street.

17 Cross Street was awarded a total of £12,021, which is 60% of total eligible costs which are £20,035. The total project costs were £49,199.50. The grant was awarded to change the ground floor of 17 Cross Street from a café to a space to carry out activities with people of all abilities. They will also house a shop to sell goods made on site.

Shrewsbury BID – £388,722

A number of projects to help Shrewsbury Town centre to recover and improve:

- High impact promotional campaign to celebrate and promote the re-opening of Shrewsbury town centre
- Small grants programme for local businesses to deliver impactful events in the public realm
- Diverse programme of activities to maximise the experience within the town centre of Shrewsbury
- New promotional video for Shrewsbury and advertising to reach 1m+ audience
- Small improvements to the public realm including vacant units, signage etc.
- Equipment to support the extension of the season and increase economic activity such as stretch tents, gazebos
- New high impact campaign and activities to transform and promote the early evening and Sunday economy
- Projects, campaign and activities to promote walking and cycling into Shrewsbury town centre for 70k people who live within 15 min cycle

- New digital platform for the town centre with live data and connections to social media
- Supporting the work of the Big Town Plan partnership on a Movement & Place strategy
- Campaign, events and opportunities for local young people to start and grow their retail/entrepreneur journey
- New and enhanced tools to track footfall, dwell, flow, catchment and visitor origin
- Intensive one to one mentoring for business improvement & social media

Oswestry BID Grant – £40,000

A town centre business directory giving all the businesses opportunity to have an entry on the fold-out map. This will then be printed in hard copy for distribution locally but also further out to our catchment area by way of local readerships like Oswestry Life Magazine etc. They will also be available at business premises and as an electronic version online.

To develop an additional page on the One Oswestry Website dedicated to all BID businesses that are now operating with an online presence such as Click and Collect, delivery services and ordering online. This page will act as a signpost to these businesses showing that you can shop online but still use local businesses.

Oswestry Balloon Carnival 21st/22nd August. A great family event that will bring footfall into Oswestry that then supports all our businesses and raises the profile of Oswestry to the wider visitor economy.

The Food Festival is another great annual event that increases footfall into our town to support all our businesses showcasing local produce. Again, attracting visitors from the wider region.

Family focused event to draw people into town to support retail but also hospitality sector. Themed activities and supporting marketing campaign.

More than a training course, the trainer goes into the business premises to work with business owners on what their business needs to make the best of its trading environment. (Similar to the Mary Portas TV series). The mentor helps business make the most of window displays, ensuring everything is placed in the right 'space' (product placement). They will advise on pricing structures, displays, staffing, online/social media offering and then return 2-3 months later to ensure new

policies/procedures have been implemented, maintained and give further feedback. This funding should provide approx. 24 sessions (rough £500/session – this covers initial 3 hour training and 1 hour follow up at the premises).