
THE WEST OF ENGLAND GROWTH FUND

Overview

The West of England Growth Fund (WEGF) is a £25m grant programme administered by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (comprising of the four Local Authority areas of Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council) that aims to stimulate economic growth across the region through providing business grants to create new private sector jobs and/or the safeguarding of existing private sector jobs together with leveraging private sector investment into the economy through the principle of 'match' funding (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/understanding-the-regional-growth-fund>)

The programme is being delivered between 2012 and 2017 and aims to achieve the following:

- Create 1,300 private sector full-time jobs
- Leverage £100m of private sector investment into the region's economy

The Growth Fund supports distinct projects or activities that would otherwise not have happened or where businesses can show other additionality, such as an increase in scale or acceleration of delivery. A range of activities and projects are supported, examples of which include capital investment, training and research and development across various sectors of the economy. Grant amounts range from £10k to £2m and are governed by European Commission State Aid Rules (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid>)

Governance

A robust governance system for awarding funding was used with each applicant business needing to comply with European Commission State Aid Rules (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid>). Applications were appraised using recognised economic measures where the minimum criteria had to be reached. Due diligence was undertaken on all applications that satisfied the minimum appraisal criteria. The due diligence undertaken adhered to recognised accounting practices to ensure the financial soundness of the business. For those Applicants that satisfied the minimum criteria set for due diligence were submitted to governance for a grant award decision.

Decisions for awarding grant were made by an Award Panel process. For Applications up to £100k these were submitted to the Award Panel that consisted of nine public and private sector representatives from the LEP Sector Groups and each Local Authority. For Applications above £100k that were approved by the Award Panel, these were referred to a sub-group of the Board formed of the LEP Chair and one other member of the Board and the Chief Executive Officers of the four Local Authorities; to make the final decision.

All Panel and Board members were responsible to treat all proposals/projects equally and impartially which included declaring whether they or their organisation had a pecuniary interest in any of the projects to be considered. If any conflicts of interest were declared, that member was to abstain from the decision making process.

Successful Applications were issued a grant offer letter that detailed the terms and conditions of the Grant Award. Funding was released upon the achievement of agreed milestones and following the submission of a valid claim supported by evidence of eligible defrayed expenditure. On receipt of valid signed claims they were scrutinized for eligibility and value for money. Eligible claims were approved and paid in arrears into business bank accounts.

The programme is subject to external reporting by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. The programme is also subject to external auditing by the National Audit Office and internal audit by the Accountable Body, Bath and North and East Somerset Council. A comprehensive Evaluation is currently being conducted and is due to be published in 2017.

Summary

The programme has run 3 rounds to date, signing Grant Offer Letters with 340 businesses which have drawn down total funding of £19,805,942. The final deadline for drawing down funding was the 31st January 2016 and the final deadline for job creations is the 31st March 2017. The fund is currently in its monitoring phase with an Evaluation currently underway. To date, the programme has created 1,382 full-time private sector jobs and safeguarded 319 full-time private sector jobs together with leveraging £72,093,491 into the region's economy.

Summary Table (November 2016)

Total Grant Drawn down:	£19,805,942
Total Investment (Leverage):	£72,093,491
Total Number of Beneficiaries (Businesses):	340
Total Number of Created Jobs:	1,382
Total Number of Safeguarded Jobs:	319