
Report to: Business, Innovation and Growth Panel

Date: 7 March 2018

Subject: **Inclusive Growth Outcomes from the Business Growth Programme**

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1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To seek approval from the Panel for the revised criteria and associated conditions for awarding grants to businesses from the LEP/Combined Authority's Business Growth Programme (BGP).

2 Information

- 2.1 Item 7 describes the City Region's approach to a local inclusive industrial strategy that tackles the growing productivity gap and sustainably improves living standards for all. This extends to using the Combined Authority's economic services – including the BGP – to incentivise businesses to grow in a way that delivers inclusive growth.
- 2.2 As context:
- There is significant in-work poverty, where one in four jobs in the City Region pays below the real living wage (£8.75 per hour) and 165,000 households with someone in work in the City Region (1 in 5) rely on in-work tax credits to top-up pay.
 - Government policy implies increasing the national living wage (£7.83 for over 25s from April 2018) to around £8.57 by 2020¹ and requiring employers and staff to contribute more to auto enrolment pensions.
- 2.3 The proposal to introduce stretching inclusive growth outcomes for the Business Growth Programme targets finite public support at those businesses seeking to 'get ahead of the curve' on matters like paying the real living wage, providing training and supporting employees with disabilities.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/largest-rise-in-national-minimum-wage-rates-for-young-people-in-a-decade>

Consultation to date

- 2.4 The Panel's December 2017 meeting provided feedback on the revised criteria and associated conditions, which were noted subject to further consultation. The same documents were then considered by the Business Investment Panel (December 2017) and the LEP Board (January 2018), with feedback also noted.
- 2.5 The LEP hosted a workshop in November 2017 with approximately 20 representatives of prominent private sector intermediaries in the City Region, including accountants, banks and legal companies (known as the 'Professionals' Perspective'). Attendees were consulted on the proposed changes to the grant criteria, and also provided valuable feedback from their own perspectives and those of their clients and customers.
- 2.6 Finally, a survey of businesses in the Leeds City Region that have previously been awarded grants was undertaken in late 2017/early 2018. 25 businesses responded by completing a detailed questionnaire on the revised draft criteria and associated conditions. One specific question was whether the revised criteria would have deterred businesses from applying for the grant.
- 2.7 Following this meeting, the revised criteria and associated conditions will be considered by the LEP Board and the full Combined Authority in spring 2018, with a view to implementation from summer 2018.

Consultation Findings

- 2.8 The main findings from the all of the above consultation and business engagement are as follows:-
- Strong support for the inclusive growth agenda and its underpinning principles, and for encouraging employers of all sizes to invest in their lower-paid staff and facilitate career progression.
 - Consensus that the LEP and the Combined Authority need to realise increased inclusive growth outcomes and benefits from the grants awarded to businesses in the City Region.
 - Support for the new approach to be proportionate depending on the size of the business and of the grant i.e. businesses in receipt of larger grants should deliver the most inclusive growth outcomes.
 - Paying the 'real living wage' was regarded as the main barrier for businesses in terms of implementing all of the proposed changes. This was primarily because of the cost implications in sectors with typically low margins.
 - Strong support for incentivising businesses to deliver more inclusive growth outcomes, but without excluding certain sectors or sub-sectors.
 - Support for grant-recipients to commit to paying their suppliers (particularly small businesses) as promptly as possible (particularly pertinent in the light of Carillion).
 - Need to improve the link between grants and improved productivity, which is particularly important for manufacturers that may be investing in productivity measures without necessarily increasing headcount in the business.

2.9 The headline findings from the questionnaire with businesses were as follows:-

- 72% agree that the LEP/Combined Authority is right to look at ways in which businesses can support the inclusive growth aims.
- 56% of businesses already are, or have plans to, become a Living Wage employer within two years.
- 32% would be inclined (hypothetically) to committing to become a Living Wage employer within two years.
- 44% of businesses would not be put off from applying for a grant if the new conditions were introduced, 24% would be put off and 32% were unsure.
- Most businesses would welcome support from the LEP/Combined Authority to deliver more inclusive growth outcomes e.g. through skills plans and apprenticeships, working with schools, training lower paid staff, undertaking a supply chain audit etc.
- The conditions that most businesses would be inclined to commit to were developing a skills plan and working with schools, whilst the ones they were least inclined to commit to were offering work opportunities to local people with disabilities or health issues and offering more sustainable green travel options. The main reason for this was lack of awareness of the support available to undertake such activities.

2.10 There were several areas of risk raised during the consultation process from both the businesses that responded to the questionnaire, and the private and public sector members of the two panels and the LEP Board. These were as follows:-

- The sectors that typically employ staff on lower salaries could be those most excluded from future grant-funding e.g. food and drink, some parts of the manufacturing sector, warehousing and distribution.
- Margins within these sectors are very tight, which will make it difficult for businesses to pay the real living wage and remain competitive or even viable.
- The above sectors also employ large numbers in the Leeds City Region and are particularly prevalent in certain areas of Kirklees, Bradford and Wakefield.
- Recent analysis of grants awarded to 138 businesses over the last 12 months shows that 42% of the jobs created (totalling 466) were below the real living wage rate of £8.75 per hour and, therefore, would not have been supported if the new criteria had been in use. The businesses in receipt of these grants include some of the city region's most established and innovative manufacturers.
- Grant awards are a recognised and proven way for the public sector to build strong, lasting and mutually-beneficial relationships with key employers. Therefore, there is a risk that some of these relationships will not progress and flourish if some businesses are deterred from applying for grants.

- There is a potential reputational risk for the LEP/Combined Authority if the public sector is perceived to be influencing wage policy within the private sector, and is not adopting the same policies within its own organisations and supply chains.
- 2.11 A common response from the consultation was the need to identify an effective, robust and deliverable way to support businesses with grant-funding that are improving their productivity, without necessarily creating new jobs. This is an issue under consideration at the national level, and it is proposed that a working group is established with representation from businesses, to take it work forward at the local level. It is proposed that the group reports progress to the BIG Panel on this important issue, and that members consider their potential involvement in the group.
- 2.12 Further consideration will be undertaken into how this approach might be applied to strategic inward investment projects. This will include more detailed analysis of projects supported to date and those in the pipeline.

Conclusions and proposed revised approach

- 2.13 The overall conclusion of the consultation and business engagement activity to date is that there is strong support for the proposed new criteria and conditions.
- 2.14 The main area of concern for some businesses and other stakeholders is the requirement to pay the real living wage for all new jobs created as a result of investment projects supported by grants. This is primarily because of the potential for certain sectors, sub-sectors and parts of the City Region to be excluded from grant-funding and from engaging meaningfully with the LEP/Combined Authority.
- 2.15 Therefore, it is proposed that the new criteria incorporates an 'incentive element' that provides more funding per new job paying the real living wage, and less funding per new job paying the National Minimum Wage. This revised approach is set out in more detail within **Appendix 1**.

3 Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

4 Legal Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

5 Staffing Implications

- 5.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

6 External Consultees

- 6.1 Please see 2.4 to 2.10 above for detail of the consultation undertaken to date.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Panel considers and approves the revised new criteria and associated conditions for awarding grants to businesses as set out within **Appendix 1**.
- 7.2 That the Panel supports the proposals set out above related to productivity and strategic inward investment.

8 Background Documents

None.

9 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Proposed new criteria for the Business Growth Programme