

ANNEX C

Note from GFirst LEP

February 2023

UKSPF Business Support in Cotswold District

GFirst LEP has taken a lead role in developing the Growth Hub model over the last 7 years, facilitating the procurement of the physical sites, *providing staff resources, *funding for marketing, *management and costs for CRM, website & other software. The LEP Board has oversight of the Network & the LEP team have directly delivered Growth Hub projects - EU Exit, Digital grants, Covid recovery and Net Zero.

The Cirencester Growth Hub is delivered through a partnership arrangement with the Royal Agricultural University. The RAU received £1.25 million to develop the Growth Hub facility and in return provides staff who deliver free and impartial business support. To resource the Growth Hub team, the RAU runs a paid membership model for use of the co-working space, incubators and rooms that can be hired; but businesses do not need to be members to access the free support from the Growth Hub.

On 31st March 2023, core Growth Hub services – three guides, navigator support, marketing, initial client contact, training, and data management -which have been resourced by the University of Gloucestershire via an ERDF contract will come to an end. Central Growth Hub services listed above* run by the LEP have been covered to date through funding from BEIS (this was reduced by 50% in 2022 – 2023 and there is no clarity as to future funding). UKSPF is therefore now needed to cover the central Growth Hub service managed by the LEP and offers the opportunity to focus resources previously covered under the ERDF contract held by the University of Gloucestershire into each district.

The capital funding agreement with the LEP requires the RAU to provide staffing of 0.6 FTE Manager and 2 FTE Navigators. The costs for these staff are covered or at least subsidised through the membership model. Expanding this team using UKSPF is not only needed to cover staffing losses due to the cessation of the ERDF contract but will also offer the opportunity for greater outreach and activities across the Cotswolds district, to drive higher levels of business engagement and the introduction of specialist services such as those focussed on Net Zero, green/clean growth and digital.

Funding the work of GFirst LEP and RAU in Growth Hub delivery will help meet CDC's aims in the following areas –

Develop a high value, highly skilled, low environmental impact economy that includes agritech, digital/cyber, medical equipment and environmental technologies - *Work with key sectors to create new highly skilled jobs.*

Help our town centres recover from COVID-19 and in the face of changing shopping habits - *Support business to become resilient and grow. Support businesses to enhance their digital presence.*

Secure successful businesses in the visitor economy with higher visitor spend and more even footfall – *Increase tourism's contribution to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of our communities.*

Offer better qualifications for our young people- *Work with GFirst LEP to improve the Growth Hub provision in the north Cotswolds.*

Develop strong networks, collaboration and partnerships - *Work with partners to support existing businesses and encourage the growth of start-ups*

UKSPF allocation

GFirst LEP are requesting £79,000 over the next two years (£39,500 2023-2024 and £39,500 2024-2025) from each district to provide – management, marketing, administration support, marketing budget, CRM, new website and software.

A further £191,000 is requested over the next two years (£95,500 2023-2024 and £95,500 2024-2025) for the provision of additional business advisor support in Cotswold district.

The LEP has previously suggested additional staffing resources, but these discussions will need to be finalised with the organisation who will ultimately be responsible for the contracts of employment as costs may vary.

Outputs

E24 – number of businesses receiving non-financial support per annum = 120

E24 – number of potential entrepreneurs to be business ready per annum = 40

E24 – Jobs created per annum = 50

E24 New businesses created per annum = 20

Additional outputs such as E29: Supporting decarbonisation whilst growing the local economy to be agreed once additional advisor requirements are clarified.

Notes

The Growth Hub and Farm491

The Growth Hub and Farm491 are 2 separate brands, but both are part of the Royal Agricultural University. The support offered does differ, as Farm491 has a focus on support for AgriTech entrepreneurs across the UK and internationally, whereas the Growth Hub offers support for any other types of local business within Gloucestershire. There is also a difference as the support offered by Farm491 is not funded and is therefore a paid model, whereas support offered by the Growth Hub is free to access under the capital funding agreement with the LEP.

The 2 brands operate from the same building and not all members of the team work on both projects, but activities are joined up when it makes business sense to do so and when resources can be shared – such as putting on a joint event. With the launch of the RAU's Innovation Village, both Farm491 and the Cirencester Growth Hub are seen as core to the development of that project and so being “one team” is very important.

Cirencester Membership Model

Paying members of the Growth Hub are only paying for use of our facilities. Business support is totally separate and a business does not need to be a member to access this support.