Superfast South Yorkshire Business Programme Summative Assessment

Report

September 2019

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Executive Summary

This report provides a summative assessment of the Superfast South Yorkshire (SFSY) Business Programme. The programme, part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), promoted connectivity to, and the benefits of, superfast broadband by: a) actively raising awareness of its additional availability; and b) increasing understanding of the potential benefits from adopting digital technology, enabled by faster broadband. In providing this support it aimed to raise take up levels of superfast broadband and support businesses to access new markets, remain competitive and grow. The support specifically incorporated the provision of awareness raising activities (demand stimulation) alongside a programme of events (the SFSY Digital Growth Programme).

The programme, which was available to businesses across the Transition Region of the SCR,[1] officially commenced in April 2016 and completed in March 2019. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) was the Accountable Body, with the programme being managed and delivered by SFSY (employed by Barnsley MBC) alongside its contracted partner, East Midlands Chamber.

The summative assessment is a requirement of ERDF funding and is based upon specific guidance provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Similarly, this Executive Summary is structured around the required sections within the summative assessment guidance. The assessment was based on a range of different research methods, including: documentary and data analysis; consultation with programme management and delivery staff; and direct one-to-one consultation with programme beneficiaries.

Carney Green was appointed in July 2019 to undertake the summative assessment. It is important to note here that, given this appointment was several months after the conclusion of the programme, there were limited opportunities for extensive consultation with beneficiaries and stakeholders; for example, several stakeholders had left their roles by the time the summative assessment commenced.

Headline statement

The SFSY Business Programme provided two core themes of support. The first theme, demand stimulation activities led by SFSY, included a wide range of methods to raise awareness of enhanced broadband infrastructure and the potential benefits from utilising this. This activity successfully led to the programme achieving its target for 501 additional businesses to take up broadband access of at least 30mbps.

The second key element of the programme was the provision of 157 events by East Midlands Chamber, in partnership with South Yorkshire chambers of commerce and supported by SFSY. This included 18 different subjects aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities arising from digital technology, enabled by faster broadband. Feedback from businesses that attended the events was very positive, referring to high quality facilitation and content.

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[1] The Transition Region includes the South Yorkshire boroughs of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield

Overall, consultation with beneficiaries of the SFSY Business Programme identified a series of positive outcomes relating to the support. This included access to improved broadband as well as enhanced knowledge as a result of the programme's events. Beneficiaries had used this knowledge to improve various elements of their business, particularly their approach to marketing and customer engagement.

Programme context

The programme's design was based upon clearly identified demand, and associated context, from a range of sources. Specifically, this included a recognition of:
- The importance of quality broadband connectivity in driving the growth of businesses and the associated economic success of geographical regions
- Lower than average take up rates of fixed line broadband and superfast broadband in South Yorkshire
- A willingness from businesses within the SCR to understand how digital technologies could assist their development, and an associated desire for additional support to do so

Addressing the above demand via the SFSY Business Programme was particularly timely given the ongoing infrastructure work of SFSY to increase the availability of fibre broadband coverage across the SCR, with a particular focus on areas deemed commercially unviable. This meant the programme complemented and enhanced the broader work of SFSY and aligned closely with national policy focused around superfast broadband and better mobile connectivity. In addition, the programme demonstrated close alignment with other interventions and policies, for example:
- The ERDF-funded SFSY Connection and Innovation Voucher Programme
- The wider business support arena of the SCR, particularly the availability of provision through the SCR Growth Hub
- The SCR's ambitions to transform the local economy through the creation of 70,000 new private sector jobs and 6,000 new businesses over a ten-year period
- The vision of the SCR ESIF Strategy 'to create a city region with a stronger and bigger private sector, that can compete in global and national markets'
- The UK's Digital Economy Strategy 2015-18
- The Digital Agenda, which forms one of the seven pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy

Programme progress

Despite an initial delay receiving its contract, the SFSY Business Programme commenced its demand stimulation activity in May 2016. This helped to drive awareness of the additional infrastructure provision and also of the potential benefits from using associated digital technology; in this respect it was sensible to undertake the demand stimulation activity ahead of the events programme, which commenced in late 2017 following the appointment of East Midlands Chamber. The Chamber itself also undertook a series of initial meetings and activities to understand the local need and demand for events, particular the subjects to offer.

It became evident, during the lifetime of the programme, that the original P4 target of 3,000 additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps was unrealistic and represented a miscalculation. Specifically, the original target was based on a nine per cent penetration of SMEs

across the entire SCR. In reality, SFSY's Intervention Area only represented approximately 20 per cent of South Yorkshire. A Project Change Request (PCR) therefore reduced the P4 target to 501, but at the same time increased the programme's C1 target (enterprises assisted) from 80 to 115 (utilising marketing underspend to provide additional events).

The programme's final performance against its contracted output targets is shown in Figure 1 below. This shows that:
- The programme performed positively in terms of being within three per cent of achieving its core C1 enterprise assist target; this related directly to the events delivered by the programme
- The programme successfully met it P4 target regarding the number of additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps; this related to the demand stimulation activities led by SFSY and was also supported by the programme's events
- Less positively, the programme only achieved just over half of its (C5) target to support 16 new enterprises; these outputs were designed to be achieved through the programme's events, but feedback indicated that accessing evidence to confirm businesses were new/had commenced trading was more problematic than anticipated

Figure 1: Performance against output targets

Indicator	Original targets	PCR targets	Final achieved	% of target achieved
C1 (enterprises receiving assistance)	80	115	112	97%
C5 (new enterprises supported)	16	16	9	56%
P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps)	3,000	501	501	100%

Source: Accountable Body (July 2019)

The programme provided added value beyond the above outputs by the following means:
- 65 businesses received in excess of 12 hours support, with a total 1,257 hours delivered across these businesses over and above their initial 12 hours
- 99 businesses attended at least one event but did not ultimately access 12 hours support; hence they would have received some benefit without being recorded as one of the 112 C1 outputs

The programme achieved only 83 per cent of its original lifetime expenditure target, representing an underspend of £139,337. Although this underspend was negative from a contract performance perspective, it did demonstrate positive value for money given that C1 and P4 targets were achieved. The main reasons for the programme's underspend, in volume terms, related to salaries and marketing; throughout its lifetime the programme was rarely staffed to the level originally anticipated.

Programme delivery and management

Promotion and engagement
Promotion of the programme's events was partly reliant on East Midlands Chamber's core partners for the programme, namely the three South Yorkshire chambers of commerce (their role included promoting and hosting the events); the engagement of these chambers was logical given their local presence/knowledge and business engagement. East Midlands Chamber therefore developed early working relationships with the three chambers; these relationship were described as positive, with each chamber engaging with, and supporting, the programme effectively. The only challenges here related to a perceived lack of collaborative working between each of the South Yorkshire chambers, potentially due to competing membership given their close proximity to each other. This reduced the opportunity for more collaborative (i.e. combined) meetings across all of the chambers.

To ensure wider business engagement East Midlands Chamber undertook a wide range of additional promotional activities relating to the events. These included engaging with a variety of other local partners (e.g. the SCR Growth Hub and local authority business support functions), the use of social media and direct email marketing, the use of advocacy via programme beneficiaries, promotion via Eventbrite, and the use of business databases.

Programme delivery
The programme's demand stimulation activity was, by its very nature, focused upon engagement of businesses and associated awareness raising. This initially involved communicating the ongoing and forthcoming deployment of superfast broadband to relevant businesses. Subsequently, the focus, following deployment, was upon re-engaging with business communities to support them regarding: a) how to order/connect with the new provision; and b) further explanation of the potential benefits it could provide their business regarding additional digital/ICT adoption. A wide variety of engagement methods were used, utilising the existing channels and activities of SFSY but also engaging with a range of partners and undertaking specific events. SFSY also undertook specific research to adapt its approach for different communities. Feedback from beneficiaries referred positively to the demand stimulation activities; one business supported the development of a promotional video given their positive experiences of accessing improved broadband.

The engagement of East Midlands Chamber to deliver the SFSY Digital Growth Programme (i.e. the programme's events) provided a series of benefits due to it already delivering a similar programme in neighbouring geographical areas (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) and Leicester and Leicestershire). East Midlands Chamber was therefore able to build on this but ensure it was adapted to the needs of South Yorkshire businesses and the SFSY Business Programme. Ultimately, the programme included the delivery of 57 events covering 18 different specific subjects, with the programme evolving over time based on identified demand. Businesses consulted during the summative assessment commented very positively regarding the events, referring to the high quality facilitators and content that was provided; this allowed them to gain significant knowledge. They also cited the benefit of the events being interactive, action-focused and tailored to individual businesses wherever possible.

Governance and management

The programme was governed through the broader processes of SFSY. This provided knowledge and expertise, as well as alignment with SFSY's other activities. However, feedback indicated the potential for greater communication between the overall governance of the programme and those within SFSY delivering the contract and associated activities. This may have been exacerbated by the understaffing (compared to originally planned) which occurred throughout the programme within SFSY. Specifically, the Programme Manager left during the programme's lifetime, the Contract Manager went on maternity leave, and with the exception of a six-week period there were never more than two full time Project Officers in place (at one stage of the programme there was only one Project Officer in place). This inevitably created additional pressure within the programme. Despite this, the programme was delivered effectively and was supported by regular (approximately once a month) management team meetings. There was also a good working relationship between SFSY's programme management and the East Midlands Chamber; this included sufficient oversight of activity whilst at the same time enabling the Chamber to focus on the delivery of events.

Programme outcomes and impacts

Consultation with programme beneficiaries, supported by a review of documentation, identified a series of key outcomes and impact themes achieved as a result of accessing the programme's support:

- **Enhanced broadband speed and quality:** This was enabled via the demand stimulation work of SFSY which raised awareness of the improved broadband infrastructure and also provided support and guidance regarding ordering/connecting to it. The effect of this increased speed was transformational for some businesses, for example one beneficiary referred to reduced business costs, increased efficiency, turnover and profit.

- **Enhanced awareness, knowledge and prioritisation:** Businesses that attended the SFSY Digital Growth Programme events commented that they enabled them to become fully aware of ongoing developments and innovations regarding digital technology. This often related to digital marketing, social media and video content. It enabled them to make more informed decisions, and therefore prioritise their work on specific areas of activity.

- **Increased confidence and efficiency:** The knowledge gained as a result of the programme provided businesses with additional confidence to undertake activities related to digital technology and ICT. For example, beneficiaries reported that the events provided them with 'simple steps' to undertake certain activities. This not only increased their confidence to undertake the activities, but made them more efficient when doing so.

- **Catalyst for spend:** Some of the beneficiaries stated that, following attendance at the programme's events, they identified the need for additional expenditure. One example was a business which, having pinpointed its requirements related to GDPR, was able to create a specific brief and subsequently appoint a consultant to assist with ensuring compliance. Another example was a business which, upon obtaining much greater knowledge of video marketing methods via the events, subsequently purchased and utilised additional video equipment.

- **Collaboration:** The SFSY Digital Growth Programme events, partly due to their day-long format, provided the opportunity for different business beneficiaries to interact with each other. This not only led to informal discussions and learning, but also enabled some businesses to share contact details with a view to collaborating with, or selling to, each other.

It was difficult for beneficiaries to quantify the impact of the support upon their business, particularly in economic terms regarding sales, turnover and job creation. Whilst several commented that the support had contributed to economic benefits, for example through enhancing their marketing approach and raising awareness of the business, the overriding benefit of the programme was providing businesses with updated and enhanced knowledge. This gave them with the tools to make more informed decisions moving forward.

Programme value for money

Due to its positive performance against output targets and its lower than anticipated spend, the programme achieved lower unit costs for its C1 and P4 outputs than originally envisaged. In contrast, its underperformance against C5 targets resulted in higher unit costs than expected.

When benchmarking the programme's unit cost per enterprise assisted (C1), it suggested relatively good value for money compared to other business interventions. However, the majority of these comparator interventions provided a proportion of more intensive one-to-one support. Despite this, it is worth noting (as referred to above) that value for money was also provided by the programme supporting 65 businesses to receive in excess of 12 hours support (many of these received considerably more) and another 99 businesses attending at least one event that were not ultimately claimed as outputs (and are therefore not considered in the unit costs). In addition, despite a programme underspend, feedback from beneficiaries referred to high quality provision.

Lessons learnt

A series of lessons learnt are provided below. These are separated for different audiences, as required within the summative assessment guidelines.[2]

Lessons for the programme management and partners

- Based on good practice within the SFSY Business Programme, interventions should seek to increasingly adopt the use of functional electronic websites/solutions to support the management, delivery and monitoring of their activity. This has the potential to provide advantages for beneficiaries (for example via an automated registration process) and accountable bodies/delivery partners (for example by maintaining client data and supporting pipeline management and reporting).
- Although the provision of online learning is increasingly prevalent, feedback from businesses (including within the SFSY Business Programme) continues to highlight the advantages of face-to-face delivery regarding business support. It is therefore important that such delivery is retained within future interventions, whether this be via one-to-many or one-to-one methods.
- Future interventions aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities related to improved broadband and associated digital technology could consider including provision dedicated specifically towards start-up businesses (i.e. separating provision from that aimed at existing/established businesses). This would need to link closely with any wider

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[2] The summative assessment guidance requests lessons learnt for three audiences: the grant recipient/project delivery body; those designing and implementing similar interventions; and policy makers. However, as the Business Programme has now finished, it was deemed appropriate to combine the first two audiences.

start-up business support provision available at the time, but would provide the opportunity for support to be more tailored towards that specific cohort.

- Whilst it would require considerable additional resources, future interventions aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities related to improved broadband and associated digital technology could consider incorporating a level of one-to-one consultancy advice. This could include an adviser (funded through the programme) visiting businesses to undertake an 'audit' of their existing processes and providing tailored recommendations regarding potential digital enhancements/solutions related to ICT/broadband usage.

- The potential for developing platforms which enable beneficiaries to share thoughts, experiences and good practice should be considered by interventions. This could include Facebook or WhatsApp groups and would be managed and maintained by the accountable body or a delivery partner.

- The SFSY Business Programme incorporated a Digital Showcase Conference which covered a wide range of subject areas across one day, utilising a variety of different speakers. This was well received and the inclusion of a series of larger events such as this should therefore be considered within future interventions.

- Wherever contractually possible, programmes should ensure they have the ability to undertake the timely replacement of staff that leave their posts either permanently or temporarily. This is a specific issue for time-bound interventions which have allocated budgets and associated contractual targets, whereby any change in staffing levels can have a significant effect.

- Interventions should ensure there are clear and effective communication channels between the governance/management-level staff and those delivering the programme. For example, such communication has the potential to ensure the effective transfer of performance information throughout the course of an intervention and enhance the understanding of those at governance levels. Individuals delivering 'on the ground' are also well placed to advise on potential solutions to any challenges that emerge.

- Ideally, performance and progress reporting required from delivery staff for the purposes of the funder (MHCLG) and that required for internal governance structures should be aligned (chronologically and in terms of format). This would reduce the reporting requirements placed upon those engaging directly with businesses.

Lessons for policy makers
- Wherever possible, funding-based targets should be focused upon outcomes rather than outputs; this shows the actual impact of support delivered, rather than the volume of delivery. For an intervention such as the SFSY Business Programme this could include a series of outcome indicators focused on what the programme's events led to – for example, increased use of new digital methods, adoption of new technology, increased sales etc.

- Furthermore, the focus on delivering 12 hours' of support is not always appropriate, and should not necessarily be the primary performance indicator. For example, some businesses require only 5-6 hours support to enable the achievement of significant outcomes and impacts.

- The requirement for 'wet' signatures from beneficiaries is not ideal in terms of the efficient use of resource/time, or in relation to environmental sustainability; this is particularly the case for programmes focused around enhancing the use of digital technology. The use of electronic signatures should therefore be encouraged.

- Interventions should incorporate a 'lead-in' period prior to delivery commencing. Ideally this would be for a minimum of three months and would support the creation of programme templates and processes, the development of effective communication mechanisms, and complete clarity regarding the approach to management and delivery. It could potentially be extended to include a trial period of delivery.
- Throughout the delivery of interventions, continual feedback should be sought from beneficiaries to identify changing needs and demands; interventions should ideally be designed whereby there is flexibility to respond to such changes.

1. Introduction

1.1　This report provides a summative assessment of the Superfast South Yorkshire (SFSY) Business Programme. The report has been designed in accordance with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) summative assessment guidance.[3]

1.2　The Programme provided free support across the Transition Region of the Sheffield City Region (SCR)[4] to promote the availability of superfast broadband connectivity by actively raising the awareness of its additional availability whilst also increasing understanding of what new technology, enabled by faster broadband, could achieve. In providing this support it aimed to raise take up levels of superfast broadband and support businesses to access new markets, remain competitive and grow. The support specifically incorporated the provision of awareness raising activities alongside a programme of events.

1.3　The programme, which was part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), commenced on 1 April 2016 and completed on 31 March 2019. Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) was the programme's Accountable Body, whilst SFSY (employed by Barnsley MBC) managed the programme.

1.4　Carney Green was appointed in July 2019, following completion of the Superfast South Yorkshire Business Programme, to undertake the summative assessment. Details of the assessment methodology are provided below.

1.5　*It is important to note here that, given the evaluators were appointed several months after the conclusion of the programme, there were limited opportunities for extensive consultation with beneficiaries and stakeholders; for example, several stakeholders had left their roles by the time the summative assessment commenced.*

1.6　Following this introduction, the report includes the following sections:

- Section 2 details the context of the Superfast South Yorkshire Business Programme
- Section 3 assesses performance against expenditure and output targets
- Section 4 reviews programme delivery and management
- Section 5 assesses programme outcomes and impact
- Section 6 reviews programme value for money
- Section 7 provides conclusions and lessons learnt

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[3] ESIF-GN-1-033 (v2) and ESIF-GN-1-034 (v2)
[4] The Transition Region includes the South Yorkshire boroughs of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield

Assessment methodology

1.7   Figure 1.1 below provides an overview of the methodology used for the summative assessment.

Figure 1.1: Overview of assessment methodology

1.8   Further details of the research activities are detailed below.

Summative assessment research activities

- An inception discussion attended by representatives of Barnsley MBC and Carney Green
- A review of wide ranging SFSY Business Programme documentation and data
- Consultation activity with programme management and delivery staff
- Detailed one-to-one interviews with six programme beneficiaries
- Review of programme performance and expenditure data, as well as wider data provided by the Accountable Body

2.   Programme Context

2.1   This section considers the rationale and associated context within which the SFSY Business Programme was designed, and also provides a summary of its activities and objectives.

Demand for the programme

2.2   The design and development of the programme occurred based on clearly identified market failure, and associated demand. This included the following factors:

- Despite fast broadband connectivity being a vital component in the growth of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), many commercial and industrial areas lacked broadband infrastructure to support business development, innovation and technology ventures; this was primarily related to the residential market being more lucrative for broadband infrastructure providers.

- In addition, 2013 Ofcom data showed that the take up of fixed line broadband services was lower than the UK average in South Yorkshire, and similarly the take up of services from BT's commercial deployment of superfast broadband was also below average.

- This lack of broadband infrastructure and associated take up limited the potential economic success of the SCR; as evidenced by a 2014 SFSY business survey where poor broadband connectivity was cited as an impediment to growth, expansion and productivity.[5] Almost 47 per cent of respondent businesses said their current broadband prohibited areas within the business and if they were looking to relocate over 79 cent identified that the availability of superfast broadband would be a priority consideration.

- Importantly, the SFSF survey also established that almost 52 per cent of respondents were keen to understand how digital technologies could transform business and almost 54 per cent requested additional support.

2.3   The above factors, and particularly the results of the SFSY business survey, highlighted the need and demand for provision to further identify the specific benefits of improved connectivity to businesses, as well as the associated opportunities related to adopting new technology; this was particularly relevant given that the lack of infrastructure has now been significantly addressed since the inception of SFSY, with fibre broadband coverage of almost 99 per cent of South Yorkshire expected. The SFSY Business Programme was therefore

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[5] This was also emphasised within Britain's Digital Opportunity report (Lloyds Banking), which highlighted the Internet's importance for the majority of SMEs, but also identified that a core group remained digitally disengaged

designed to address this need and demand, providing information to businesses across the SCR. In particular, its European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) application referred to demonstrating the following benefits:

- Small businesses with a high digital maturity are a third more likely to see a rise in turnover when compared to those with low digital maturity

- Businesses using digital technology have increased revenues of 6.6 per cent and reduced costs by 4.4 cent in the last 12 months

- UK online businesses are growing 50 times faster than the economy

- 19 per cent of businesses with a website are exporting compared to 6 per cent of those without a website

- In 2014 small businesses made total e-commerce sales of £19.5 billion

Policy context

2.4   The SFSY Business Programme was designed to complement and enhance ongoing investment in broadband infrastructure across the SCR; specifically by maximising the opportunities created by the wider activity of SFSY regarding improved infrastructure. In this respect it aligned closely with national policy, being delivered by Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), focused around superfast broadband and better mobile connectivity across the UK. The programme also aligned directly to SFSY's own Demand Stimulation Strategy ('Driving Take Up'), which identified the varied benefits of improved connection and provided a range of methods for driving demand.

2.5   The programme also aimed to coordinate with the ERDF-funded SFSY Connection and Innovation Voucher Programme, which provided funding to SMEs in order to support: a) the upfront costs of connecting to high speed/high grade broadband; and b) the costs of adopting superior ICT business solutions that would provide significant business benefit and growth. For example, the Business Programme could raise awareness of the benefits of improved connectivity and the adoption of digital technology, encouraging SMEs to subsequently access the vouchers.

2.6   The programme sought to integrate with the wider business support arena of the SCR, being part of the range of provision that the SCR Growth Hub could offer to businesses (the SCR ESIF Strategy outlined the local ambition to implement a 'world-class' business support offer) – specifically through supporting growth via the enhanced use of broadband technologies. Whilst this integration was partly designed to support promotion of the programme, it would also enable access for programme beneficiaries to a broader range of support delivered through the other Growth Hub providers. Similarly, the programme sought to ensure

effective engagement with other key partners and providers, examples being chambers of commerce, local authority business support teams and business intermediaries.

2.7   More broadly, the SFSY Business Programme sought to contribute to SCR's ambitions to transform the local economy over the next decade through the creation of 70,000 new private sector jobs and 6,000 new businesses; specifically, it aimed to support this by increasing productivity and innovation within SMEs as a result of improved connectivity and technological innovation, as well as attracting new businesses to the SCR due to high quality connectivity. In doing so it also aimed to support the vision of the SCR ESIF Strategy 'to create a city region with a stronger and bigger private sector, that can compete in global and national markets'.

2.8   The programme's activities also complemented the objectives of the UK's Digital Economy Strategy 2015-18 by encouraging businesses to be innovative through the exploitation of digital technology and ICT, in order to ensure that they were able to better serve their customers, whilst also providing them with the confidence and knowledge to become better informed and empowered consumers of ICT/digital products and services.

2.9   Finally, the programme's objectives also corresponded closely with the Digital Agenda, which forms one of the seven pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy (which sets objectives for the growth of the European Union (EU) by 2020). This proposes greater exploitation of ICT to drive innovation, economic growth and progress.

Programme summary

2.10   *Please note this section is designed to outline the structure and design of the programme; the evaluation of these structures is subsequently provided within Section 4.*

2.11   The SFSY Business Programme officially commenced on 1 April 2016, with delivery completion on 31 March 2019. It was delivered across the Transition Region of the SCR, covering the local authority areas of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. The More Developed Region of the SCR[6] was consulted to develop an SCR-wide project, however, a similar project was already operating across the D2N2 LEP area (this was the same Digital Growth programme that was ultimately provided within the SFSY Business Programme – see below).

2.12   The programme's total funding package was £833,333, of which £500,002 (60%) was provided by ERDF and the remainder via Barnsley MBC. This funding sat within Priority Axis

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[6] This includes the 'cross over' areas of North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire which fall within both the SCR and Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire (D2N2) geographies

2 – 'Enhancing Access to, Use and Quality of ICT', and specifically Investment Priority 2B – 'Developing ICT products and services, e-commerce and enhancing demand for ICT'.

2.13   The programme was provided to existing SMEs and new start businesses, with eligibility confirmed as per programme guidelines through SME enrolment forms. The programme requested appropriate evidence to confirm the eligibility of potential beneficiaries. Specific evidence was also required in relation to particular outputs achieved within the programme, for example the need for a 'step change' in broadband speed related to output P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps).

Programme objectives

2.14   The SFSY Business Programme's logic model, developed by the Accountable Body, stated its aim to support 3,000 additional businesses taking up broadband with speeds of at least 30Mbps, and to directly assist 80 businesses.[7] More specifically, the programme sought to:

- Stimulate demand for broadband by promoting its benefits
- Showcase the economic benefits of faster broadband to businesses
- Inform and educate about the benefits to stimulate demand and increase adoption
- Set and manage expectations about what the programme would deliver and when
- Educate businesses on the potential benefits superfast broadband can bring
- Raise participation in digital and equip individuals with confidence and skills

Programme provision

2.15   To achieve its objectives, the programme delivered a range of activity. This can be broadly summarised as including two core workstreams:

- **Demand stimulation activity**, including ongoing promotion of faster broadband benefits and associated availability in the region; and specifically ensuring businesses were aware of the superfast broadband programme – this activity was delivered directly by SFSY
- **A series of up to 60 events/seminars** to actively raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities arising from digital technology, enabled by faster broadband – this activity was delivered via a contract awarded to East Midlands Chamber following an open tendering exercise

2.16   Therefore, the programme's activities were primarily designed to inform, educate and raise awareness; both activity types ultimately sought to raise adoption and participation levels

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[7] These targets were subsequently amended via a Project Change Request (PCR), see below

regarding superfast broadband. The demand stimulation activities primarily occurred prior to the commencement of the programme's events.

Programme management

2.17   Barnsley MBC was the Accountable Body for the programme, with management being undertaken by the SFSY Programme Management Team (which is employed by Barnsley MBC). At the outset of the programme it incorporated the following staffing roles within SFSY:

- Programme Manager (1 day per week)

- Contract Manager (1 day per week)

- Project Officer (2 days per week)

- Project Officer x 3 (full time)

2.18   In addition to the above SFSY roles, the programme also contracted, following an open tender process, with East Midlands Chamber – as referred to above. The Chamber's role was specifically to deliver the programme's events and workshops; these were initially entitled Digital Taster Sessions but subsequently became known as the SFSY Digital Growth Programme. The Chamber's contract included the delivery of 60 events across the South Yorkshire area from 1 October 2017 to 31 December 2018, with the aim of achieving the following output targets:

- 110 SMEs receiving 12 hours' support (C1)

- 16 SMEs supported in their first year of trading (C5)

2.19   East Midlands Chamber delivered the contract in partnership with other chambers of commerce across South Yorkshire, specifically Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber, and Doncaster Chamber. The role of these additional chambers was to support promotion of the programme, manage delegate bookings and host the actual events (East Midlands Chamber provided the facilitators/speakers).

2.20   East Midlands Chamber reported directly to SFSY, whilst the overall SFSY Business Programme reported into the broader governance structure of SFSY.

Contracted programme targets

2.21   Figure 2.1 below shows the original contracted targets for the programme.

Figure 2.1: Original SFSY Business Programme lifetime targets

Indicator	Original target
C1 (enterprises receiving assistance)	80
C5 (new enterprises supported)	16
P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps)	3,000

2.22   The original rationale behind these targets, as stated in the SFSY Business Programme's ESIF application, included the following:

- P4: A 3 per cent penetration rate of SMEs based on there being over 30,850 SMEs in the SCR.[8]

- C1: The target of 80 was based on the following:
  - taster sessions will be delivered as one-to-many (anticipated 10 people each session)
  - each session will be either 3 or 4 hours (subject-dependant)
  - the sessions will be delivered in the areas that have access to superfast broadband, so there is reliance and a need to follow the infrastructure roll out programme

2.23   Throughout the lifetime of the programme there were three Project Change Requests (PCRs), all of which were agreed by MHCLG. These were primarily based upon a realisation that the original P4 target (3,000) was inappropriate. Specifically, this related to the SFSY Intervention Area only representing approximately 20 per cent of South Yorkshire, meaning it included only just over 6,000 businesses (not 30,850). The agreed PCRs therefore included a reduction in the P4 target to 501. They also incorporated an increase in the programme's C1 target, ultimately from 80 to 115; this was supported by moving underspend from the first year's marketing budget to enable additional programme events.

2.24   The above changes led to the following programme targets:

Figure 2.2: Post-PCR SFSY Business Programme lifetime targets

Indicator	Original target	PCR target
C1 (enterprises receiving assistance)	80	115
C5 (new enterprises supported)	16	16
P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps)	3,000	501

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[8] The evaluator notes that a 3% penetration rate, even based on 30,850 businesses, would be less than 1,000 – well below the programme's original P4 target of 3,000. Consultation with programme staff subsequently identified the original P4 target was based on a 9% penetration rate.

2.25   The PCRs did not lead to any changes in the lifetime expenditure budget for the programme, although they did include some reprofiling due to underspend in the first year as a result of a delayed start.

Contextual changes during programme lifetime

2.26   Although the programme demonstrated an ability to evolve throughout its lifetime, for example by changing the focus of events and demand stimulation activities, stakeholders reported no major contextual (e.g. policy or economic) changes which affected delivery.

3.   Programme Progress

3.1   This section provides details the SFSY Business Programme's performance against its contracted output and expenditure targets.

Programme output performance

3.2   Figure 3.1 below summarises the programme's output performance; this is based on actual achieved outputs at the end of its delivery lifetime (31 March 2019).

Figure 3.1: Performance against output targets

Indicator	Original targets	PCR targets	Achieved at 31 March 2019	% of lifetime target achieved
C1 (enterprises receiving assistance)	80	115	112	97%
C5 (new enterprises supported)	16	16	9	56%
P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps)	3,000	501	501	100%

Source: Accountable Body (July 2019)

3.3   Figure 3.1 demonstrates that the programme performed positively in terms of being within three per cent of achieving its core C1 business assist target. This achievement related directly to the events delivered by the programme, which supported beneficiaries to access a minimum of 12 hours' assistance. The provision of 52 workshops and 5 seminars, together with effective pipeline management from East Midlands Chamber, ensured 112 C1 outputs were achieved.

3.4   Similarly, the programme was able to successfully meet it P4 target regarding the number of additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps. These outputs related to the demand stimulation activities led by SFSY and were also supported by the programme's events. For example, businesses engaged by SFSY confirmed they had upgraded their broadband as a result of promotional activity, information or awareness raising (either by SFSY directly or through the programme's events). This demonstrated the positive alignment between the programme and the wider infrastructure development activities of SFSY.

3.5   Less positively, the programme only achieved just over half of its (C5) target to support 16 new enterprises. Feedback from programme staff referred to the following issues here:

- Whilst many beneficiaries provided details of their start date on the programme enrolment form indicating they were 'new enterprises', accessing evidence to confirm this was subsequently problematic; with a lack of evidence to confirm they were new businesses, the number of C5s reduced significantly.[9]

> East Midlands Chamber stated, in its project closure report, stated that a total of 30 SMEs (believed to be new enterprises) registered to the programme, of which 14 received 12 hours of support in their first year of trading. However, following investigation, only eight SMEs could provide evidence that they were trading, and were therefore eligible to be claimed as an C5 output.
>
> The Chamber contacted all 30 SMEs to encourage further attendance at workshops, however, although these were keen continue to receive support they could not commit to attending workshops during the timescale of the programme.

- There was a degree of competition for supporting new businesses with the separate ERDF-funded SCR Launchpad Programme, which provided assistance to start-ups and businesses that had been trading for less than two years.

3.6   A review of data provided by East Midlands Chamber, in its project closure report, demonstrated that 65 businesses received in *excess* of 12 hours support, with a total 1,257 hours delivered across these businesses above their initial 12 hours. This showed that the programme provided added value above the outputs shown in Figure 3.1 above.

3.7   In contrast, it could be argued that the programme had the potential to its reach to a wider range of businesses; however, it was still able to achieve 97 per cent of its C1 target and it is understood there was capacity within many workshops for additional businesses if they had wished to attend. Indeed, consultation with East Midlands Chamber identified that it regularly reviewed its pipeline of businesses and ensured those new to the programme were prioritised above those that had already received 12 hours support. In addition, feedback indicated that several beneficiary businesses required very subject-specific support which only amounted to 3-6 hours before their 'issue' had been addressed, and example being GDPR; data showed that 99 businesses, in addition to the 112 claimed as C1 outputs, attended at least one event.

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[9] It is understood that, for future interventions, East Midlands Chamber has since enhanced the enrolment form to provide more detailed guidance regarding evidence required to confirm a business start date

Programme expenditure performance

3.8   The programme's overall expenditure performance is summarised in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2: Performance against expenditure budget

Lifetime expenditure budget	Achieved expenditure at programme end (31 March 2019)	% of expenditure budget achieved
£833,333	£693,996	83%

Source: Accountable Body (July 2019)

3.9   Figure 3.2 shows that, at the end of the programme (31 March 2019), it had spent 83 per cent of its original lifetime budget – representing an underspend of £139,337. Although this underspend is negative from a contract performance perspective, it does demonstrate positive value for money given that C1 and P4 targets were achieved.

3.10   The main reasons for the programme's underspend, in volume terms, related to salaries and marketing. This can be seen in Figure 3.3 below, which demonstrates that £118,617 (85%) of the programme's £139,337 underspend related to these two spend categories; they were also by far the biggest expenditure categories overall within the programme budget.

3.11   Consultation with staff established that the programme was never fully staffed as originally envisaged (see Section 2 for original planned staff resource). For example, the Programme Manager left during the programme's lifetime, the Contract Manager went on maternity leave, and with the exception of a six-week period there were never more than two full time Project Officers in place. This lower than planned staffing level not only led directly to an underspend but also reduced the programme's capacity to undertake procurement for marketing purposes, hence the marketing underspend.

Figure 3.3: Expenditure performance by spend category

Expenditure category	Target	Performance at project closure (30 June 2019)		
		Total	Variance (-/+)	% of lifetime PCR target
Salaries	£341,598	£276,027	£65,571	81%
Flat rate indirect costs	£51,240	£41,503	£9,737	81%
Marketing	£421,914	£368,868	£53,046	87%
Office costs	£11,171	£3,441	£7,730	31%
Other Revenue	£7,410	£4,157	£3,253	56%
Total	£833,333	£693,996	£139,337	83%

Source: Accountable Body (July 2019)

4.   Programme Delivery and Management

4.1   Section 4 provides qualitative analysis of the programme's implementation, specifically focused around its delivery and management.

Programme commencement

4.2   Although the SFSY Business Programme officially commenced (from a contractual perspective) on 1 April 2016, it is understood that the contract was not received by the Accountable Body (from MHCLG) until August 2016. Anecdotally, this related to a delay in ERDF contractual activity following the result of the UK's EU Referendum. Despite this delay, and a level of uncertainty it created, programme activity commenced in May 2016 with regard to the initial development of demand stimulation activities by SFSY.

4.3   From a programme management perspective, the delay created additional challenges for the Accountable Body whereby its first claim (to MHCLG) incorporated three separate quarters of funded activity. It is understood that this initial claim led to a series of queries/issues to be addressed, which was exacerbated by it incorporating three separate claim periods.

4.4   The initial demand stimulation activities occurred prior to the contracting of East Midlands Chamber to deliver the SFSY Digital Growth Programme (events). This was a conscious decision to ensure that the programme could become established and aligned to SFSY, and that initial marketing and promotional activity could place to develop a customer base and generate interest. Furthermore, once appointed, East Midlands Chamber also took a period of several months to undertake initial partnership working, assessment of demand and promotional activity. These approaches were effective and appropriate.

Business engagement

4.5   This section explores the methods by which businesses were engaged to the programme, and the types of businesses supported.

Engagement methods

4.6   The programme's demand stimulation activity was, by its very nature, focused upon engagement of businesses and associated awareness raising. As a result, this is explored within the 'delivery performance' section below to avoid duplication.

4.7   The provision of programme events, referred to as the SFSY Digital Growth Programme, was partly reliant on East Midlands Chamber's core partners for the programme, namely the three South Yorkshire chambers of commerce:

- Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber

- Doncaster Chamber

- Sheffield Chamber of Commerce

4.8   These South Yorkshire chambers were responsible for promoting the programme of events, as well as managing delegate bookings and hosting the events. The East Midlands Chamber recognised the importance of the role played by the other chambers, particularly given their local membership[10] and the limited existing awareness of the Digital Growth Programme in South Yorkshire compared to the D2N2 and Leicester and Leicestershire regions.[11] This was a logical approach given their local presence, and also due to the fact they were hosting the events; it ensured familiarity for many local businesses.

4.9   The East Midlands Chamber programme lead, following commencement of its contract, therefore spent an initial period of several months undertaking marketing and development activity to raise awareness of the events. This included meetings with each of the South Yorkshire chambers as well as a variety of other local partners (see below), discussing the planned events and providing them with marketing packs/toolkits (mainly to be used via social media).

4.10   Although each of the South Yorkshire Chambers were described as helpful and engaging, the approach did create the following challenges:

- Natural competition between the three South Yorkshire chambers regarding membership from local businesses, particularly given their close proximity, reduced the opportunity for more collaborative (i.e. combined) meetings across all of the chambers

- There was a need to ensure each chamber promoted the SFSY Business Programme to a wider range of businesses beyond their existing membership

4.11   Partly linked to addressing the second bullet point above, and also to ensure a broader scope of promotional activity, East Midlands Chamber also utilised the following methods:

- The development of working relationships (for programme promotion and referral purposes) with a wider range of business support organisations, including:
  - SCR Growth Hub (which ensured events were listed on its website)
  - Enterprising Barnsley
  - Creative Sheffield
  - Rotherham Investment and Development Office (RiDO)

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[10] Although the East Midlands Chamber did already have members that are based in South Yorkshire, clearly the chambers based within the area had higher numbers of local members

[11] Prior to commencing provision within the SFSY Business Programme, East Midlands Chamber was already delivering the Digital Growth Programme within the D2N2 and Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) regions

- Sheffield Hallam University Business School
- The use of social media and direct email marketing
- The development of programme marketing materials
- Promotion of programme events via Eventbrite
- The use of East Midlands Chamber's own business database (for businesses that were based in South Yorkshire)
- The use of an existing business database provided by SFSY (partly developed via the demand stimulation events)
- The development and dissemination (through social media and the programme website) of beneficiary case studies and testimonials, demonstrating the impact of the programme
- Attendance at a wide range of events and meetings led by partners, for example Sheffield Digital, Sheffield Innovation Project (SIP) and RiDO

4.12   Recognising the broader activities of SFSY, and particularly the programme's requirement to ensure additional businesses took up broadband access of at least 30mbps, East Midlands Chamber, when delivering the events, sought to emphasise the availability of the provision available via the separately funded SFSY Connection and Innovation Voucher Programme, as well as more generally encouraging take up of enhanced connectivity; there were some examples within the summative assessment of businesses that attended SFSY Business Programme events and also accessed a Connection or Innovation Voucher.

4.13   There was a slight challenge branding different elements of the SFSY Business Programme. For example, the demand stimulation activities were part of SFSY provision, yet the events formed a component of the wider Digital Growth Programme. The programme sought to achieve a middle ground here by entitling the events as the 'SFSY Digital Growth Programme'. This was logical as it continued to build upon the existing reputation of the overall Digital Growth Programme whilst also emphasising the involvement of SFSY.

4.14   Unfortunately, it was not technically possible to achieve greater integration by hosting the SFSY Digital Growth Programme element within the SFSY website (i.e. to enable registration of beneficiaries via this route), hence instead it formed part of the overall East Midlands Chamber Digital Growth Programme website (as a separate 'mini site'). Although programme staff suggested this approach led to a slight disconnect whereby some beneficiaries were not always aware of the role of SFSY, ultimately they were able to access the support they required; furthermore, businesses consulted during the summative assessment were fully aware that the Digital Growth Programme formed part of the wider SFSY provision.

4.15   Ultimately, data provided by the Accountable Body and East Midlands Chamber demonstrated positive levels of engagement in the programme's events. This included 112

businesses accessing at least 12 hours support via the events and 211 attending at least one event, while the wider demand stimulation activities led to 501 additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps.

Beneficiary profile

4.16   As outlined above, the SFSY Digital Growth Programme element of the provision enabled 211 separate SMEs to attend at least one event. The breakdown of these businesses, by local authority geography and sector, is shown in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Geography and sector of businesses attending at least one event

Sector	Barnsley	Doncaster	Rotherham	Sheffield	Total
Professional/scientific/technical activities	5	5	4	18	**32**
Information and communication	3	6	2	19	**30**
Wholesale and retail trade	4	6	2	15	**27**
Manufacturing	4	1	3	15	**23**
Other service activities	3	5	1	8	**17**
Education	4	2	1	10	**17**
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2	5	1	6	**14**
Administrative and support service activities	3	4	1	6	**14**
Construction	2	1	-	6	**9**
Transport and storage	2	1	2	1	**6**
Human health and social work activities	-	1	-	5	**6**
Accommodation and food service activities	1	-	2	1	**4**
Real estate activities	-	1	-	3	**4**
Financial and insurance activities	-	1	-	1	**2**
Electricity/gas/steam and air conditioning	-	-	1	1	**2**
Renewable energy/low carbon/environment	-	-	1	1	**2**
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1	-	-	-	**1**
Mining and quarrying	1	-	-	-	**1**
Grand Total	**35**	**39**	**21**	**116**	**211**

Source: East Midlands Chamber (March 2019)

4.17   Figure 4.1 shows no major concentration of specific sectors, although those with the greatest proportions of beneficiaries included professional, information and communication, wholesale and retail, and manufacturing. These broadly represent the most common sectors within the SCR, although feedback from programme staff did suggest a greater proportion of 'digitally aware' businesses, which may explain the high proportion of information and communication sector businesses.

4.18   The programme, and specifically the SFSY team supported by East Midlands Chamber, sought to encourage additional engagement in the programme by manufacturing businesses – recognising a generally lower propensity for that sector to engage. This involved the development and facilitation of 'Art of the Possible' workshops held within manufacturing environments/locations, with a view to showcasing the benefits of digital technology to the sector and encouraging take up.

4.19   Geographically, Figure 4.1 demonstrates that businesses from Sheffield most commonly engaged in the programme's events, representing 55 per cent of attendees. Although this indicates a high concentration of Sheffield-based businesses, as would be expected given its larger business base, there were notable proportions of attendees from Doncaster (18%) and Barnsley (17%). Figure 4.2, later within this section, demonstrates a relatively equitable breakdown regarding where the programme's events were held (geographically).

4.20   The evaluators, when reviewing other SCR-based interventions, have identified relatively low attendance levels at one-to-many events from Rotherham-based businesses, which is again evident within Figure 4.1 above. Feedback from Rotherham stakeholders (within other evaluations) indicated this has always been an issue historically.

Business need

4.21   Business needs regarding the programme's events provision were regularly reviewed. They were initially based on experience of the existing wider Digital Growth Programme but also informed by consultation with a range of South Yorkshire partners and by the feedback obtained through the initial SFSY demand stimulation activities. In addition, East Midlands Chamber undertook some initial direct consultation with businesses, for example via business parks, to assess demand. Furthermore, at the end of each programme event the attendees were asked what specific subjects they required further support towards, including anything more bespoke.

4.22   Although support requirements were described as widespread, more commonly requested themes included:

- Digital marketing
- Video marketing
- Social media
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

4.23   It is evident, when reviewing the types of events provided through the programme, that the above themes were commonly provided subjects.

Delivery performance

4.24   This section explores the delivery of the SFSY Business Programme, including perceptions of its quality from beneficiaries and stakeholders.

Demand stimulation

4.25   SFSY's demand stimulation activity was initially drafted to obtain comment and buy-in from the four local authority partners within South Yorkshire. This approach was positive and important given their role in supporting the activity and increasing awareness of it with local businesses. It ultimately led to the development of a SFSY's Demand Stimulation Strategy ('Driving Take Up'), which outlines how South Yorkshire's economic strengths could be built upon to establish it as one of the UK's best connected areas, leading to both resident engagement and digital industry growth. The Strategy helped to inform the SFSY Business Programme's demand stimulation activities, but was developed to support the overall work of SFSY.

4.26   Perhaps of most relevance to the SFSY Business Programme were the Demand Stimulation's Economy and Engagement themes, as summarised below.

SFSY Demand Stimulation Strategy

Economy Theme

SFSY will support the Sheffield City Region's 'Growth Plan' which sets out the LEP's plans to transform the local economy over the next decade by creating 70,000 new private sector jobs and 6,000 new businesses. This will be achieved by supporting business through a wide array of business support activity including workforce development:
- *Champion the benefits of the Connection Vouchers across South Yorkshire SMEs*
- *Expand existing business support programmes to support growth using broadband technologies*
- *Securing funding to develop new business support programmes to providing targeted support for businesses to adopt new technologies for business grow*
- *Promote the business benefits and availability of superfast broadband across South Yorkshire*
- *Promote and celebrate South Yorkshire's digital adoption among businesses through case studies and events*

Engagement Theme

SFSY will improve the superfast broadband awareness, skills and confidence across South Yorkshire by working in partnership with existing agencies and organisations and through a series of mini projects. The use of social media will be expanded providing significant opportunities to reach individuals and respond to their needs:
- *Tell people that superfast broadband is available*
- *Tell people what they can use superfast broadband for and how it can make a difference*

> - *Launch Facebook and twitter to provide a simple interaction for businesses and residents with SFSY*
> - *Work with partners who offer opportunities for individuals raise their digital skills and confidence levels.*

Source: SFSY Demand Stimulation Strategy – Driving Take Up

4.27   The focus upon promoting business benefits, celebrating digital adoption among businesses through case studies and events, and working with partners to enable improved digital skills and confidence levels were particularly well aligned with the SFSY Business Programme. Furthermore, the Demand Stimulation Strategy also outlined key messages for businesses and identified a series of potential communication channels.

4.28   Utilising this broader demand stimulation framework, the SFSY Business Programme commenced by engaging with communities, specifically focused around businesses, to communicate the ongoing and forthcoming deployment of superfast broadband within their area. Subsequently, the focus, following deployment, was upon re-engaging with business communities to support them regarding: a) how to order/connect with the new provision; and b) further explain the potential benefits it could provide their business regarding additional digital/ICT adoption, for example cloud-based solutions.

4.29   As explained in Section 2, there was clear evidence of the need to demonstrate and promote these benefits to businesses in order to encourage take up of superfast broadband as well as the associated utilisation of digital technology. Whilst the outset of the programme (at the time of writing) was only three and a half years ago, there was considerably less awareness of, and appetite towards, the benefits of superfast broadband; hence the importance of the initial demand stimulation work.

4.30   The specific activities undertaken as part of the demand stimulation work were varied and widespread, for example including the following. These were also monitored and driven by a SFSY Activity Planner.

> **Examples of SFSY demand stimulation activities (not exhaustive)**
>
> - Social media campaigns
> - Door-to-door awareness raising activities
> - Promotion via leaflets, stickers, posters and coasters provided to local businesses
> - Engagement with partner organisations, for example local authority business support teams and the SCR Growth Hub (direct meetings or attendance at existing events/meetings))
> - One-to-one engagement with individual businesses
> - One-to-many events (e.g. the aforementioned 'Art of the Possible' workshops held within manufacturing environments/locations)

- Emails to, and meetings with, intermediaries and a wide range of other organisations – including businesses and voluntary/community sector organisations
- Attendance at a variety of events to promote the provision (e.g. Doncaster Business Showcase 2017, Sheffield Business Show, Tour de Yorkshire, Federation of Small Business events, Visitor Economy Forum, Barnsley Pride, Flavours Food Festival, Sheffield Business Show)
- Development of a promotional video
- Use of business case studies for promotional purposes
- Identification of specific localities to target using a traffic light system
- Press releases to/adverts in newspapers and publications (e.g. Sheffield Star, Insider Magazine)

4.31   The above activity took place prior to the commencement of the SFSY Business Programme's events, which started in autumn 2017. It not only helped to raise awareness of potential benefits of superfast broadband and associated digital technology, which would encourage businesses to attend the subsequent workshops, but also enabled SFSY to develop a database of businesses which registered interest via the demand stimulation activity. This database, containing c2,000 businesses, was subsequently used to keep businesses informed of the events list.

4.32   Further to raising awareness of the forthcoming events and the general benefits of superfast broadband, the demand stimulation events also sought to enable the programme's achievement of its P4 target relating to 501 additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps. This therefore formed a focus of the activities, providing advice and guidance on how to order and connect to superfast broadband; it was also the focus of subsequent activity by SFSY towards the end of the programme which included re-engaging businesses to further encourage take up. As shown in Section 3 the programme was successful in achieving this target.

4.33   In some instances, the demand stimulation activities engaged with businesses which were located in areas where superfast broadband was not being deployed. Where this occurred, or where a business had more bespoke digital requirements, the programme team referred the business to the separate SFSY Connection and Innovation Voucher Programme.

SFSY Digital Growth Programme

4.34   As outlined in Section 2, East Midlands Chamber was contracted to deliver a series of events as part of the SFSY Business Programme. This provided the opportunity to build on an existing event programme delivered by the Chamber in the D2N2 and LLEP regions, entitled the Digital Growth Programme; as a result, to utilise this existing brand recognition, the

events within the SFSY Business Programme were termed the SFSY Digital Growth Programme.

4.35   The existing programme delivered by East Midlands Chamber provided the following benefits for the SFSY Business Programme:

- A tried and tested model
- Existing course material already developed
- A series of experienced trainers/facilitators in place
- An understanding of the subjects that were well received by businesses[12]
- Recognition of the most suitable delivery methods to engage businesses

4.36   Despite its existing delivery experience, it is important to recognise (as explained within the 'business engagement' section above) that East Midlands Chamber undertook a significant engagement with a range of South Yorkshire partner organisations (particularly chambers of commerce) to understand the specific demands of businesses in the region (in relation to maximising digital technology); this enabled events to be tailored to local demand and was also based on the concept of inclusivity.

4.37   Following the above assessment of demand, East Midlands Chamber put together a series of strategic action planning workshops, together with a smaller number of awareness raising seminars (e.g. breakfast briefings). The workshops, which formed the majority of provision, were six hours long. This was viewed as an effective mechanism to ensure that beneficiaries, by attending only two workshops, received 12 hours of support; it also reduced the administrative burden upon East Midlands Chamber and its partners. When consulted, beneficiaries reported positively regarding the length of the workshops, for example one stated:

"A full day workshop was good for me as it meant I could really concentrate on the event and not worry about having to work on other tasks later in the day. I liked this approach as it made me focus."

4.38   The awareness raising seminars were three-hours in length.

4.39   The events commenced from autumn 2017, with a focus on assisting businesses to understand the opportunities available to them in relation to digital technology (enabled by improved broadband) across a range of disciplines and themes. A full list of the 18 different subjects provided through the events programme is shown below.

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[12] East Midlands Chamber also adopted learning from an evaluation of a previous ERDF-funded project entitled 'Transformational ICT'

Programme events – subjects

- Integrating Social Media Into Your Business (2 days)
- Email Marketing for Success
- Understanding Google Analytics
- Video Marketing, Including Live Streaming
- Getting Ready for GDPR
- Effective Search Engine Optimisation
- Superfast South Yorkshire Digital Showcase Conference
- Creating Video Content for the Web
- Blogging for Business
- Digital Marketing for Local Business
- Planning an Effective Website
- Converting Website Visitors into Sales
- Data and Making the Most of your Business Relationships
- What's New in Search 2017
- Working with Digital Images
- Getting Ready for Cyber Essentials
- Developing Effective Content for the Web
- Life After GDPR - Next Steps

4.40   It is notable above that Digital Showcase Conference was provided via the programme. This occurred close to the end of the provision with the aim of covering a wide range of subject areas across one day, utilising a range of different speakers. This was viewed positively by programme staff, who also suggested it was partly used as a celebration event for the programme. The original programme application had indicated the potential for two such events, and given the feedback above, it may be useful to consider additional events of this nature within future interventions.

4.41   East Midlands Chamber collected feedback at the end of each programme event. This was subsequently used to improve provision wherever possible, and to identify additional areas of demand. This was also informed by attendance levels for specific workshop subjects, which led to the programme being evolved and refined. For example, the 'Integrating Social Media Into Your Business' event was particularly popular, and hence was held on six separate occasions. In contrast, a series of other events were cancelled due to low subscription rates from businesses, and hence were not subsequently provided (e.g. Improve Operational Effectiveness with Cloud Computing).

4.42   Over the course of the programme's lifetime, a total of 57 events were delivered via the programme, with an average attendance rate of ten people – this is summarised below.

Programme events – volumes and attendees

- Total number of events: 57 (52 full-day strategic workshops and 5 3-hour seminars)
- Total number of attendees: 211 separate businesses *(note many businesses attended more than one event)*
- Average attendees per event: 10
- Number of different event subjects: 18
- Most commonly held event: Integrating Social Media Into Your Business (6 events)
- Highest number of attendees: 34 (Superfast South Yorkshire Digital Showcase Conference)
- Lowest number of attendees: 5 (Developing Effective Content for the Web)
- Average drop-out rate following initial booking: 2.2 (when excluding the SFSY Digital Showcase Conference the dropout rate was 1.8)

4.43   In addition to the 57 events provided through the programme, a further 18 were cancelled; this was mainly due to low booking/subscription numbers.

4.44   The events were hosted by the three separate South Yorkshire chambers. This involved undertaking 'meet and greet' activity, signing attendees in and registering attendees via the programme website. East Midlands Chamber provided the trainers/facilitators, and the Chamber's programme lead also sought to attend events wherever possible. This approach was reported to work well and ensured a 'local presence'.

4.45   Feedback reported particularly high demand for events in Sheffield, evidenced by the significant proportion of beneficiaries from Sheffield (see Figure 4.1 above). Despite this concentration, East Midlands Chamber sought to ensure effective coverage across South Yorkshire. There were some particularly beneficial locations, an example being the Digital Media Centre in Barnsley, which provided the opportunity to engage with other businesses that were attending the Centre for other purposes. Figure 4.2 shows the breakdown of 57 events provided through the programme by local authority geography; this reveals a relatively equitable spread.

Figure 4.2: Geography of programme events

Sheffield   Rotherham   Doncaster   Barnsley
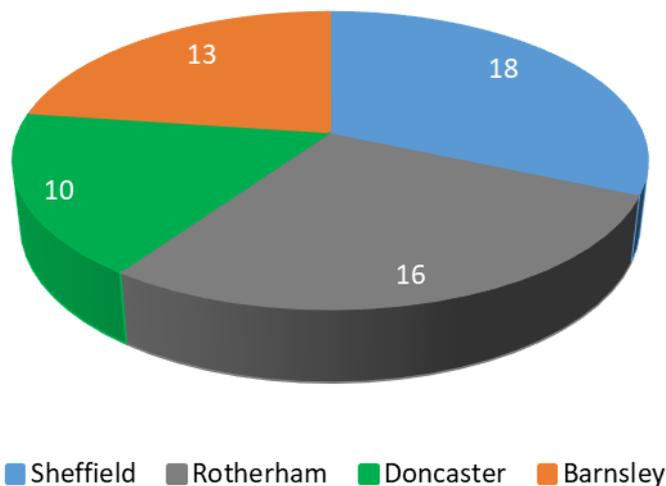
4.46   In addition to the events programme, East Midlands Chamber developed a Facebook support group for the overall Digital Growth Programme, available to beneficiaries from across the three regions it operated within (SCR, D2N2 and Leicestershire). This provided businesses with the opportunity to join the group and share their experiences, as well as to ask questions of each other. It also helped to promote programme events.

Processes

4.47   East Midlands Chamber developed a SFSY Digital Growth Programme website to help promote the events. As it was not possible for this to be hosted within the SFSY website, it was instead developed as a landing page on the wider overall Digital Growth Programme website, making clear reference to SFSY branding.

4.48   Positively, the website was designed to be functional, whereby it not only raised awareness of the events but also enabled the registration of beneficiary businesses. For example, businesses were invited to visit the registration page and to enter their details, print the completed registration form and scan or post this to the East Midlands Chamber (with a 'wet' signature). This enabled the Chamber to undertake an eligibility check and, if eligible, meant the beneficiary could subsequently select the events they wished to attend via the website. This was supported by a video explaining the registration process. Beneficiaries consulted during the summative assessment referred positively to the ease of registration.

4.49   In addition to enabling registration, the website also incorporated a client management system for East Midlands Chamber to utilise. For example, the Chamber could interrogate data regarding the businesses that had enrolled, what sector they were from, where they

were based and the level of support they had received. This was particularly useful from a pipeline management perspective. It could also enable the Chamber to identify, where there was high demand for certain events, if this demand was primarily from businesses that had already received twelve hours support or from businesses that had only received six or less. In addition, the system enabled waiting lists when events were fully booked, which sometimes led to additional events being provided (i.e. if there was a sufficient waiting list).

Quality of support received

4.50   Consultation with a sample of beneficiaries that had attended the SYSF Digital Growth Programme events generated very positive feedback. Those consulted referred to the high quality of the facilitators and the content that was provided; this allowed them to gain significant knowledge. For example, one beneficiary who had attended three events commented:

> *"The events far exceeded my expectations, I was blown away by it. It was not a sales pitch at all, as some can be. The trainer was very engaging, I learnt loads and I couldn't believe we were getting such quality for free. There was loads of useful and quality content."*

4.51   Specific comments relating to the events included the following:

- **High quality facilitators:** the facilitators had significant and current knowledge of the subject matter; more than one beneficiary also commented that they were not focused on selling additional products or services (which they had experienced when attending other free events).

   "I was really impressed with them, the quality was excellent and they really knew their stuff. Also, they were not at all salesy; they were there to help."

- **A tailored approach:** the length of the events (6 hours in most cases) provided the opportunity for support to be tailored to the specific circumstances of individual businesses.

   "The day-long approach meant we could really focus on our own business in depth, meaning what we learnt was really relevant to us."

- **Action-focused:** beneficiaries referred to the benefit of taking away a bespoke action plan for their business based on the activities within the event.

   "We got a really detailed workbook to take away with us which we could use specifically for our business moving forward."

- **Interactive:** The events provided the opportunity for significant discussion amongst different businesses, enabling the effective sharing of knowledge.

   "I really liked how interactive the events were. We sat with other businesses on tables, rather than in a classroom style. This helped us to have good discussions with other people that attended. There were also really good Q and A sessions."

4.52   Although limited in volume, consultation with beneficiaries that had engaged with SFSY to obtain awareness and understanding of improved broadband in their area also referred very positively to its work. They particularly referred to SFSY maintaining communication and responsiveness to queries. One beneficiary described the support as 'brilliant'.

Addressing horizontal principles

4.53   Although the SFSY Business Programme was not specifically designed around addressing the **ERDF's Equality and Anti-Discrimination theme,** it is notable that the wider provision of SFSY naturally delivers improved infrastructure to areas where market failure exists and which are not deemed commercially viable; this often includes deprived areas such as former mining villages, for example.

4.54   The programme sought to ensure businesses within these areas were able to take advantage of this infrastructure wherever possible. Programme staff gave specific examples of effective engagement with traditionally deprived communities such as Burngreave and Firth Park. In Burngreave, SFSY had created strong links with the local library and the Burngreave Messenger, which had led to over 50 per cent take up of superfast broadband. In addition, the programme utilised data to identify and shape its approach to engagement, an example being whether English was the first language within a targeted area.

4.55   The activities of SFSY via its demand stimulation work sought to ensure a wide range of different businesses and organisations were aware of, and could access, improved broadband connection and associated digital technology. This occurred through the varied promotional activities of SFSY, examples being:

- Engagement with specific organisations and community groups – for example, Age UK, MacMillan, community festivals etc.
- Voluntary sector/social enterprise-focused campaigns
- Widespread engagement with local authority economic development/business support functions
- Widespread engagement with a range of intermediary organisations to promote the vouchers
- Advertisements and press releases within newspapers and other publications

4.56   As evidenced in Figure 4.2 above, the events programme delivered by East Midlands Chamber was spread relatively equitably across South Yorkshire, supporting access wherever possible. The Chamber sought to be inclusive by adapting the events based on feedback from local partners and beneficiaries; feedback from beneficiaries welcomed the subjects that were provided and stated they were aligned to demand.

4.57   SFSY, through the wider procedures of Barnsley MBC, sought to support the **ERDF's Sustainable Development theme** wherever feasible. This included utilising electronic documentation where possible within the timescales and resource of the programme; supported by the integrated programme website and client management system. The overall ethos of the programme, focused upon the use of improved broadband and digital technology, was closely aligned to sustainable development by reducing the need for travel and documentation within everyday business practices.

Governance and management

4.58   This section provides a review of the structures in place to govern and manage the programme, and the implementation of these.

Programme governance

4.59   The SFSY Business Programme was incorporated within the governance structure of SFSY (part of the Accountable Body, Barnsley MBC). This included its discussion within SFSY's quarterly management board meetings, and the submission of highlights report to it. Despite this mechanism, programme staff reported the potential for more effective communication channels between the governance/management-level staff and those delivering the programme; it was suggested that this would have enhanced progress updates provided to the funding body, for example. Staff also referred to a 'mismatch' (in timescale terms) regarding the need to provide separate progress information required for SFSY governance structures and the external funder (MHCLG); a more aligned approach would have reduced the time required by delivery staff for these activities.

4.60   The programme also formed an agenda item within the organisation's (approximately) monthly team meetings, attended by the following (when available):

- SFSY Broadband Contract Manager
- SFSY Broadband Programme Manager
- SFSY Broadband Project and Contract Officer
- SFSY Voucher Business Support Officer
- SFSY Business Support Officer
- SFSY Broadband Project Officer

4.61   A review of minutes from these meetings demonstrated a series of issues were discussed at each meeting regarding the SFSY Business Programme; in addition, a list of actions were created and reviewed at subsequent meetings.

4.62   The governance of the programme also included the provision of quarterly reports to the SFSY board meetings, and also to the programme manager for distribution to MHCLG. Whilst the relationship with MHCLG was cordial at a local level, with SFSY praising the support of individuals involved, it was reported that responses (from MHCLG) to queries from SFSY were not always timely and did not always provide direct answers to the questions raised. Reference was also made by programme staff to conflicting conversations regarding output evidence requirements, for example between the MHCLG Contract Manager and two different auditors.

Programme management

4.63   As referred to within Section 3, the programme experienced understaffing compared to its original planned staffing structure. Specifically, the Programme Manager left during the programme's lifetime, the Contract Manager went on maternity leave, and with the exception of a six-week period there were never more than two full time Project Officers in place (at one stage of the programme there was only one Project Officer in place). This inevitably created additional pressure within the programme, particularly given the varied roles of the SFSY programme team; the included designing and undertaking the demand stimulation activities, creating and implementing procurement processes for the events programme, leading the design and implementation of a print and design contract, and overseeing the 'Art of the Possible' events.

4.64   A particularly important role for the SFSY programme team was to manage the procured events (SFSY Digital Growth Programme) contract delivered by East Midlands Chamber. Both SFSY and the Chamber referred positively to this working relationship. Although it was described as relatively informal, quarterly meetings occurred between the relevant programme staff in which the Chamber provided progress updates and associated evidence to SFSY; this informed the quarterly report submitted to MHCLG.

4.65   East Midlands Chamber described Barnsley MBC as an effective accountable body/programme manager which fostered a productive relationship and would raise any issues where necessary. Similarly, SFSY referred to the expertise of East Midlands Chamber in managing the contract, which reduced the need for significant intervention. The only concerns raised by SFSY referred to the administrative processes at the very end of the programme after the Chamber's programme lead had ended their involvement in it (i.e. these processes were led by other Chamber staff); this led to some initial errors within the final claim.

5. Programme Outcomes and Impact

5.1   This section reviews the programme's outcomes and impacts, including feedback from beneficiaries.

Beneficiary outcomes

5.2   Feedback from beneficiaries consulted during the summative assessment, supported by a review of programme data and documentation, identified a series of outcomes achieved following the FSY Business Programme's support. A summary of feedback from six different beneficiaries is provided in Figure 5.1 below. However, overall, the following outcome themes were evident:

- **Enhanced broadband speed and quality:** Data from the Accountable Body demonstrated that the programme had supported 501 additional businesses to take up 30Mbps+ broadband. This was enabled via the demand stimulation work of SFSY which raised awareness of the improved broadband infrastructure and also provided support and guidance regarding ordering/connecting to it. The effect of this increased speed was transformational for some businesses, for example one beneficiary referred to reduced business costs, increased efficiency, turnover and profit.

  "My life has been transformed by the new broadband access. It has had a massive impact on my business. Without SFSY I don't think my area would have got it as it was not seen as commercially viable. SFSY also kept me fully informed of when it would be available and how to order it."

- **Enhanced awareness, knowledge and prioritisation:** Businesses that attended the SFSY Digital Growth Programme events commented that they enabled them to become fully aware of ongoing developments and innovations regarding digital technology related to their business. This often related to digital marketing, social media and video content. This enabled them to make more informed decisions, and therefore prioritise their work on specific areas of activity, for example certain elements of social media. Another example of this was the programme's GDPR workshops; some beneficiaries commented that attending these enabled them to focus on specific elements of GDPR which they became aware were most relevant to them.

  "The knowledge we gained helped us to cut through the noise and prioritise. It is difficult to stay on top of our everything as the digital world is fast changing."

- **Increased confidence and efficiency:** The knowledge gained as a result of the programme provided businesses with additional confidence to undertake activities related to digital technology and ICT. For example, beneficiaries reported that the events

provided them with 'simple steps' to undertake certain activities. This not only increased their confidence to undertake the activities, but made them more efficient when doing so.

"I was able to identify my real priorities for marketing with much greater confidence. It helped me to reach my potential."

- **Catalyst for spend:** Some of the beneficiaries stated that, following attendance at the programme's events, they identified the need for additional expenditure. One example was a business which, having pinpointed its requirements related to GDPR, was able to create a specific brief and subsequently appoint a consultant to assist with ensuring compliance. Another example was a business which, upon obtaining much greater knowledge of video marketing methods via the events, subsequently purchased and utilised additional video equipment.

"I suddenly knew more about how to use videos to market our business after the workshop broke it down for us, so we went out and bought more equipment."

- **Collaboration:** The SFSY Digital Growth Programme events, partly due to their day-long format, provided the opportunity for different business beneficiaries to interact with each other. This not only led to informal discussions and learning, but also enabled some businesses to share contact details with a view to collaborating with, or selling to, each other.

"There was a lot of time to speak with other people. This was really helpful and I made quite a few contacts who I hope to do business with in the future."

5.3   It was difficult for beneficiaries to quantify the impact of the support upon their business, particularly in economic terms such as sales, turnover and job creation. Whilst several commented that the support had contributed to economic benefits, for example through enhancing their marketing approach and raising awareness of the business, the overriding benefit of the programme was providing businesses with updated and enhanced knowledge. This gave them with the tools to make more informed decisions moving forward.

5.4   As referred to above, a summary of support received by a sample of beneficiaries, and the impacts of this, is provided in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1: Summary of support received and subsequent outcomes and impacts (beneficiaries consulted during evaluation)

Summary of support received	Headline outcomes and impacts
• The beneficiary business manufactures and designs traditional and innovative marking, identification and traceability solutions. • The business' lead marketer attended four SFSY Digital Growth Programme events. • The events each lasted for a full day; the beneficiary liked this approach as it meant they could focus fully on it. • Events attended included GDPR and What's New in Search 2017. • All of the events attended were described as high quality and very helpful by the beneficiary. • A key positive element of the events was that they were very interactive. This included sitting with other businesses on tables and incorporating useful Q and A sessions.	• The beneficiary commented that the events really helped them to stay on top of their role within the business, for example understanding the current innovations and being aware of shortcuts, tips and updates related to digital marketing. They said this enabled them to 'cut through the noise and prioritise', ultimately meaning they became more efficient in their role. • Following the marketer's attendance at an initial GDPR event, the organisation's IT and Operations Directors attended a second GDPR event; this led to the business appointing a separate company to provide it with additional bespoke GDPR support. Without attending the SFSY Digital Growth Programme GDPR event the business would not have been able to pinpoint its exact requirements with regard to this appointment. • In addition to supporting the appointment of a bespoke organisation, the GDPR events helped to 'ease the concerns' of the business and to focus on what was specifically relevant to it as an organisation. • The interactive nature of the events enabled the beneficiary to meet potential customers and collaborators; at the time of consultation this had not led to any direct developments but there was potential for this moving forward. • Whilst the beneficiary could not directly attribute, in numerical terms, the contribution of the events to turnover increases and job creation, they did comment that the information and knowledge gained all helped towards this goal. For example, the knowledge gained fed into the business' website content strategy and meant it was able to respond directly to whoever was viewing the website. The business has since seen an increase in website visitors.
• The beneficiary is a theatre company that creates new musical theatre and performs in South	• The support led to the beneficiary obtaining significantly more knowledge, and particularly confidence, to develop the business with regard to the subject

Yorkshire and beyond. The individual consulted also provides freelance marketing.

- In approaching the SFSY Business Programme they required general support but with a particular emphasis on keeping up to date with changing technology and methods around marketing, digital media and communications.
- The beneficiary attended three events, specifically:
  - Creating Video Content for the Web
  - Email Marketing for Success
  - Effective Search Engine Optimisation
- The beneficiary liked the full-day format of the events, stating that it enabled greater depth, practical implementation and networking.
- They stated that the events 'far exceeded' their expectations, referring to a very engaging trainer, a significant amount of quality content and a very detailed workbook to take away.

areas (e.g. video content, email marketing, SEO). For example, they gained an understanding of simple steps required to set up and frame a video; this had already saved the beneficiary a lot of time and made them more effective and efficient.

- Although the beneficiary said it was difficult to quantify the impact of the support received through the programme, they did state it had led to an increased engagement rate for the business; for example an increase in the opening of emails that it had disseminated. They suggested this was very positive and should lead to additional benefits in the future.
- The beneficiary stated that, if they had not attended the events, they would have carried on trying to find ways of improving on their own by searching the internet.
- The beneficiary commented that they had already shared some of their new knowledge (gained from the events) with other businesses and friends.
- The opportunity to access faster broadband was explained within the events but this was not a priority for the beneficiary at the time.

- The beneficiary businesses provides a range of products focused on minimising waste and helping the environment; these specifically include hand dryers and other washroom products.
- The beneficiary consulted was the organisation's lead for digital marketing and content creation. They therefore sought to increased their knowledge in this area by attending the events.
- The business had provided representatives to at least six events delivered by the SFSY Business Programme; with the majority being attended by the digital marketing and content creation lead.

- The beneficiary stated that the events primarily consolidated what the business already knew whilst also updating this knowledge. They referred to the subject areas covered as 'fast changing', hence the benefit of the events.
- Each event provided the beneficiary with something helpful to take away and implement, particularly as individual action plans were developed. The events also provided signposting to additional support if required.
- Ultimately, by attending the events the business has become better at undertaking its content marketing. Linked to this, it has purchased more video equipment as it has a better understanding of how to use this.
- The beneficiary commented it was difficult to quantify the broader impact of the events on the business, as sales were improving anyway. However, they

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• Topics of the events attended included:
   - Search Engine Optimisation
   - Blogging for Business
   - Integrating Social Media Into Your Business
     Creating Video Content for the Web
   - Understanding Google Analytics
• The beneficiary was very impressed with the events and did not expect them to be so good considering they were provided free of charge. They referred to the high quality information that they took away from the events and the 'brilliant' standard of delivery.
	referred to improved marketing delivery and content, which would have supported business growth to some extent.

• The beneficiary, an IT and technology support provider, accessed a SFSY Connection Voucher as well as attending a series of events through the SFSY Business Programme. • The events attended were varied and included those focused on social media and the use of video marketing. • The beneficiary would have ideally liked to have sent more than one staff member to each workshop, but this was not allowed.	• Attendance at the events helped the beneficiary to focus on specific methods for marketing its products and services. • In particular, it helped to focus and improve the business' social media activities. • The beneficiary commented on the important role of the events in terms of improving the overall marketing of the business, whereby existing and new clients had specifically commented on this. • It was stated that the improved marketing had definitely created some positive impacts regarding business sales and turnover, but it was not possible to quantify this.
• The beneficiary is a human resources consultant, working predominantly with law firms either from home or at client locations.	• The improved and faster broadband connection has had a 'massive' impact on the business. In particular, this has included: - The need for fewer 'onsite' visits to clients as the beneficiary has much greater capacity to work at home; this has reduced costs/efficiencies for the beneficiary and their clients

• They had faced significant difficulties regarding low broadband speed, which was negatively affecting their business. • Having been made aware of SFSY via their local MP, the beneficiary began to communicate with it, initially via Twitter. This enabled the beneficiary to understand when improved broadband, via SFSY, would become available to them. As a result, once it was available, they immediately connected to it. • The beneficiary commented very positively regarding SFSY, stating how the organisation always stayed in touch and responded to enquiries.	- Enabled the beneficiary to operate several different (client) laptops and associated technology at the same time - Broadened the range of tasks the beneficiary can undertake, for example the ability to hold Skype calls with clients - Increased the overall speed of working for the beneficiary • The above impacts had, according to the beneficiary, created additional turnover and profit for the business. • The beneficiary was so pleased with the impact of the improved broadband, and the support from SFSY, that they worked with SFSY to create a promotional video.
• The beneficiary, who works in the brewing industry, wanted to improve their business' use of social media, having seen its positive impact on other businesses. • They attended three events through the SFSY Business Programme and reported these to be 'very informative' and 'very useful'. • The support provided within the events was also described as 'high quality', including the presentations, the handouts, and the knowledge of the facilitators.	• The knowledge obtained at the events has enabled the business to improve its use of social media, especially new forms of social media more relevant to younger people outside of the beneficiary's peer group. • In addition, it has led to the business improving its use of images online. Aligned to this, the beneficiary now has greater understanding of image copyright. • The resultant impact has been an increased awareness of the business through channels other than paid advertising. • Whilst this has not directly led to an increase in turnover or employment for the business, it has supported it to maintain a presence in a declining sector and also to engage with a younger audience.

Source: Carney Green (September 2019)

5.5   All beneficiaries that were consulted via detailed interviews were asked a series of statements regarding the impact of the programme's support. For each statement they provided one of the following responses: *strongly agree, partly agree, partly disagree, strongly disagree or not relevant.* The findings from these questions are shown in Figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2: Response from beneficiaries to statements regarding programme impacts

Due to support from the SFSY Business Programme…
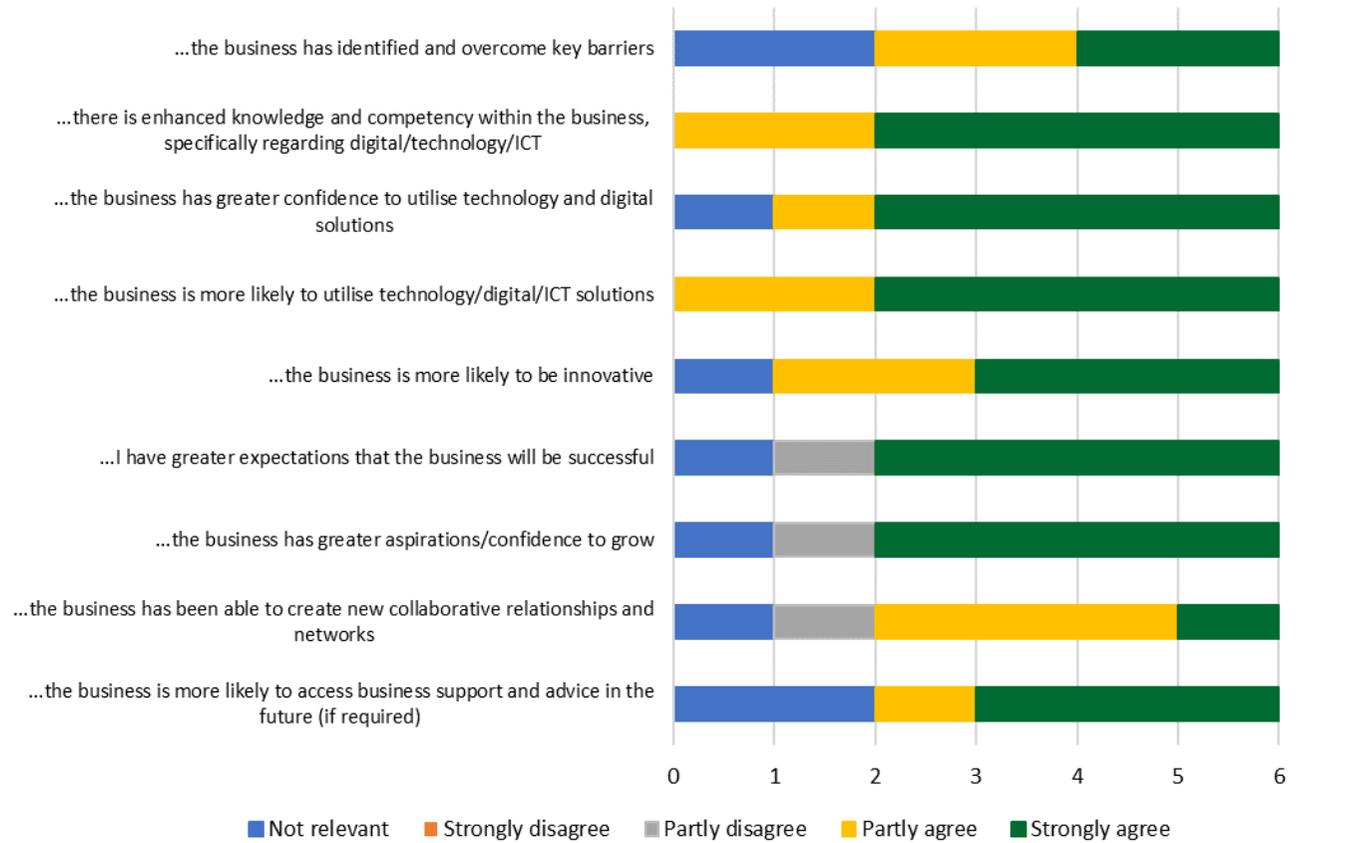
5.6   Figure 5.2 above demonstrates that the most positive impacts upon beneficiaries as a result of the SFSY Business Programme's support were as follows:

- Enhanced knowledge and competency within the business

- Greater confidence to utilise technology and digital/ICT solutions, and an increased likelihood of using them

- Enhanced expectations of growth and success for the business

Economic impact (gross and net)

5.7   The SFSY Business Programme did not have contracted targets related to employment outcomes (C8). The programme did not therefore systematically collect data regarding job creation, turnover increase or Gross Value Added (GVA) generated. Given the timing of the summative assessment, it was also not possible to collect sufficiently robust economic impact data during the primary research.

5.8   Furthermore, the focus of the programme was not based upon job creation or turnover increase. Whilst the consultation with beneficiaries (summarised above) demonstrated a range of positive outcomes, it also highlighted the inability of beneficiaries to directly attribute or quantify any economic impacts from the support; many of the outcomes were primarily knowledge-based and 'enabling' benefits.

5.9   The SFSY Business Programme logic model, developed by the Accountable Body, included the following outcomes, as shown in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8: Outcomes within project logic model

Logic model outcomes:

- Increased GVA
- Increased business take up of 30Mbps+ broadband

Source: Superfast South Yorkshire Business Programme Logic Model (Accountable Body)
Note: the logic model did not contain any impacts

5.10   A review of performance against the above outcomes is provided below.

Figure 5.9: Progress against logic model outcomes

Outcome	Progress
• Increased GVA	• Data was not collected by the programme to enable this to be calculated. • Whilst consultation with a sample of beneficiaries indicated there may have been some impacts upon turnover increase as a result of the support provided, they were unable to quantify this or give any estimate of attribution levels; meaning it was not possible to estimate GVA contributions at gross or net level. Many outcomes were related to knowledge-based or enabling benefits.
• Increased business take up of 30Mbps+ broadband	• Data from the Accountable Body showed that the programme achieved its target of increasing take up of 30Mbps+ broadband for 501 businesses. • Consultation with beneficiaries identified the positive role of SFSY in raising awareness of improved broadband availability, and also providing guidance and support regarding ordering/connection. • Beneficiaries that attended the SFSY Digital Growth Programme events referred to increased confidence to utilise technology and digital/ICT solutions, and also an increased likelihood of using them.

Source: Carney Green (September 2019)

Strategic Added Value

5.11   This section explores the SFSY Business Programme's main contributions to Strategic Added Value (SAV). The programme was not ultimately designed to focus upon SAV, hence an overall summary of its contribution is provided below, rather than exploring the separate elements of SAV. Despite this, it did provide contributions via the following:

- The programme enabled a clear and direct focus upon the importance, and associated benefit, of superfast broadband – as well as the wider digital technology and related

business growth opportunities this can create; in this respect it provided strategic leadership across the SCR.

- The programme ensured effective coordination between the wider broadband infrastructure provision of SFSY and the specifics of ordering, connecting to and taking advantage of this improved infrastructure.

- The programme facilitated enhanced engagement across a wide range of partners throughout the SCR to increase awareness of, and engagement with, superfast broadband and the opportunities it provides; working with these partners helped to provide a degree of strategic influence and also improved demand for the programme's provision.

6.   Programme Value for Money

6.1   This section draws upon findings from previous sections of the report to provide an analysis of the programme's value for money.

Cost of outputs

6.2   Cost per outputs are calculated using overall project expenditure data divided by the number of outputs achieved, for each type of output indicator.   It is important to recognise there are some limitations with this approach, specifically that not all programme expenditure is focused on all output types (it is generally not possible to disaggregate programme expenditure whereby it can be 'allocated' to separate output types). Identifying cost per outputs is, however, a commonly used method of assessing value for money for ERDF and other interventions.

6.3   Figure 6.1 below provides 'planned' cost per outputs, based on the original programme expenditure and output targets (agreed via the PCR), as well as the achieved/projected cost per outputs, based on the performance data shown in Section 3.

Figure 6.1: Profiled and achieved cost per outputs

Indicator	PCR 'planned' cost per output	Achieved cost per output
C1 (enterprises receiving assistance)	£7,246	£6,196
C5 (new enterprises supported)	£52,083	£77,111
P4 (additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps)	£1,663	£1,358

Source: Carney Green, adapted from data provided by Accountable Body (July 2019)
Note: includes <u>all</u> programme expenditure

6.4   Positively, Figure 6.1 shows a lower cost per output than originally expected for enterprises receiving assistance (C1) and additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps (P4). The primary reason for this is that outputs were achieved whilst at the same time the programme underspent.

6.5   The underperformance against targeted C5 outputs relating to the number of new enterprises supported meant that, despite the overall programme underspend, the unit costs was higher than originally planned.

6.6   In assessing value for money it is worth noting that, in addition to the core outputs recorded by the SFSY Business Programme, it also:

- provided support to 99 businesses that attended at least one event but did not ultimately access 12 hours support; hence they would have received some level of benefit without being recorded as a C1 output; and

- assisted 65 businesses to receive in excess of 12 hours support, with a total 1,257 hours delivered across these businesses above their initial 12 hours.

6.7   Whilst it is difficult to disaggregate the expenditure across different elements of the programme, it is partly possible to isolate the activity of East Midlands Chamber in delivering C1 business assists (although it should be recognised that this was supported by time and expenditure form SFSY, for example through submitted claims to MHCLG). In this respect, the unit cost provided by East Midlands Chamber's contract alone was £1,428 per business assist (C1). This represents good value for money, as recognised by the Chamber when comparing with delivery of the same Digital Growth Programme in the D2N2 and Leicestershire regions, where the unit cost was reported as £3,948 and £3,672 respectively.

Benchmarking

6.8   It is difficult to ascertain what constitutes 'good' value for money without reviewing data against comparator interventions. Unfortunately, there is relatively limited literature or data available in this respect. However, Carney Green has developed a series of cost per outputs based on its recent range of evaluations (of business support projects). Whilst these are not wholly the same intervention types, they do provide an opportunity for comparison.

6.9   Furthermore, output unit cost guidance provided for the ERDF 2014-2020 programme,[13] whilst recognising the significant output cost variation across programmes,[14] gives mean and median suggested unit costs for different types of outputs; figures here are based on analysis of 1,185 previous interventions. These, together with unit costs of other interventions evaluated by Carney Green, are shown alongside the SFSY Business Programme in Figure 6.2 below in relation to C1 outputs (comparator interventions have been anonymised).

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[13] Regeneris Consulting (2013) England ERDF Programme 2014-20: Output Unit Costs and Definitions
[14] For example, a business assist (i.e. a C1) can range from two days' (i.e. six hours per day) active consultancy advice or other non-financial assistance, to a significant grant award, or attendance at a series of one-to-many events

Figure 6.2: Benchmark costs for business assists

ERDF intervention	Cost per business assist (C1/C2)
SFSY Business Programme	£6,196
Project 1	£2,390
Project 2	£31,862
Project 3	£9,632
Project 4	£5,581
Project 5	£6,292
Project 6	£5,613
2014-2020 programme indicative guidance	£10,200 (intensive support)

Source: Carney Green (September 2019)
Note: all figures from comparator projects have been adjusted for inflation

6.10   Although it is difficult to accurately compare, Figure 6.2 does suggest that the SFSY Business Programme provided relatively good value for money when assessing the unit cost for each business assisted. However, it is worth noting here that many of the comparator interventions shown above included substantial levels of one-to-one business support, which is generally viewed as more intensive and costly than the one-to-many support provided via events and workshops.

6.11   A further note of caution when analysing the unit costs above is that, as it is not possible to break down expenditure related to each output and hence overall expenditure is used for all interventions, this does not take account of the fact that some interventions will be delivering a much wider range of outputs than others.

Economy, efficiency and effectiveness

6.12   Value for money can also be explored with regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Specifically, these relate to:

- Economy: the careful use of resources to save expense, time or effort (what is spent)
- Efficiency: delivering the same level of service for less cost, time or effort (how the money is spent in terms of delivering the service)
- Effectiveness: delivering the same level of service or getting a better return for the same amount of expense, time or effort (what returns are provided by the money spent)

6.13   Each of these is explored below for the SFSY Business Programme.

- **Economy:** The programme sought to utilise resource effectively wherever possible, for example through accessing existing partner events and meetings when undertaking the demand stimulation activity. Furthermore, the programme's events utilised local venues

provided by the South Yorkshire chambers of commerce. Clearly, the one-to-many focus of the programme's events reduced the amount of time required for advisers/staff to engage with each individual beneficiary. East Midlands Chamber's automated registration process also reduced the level of required spend surrounding this activity.

- **Efficiency:** The programme ultimately spent only 83 per cent of its original budget, with an underspend of £139,337. This was primarily due to understaffing throughout the programme and an associated lower level of marketing spend than planned. Whilst this was not positive from a contractual perspective it resulted in the efficient delivery of the programme. This was also supported by a specific contract (with an agreed budget and associated ceiling) for a considerable proportion of the programme (regarding the events).

- **Effectiveness:** Two of the programme's three unit costs were lower than originally planned; these indicated better value for money than expected. Despite its relatively significant underspend the programme was able to achieve two of its three output targets and received positive feedback regarding the quality and effectiveness of its provision. It also supported an additional 99 businesses to attend events that were not ultimately included in the programme's formal output figures.

7.   Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

7.1   In line with the summative assessment guidance, this section provides headline findings by identifying the programme's strengths and its areas for improvement. It does not, therefore, duplicate the Executive Summary by providing conclusions for each section of the report.

7.2   The section concludes by providing a series of lessons learnt for key audiences, again as outlined within the summative assessment guidance.

Programme strengths

- **Achieving contracted outputs:** The programme performed positively against its two core output targets related to enterprises assisted (C1) and additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps (P4). These targets represented, from a contractual perspective, a key focus for the programme. Data provided by East Midlands Chamber also highlighted that, in addition to the 112 enterprises receiving at least 12 hours support, a further 99 enterprises attended at least one programme event.

- **Achievement of the programme objectives:** By achieving its core targets and delivering provision as planned, the programme achieved its primary objectives related to:
    - Stimulating demand for broadband by promoting its benefits
    - Showcasing the economic benefits of faster broadband to businesses
    - Informing and educating businesses about the benefits to stimulate demand and increase adoption
    - Setting and managing expectations about what the programme would deliver and when
    - Raising participation in digital and equipping individuals with confidence and skills

- **Quality of programme events:** Feedback from beneficiaries and programme staff referred to the high quality of the events provided through the programme. Central to this was: the knowledge and expertise of the facilitators; the opportunity for provision to be tailored to individual businesses; the level of interaction within the events; and the provision of specific action plans and workbooks for attendees to take away. Contracting East Midlands Chamber to deliver the programme's events meant it was able to build on the experience and expertise developed by the Chamber in running similar schemes within D2N2 and Leicestershire.

- **Wide range of demand stimulation activity:** The programme incorporated a wide range of different demand stimulation activities to raise awareness of, and demand for, improved broadband infrastructure. This approach also utilised the broader promotional channels and activities of SFSY whilst ensuring substantial engagement with a range of partner organisations and community locations. Feedback also referred to SFSY reviewing local demographic data in order to tailor its approach to specific communities.

- **Outcomes achieved by beneficiaries:** Although a relatively small sample, beneficiaries consulted during the summative assessment reported a series of positive outcomes achieved as a result of their involvement in the programme. This included access to improved broadband as well as enhanced knowledge as a result of the programme's events. Businesses had used this knowledge to improve various elements of their business, particularly their approach to marketing and customer engagement.

- **Relationship between SFSY and East Midlands Chamber:** Consultation with programme staff, together with a review of programme documentation and performance data, identified a positive and effective working relationship between SFSY (in its contract management role) and East Midlands Chamber (in its delivery role). Whilst there were regular meetings between the two partners, and appropriate evidence of expenditure and outputs were provided, there was clearly a level of flexibility and trust within the relationship; this enabled the Chamber to primarily concentrate on delivering events to the benefit of businesses.

- **Alignment with wider activity and policy:** The SFSY Business Programme was well designed to ensure it built upon, and took advantage of, the wider activities of SFSY and its development of superfast broadband infrastructure in South Yorkshire; this included implementing elements of SFSY's Demand Stimulation Strategy. It also provided a level of coordination with the separate ERDF-funded SFSY Connection and Innovation Vouchers Programme.

- **Functional SFSY Digital Growth Programme website:** East Midlands Chamber developed a specific SFSY Digital Growth Programme website within its overall Digital Growth website. This not only sought to promote the programme but provided functionality, for example by incorporating an automated registration process and generating client management data (which the Chamber could use to manage its pipeline and assess programme against targets).

- **Timing of activity:** The initial demand stimulation activities occurred prior to the contracting of East Midlands Chamber to deliver the SFSY Digital Growth Programme (events). This was a conscious decision to ensure that the programme could become established and aligned to SFSY, and that initial marketing and promotional activity could place to develop a customer base and generate interest. Furthermore, once appointed, East Midlands Chamber also took a period of several months to undertake initial partnership working, assessment of demand and promotional activity. These approaches were effective and appropriate.

Areas for improvement

- **Setting appropriate and realistic output targets:** The original programme application miscalculated the market size available to SFSY with regard to its P4 target for additional businesses taking up broadband access of at least 30mbps. Specifically, this was based upon achieving a 9 per cent penetration rate of all South Yorkshire SMEs, rather than recognising that

SFSY's intervention area only covered 20 per cent of this geography. As a result, a PCR was submitted and agreed which reduced the target accordingly.

- **Improved clarity regarding evidence needed for C5 outputs:** There was a lack of clarity and understanding during the programme's lifetime regarding the availability of evidence to confirm C5 outputs (particularly regarding business start dates). Once this was fully recognised, it was relatively late in the programme's lifetime and hence the target was not achieved due to lack of evidence for some businesses which were originally seen as being 'new enterprises'. Positively, it is understood that, for future interventions, East Midlands Chamber has enhanced the enrolment form to provide more detailed guidance regarding evidence required to confirm a business start date.

- **Staffing resource:** The programme faced difficulties throughout regarding its staffing resources. Whilst the original planned level of staffing appeared appropriate, this did not ultimately materialise and therefore provided specific challenges for the programme; the effect of this was an overall underspend and reduced time to undertake additional marketing and promotional activity.

- **Programme underspend:** Aligned to the previous point, the programme fell considerably short (83%) of its expenditure budget, with an underspend of £139,337. Although this helped to ensure improved unit costs for the programme, it was less positive from a contractual performance perspective. The underspend was mainly due to lower levels of staffing than originally planned, and an associated marketing underspend.

- **Collaborative promotion and engagement across the South Yorkshire chambers:** Feedback indicated that, although each South Yorkshire chamber was helpful and engaging towards East Midlands Chamber (and also provided a very useful local presence), there were limited levels of collaboration *between* the three organisations in relation to the programme; this may have been due to competition amongst them for members. A more collaborative approach may have led to a more effective promotional and marketing approach regarding the programme's events.

Lessons Learnt

This section outlines a series of lessons learnt for consideration by two different audiences, as required within the summative assessment guidelines.[15] Many of these lessons learnt reflect the areas for improvement outlined above, whilst some build on good practice from within the programme.

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[15] The summative assessment guidance requests lessons learnt for three audiences: the grant recipient/project delivery body; those designing and implementing similar interventions; and policy makers. However, as the Voucher Programme has now finished, it was deemed appropriate to combine the first two audiences.

Lessons for SFSY and those designing/implementing similar interventions

- Based on good practice within the SFSY Business Programme, interventions should seek to increasingly adopt the use of functional electronic websites/solutions to support the management, delivery and monitoring of their activity. This has the potential to provide advantages for beneficiaries (for example via an automated registration process) and accountable bodies/delivery partners (for example by maintaining client data and supporting pipeline management and reporting).

- Although the provision of online learning is increasingly prevalent, feedback from businesses (including within the SFSY Business Programme) continues to highlight the advantages of face-to-face delivery regarding business support. It is therefore important that such delivery is retained within future interventions, whether this be via one-to-many or one-to-one methods.

- Future interventions aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities related to improved broadband and associated digital technology could consider including provision dedicated specifically towards start-up businesses (i.e. separating provision from that aimed at existing/established businesses). This would need to link closely with any wider start-up business support provision available at the time, but would provide the opportunity for support to be more tailored towards that specific cohort.

- Whilst it would require considerable additional resources, future interventions aimed at raising awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities related to improved broadband and associated digital technology could consider incorporating a level of one-to-one consultancy advice. This could include an adviser (funded through the programme) visiting businesses to undertake an 'audit' of their existing processes and providing tailored recommendations regarding potential digital enhancements/solutions related to ICT/broadband usage.

- The potential for developing platforms which enable beneficiaries to share thoughts, experiences and good practice should be considered by interventions. This could include Facebook or WhatsApp groups and would be managed and maintained by the accountable body or a delivery partner.

- The SFSY Business Programme incorporated a Digital Showcase Conference which covered a wide range of subject areas across one day, utilising a variety of different speakers. This was well received and the inclusion of a series of larger events such as this should therefore be considered within future interventions.

- Wherever contractually possible, programmes should ensure they have the ability to undertake the timely replacement of staff that leave their posts either permanently or temporarily. This is a specific issue for time-bound interventions which have allocated budgets and associated contractual targets, whereby any change in staffing levels can have a significant effect.

- Interventions should ensure there are clear and effective communication channels between the governance/management-level staff and those delivering the programme. For example, such communication has the potential to ensure the effective transfer of performance information throughout the course of an intervention and enhance the understanding of those at governance levels. Individuals delivering 'on the ground' are also well placed to advise on potential solutions to any challenges that emerge.

- Ideally, performance and progress reporting required from delivery staff for the purposes of the funder (MHCLG) and that required for internal governance structures should be aligned (chronologically and in terms of format). This would reduce the reporting requirements placed upon those engaging directly with businesses.

Lessons for policy makers

- Wherever possible, funding-based targets should be focused upon outcomes rather than outputs; this shows the actual impact of support delivered, rather than the volume of delivery. For an intervention such as the SFSY Business Programme this could include a series of outcome indicators focused on what the programme's events led to – for example, increased use of new digital methods, adoption of new technology, increased sales etc.

- Furthermore, the focus on delivering 12 hours' of support is not always appropriate, and should not necessarily be the primary performance indicator. For example, some businesses require only 5-6 hours support to enable the achievement of significant outcomes and impacts.

- The requirement for 'wet' signatures from beneficiaries is not ideal in terms of the efficient use of resource/time, or in relation to environmental sustainability; this is particularly the case for programmes focused around enhancing the use of digital technology. The use of electronic signatures should therefore be encouraged.

- Interventions should incorporate a 'lead-in' period prior to delivery commencing. Ideally this would be for a minimum of three months and would support the creation of programme templates and processes, the development of effective communication mechanisms, and complete clarity regarding the approach to management and delivery. It could potentially be extended to include a trial period of delivery.

- Throughout the delivery of interventions, continual feedback should be sought from beneficiaries to identify changing needs and demands; interventions should ideally be designed whereby there is flexibility to respond to such changes.

Carney
Green