



CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON

SMALL BUSINESS: **BIG IMPACT**

BUSINESS GROWTH WOLVERHAMPTON
A Review of Business Support 2024/25



Funded by
UK Government

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL



Business Growth
West Midlands

FOREWORD

Throughout 2024 our Business Growth Team has collaborated with numerous small but highly ambitious businesses to help them make and secure investment, create and sustain jobs, develop new products and services, and access new UK and overseas markets. Over the following pages we share the details of some these successful companies – revealing a city economy that is underpinned by creative thinking, innovation, ambition, skills, and sheer hard work.

We have also continued to build the relationship with a range of strategic partners including Access to Business, Aston Centre for Growth, the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Gateley Global, Innovate UK, Nat West Accelerator, Pro Enviro, Warwick Manufacturing Group, and the University of Wolverhampton – directing numerous businesses to the programmes these partners deliver.

As a Council, with a responsibility to support all our residents and the economic well-being of the city, we ensure there is wrap around support from those with just the germ of a business idea through to those businesses that are looking to make major investments. To support business growth, investment and job creation we work with a range of partners and stakeholders across the City.

In partnership with the West Midlands Growth Company we have a light touch but regular relationship with some 50 companies considered to have a strategic influence within the city including JLR and Collins Aerospace. These are companies key to supply chain opportunities, sector intelligence and innovation, significant job and apprentice opportunities, and inward investment.

We also promote a number of programmes that directly support established and growing businesses including two that we deliver direct. Following the closure of the Black Country Growth Hub in 2023 we took on the role of being the first point of contact for any business enquiry in the city, or for any individual wanting to start a business. And now, as a partner in Business Growth West Midlands (the business support arm of the West Midlands Combined Authority), we seek to promote awareness of, and engage local businesses with the 100-plus funded business support programmes.



Cllr Chris Burden

INTRODUCTION

The new regional business support service **Business Growth West Midlands (BGWM)**, launched in 2023 became fully embedded in 2024. BGWM operates through a core regional contracting team with delivery through a range of stakeholders including **Oxford Innovation, Gately Global, Aston University** and **Warwick Manufacturing Group**, as well as the seven regional local authorities including the **City of Wolverhampton Council**.

This regional business support is enhanced by a range of additional support delivered by all the regional universities, the high street banks, and some national charities, as well as a plethora of private sector providers.



The City of Wolverhampton Council's Business Growth Team play a pivotal role in promoting and delivering business support across the city. We act as a single point of contact for all business and start up enquiries via phone, email and a web based enquiry form; offer free diagnostics to ensure businesses are connected to the most appropriate support; run and facilitate a programme of workshops and webinars; manage a £1M plus grant programme to support capital investment and energy efficiency measures; and procure mentoring and workshop support for aspiring business entrepreneurs.

HEADLINE COMMENTARY

Over the past 12 months the team has fully committed all its **£1.3M of UKSPF grant funding** and has exceeded its targets securing a private leverage to grant ratio of almost 2:1, supporting the creation of 83 new jobs, safeguarding a further 179, and underpinning an average projected growth rate of more than 14%.

Our focus on bridging the innovation deficit across the Black Country also achieved real success with our target of businesses engaged on an Innovate UK programme being exceeded threefold.

We continued the seamless transition from the closure of the **Black Country Growth Hub** to the delivery of a local diagnostic and business support service. Working as a partner in **Business Growth West Midlands** we have dealt with 700 enquiries over the past year and completed 200 diagnostics.

We have also reached out beyond the city to ensure that local businesses had access to some of our key regional assets right here in Wolverhampton. We partnered up with **Aston Centre for Growth** to run local workshops to promote their **Green Advantage Sustainability Bootcamp, Help to Grow Management Programme,** and **Minerva Pitch Up competition;** with the **Warwick Manufacturing Group** to secure local delivery of their **Net Zero Innovation Programme** for the first time outside of Coventry; and with **Innovate UK** to run five local workshops on developing an entrepreneurial mindset and securing innovation funding.

HEADLINE FIGURES

	SME GRANT CAPITAL	SME GRANT REVENUE	NET ZERO GRANT	TOTAL
Businesses Assisted	25	7	13	45
Project Cost	£2.6M	£110K	£610K	£3.3M
Grant Contribution	£1M	£55K	£245K	£1.3M
Private Sector Leverage	£1.6M	£55K	£365K	£2M
FTE Jobs Created	79	4	N/A	83
Grant Cost per Job	£12.65K	£13.75K	N/A	N/A
FTE Jobs Safeguarded	167	19	N/A	186
Grant Cost per FTE Jobs Safeguarded	£5.99K	£2.89K	N/A	N/A
Average next year growth in turnover predicted as a result of the grant supported investment	18.85%	11%	N/A	17%
Companies Accessing New Markets	21	4	N/A	N/A
Companies Introducing New Products or Services	17	4	N/A	N/A
Average Tonnes of CO2 Saving over 12 months	N/A	N/A	185	N/A

	TARGET	ACHIEVED
Private Sector Leverage Ratio via Grants	1:1	1.7:1
Jobs Generated by Grant Support	63	83
Business Assists	500	688
Business Diagnostics Completed	200	212
Referrals to Third Party Support Providers	400	498
Businesses Engaged with an Innovate UK Programme	5	15
Business Engaged with the Gately Global High Growth Programme	5	5
Workshops Held	10	10
Workshop Attendees	200	221
Newsletters	25	20

OUR ROLE IN DRIVING SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN THE CITY

Increasing the level of GVA, the number of jobs created, the level of R&D spend, new product and service innovation; and reducing business energy costs and carbon emissions are the key outcomes the council's **Business Growth team** is focused on. Our delivery of two grant programmes, funded through the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund**, lie at the heart of this – the SME grant and the Net Zero grant.

These were competitive grant programmes designed to secure the greatest economic and environmental impact for the city. Our team of advisers not only supported the business through a diagnostic and grant application process designed to look at growth in the round but also carried out the appropriate due diligence around eligibility, financial viability and procurement rules.

Out of over **100 businesses** who submitted an **expression of interest** for grant support **32 successfully secured SME grants** resulting in the purchase of a range of productive capital equipment such as vertical lathes, laser cutters, cold rolling machines, new IT server, CNC tube bending and forming machine, 3D laser scanning inspection equipment, storage silos, and polymer sorting machines. Projects costing £2.83m were supported with grants totalling £947,000 that levered in almost £1.9m of private sector investment resulting in over 60 jobs being created and over 160 safeguarded. The average annual growth in turnover predicted as a result of the grant supported investment stood at over 14%.

A further **16 businesses successfully secured net zero grants** allowing for the purchase of energy efficient lights and windows, new boilers, and solar panels. Importantly a further **90 businesses benefited from a free Energy Assessment** delivered through Pro Enviro which identified how savings on energy bills could be secured, and how carbon emissions could be reduced. Throughout the past 12 months we have worked closely with Pro Enviro to promote an understanding of how to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions – the Energy Assessments playing a key role in this.

Our SME and Net Zero grant programmes evidence drivers of sustainable growth in a number of ways – these include jobs created, new markets entered, new products and services introduced to the market, and reductions in production times, reduction in carbon emissions and lower energy costs. The following highlights some examples of these.


EXAMPLES OF THE **IMPACT OF GRANT SUPPORT**



Gabitie are a metal processing company specialising in steel structures and fabrications. Grant support toward the acquisition of a laser cutter and the standing seam cladding machine by Gabitie will enable the business to launch new ranges such as garden offices, and to focus on entering the lucrative domestic extensions market.



Stainless Steel and Aluminium Ltd is a specialist supplier and fabricator of aluminium extrusion, stainless steel & aluminium coil, stainless steel sheets and special finish lighting products for industry. Grant support toward the purchase of a 3D scanner will help create 14 new jobs including a specialist Automotive Manager to help them access the lucrative automotive assembly and machinery market.



Ceandess supplies and manufactures a range of fuel and oil fillers; base and filler assemblies; and also fuel engine and hydraulic filter caps. Grant support toward the acquisition of a tube bending and forming machine will provide them with a strong platform to access the lucrative Australian and Canadian mining markets by offering formed tubes alongside their existing range.



Alpha Designs Upholstery Ltd manufactures a wide range of high-quality upholstered furniture products. Grant support to the purchase of three specialist PCs to create immersive AR and VR experiences for showcasing upholstery designs will mean that the timeframe for producing bespoke AR images can be reduced from six weeks to three weeks.

J H Marshall is a family run business with over 90 years' experience in metal press work operating in Wolverhampton. Grant support toward the purchase of solar panels will reduce annual carbon emissions by over 30% and reduce energy consumption by over 50% on average per month across each year - helping them keep on track to become carbon neutral by the end of 2027.

OUR ROLE AS A GROWTH HUB

Through 2024 we dealt with over 500 enquiries from businesses – all of which were offered a business diagnostic, often our starting point in the business relationship, ensuring we can get a broad view of the business and they get the right support.

Over 250 diagnostics were completed – these allowed us to not only respond to the original ask but to also identify other appropriate support resulting in some 550 referrals being made. Win Media were referred to us by a colleague at Nat West. The company were on the Nat West Accelerator programme and as a result of the close links we have with the programme manager they suggested the company could benefit from support from the council. Win Media are a brand marketing agency with a turnover of £500,000 and five staff on the payroll. Following a site visit and a detailed business diagnostic from one of our Business Growth team a range of

business support was identified and a series of referrals were made. As well as digital scale up and mentoring programmes discussions had focused on one company project that could benefit from support from Innovate UK and in particular an AI expert; as well as possible grant support for energy efficient measures to the property. Introductions were made to the Innovate team resulting in one-to-one meetings; and the company registered for an energy efficiency assessment as the first step towards applying for a Net Zero grant. Harmish Chander, owner of Win Media, commented: *“I set up Win Media ten years ago and until this year had not had any discussions with the council. I found the business diagnostic to be very helpful and informative, it provided an insight into the business from an angle new to me and has identified a number of individuals and organisations that can help me further grow my business. I would recommend any local business to engage with the council’s Business Growth team.”*



REGIONAL PARTNER COLLABORATION

How do incredibly busy business owners find the time to understand the wider business offer, identify what is relevant to them and then take the actions to engage with that support. Well, that's where our Business Growth team come in, and through our experienced and well connected team we have well established relationships with hundreds of businesses in the city already.

It is our role to understand our local business base, understand the very broad offer of business support, and then ensure we can match the business with the right business support programme. **We have mapped out over 100 publicly funded business support offers**, identified those most relevant to the local business base, and then engaged directly with the providers to best understand their offer. In doing this we also factored in what the data was telling us – we underperform in respect of R&D spend and in accessing finance, two of the key drivers for growth. We have therefore reached out to the regional HE

institutions, Innovate UK, the banks and other finance providers. Alongside this we have engaged with providers of BGWM funded programmes that support innovation and that support a better understanding of how to finance growth. **We have brought Aston Centre for Growth, Innovate UK, Oxford Innovation, Nat West and Warwick Manufacturing Group into the city.**

Eamonn O'Connor, Senior Innovation Adviser at Innovate UK, led the collaboration with the business growth team at the city council and delivered a number of local workshops. He noted: *"The support from the Wolverhampton Council's Business Growth Team has resulted in a significant uplift in the number of businesses we are now engaging with in the city. We have benefited from the team's local knowledge and existing relationships; and our joint workshop programme has brought us into contact with many new businesses."*

Shirley Hodson Walker, Programme Manager at Aston Centre for Growth, delivered their first workshop outside of Birmingham. She said: *“It has been great to partner up with Wolverhampton Council’s Business Growth Team, and have the opportunity to collaborate and engage directly with businesses in the city resulting in business leaders joining our Help to Grow Management, Green Advantage and Pitch up schemes. Our delivery of the Wolverhampton workshop was particularly successful, and we look forward to our continued collaboration in 2025.”*

We also brought Warwick Manufacturing Group into the city to deliver part of their Net Zero Innovation Programme. Through an early discussion we identified the challenge for Wolverhampton companies to attend a Coventry based programme. They then worked with us to run the initial one-day workshop in Wolverhampton – this was the first time they had delivered the programme outside of their Coventry base.



WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS

Our council workshop programme has provided direct support on a number of themes, has introduced the offer of some key regional partners to Wolverhampton, and has provided an ongoing opportunity for networking and peer to peer support. **We delivered workshops with the Wolverhampton Creative Chain of marketing businesses, the Council procurement team, several of our leading women entrepreneurs, Innovate UK, and Aston Centre for Growth.** Importantly we work in partnership with and utilise the expert knowledge base of our local businesses creating a unique approach to workshop delivery.

Throughout the year we have promoted a range of webinars and workshops delivered through Business Growth West Midlands covering a multitude of topics from sales and finance, marketing and social media, and workforce development and well-being at work.



CASE STUDIES

The following case studies showcase just four of the many Wolverhampton businesses who have collaborated with our Business Growth Team to secure grant support and much more. Our approach is one of building an ongoing collaborative relationship with businesses so we can maximise the benefits they can get from the support that is available.

Bowers and Jones Ltd have been making roll tooling and equipment for the metal rolling industry in the Black Country for almost 70 years.

We helped them secure a £95,000 grant towards an investment to improve productivity, and helped them secure one of only 50 places available on the regional Gately Global High Growth Programme.

The company employ 16 staff who offer a complete in-house service provided by their experienced engineers. This together with continuous investment in machinery and software, has built Bowers and Jones into a Centre of Excellence for design manufacture and the worldwide distribution of rolls and rolling equipment for a wide range of sizes and applications.

The company exports over 70% of sales, with more than half of this being into the EU the other half going to North America. They specialise in high value, high performance products and have a very loyal customer base who rely on quality, experience, and technical abilities.

The company has been working with the Business Growth Team for a number of years and in 2022 **with Council support the company secured a grant to invest in a new CUT E 600 Wire Eroding Machine** allowing them to cut complex shapes from a variety steel grades, to improve their productivity and reliability, thus reducing lead times to begin delivery of a new growth plan.

Early in 2024, working with support from the Council's Business Growth Team **the company secured a £95,000 UKSPF grant toward a £400,000 investment in a new Doosan Vertical Lathe**. Commenting, MD Jane Sommerville said: *"We want to expand further, and the new machine will provide capacity to bid for high value, high quality products for very special applications in metal forming and rolling contracts in the UK and overseas. It will reduce business lead times by alleviating a bottleneck the company currently has in this product range.*

Most recently the Business Growth team helped the company secure a place on the regional High Growth Programme, one of just 50 companies in the West Midlands to secure a place."



Barr and Grosvenor Ltd manufactures calibrated weights in all classes from 1mg - 1 tonne and also produces specialised castings in iron, brass, bronze and other white metals in order to carry out important conservation work to historical architectural structures.

We helped them secure a £14,000 grant toward an investment critical to securing a contract to renovate Blackfriars Bridge in London, and then helped them secure support from Innovate UK and from the West Midlands Resource Reuse Centre.



The council has been working with the company for the past five years and its impressive list of conservation projects includes the restoration of The Iron Bridge in Shropshire, the production of a new Shrine to St Chad in Lichfield Cathedral, the casting of bronze door locks for galleon lighting columns down the Mall for the Queen Mother's funeral and bronze handrails for Westminster Cathedral. The company also played a key role in the regeneration of the Springfield Brewery site in Wolverhampton.

In November 2024, Barr & Grosvenor Ltd worked with the council's Business Growth team to **secure grant funding towards the cost of a new 75kW inverter** to upgrade the power supply to its small furnace. This investment replaced an increasingly unreliable power supply that was over 40 years old and becoming difficult to repair because of scarcity of parts. The new furnace will be used immediately to provide replacement balusters for Blackfriars Bridge and the Thames Tideway Project.

Commenting, MD Dominic Grosvenor, said: *"A fully functioning, reliable and efficient small furnace operation to complement our larger furnace is vital to the successful delivery of our current and future projects and to the company's resilience and growth. It will be used for a wide range of castings, such as a Grade I listed country house in Marlborough and cast iron posts for the Chiswick embankment on the River Thames. The advice and support from the council's Business Growth team has been invaluable – and it's great to know that help is always close at hand."*

As part of an initiative by the council to engage more businesses with the innovation ecosystem, we also referred Barr & Grosvenor to Innovate UK Business Growth for further support and possible funding towards an R&D project to test future uses of the company's waste sand.

The company's ongoing engagement with Innovate UK highlighted that the relatively low volume of sand produced compared with larger foundries in the region could be a barrier to finding secondary uses of it. In response to this, the Business Development Team subsequently referred the company to the West Midlands Resource Reuse Network (WMRRN) which has provided a potential solution to this barrier by adding the company to a regional group of foundries working with WMRRN to achieve the volumes necessary to begin attracting potential end users.

Based in Wolverhampton, **Advanced Lightning Protection Systems Ltd (ALPS)** is a leader in lightning protection solutions, specialising in British-made Early Streamer Emission (ESE) systems. Established in February 2017 by Steven Drinkwater and Julian Johnson, ALPS is the only UK company to produce fully tested and certified ESE systems. These systems protect structures and critical assets from the devastating effects of lightning strikes, offering superior performance and sustainability.



To enhance their production capabilities, ALPS worked with the council's Business Growth team to secure an UKSPF SME grant. The grant enabled the company to invest in a laser engraver to streamline operations, reduce outsourcing costs, and improve product customisation.

Prior to securing the grant ALPS had identified inefficiencies caused by outsourcing engraving services for their lightning protection systems. This dependency resulted in high outsourcing and transportation costs, extended lead times, limited flexibility for custom orders, and reduced oversight of product quality. Working with the council's Business Growth team the company was able to develop a strong business case for grant support by articulating how these constraints hindered productivity, increased costs, and limited the company's ability to meet growing demand effectively.

With the support of a 50% grant, ALPS were able to invest in a state-of-the-art laser engraver. As well as addressing the challenges experienced with the previous outsourcing route, the investment enabled ALPS to reduce their carbon footprint by eliminating transportation costs and minimising raw material usage.

Commenting Steve Drinkwater, Director of ALPS added: *"This investment supports our long-term growth strategy. We will monitor and refine production workflows to maximise efficiency, explore further automation to enhance manufacturing processes, and expand our customer base by leveraging the improved production capabilities. With support from the council's Business Growth team the grant has enabled the business to address key operational challenges, improve our production processes, and strengthen our market presence."*

Founded in 2011, **Stone's Throw Media** has grown into a thriving business that continues to flourish today.

We have supported the company since 2017, this was the second grant programme we have supported them with, and the company leads the 'Black Country Creative Chain'.

The company has now expanded to a team of nine, delivering a wide range of creative services, including video production, animation, live streaming, podcasts, and more. Their impressive client list includes renowned names such as **Collins Aerospace, the University of Wolverhampton, DX Delivery, Easy Group, and Joblogic.**

Recognising the need to stay ahead in a competitive market, where clients are increasingly budget-conscious, Stone's Throw Media made a strategic decision to enhance their live-streaming capabilities. Central to this effort was the acquisition of high-performance cameras and camera controllers. To manage costs while making this investment, the company sought grant support. With the guidance of the Business Growth team, they developed a robust business case and successfully navigated the grant application process.

Reflecting on this milestone, Director Matt Weston said: *"In 2022, our live-streaming revenue grew significantly, but we missed out on high-profile opportunities due to limited capacity. This funding directly addresses that challenge, allowing us to seize every opportunity and safeguard current jobs while paving the way for future growth."*

Beyond the immediate benefits of live streaming, the company has seen how comprehensive event coverage often leads to increased demand for their other services. By enhancing their core capabilities, Stone's Throw Media is not only meeting client needs but also unlocking cross-selling opportunities that further strengthen their business.

Matt added: *"We've worked closely with the Business Growth team for the past seven years, and their support in helping us invest in advanced live-streaming technology has been invaluable. This project positions us for significant growth, enhances our service delivery, and ensures we can continue to provide exceptional value to our clients and stakeholders."*





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