

Wider Promotion of the LEP Business Grants Programme

CONTEXT

Since launch of the LEP's Growth Service in 2015, which provides a single access point to publicly funded business support within Leeds City Region (the City Region), access to finance, in its widest form has consistently represented almost 70% of all enquiries received.

The capital grants programme is one of several finance and wider business products currently delivered by the LEP and its partners across the City Region. Others include:- Access Innovation, Strategic Business Growth, Resource Efficiency Fund, and the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers, Ad:Venture and Digital Enterprise. These products, and several others, are primarily accessed via the LEP's Growth Service.

Over 10,000 businesses in the City Region have accessed support from the LEP since the launch of the Growth Service in 2015, which is encouraging. However, and specifically in relation to the capital grants programme there has been an increasing trend of businesses accessing it on more than one occasion.

Since 2013 when the programme was first launched to June 2018, 917 grants totalling £47.7 million have been awarded to 712 different businesses, with 20% of businesses supported being repeat applicants. Whilst repeat business is clearly positive factor for any provider of products and services to a defined customer base (i.e. the circa 120,000 businesses in the City Region), it is recognised that there is a need to broaden awareness of the support available and stimulate interest from a wider range of businesses.

Table 1: Enquiries to the Capital Grants Programme

Year	Total number of enquiries	Number of enquiries from new businesses	Number of enquiries from businesses previously engaged with the programme	% of grant enquiries from businesses previously engaged with the programme
15/16*	202	190	12	5.94%
16/17*	296	231	65	21.96%
17/18	422	336	86	20.38%
18/19 (to 23 October 2018)	182	138	44	24.18%
Total	1102	895	207	18.78%

* This does not include all enquiries that were previously routed through Leeds City Council

Table 1 highlights that since 2015/16 just over 1,100 enquiries have been received for the capital grants programme. Since 2016/17 approximately one in five enquiries have been from businesses that have previously engaged with the programme. This has peaked in the current financial year at one in four, hence the proposal to undertake a range of business engagement and marketing activities in order to try and reach a wider audience.

According to the latest City Region business survey, awareness of the LEP has increased, with 49% of firms surveyed being aware of the LEPs services, up from 39% in 2015, which is encouraging. However, more can be done to increase awareness levels and a number of routes to market that form part of the marketing plan to reach a wider business audience are outlined below.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Private sector intermediaries - The LEP facilitates the Professionals' Perspective Network that meets regularly and is made up of representatives from banks, accountants and legal firms, all of whom have access to a substantial small and medium sized enterprise (SME) client base. The forum is used as an opportunity to update members on the LEP's products and services, including capital grants, with a view to increasing the level of referrals from intermediaries. It is also a valuable way for the LEP to gain intelligence on what is happening in the business community, including challenges and opportunities, but with a focus on access to finance. The LEP will continue to expand the network and include more medium-sized local accountancy firms that are more likely to have clients suitable for the range of products available. The network meetings will also move to quarterly rather than the current six-monthly and will be followed up with bespoke sessions, particularly with local business banking teams

Business Advice Pop-Up Cafes - To date, the LEP has delivered 17 'Pop-Up Cafes' across the City Region. The rationale behind the cafes is to provide localised access to business support. Businesses within the locality of each event are pro-actively targeted by the LEP to raise awareness of the event. Those that register to attend are offered free 20-minute sessions to speak to local business experts across a range of business topics, including access to finance, sales and marketing and the use of digital and social media. The events are delivered from venues and locations across the City Region, ranging from inner city areas, such as Beeston in Leeds and Manningham in Bradford, through to more rural locations such as Otley (Leeds), Steeton and Holmfirth (both Kirklees), the latter being the most recent event which had a focus on access to finance. Delivery of the cafes has proved to be a very good route to market in terms of engaging with new clients at a localised level and the LEP intends to increase their delivery over the remainder of 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Black and Minority Ethnic Networks - The LEP has been active over the past two years in attempting to increase engagement with the Asian business community.

Strong and ongoing relationships have been built with organisations that have good reach into such communities, particularly those in Bradford, Leeds and Batley/Dewsbury. This has helped to increase engagement levels, particularly from the bed and allied trades manufacturing sector in Kirklees and the food and drink sector in Bradford. It is recognised that more activity of this nature is needed to take the support available to different locations, groups and sub-sectors. This will occur in the coming months via the pop-up events (referenced above) and continued engagement with key networks and contacts in local communities, including several now on the LEP Board and Panels.

Business Communications Group - This is a group that is facilitated by the LEP and is made up of a range of business membership groups and organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF), Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors and Forward Ladies. These groups have collective access to thousands of businesses in the City Region and, as such, are a major source of referrals for capital grants and also other products available from the LEP and its partners. Updates on business support available to their members will be provided on a regular basis to the group and individual meetings will take place with business support organisations such as the FSB and EEF to identify specific opportunities for joint marketing/communications activity.

Leeds City Region SME Support Network - This is a group that is also facilitated by the LEP and brings together all publicly-funded business support organisations and professionals, normally on a quarterly basis, to ensure that providers of business support in the City Region are fully aware of the capital grants offer and know how to refer their clients and customers into the programme. The network meetings are attended by a wide range of business support professionals, including those from the Manufacturing Growth Programme, the Department for International Trade and Innovate UK, all of whom have potential to increase referral levels into the capital grants programme. Future network meetings will feature case studies of businesses that have received capital grants that will help to further promote the benefits of the programme.

Growth Managers - The LEP currently has 12 SME Growth Managers who engage with SMEs across the City Region that demonstrate clear growth ambition and potential. They provide an account management service for circa 630 businesses per year and are a high source of referrals to the capital grants programme. A European funding bid is currently under appraisal to increase the number of Growth Managers from the current 12 to 20. If successful, the additional staff will be in place by April 2019 and will be an extra resource focussed on broadening the LEP's reach into the business community, thereby, further increasing take-up of capital grants and other support products.

Investment Readiness - This is a new LEP project that will launch in early 2019. Its main focus is access to finance and will provide one-to-one and one-to-many impartial support to SMEs on the various forms of finance available to them (including the capital grants programme). It will assist them with preparing

professional and investable proposals to a range of business-funders, including practical guidance on how to pitch for investment. An external provider will be openly procured to deliver the core elements of the project and a main part of the tender opportunity will be the ability of the contractor to reach businesses as yet untouched by the LEP.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

Case Studies

One of the most powerful ways of promoting the capital grants programme is through the production of case studies that set out the positive impact and outcomes on business-recipients. There will be a concerted focus on producing and promoting a broader range of case studies over the coming months and on using different media platforms and technologies to promote them. These will aim to better represent the sectors and districts of the City Region and will also be sent to the Business Communications Group and other key stakeholder groups. Case studies will be in the form of press releases, videos or web stories.

Media Releases

The LEP also produces media releases about key investment milestones for The Growth Service, including the number of businesses supported with capital grant investment and associated job creation. Historically, these media releases have gained coverage in key regional press, the Business Desk, Business Insider and trade magazines, for example The Manufacturer.

The LEP also provides quotes for press releases from businesses that have received capital grant investment, in particular how support received has accelerated the growth of their business.

Local and Regional Events

The LEP exhibits at key regional and local business events across the City Region to promote capital grants, as well as the wider business support offer. It also sponsors key events, included, but not limited to, Manufactured Yorkshire and Yorkshire Business Market as well as Leeds, Wakefield and York Business Weeks. These events offer a key route to market and provide the LEP with an opportunity to present in front of a wide business audience. Attendance at selected events such as these will continue in 2019/20.

LEP Website

The LEP website is a key channel used to market and promote the support available from the LEP and its network of partners. The primary audience of the website is SMEs in the City Region and it receives an average of 15,800 web visits per month.

The capital grants page is one of the most visited pages, with 10,000 page views in financial year 2017/18. There are plans currently underway to redevelop the

website. Search engine optimisation 'key word' activity will be improved as part of this.

LEP Social Media Channels

The LEP Twitter account, with over 9,300 followers is used to promote the LEP Growth Service, including the capital grants programme. It has been and remains an effective way to engage with local businesses as well as local authority partners and business networks. Subscribers continue to grow month on month with an average monthly reach of over 100,000.

LEP Newsletter

The monthly SME newsletter is sent to over 12,000 businesses across the City Region. It features regular case studies about businesses that have benefited from capital investment from the LEP.

Marketing Collateral

Marketing collateral aimed at the LEP's SME target audience, which includes information about the capital grants and the wider business support offer, is distributed at all events and to business networks across the City Region. Separate collateral has also been produced for intermediaries and partners so they can effectively promote the capital grants and wider support offer.

Marketing Campaigns

The LEP's marketing and communications team runs sector focused campaigns at key intervals throughout the year to bring together all LEP work and activities. These include a digital campaign and more recently a manufacturing focused campaign where LEP products and case studies were promoted and businesses encouraged to contact the Growth Service. This will continue in 2019/20.

NEXT STEPS

The marketing plan for 2019/20 is currently under development and panel members are invited to feed into the plan with suggestions for other ways of engaging businesses in addition to those outlined above.

An update will be provided to Business Investment Panel in April 2019 to inform members of the effectiveness of the above actions in terms of generating new clients.