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# Executive Summary

## Background and Context

The Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board commissioned this project in response to concerns about the fragmented landscape of business support services across Hampshire and the Solent region.

With multiple organisations delivering support through various funding streams, there was evidence of overlapping services in some locations. Significant gaps existed in others. The project aimed to comprehensively map all existing national and local business support provision, identify areas of overlap and coverage gaps and explore establishing a Business Support Partnership to enhance collaboration and reduce duplication.

The research methodology involved building upon an extensive in-house database of business support provision through desk research, face-to-face and telephone interviews with over 100 stakeholders including local authorities, business support organisations, membership groups, academia, banks, accountants, professional services, trade associations, enterprise agencies, business incubators and co-working spaces.

The project commenced on 30th June 2025, with the report delivered on 28th August 2025.

## Key Findings

Finding business support across Hampshire remains challenging despite the apparent abundance of provision. Small businesses consistently report that they find the business support landscape fragmented and complex, creating barriers to accessing the help they need.

**The Reality of Provision:** Most of the provision is online information only, with actual delivery being significantly limited. Online resources are frequently confusing, often outdated and difficult to navigate, creating additional obstacles for businesses seeking support.

**Geographic Fragmentation:** Despite the Growth Hubs coverage of the whole region, dedicated local delivery operates with inconsistent coverage, creating a patchwork of provision where some areas benefit from comprehensive support whilst others have minimal access. Much of the current provision relies heavily on UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding, which ends on 31st March 2026, creating significant uncertainty about future service availability.

**Regional Divisions:** Strong local identities mean that Portsmouth, Southampton, the Isle of Wight and the rest of Hampshire operate largely in separate spheres with limited collaboration between areas. This division further compounds the fragmentation and reduces opportunities for coordinated support delivery.

**The Challenge:** Businesses across the region face a confusing landscape characterised by duplication in some areas, gaps in others and inconsistent quality and availability of support.

**The Opportunity:** A coordinated Business Support Partnership could effectively address these systemic issues and create a more coherent support ecosystem. However, bringing stakeholders together will require careful management and strong leadership to overcome the existing regional divisions and establish meaningful collaboration across traditional boundaries.

## The current business landscape from a business owner's perspective

Before examining the various providers and channels of business support, we first wanted to view the landscape from the business owner's perspective. This approach helps identify what help businesses actually need, how they currently seek assistance and what barriers they encounter when trying to access support. By understanding these fundamental challenges, we can better assess how well the current support ecosystem serves local businesses and where improvements might be needed.

<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Population (2021)</b>	<b>No. of businesses (2024)</b>	<b>High Growth</b>	<b>Business Births (2023)</b>	<b>Per head (average 267)</b>	<b>Business Deaths (2023)</b>	<b>Net</b>
Basingstoke and Deane Borough	187,000	7,315	25	675	277	725	-50
East Hampshire District	127,000	6,645	35	625	203	575	50
Eastleigh Borough	138,000	5,715	25	565	244	500	65
Fareham Borough	114,000	4,655	25	405	281	420	-50
Gosport Borough	82,000	2,045	5	200	410	225	-25
Hart District	100,000	4,815	20	445	225	465	-20
Havant Borough	124,000	4,725	15	495	251	440	55
New Forest District	175,000	8,170	50	685	255	720	-35
Rushmoor Borough	101,000	3,490	20	375	269	335	40
Test Valley Borough	132,000	6,055	35	525	251	550	-25
Winchester City	130,000	8,400	60	660	197	780	-120
Portsmouth City Council	238,000	6,705	35	830	287	785	45
Southampton City Council	279,000	8,600	35	1,005	278	1175	-170
Isle of Wight Council	140,000	4,795	15	435	322	420	15

Local businesses face an increasingly challenging environment. The region supports over 82,000 businesses serving a population of more than 2 million, yet the statistics reveal areas of concern.

While the regional business birth rate of 383 per 100,000 population appears healthy, the death rate of 393 per 100,000 slightly exceeds it ([NOMIS](#)), indicating that businesses might be struggling to survive rather than failing to start.

The economic pressures facing local businesses mirror national trends but with regional variations. However, even in Winchester, despite the city's exceptionally low High Street vacancy rate, a recent [Business Barometer](#) reveals that businesses have growing concerns about footfall and cost pressures.

## What Support Do Businesses Actually Need?

The challenges facing regional businesses fall into distinct categories that define their support requirements.

Cash flow management has emerged as the dominant concern, with 47% of UK SMEs reporting cash flow challenges and small businesses owed an average of £21,000 in unpaid invoices. This financial pressure is compounded by rising operational costs, particularly following changes to National Insurance contributions and minimum wage increases.

Skills shortages represent another critical area where businesses need support, with 62% of organisations struggling to find workers with appropriate skills. The UK faces its most severe skills shortage in 18 years, affecting everything from basic digital capabilities to specialist technical expertise. The scale of this challenge is stark: about 21 million workers may lack the basic digital skills employers will need by 2030.

Access to finance remains a persistent challenge, with loans to SMEs down 1.7% as of January 2025 and 41% of small businesses lacking emergency funds to survive more than six months.

Beyond these immediate pressures, businesses increasingly need support with digital transformation, sustainability initiatives and navigating regulatory compliance. The emergence of AI and changing consumer behaviours add further complexity to an already challenging landscape.

## Search for Help

When business owners seek support, they encounter a fragmented landscape that can be overwhelming and confusing. A simple Google search for business support yields a maze of websites, directories and resources that often contradict each other or provide outdated information.

Google's increasing use of AI-generated search results has magnified this problem, as automated summaries can pull from obsolete sources or combine information from different time periods, creating misleading overviews that appear authoritative but may be fundamentally incorrect.



what business support is available in eastleigh hampshire

Business support available in Eastleigh, Hampshire

Eastleigh Borough Council, in partnership with other organizations, offers a range of support to businesses in the area, whether they're just starting or looking to grow. 

1. Advice and guidance

- Platform 4: A free, one-stop service for business advice and support in Eastleigh.
  - Connects businesses with qualified business advisors via live chat (weekdays 9am-5pm) or email request outside these hours.
  - Helps identify relevant programs, initiatives, and funding schemes.
  - Provides online business start-up and support services delivered by Wenta.
  - Offers downloadable business guides and templates.

## Online confusion

Google Gemini's response to a search for 'Business support in Eastleigh?' produced completely outdated information. Similarly, Enterprise M3 is still referenced on Hampshire, Hart and Basingstoke councils' websites plus numerous directory sites. Online directories are particularly guilty of displaying outdated information, with many failing to remove discontinued services or update details for programmes that no longer exist.

Only 26% of UK SME employers sought external advice in 2023, largely due to this complexity. Business owners frequently encounter broken links to discontinued programmes, eligibility criteria that have changed and contact information for services that no longer exist.

## Top-Level Support Choices Available

*"The market has plenty of information but not enough clarity."*

Jeev (Step8Up Ltd)

Despite the complexity, business owners have several main channels through which they can access support. Government services provide the foundation, with the new Business Growth Service launched in 2025 designed to create a one-stop shop for accessing government resources. The Hampshire Growth Hub and the Solent Growth Partnership offer free guidance and tailored support for SMEs, while the national Business Support Helpline provides initial signposting services.

Private sector support operates through multiple channels. Professional services including accountants, solicitors and business advisors form a critical infrastructure, often serving as the first point of contact for businesses seeking help. Banking services have evolved significantly, with traditional banks like Barclays and NatWest offering comprehensive business development programmes alongside challenger banks such as Tide and Starling Bank that focus on digital-first solutions for underserved segments.

The educational sector contributes substantial support through universities and colleges across the region. Institutions like South Hampshire College Group support over 1,000 businesses with training, while Farnborough College of Technology has worked with more than 6,000 employers. These institutions provide apprenticeship programmes with government funding covering up to 95% of costs for small businesses, alongside bespoke training and research partnerships.

Business networks represent a growing element of the support landscape. Over 100 networking groups operate across the region. These provide invaluable learning opportunities, mentoring and sector-specific expertise that complement formal support services.

Business centres add another layer, with at least 75 identified providing varying levels of support alongside workspace facilities.

## The Support Ecosystem Reality

The reality for business owners is that effective support often requires navigating multiple channels simultaneously. A startup might begin with free government guidance through Hampshire Growth Hub or the Solent Growth Partnership, access Local Authority funded programmes, join networking groups for peer support and engage professional services for specialist expertise.

The challenge lies not in the availability of support but in understanding what exists, which services are current and relevant and how to access them efficiently.

*Research by Oxford Innovation Advice reveals that innovative SMEs feel unsupported by the current landscape, overwhelmed by competing programmes, inconsistent messaging and inaccessible processes. This disconnect between available support and business needs suggests that coordination and simplification should be priorities for any approach to regional business support.*

The opportunity exists to create a more coherent system that maintains the diversity and specialisation of current provision while making it easier to navigate for the businesses that need it most. Understanding this challenge forms the foundation for developing a coordinated support partnership that can improve business survival and growth rates across the region.

## Where Businesses Turn for Help

When a business decides it needs external assistance, several pathways typically emerge. Many start by consulting their existing professional network - particularly their accountant, who often serves as the first port of call for business advice beyond pure financial matters. Legal advisors, business mentors and other professional service providers within their established relationships frequently provide initial guidance or appropriate referrals.

Local authorities represent another common starting point, with many businesses approaching their council for guidance, grants, or signposting to relevant services. Similarly, business connections - whether formal membership organisations or informal relationships – offer recommendations based on direct experience. Banking relationships can also provide support referrals, particularly as both traditional and challenger banks have expanded their business advisory services.

Trade associations and industry-specific bodies serve businesses seeking sector-specialised support, while educational institutions increasingly act as gateways to assistance through their business engagement teams.

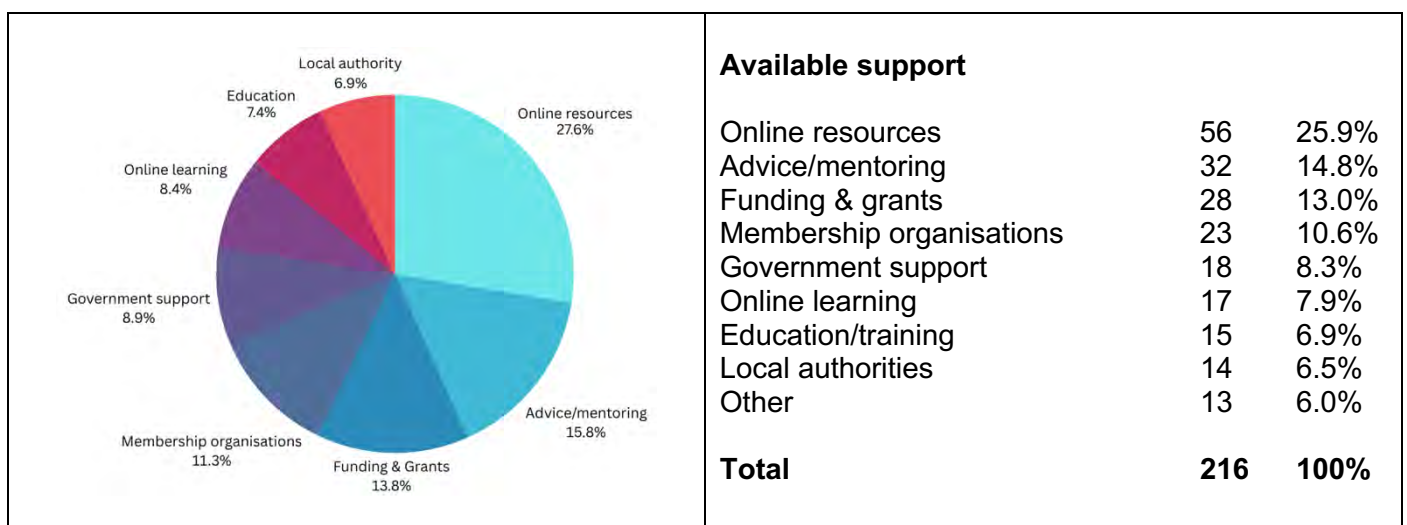
For many businesses, however, the most common initial approach is conducting an online search - typing terms like "business support" or "small business help" into search engines and hoping to find relevant, current and accessible information. This digital path, with all its challenges that we have outlined already, forms the focus of our next section.

## Online search



**When businesses embark on an online search for support, they encounter a digital landscape that mirrors the fragmented nature of the broader support ecosystem.**

Our research identified 216 distinct online resources, revealing both the abundance and the challenges of digital business support.



The results show that online resources dominate the landscape at 25.9% of all offerings, followed by advice and mentoring services at 14.8% and funding and grants information at 13.0%. However, this apparent wealth of options comes with significant limitations. The majority of these 216 resources function primarily as information and signposting services rather than direct support providers.

While there are some genuinely useful sector-specific websites and membership organisations that offer substantial value, very few can be considered truly 'local' in their focus or delivery. This creates a disconnect between the national and generic support that dominates online search results and the localised, contextual assistance that many businesses actually need.

The prevalence of information-only resources means that businesses often find themselves in a cycle of being directed from one website to another, accumulating links and contact details but struggling to access direct, actionable support that addresses their specific circumstances and location.

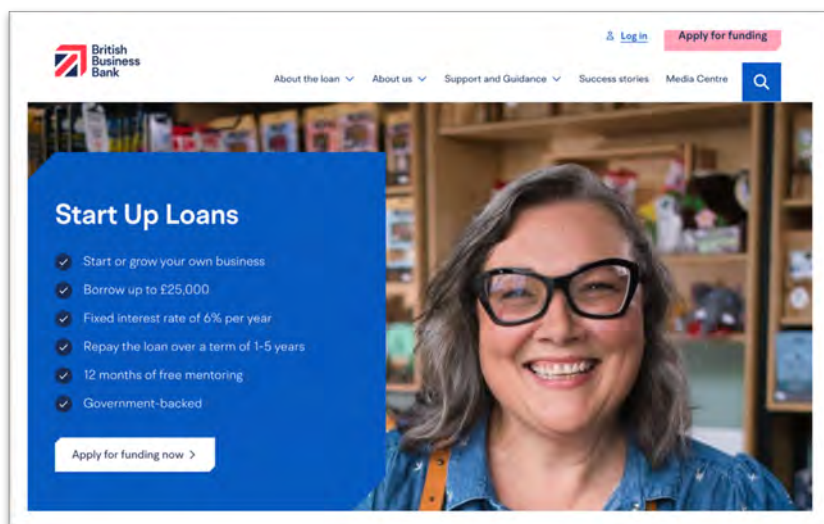
## Government Business Growth Service

The UK Government launched the [Business Growth Service](#) in the first half of 2025 as a centralised platform to provide a more unified, nationally coordinated system while maintaining "locally led delivery" - essentially trying to combine the benefits of national coordination with local responsiveness. The service operates through a revamped web platform designed to streamline access to government resources that were previously scattered across different departments and agencies.

The service functions as a one-stop shop offering comprehensive business guidance, finance-raising assistance. It forms part of the broader Small Business Strategy and supports the government's Industrial Strategy and growth mission. However, at the time of our research, the platform was sparsely populated and not yet offering many results to businesses conducting searches, indicating that full implementation and content development is still ongoing.

## Other key websites

The full list of online resources identified can be found in the supporting spreadsheet, but examples of the most relevant sites include.



## Key sites

- [Business Support Service](#)
- [Companies House](#)
- [Enterprise Nation](#)
- [FSB](#)
- [Health and Safety Executive](#)
- [HMRC](#)
- [Innovate UK](#)
- [Made Smarter](#)
- [Startup Loans](#)
- [The King's Trust](#)

While online searches reveal the breadth of available support, they also highlight the need for more localised, directly accessible assistance. The following section examines local business support provision and how it complements the digital landscape.

**Key takeaway:** "The majority of these 216 resources function primarily as information and signposting services rather than direct support providers"

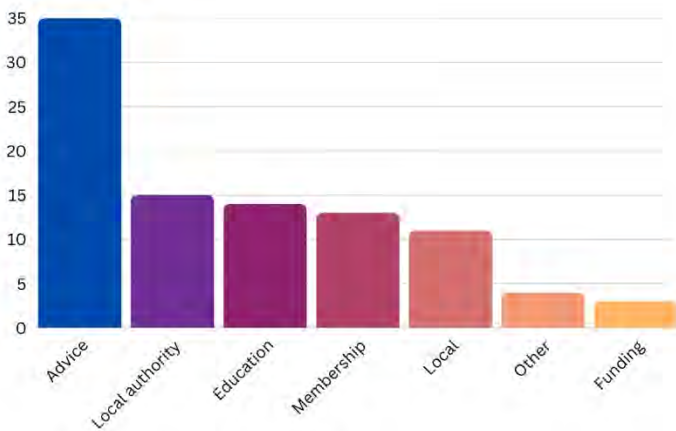
# Local business support



This section provides a detailed overview of local business support services across Hampshire and the Solent, mapped by sector, business size and type of provision.

\*Local funded delivery programmes and grants are examined in detail in the following section.

## Local support organisations



### By channels

Advice/mentoring:	35	36.8%
Local authority:	15	15.8%
Education/training:	14	14.7%
Membership:	13	13.7%
Local organisation:	11	11.6%
Other:	4	4.2%
Funding:	3	3.2%

Full list of organisations can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet.

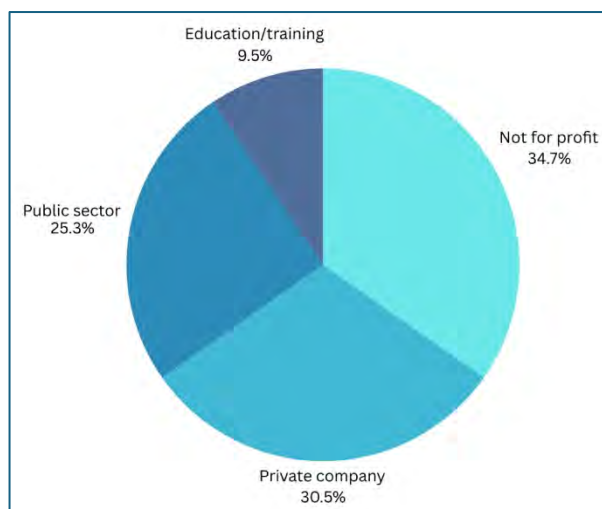
Personal guidance is the most prevalent form of help, suggesting a relationship-driven support ecosystem where advisors and mentors are the primary resource for local businesses, rather than financial assistance.

## Business support – by sector

The provider landscape shows a balanced mix with not-for-profit organisations, private companies and public sector bodies suggesting a healthy diversity of provision models.

Although education and training represent almost 10% of the total, there appears to be potential for academic-business collaboration.

Not-for-profit:	33	34.7%
Private sector:	29	30.5%
Public sector:	24	25.3%
Education:	9	9.5%



## Business support by category

Service provider category	Start up	Growth	Innovation	Other
<i>Business support</i>				
LA funded – growth hubs				
LA funded – support orgs				
Government funded				
Private sector				Professional services provision
Banks				
Membership groups				
Trade associations				
Networking groups				
Local Authorities				
Universities / education				
Business centres				
Other				

(Darker blue shows strong support, paler blue indicates a lighter touch.)

## Growth hubs

Growth hubs serve as the primary government-funded business support mechanism at local level, providing free advice, guidance and signposting services to SMEs. Following the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership functions to local authorities in April 2024, these hubs have become more integrated with county council economic development strategies while maintaining their role as the main access point for businesses seeking government support programmes.

**The region is served by two main growth hubs:**

**Hampshire Growth Hub**, operated by Hampshire County Council, provides expert guidance and tailored one-to-one support for businesses across Hampshire with fewer than 250 employees. Their flagship programme is the Hampshire Business Growth Accelerator, delivered through intensive workshops focusing on vision, strategy, sales, marketing and financial skills.

**Solent Growth Partnership** (formerly Solent Growth Hub) covers Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, offering bespoke business support programmes including the Solent Business Accelerator for established businesses with £100k+ turnover, skills bootcamps, mentoring services and sector-specific support across creative, digital, transport, space and manufacturing industries.

Both services are fully funded by the UK Government and available at no cost to local businesses and Hampshire Growth Hub recently became a network partner of the national Business Growth Service.

## Local authority funded support organisations

Local authorities fund various support organisations that deliver targeted business support, often focusing on specific sectors, demographics, or business stages.

*SEE NEXT SECTION FOR DETAILED OVERVIEW*

## Government funded - other

Direct government-funded support includes national programmes delivered locally, such as specific sector initiatives, innovation funding and skills development schemes. These services provide access to larger funding streams and specialist expertise that local organisations might not be able to offer independently, often requiring businesses to meet specific eligibility criteria.

## Private sector

Private contract providers deliver business support services on behalf of public sector clients, combining commercial expertise with public funding to achieve specific regional business development outcomes.

Hampshire hosts a comprehensive network of over 25 business mentoring and advisory organisations, ranging from independent practitioners to national franchise networks like ActionCOACH, which operates multiple locations across the county. The Association of British Mentors (ABM) also maintains a regional network and has expressed interest in participating in coordinated partnership structures.

There are numerous independent advisors who have established strong local reputations, but they tend to focus on larger or more ambitious businesses that are able to pay for dedicated support. National franchise networks bring proven methodologies and performance guarantees, with ActionCOACH Solent reporting they work with over 250 local businesses and achieve average profit increases of 47%.

Specialist mentors serve specific sectors, including creative industries specialists like Portsmouth-based Morph PR, which recently won the UK Business Award 2025 for Business Mentoring.

## Private sector – professional services

The area's professional services sector forms a critical foundation of the regional business support ecosystem, with accountants, solicitors and business advisors working closely alongside public sector initiatives to provide comprehensive support for local businesses.

These professionals integrate extensively with Hampshire Growth Hub, local authority initiatives and business development schemes to create a coordinated support network covering everything from startup formation to complex commercial transactions.

The sector includes both specialist local practices and national firms with Hampshire operations, providing services from Making Tax Digital compliance to sector-specific expertise in aerospace, maritime and technology companies. Legal services operate on multiple levels, from Hampshire Legal Services - one of the largest local authority legal teams in the country with around 70 qualified lawyers - to established commercial practices providing business formation services, employment law guidance and commercial property support.

Accountants and legal practices often provide free advice sessions and business-focused seminars that complement other support services. For example, Heelan Associates runs "The Heelan Hub," their own networking group, held on the last Wednesday of each month.

This coordinated approach means businesses can access technical expertise, regulatory guidance and strategic advice through connected networks rather than sourcing these services separately.

## Banks

Both traditional and challenger banks have expanded their business support offerings beyond financial services, providing training programmes, mentoring, networking opportunities and advisory services. Banks serve as crucial first points of contact for many businesses and increasingly act as gateways to broader support ecosystems.

Traditional banks like Lloyds, Barclays and NatWest offer comprehensive programmes including Lloyds Bank Academy's free digital skills training, Barclays Eagle Labs innovation hubs and NatWest's Business Builder. The NatWest Accelerator proved particularly popular with participants, providing intensive growth support for scaling businesses. These banks also support government initiatives like the Help to Grow: Management, offering subsidised training for SME leaders.

Challenger banks have created significant disruption, now serving substantial portions of the SME market. Tide serves over 575,000 members - approximately 10% of all UK SMEs - while Starling Bank has lent more than £1.8 billion to UK businesses. These digital-first banks focus on underserved segments, particularly micro-businesses and startups. During COVID-19, Tide provided over £50 million in Bounce Back Loans to nearly 2,000 small businesses.

The banking sector's strength lies in combining financial expertise with practical business development support. Traditional banks bring established relationships and business support programmes, while challenger banks provide technology-first solutions for previously overlooked segments. Research by Starling Bank shows that 43% of founders needed less than £10,000 to launch their businesses, indicating how challenger banks successfully support micro-businesses requiring minimal capital but maximum flexibility.

## Membership groups

Membership organisations play a role in local business support, offering structured networks that combine advocacy, practical services and peer-to-peer learning.

Chambers of Commerce form the backbone of this sector, with Hampshire Chamber, Romsey, Lymington and Isle of Wight chambers providing membership-based support that goes beyond traditional networking. These organisations serve as representative voices for their local business communities while offering members access to training, business development services and valuable peer connections that can drive growth and collaboration.

Professional membership bodies like the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and the Institute of Directors complement local chambers by providing sector-specific expertise and national-level advocacy. The FSB focuses particularly on small business needs, offering legal advice, business insurance and policy representation, while the Institute of Directors provides leadership development and governance support for senior executives. Together, these membership organisations allow businesses to access everything from local networking opportunities to professional development and political representation.

## Trade associations

Trade associations deliver sector-specific support that addresses the particular challenges, regulations and opportunities within specific industries. They provide specialist knowledge, industry networking and advocacy that generalist business support organisations cannot match. For example, the Farnborough Aerospace Consortium is a trade association with national and international members serving the aerospace sector.

Maritime UK Solent represents the region's exceptional maritime cluster, working to champion the Solent as a leading maritime hub with Portsmouth and Southampton as headline cities, supporting a diverse £7.7 billion maritime community.

The British Marine Federation serves as the trade association for the British boating industry, offering member benefits including exhibitor discounts at boat shows in Southampton and London, while creating and maintaining services to promote the marine industry and its products.

These sector-specific organisations understand the unique regulatory environments, supply chains and market dynamics within their industries, enabling them to provide targeted support that addresses issues such as international trade requirements, technical standards and sector-specific skills development that general business support providers cannot adequately cover.

## Networking groups



Our research has identified over 100 networking groups across the region, though there are likely to be considerably more operating at local and sector-specific levels.

This includes a recent rise in peer-to-peer networking and learning, with businesses increasingly seeking informal support and knowledge-sharing opportunities from fellow entrepreneurs rather than relying solely on formal advisory services.

These groups offer peer mentoring, local connections and sector-specific expertise that complement formal support services. They provide opportunities for businesses to learn from each other's experiences and benefit from guest speakers who share specialist knowledge with the local business community.

The scale of this informal network is particularly striking when examined at local level. The New Forest Business Partnership exemplifies this trend, maintaining a comprehensive diary of events throughout the year including regular in-person workshops. Matthew Lawson, their CEO, states that there are over 35 networking groups operating in the New Forest alone. This would indicate that the total across the area is considerably higher than the 100+ groups identified in our initial research.

These networking groups contribute significantly to the business support landscape through their ability to foster learning environments and build genuine business relationships. Given their extensive reach and the growing popularity of peer-to-peer support, they should be considered when creating any new Business Support Partnership.

## Universities/education

Educational institutions serve as major contributors to the regional business support network, providing practical services that directly help local companies grow and compete. Hampshire's universities and colleges have evolved beyond traditional teaching roles to become essential business partners, with South Hampshire College Group supporting over 1,000 businesses and Farnborough College of Technology's Business Services team working with more than 6,000 employers.

These institutions deliver three core types of business support: workforce development through apprenticeship programmes from basic to degree level with government funding covering 95% of costs for SMEs; business advisory services including strategic planning, research partnerships, cybersecurity guidance and funding application support; and innovation assistance through research collaborations, access to modern facilities and technology development support.

Their strategic positioning across the region matches local industry strengths, with maritime expertise in Portsmouth and Southampton, aerospace knowledge in Farnborough and agricultural training near Winchester.

The £13 million South Coast Institute of Technology exemplifies this coordinated approach, bringing together five colleges and two universities to deliver training that addresses specific skills gaps identified by local employers. Educational institutions provide unique value through their combination of academic expertise, modern facilities and direct connections to emerging talent, making them indispensable partners in any comprehensive business support network.

## Business centres



There are at least 75 business centres operating across the region, with many providing varying levels of business support alongside their core workspace facilities.

These centres represent a significant yet often overlooked component of the business support ecosystem, providing essential support to local entrepreneurs and growing businesses.

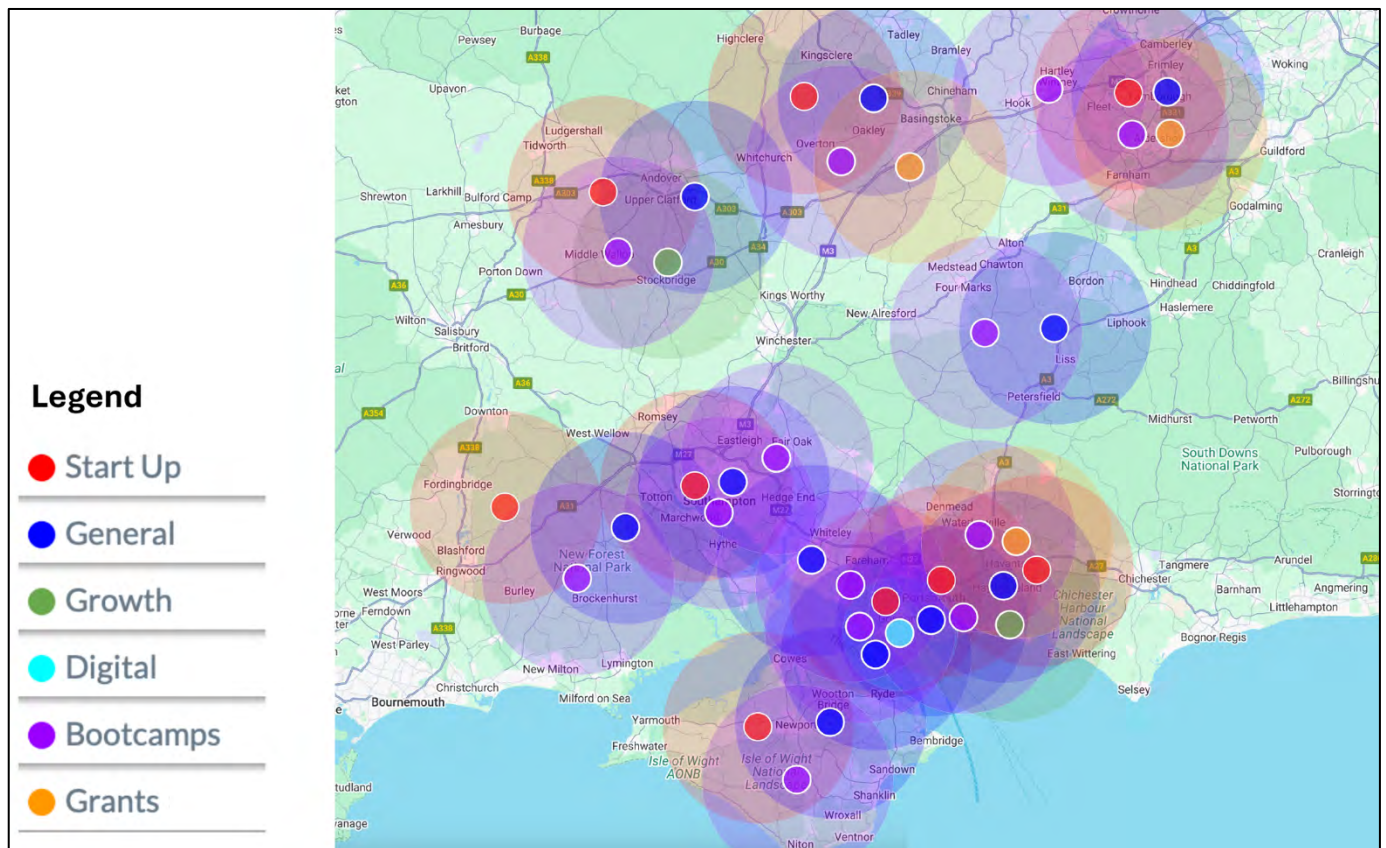
The diversity of support offered by these centres demonstrates their integral role in the regional landscape. Aldershot Enterprise Centre delivers in-person start-up courses, whilst Signal in Bordon operates a comprehensive business hub featuring networking opportunities and workshops.

[The IncuHive Group](#) has established workplaces in Andover, Brockenhurst and Hursley, where all residents benefit from free business support services.

[The Innovation Centre](#) in Newport on the isle of Wight serves as a focal point for numerous events and business support programmes, providing a hub for the local business community.

Our analysis concludes that business centres could play an essential role in any coordinated local business support partnership, particularly for their ability to reach businesses that might not otherwise engage with traditional support channels. These centres offer a more accessible, community-based approach to business assistance, often catching entrepreneurs at the precise moment they need guidance.

# Local funded delivery



**Business support across the region is delivered through a combination of national programmes and locally focused initiatives.**

Several specialist organisations provide targeted support to specific groups and sectors. [Innovate UK](#) supports innovative businesses. [X-Forces Enterprise](#) offers dedicated support for service leavers, whilst the [King's Trust](#) focuses on helping young people aged 16-30. [Made Smarter](#) provides manufacturing businesses with digital transformation support and advice.

Regional coordination is provided through [Hampshire Growth Hub](#) advisers who offer comprehensive business support across the county.

The [Solent Growth Partnership](#) delivers Business Support Clinics in partnership with Isle of Wight, Portsmouth City and Southampton City Councils, providing free face-to-face support to help small and medium enterprises overcome challenges and boost growth. The partnership also runs Peer Networking events with sessions delivered across the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton.

Specialist support is available through the [South East Cyber Resilience Centre](#), which offers free membership to help businesses and third-sector organisations improve their cyber security.

[Hampshire Chamber of Commerce](#) has launched a new Sustainability Network for SMEs to support environmental initiatives, while Fareport and Solent Skills Bootcamps provide free, training courses or adults aged 19 or over, designed to address skills shortages in local priority sectors.

A detailed breakdown of dedicated business support services available through each local authority in the region follows, with full details contained in the accompanying spreadsheet.

## Summary by Local Authority area

### Basingstoke & Deane Borough

Four business support initiatives funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and running until 2026, comprising three grant schemes and one business support programme.

**Business Investment Fund:** Provides flexible capital and revenue funding for micro and small businesses.

**Rural England Prosperity Fund:** Supports rural business diversification and visitor infrastructure development.

**Town and Village Centre Fund:** Offers grants for shopfront upgrades.

**Pop-Up Incubator Programme:** Due to start in October 2025, this programme will provide pre-start and start-up business support.

### East Hampshire District

Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, free workshops and one-to-one expert support for local businesses are being offered from September to October 2024, covering key business areas such as digital growth and cybersecurity, peer networking, business resilience and AI integration and recruitment and retention strategies.

### Eastleigh Borough

Apart from a [page on the council's website](#), there does not appear to be any more information or funded support available specifically designed for Eastleigh businesses.

### Fareham Borough

Fareham Business Expo and regular networking events are supported by FBC and, in addition to running their own events, the Fareham Innovation Centre host pop-up clinics run by Hampshire Growth Hub and Barclays Eagle Lab



## Gosport Borough

**Gosport Informal Networking (GIN):** The council has successfully operated this bi-monthly networking event for many years.

**Previous Programmes:** Gosport has historically delivered business support programmes through Enterprise South, alongside a UKSPF-funded digital inclusion programme.

**Upcoming Initiatives:** Both programmes are due to be replaced by new initiatives starting in October 2025 and running until 31st March 2026.

**YourSpace Digital Hub:** UKSPF funding has supported this town centre Digital Hub, providing digital workspace and support services.

## Hart District

**No funded delivery.**

**Business Guide:** Local businesses have access to a free local book (funded by UKSPF) entitled 'Start & Grow your Business in Hart District'.

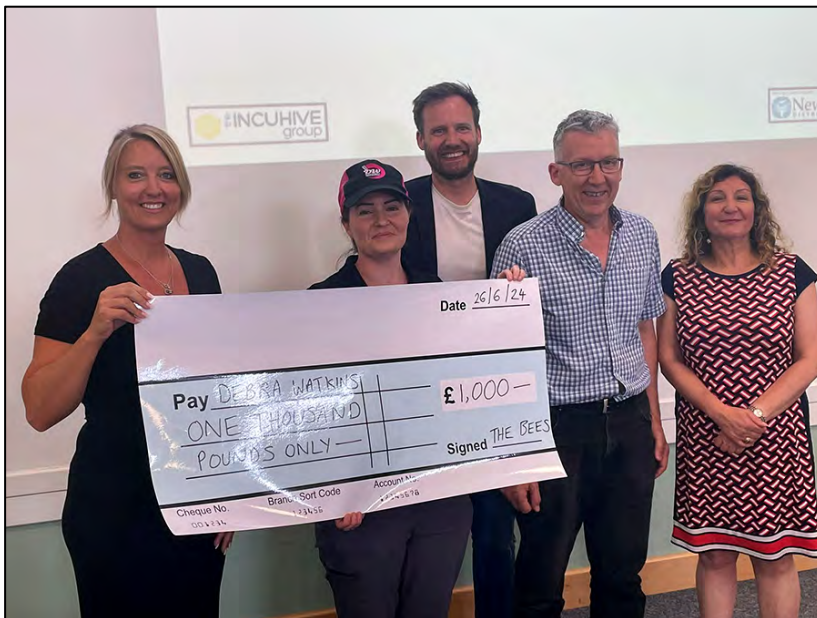
**Training Hub Access:** The North East Hampshire Training Hub provides free unlimited access to over 300 live courses at any given time.

## Havant Borough

**Business Support Programmes:** Two programmes are offered - one providing general business support to pre-start, start-up and existing businesses, whilst the other is designed to help local businesses with growth aspirations.

**Grant Schemes:** The council has recently closed a small business grant scheme but continues to offer grants encouraging the occupation of empty shops in Leigh Park.

**Green Skills Initiative:** The council is set to launch another green skills initiative to support the borough's transition to Net Zero.



The **Bees Nest Competition** was a New Forest version of Dragon's Den, inviting participants from the business support programme to pitch for a £1,000 prize.

## New Forest District

**Previous UKSPF Programs:** NFDC previously used UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding to deliver two key initiatives: Business Boost, operated by Portsmouth University and the 'New Forest Shop Doctor,' which provided support to independent retail and hospitality businesses throughout the area.

**Current Start-up Support:** Current business support focuses on start-ups and early-stage enterprises, delivered through The IncuHive Group.

**Skills Development:** The New Forest Business Partnership operates the New Forest Apprenticeship Hub, providing ongoing skills development support for the district's diverse micro-business community.

# Shop Front Improvement Grants

Funded by  
UK Government



## Rushmoor Borough

**Premises Improvement Grants:** Grants of up to £2,000 are available for businesses in Aldershot, Farnborough and North Camp to improve the appearance of their premises.

**Self-Employment Support:** Aldershot Enterprise Centre offers a free 2-hour workshop designed to help participants take their first steps into self-employment.

**Skills Development:** Rushmoor, in partnership with SeedL, provides participating businesses and their employees with access to over 200 live virtual courses.

**Business Advice:** Start-ups and businesses looking to grow can access a free business advice package delivered by The IncuHive Ltd.

**Town Centre Management:** RBC employs a dedicated town centre manager covering Farnborough and Aldershot, providing valuable support to town centre businesses.

## Test Valley Borough

**Small Business Support Service:** TVBC has partnered with The IncuHive Group to provide a business support service offering free advice and guidance.

**Net Zero Initiatives:** A successful Net Zero initiative ran earlier in 2025, offering grants and one-to-one support.

**Business Incentive Grant (BIG):** Grants of £750 available to new business start-ups. Applications must be made within eight weeks of starting to trade, with payment made after the business has been trading for a minimum of 6 months.

**Andover Town Centre Frontage Grant:** Provides existing and new businesses and landlords within the town centre with opportunities to improve their premises.

**Independent Retailer Grant:** £1,200 grants available to encourage independently-owned retailers to take up vacant premises in Andover or Romsey town centres.

**Andover Skills Training Fund Grant:** Offers up to £500 per employee for eligible training per financial year, with a maximum of £1,500 per business for employee training per financial year.

**Solar Installation Grants:** One-off contribution of 20% of solar installation costs, up to a maximum of £5,000 for commercial premises.

**Rural England Prosperity Fund:** TVBC has been awarded £154,000 of Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) money to support rural communities and businesses during 2025-2026.

## Winchester City

No current delivery programmes, but a recent initiative called Business Growth Factory was a great success.

## Portsmouth City

**Portsmouth Business Support Service:** Friendly business support service providing referrals to specific business advice agencies, funding support, premises search and support with other council services including planning permission, business rates and licensing.

**Shaping Portsmouth:** Current initiatives include business mentoring, workshops and events.

**Solent Partners:** A free business support service available to all Solent-based businesses with advisors who simplify and signpost opportunities, both locally and nationally.

**Help to Grow Programme:** Fully funded online and face-to-face practical management training programme, including 10 sessions of one-to-one bespoke mentoring with experienced coaching professionals. Delivered by Portsmouth Business School at the University of Portsmouth.

**The Hive Portsmouth:** Provides social enterprise start-up support, charity information, funding search, workspace and networks.

## Southampton City

**Business Clinics:** Run by Solent Growth Partnership (see above).

**Solent Business & Skills Solutions:** Free service providing a range of support measures to help businesses across the Southampton and Portsmouth areas to succeed.

**BIPC Southampton:** The Business and IP Centre (BIPC) Southampton is part of The British Library Business and IP Centre National Network, providing entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises with free access to databases, market research, intellectual property information, networking and business events.

## Isle of Wight

**Go for Growth:** Digital Islands has been awarded funding to provide this business support service, offering free services for eligible start-ups, sole traders, partnerships, CICs and limited companies based on the Isle of Wight.

**Red Funnel Business Start-up Courses:** Offer new businesses the opportunity to take their ideas from paper into practice through business seminars aimed at people starting a business, providing tools to take ideas from the drawing board to the real world.

**Solent Growth Partnership Clinics:** Hosting business support clinics in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council, alongside peer networking sessions guided by an experienced facilitator to keep sessions focused, friendly and valuable.

## Local support providers

### Aspire4Business

<https://www.aspire4business.com>

Aspire4Business is a one shop stop for your business growth, change programmes and Strategy Days.

### Business South and Enterprise South

<https://www.businesssouth.org>

Business South is an independent organisation representing businesses in Central South England. Enterprise South is the arm of Business South focused on business support.

### Digital Islands

<https://digitalislands.co.uk>

Digital Islands works in partnerships with local authorities to support local economic growth through developing vibrant community hubs of small business owners.

**Fareport Training**

<https://www.fareport.co.uk>

Fareport specialise in delivering Apprenticeships and professional qualifications that empower individuals and businesses to succeed.

**Hampshire Chamber of Commerce**

<https://www.hampshirechamber.co.uk>

The Chamber of Commerce is a membership organisation owned and managed by local businesses whose goal it is to protect and promote business interests and organise local events. It has an international trade team offering a portfolio of services to assist businesses that are seeking to trade overseas. It also runs seminars and events to promote networking. Many of these are open to non-members.

**The IncuHive Group Ltd**

<https://www.Incuhive.co.uk>

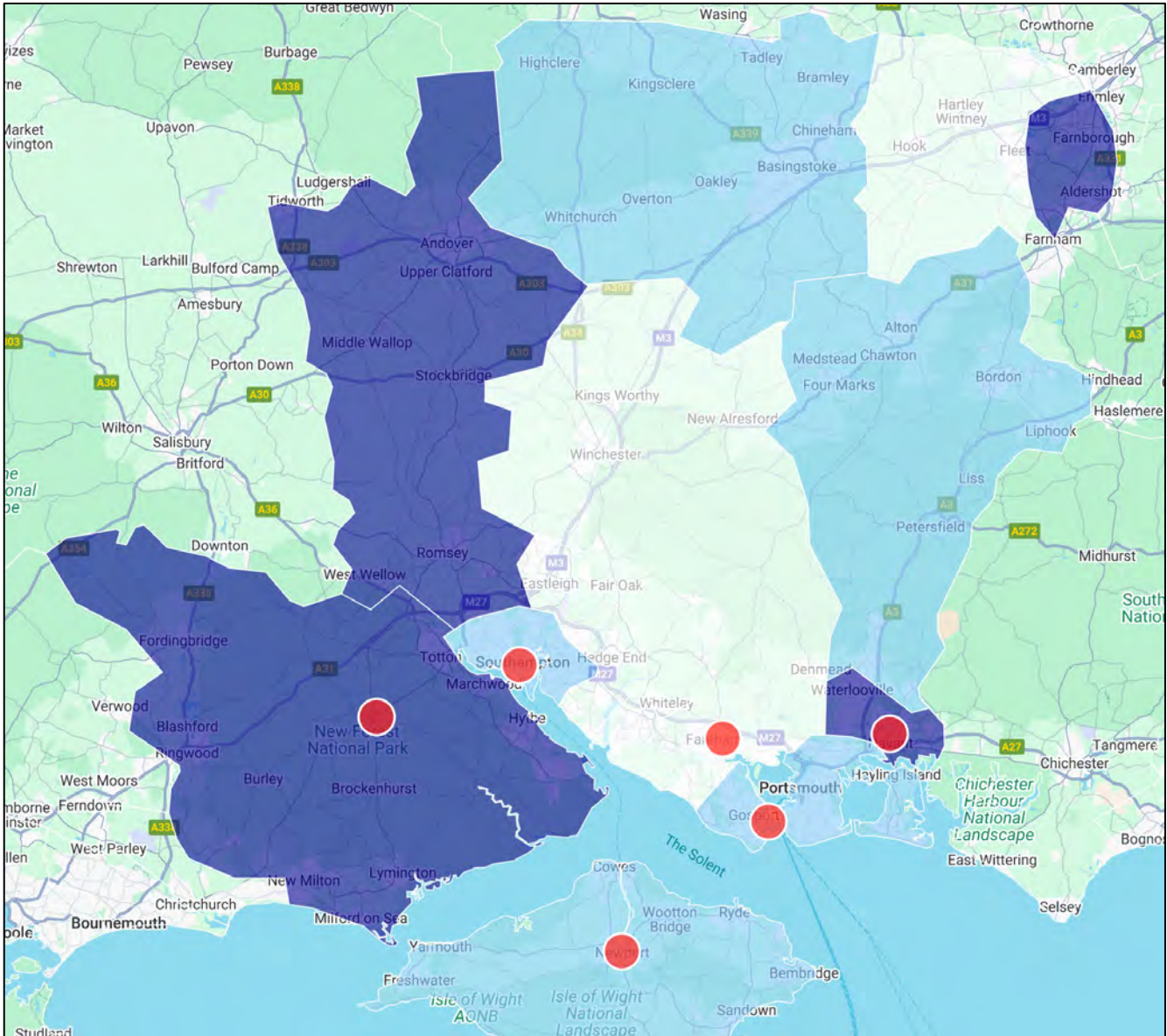
The IncuHive Group is a business incubation and co-working organisation that offers comprehensive business support, mentoring, start-up investment, networking, training, office space and desk space.

**WSX Enterprise**

[wsx.enterprise.co.uk](https://wsx.enterprise.co.uk)

WSX Enterprise provides practical support, advice, mentoring and training to people setting up and growing their businesses.

# Gaps and Overlaps



Dark blue = ongoing support, lighter blue = some coverage, red = overlaps

**Our research has identified the fragmented nature of business support across the region, creating a patchwork of provision where residents and business owners in some areas benefit from extensive choice whilst others have virtually no dedicated support available.**

## Overlaps in Provision

Despite the fragmented landscape, overlaps are relatively limited. Where duplication does occur, it tends to focus on less frequent services such as bootcamps and business clinics.

One notable area of overlap is AI training, where multiple providers are delivering similar programmes. Skills bootcamps present another area of potential confusion, though closer examination reveals that different providers are generally addressing distinct skills gaps rather than true duplication.

The banking sector shows similar overlap, with major institutions offering comparable business support services.

## Geographic Gaps

<b>Local authority</b>	<b>Start up</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Growth</b>	<b>Grants</b>	<b>Bootcamp</b>	<b>Growth Hub</b>
Basingstoke						
East Hampshire						
Eastleigh						
Fareham						
Gosport		+ Digital				
Hart						
Havant						
New Forest						
Rushmoor						
Test Valley						
Winchester						
Portsmouth						
Southampton						
Isle of Wight						

The most significant gaps in provision are geographic. New Forest, Test Valley, Rushmoor and Havant currently operate fully funded support programmes providing ongoing one-to-one access to business advisers. Gosport and Basingstoke have recently launched new initiatives. While the bootcamps cover the whole county, Winchester Hart and Fareham lack any other dedicated local provision.

Hampshire Growth Hub and Solent Business Partnership do provide help and guidance across the whole region, offering both light-touch support and high-intensity interventions including regular clinics in Fareham and Winchester.

Although Hampshire Growth Hub's Growth Champions offer both face-to-face and virtual assistance, their capacity remains limited, creating additional gaps in provision.

## Sector-Specific Limitations

The region could benefit from more comprehensive cluster-specific activities, despite strength across many different industries. This breadth, whilst positive, can limit opportunities for tailored support and the development of focused growth strategies beyond established clusters such as maritime.

Hampshire County Council is working hard to develop clusters and help businesses connect with commercial opportunities notably in the defence and security, life sciences and creative industries. Other bodies like Space South Central and Wessex Health Innovation are providing industry support.

Start-ups require intensive hand-holding support and are less well-positioned than established businesses to fund their own assistance.

The hospitality sector is experiencing particular challenges but lack specific targeted support. General business support may also be difficult to access due to standard working hours conflicting with these sectors' operational patterns.

## Rural and Demographic Gaps

Rural communities face particular challenges, Rural England Prosperity Fund money is available to support rural businesses and communities but we only have only one [rural hub](#).

Additionally, consideration should be given to whether specific support programmes are needed for LGBT+, disabled and neurodiverse entrepreneurs.

## Structural Challenges

The transition from Local Enterprise Partnership control to local authority management, whilst intended to improve coordination, initially created uncertainty and varied local approaches. This structural fragmentation has itself contributed to perceived gaps and service duplication across the region. Moving forward, there is a clear need for education and prevention-focused support rather than reactive interventions, with an emphasis on supporting businesses through guidance rather than regulation.

## Future Requirements

Looking ahead, the region may require enhanced support in digital transformation, start-up development, business growth and sustainability initiatives.

# Business Support Partnership



**The fragmented business support landscape across Hampshire and the Solent requires a coordinated partnership approach to eliminate duplication, improve business experience through a 'no wrong door' approach and strengthen collective impact.**

However, previous partnership attempts have failed due to insufficient participant benefits, reluctance to share information and the competitive nature of tendering processes that position potential partners as rivals. Local examples, including the South Hampshire Enterprise Agency's similar initiative, demonstrate both the need for such collaboration and the challenges inherent in creating sustainable partnerships.

Our consultation with local providers revealed concerns that any new partnership might serve as a vehicle for dominance rather than genuine independent collaboration. Furthermore, differences in approach between Hampshire and the unitary authorities of Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight create additional barriers that must be carefully addressed.

Drawing from successful models like Greater Manchester's Business Growth Hub and Buckinghamshire Business First, whilst learning from local failures, we propose the Hampshire Business Growth Network (HBGN) - a truly independent, simplified, sustainable partnership model focussed on relationship-building and communication that delivers clear benefits to all participants whilst respecting competitive sensitivities and political boundaries.

## Learning from Past Experience

Previous partnership attempts across the region have encountered significant challenges that must inform the design of any new collaborative model. The South Hampshire Enterprise Agency's earlier initiative to establish similar coordination demonstrates both the enduring need for such collaboration and the practical difficulties in sustaining meaningful partnerships.

These difficulties typically stem from three fundamental issues: insufficient tangible benefits for participants, reluctance to share commercially sensitive information and the inherent tension between collaboration and competition in the business support sector.

The competitive tendering environment creates a paradox where organisations that should naturally collaborate find themselves bidding against each other for the same contracts. This could breed mistrust and limit the depth of information sharing that would otherwise strengthen collective provision. Many providers fear that sharing detailed client information, service methodologies, or market intelligence might disadvantage them in future competitive situations, creating a reluctance to engage beyond superficial cooperation.

Additionally, consultation feedback highlights the importance of ensuring all voices are equally represented in the partnership. Providers are keen to ensure that the partnership does not become a vehicle for promoting one dominant partner rather than fostering genuine independent collaboration.

Understanding these historical challenges is essential to designing a partnership model that addresses legitimate concerns whilst creating sufficient value to justify participation despite competitive pressures and political sensitivities.

### **Feedback from other areas**

*“In Essex, where the council have a Business Intermediaries Forum of most business support providers and business membership organisations. Originally set up during COVID it met weekly, then moved to monthly and I think is now quarterly (and lost momentum). Its lost momentum in part because it has grown in number and ECC has lost a bit of interest because of a lot of staff changes.”*

*“A similar group operates in East Sussex through the Growth Hub, but is has never been as partnership minded, mainly I think down to the way the Council manages everything.”*

## **Proposed Collaboration Mechanisms**

### **Independent Governance Structure**

The Business Growth Network would operate through a deliberately independent governance model designed to address concerns about potential dominance whilst ensuring balanced representation across all political boundaries. The coordinating group of six to eight key representatives would be structured to include equal representation from Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, preventing any single authority from controlling the partnership's direction.

Leadership would rotate annually between different types of organisations rather than simply between authorities, ensuring private providers, membership organisations and public sector bodies all have opportunities to chair the partnership. Secretary duties would rotate quarterly, further distributing administrative responsibilities and preventing any perception of organisational capture.

This structure explicitly addresses historical concerns about dominance by ensuring no single entity can maintain long-term control over partnership activities.

The decision-making process would be consensus-based wherever possible, with a simple majority fallback mechanism for situations where complete agreement cannot be reached. However, decisions affecting competitive positioning or resource allocation would require consensus, protecting individual members from being outvoted on matters that might disadvantage them commercially.

The coordinating group would meet quarterly for face-to-face sessions lasting no more than two hours, with venues rotating across all geographical areas to demonstrate genuine regional balance.

### **Regular Communication Framework**

Monthly communication would form the backbone of ongoing collaboration through a concise newsletter limited to two pages maximum, providing updates on opportunities, events and member activities.

A WhatsApp group would facilitate instant messaging for quick queries, referrals and urgent communications, whilst a shared calendar would coordinate events across the network to avoid clashes and identify collaboration opportunities.

Quarterly activities would centre around network meetings lasting two hours, combining brief updates with guest speakers and structured networking time. These sessions would rotate between member organisations to share costs and showcase different facilities across the region. Each meeting would follow a structured agenda beginning with twenty minutes of round-table updates, followed by a forty-five minute guest speaker or training session, concluding with thirty minutes of networking and forward planning.

The annual programme would include a network day structured as a half-day conference incorporating strategic planning and relationship building activities. Additionally, the partnership would coordinate joint presence at major business events such as MIPIM and UKREiiF, maximising the collective impact of member organisations whilst sharing participation costs.

### **Digital Collaboration Tools**

The partnership would utilise existing digital infrastructure rather than investing in expensive bespoke systems that might create barriers to participation. A shared Google Drive or SharePoint system would provide centralised resource sharing and document management, incorporating a comprehensive contact directory of all member organisations and key personnel.

Service mapping would be conducted annually through a simple one-page survey, creating an accessible spreadsheet showing 'who does what' across the network. Basic referral tracking would monitor cross-referrals and help identify service gaps without requiring complex data management systems.

This approach recognises that most organisations already understand and use these free tools, ensuring maximum participation without additional training requirements or software costs that might discourage smaller providers from joining the network.

## Service Coordination Mechanisms

The referral system would operate through direct contact networks, ensuring all members have access to each other's contact details. Quick referrals would utilise WhatsApp for immediate needs, supplemented by email templates for more formal referral processes. Quarterly reviews would provide opportunities to discuss referral successes and address any challenges that arise.

Gap analysis would be conducted through annual service mapping exercises using straightforward questionnaires to identify service offerings across the region. Collaborative planning discussions at quarterly meetings would focus on unmet business needs, creating opportunities for joint service development where appropriate.

Cross-promotion activities would see members actively promoting each other's events in newsletters and communications, sharing marketing materials and expertise and facilitating knowledge transfer through brief presentations at quarterly meetings on specialist topics.

## Learning from Successful Models

The [Greater Manchester Business Growth Hub](#) provides an exemplary model, having engaged with over 90,000 businesses since 2011, raised £290 million in finance offers, created 15,000 jobs and delivered a ten-to-one return on investment through coordinated public-private partnerships. Similarly, [Buckinghamshire Business First](#) demonstrates the potential for organic growth, expanding from ten founders to over 15,000 members whilst maintaining a central coordination hub model that preserves provider autonomy.

The [National Enterprise Network](#) offers valuable lessons as an umbrella organisation championing independent agencies through best practice sharing and coordinated frontline assistance.

Internationally, the [Danish Cluster Model](#) showcases how thirteen national clusters can achieve geographical balance whilst fostering unique collaboration between businesses, academia, research institutes and authorities.

## Resource Requirements

The partnership model prioritises minimal infrastructure requirements to ensure sustainability and broad participation. Staffing needs would be met through shared responsibilities rather than dedicated posts, with the chair committing four to six hours monthly, the secretary contributing two to three hours monthly and general members participating for one to two hours monthly. This distributed approach prevents any single organisation from bearing disproportionate burdens whilst maintaining network momentum.

Depending upon the level of ambition, financial requirements could remain modest, with annual event costs of £500 to £1,000, free communications through existing systems and total annual expenditure under £2,000. These costs would be shared among members, ensuring no individual organisation faces significant financial pressure whilst participating in the network.

## Implementation Timeline

The foundation phase would focus on identifying six to eight founding organisations representing Hampshire and the Solent, holding an initial meeting to agree terms of reference, establishing basic digital infrastructure and electing the first chair and secretary.

Expansion would follow, inviting all regional business support providers to join, creating comprehensive contact directories and services overviews, launching the monthly newsletter and scheduling the first quarterly meeting. The operational phase would establish regular meetings, implementing informal referral tracking, developing cross-promotional activities and planning the first annual network day.

Evolution in year two and beyond would include annual reviews and refinement processes, organic growth based on member feedback, potential alignment with the Government's Business Growth Service and maintenance of simplicity as a core principle to ensure long-term sustainability.

## Success Metrics

Measuring success would focus on relationship-building and practical collaboration rather than complex data collection. Key indicators would include the number of participating organisations across all three geographical areas, frequency and success rates of inter-member referrals, meeting attendance levels, annual member satisfaction survey results, documented examples of successful collaborative projects and business feedback demonstrating improved 'no wrong door' experiences.

This approach recognises that meaningful partnerships are built on trust and mutual benefit rather than bureaucratic processes, ensuring the partnership remains focused on delivering practical value to both members and the businesses they serve.

## Risk Mitigation Strategies

Competition concerns would be addressed by emphasising complementary rather than competing services, focusing on collective benefit over individual gain and establishing clear agreements on referral protocols. Resource constraints would be managed by keeping requirements minimal and shared, rotating responsibilities to prevent burnout and maintaining voluntary participation with flexible commitment levels.

Geographic coverage challenges across Hampshire and the Solent would be addressed through ensuring representation from all three areas, rotating meeting locations across the region and utilising digital tools to connect participants who cannot attend face-to-face sessions. Sustainability would be built through developing existing relationships and networks, avoiding dependency on single funding sources and creating genuine value that justifies minimal member contributions whilst delivering measurable benefits to the business community across the region.

## Next Steps

To move forward, the following actions are recommended:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement Phase:** Conduct individual meetings with key business support providers across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight to gauge interest, address concerns and secure initial commitments from founding organisations. The mapping interviews have allowed us to informally start this process
2. **Founding Organisation Recruitment:** Identify and formally invite founding organisations representing a balanced mix of geographical areas, organisation types (public, private, membership bodies) and service specialisms to form the initial coordinating group.

3. **Independence Framework Development:** Draft clear terms of reference that explicitly address concerns about potential dominance, establish rotating leadership principles and define decision-making processes that protect competitive interests.
4. **Pilot Meeting:** Arrange an initial face-to-face meeting of founding organisations to agree the partnership's structure, elect the first chair and secretary and establish basic operating principles.
5. **Digital Infrastructure Setup:** Create the initial WhatsApp group, shared Google Drive and contact directory systems, ensuring all founding members have access and understand the systems.
6. **Wider Network Invitation:** Following successful establishment of the core group, extend invitations to all identified business support providers across the region, emphasising the partnership's independence, voluntary nature and tangible benefits.
7. **First Quarterly Meeting:** Schedule and conduct the inaugural quarterly network meeting, implementing the proposed agenda structure and beginning regular communication patterns.
8. **Evaluation and Refinement:** After six months of operation, conduct a review with founding members to assess what's working, address any emerging challenges and refine the model based on practical experience before expanding further.

## Reference sources

**Yorkshire:** Local Enterprise Agencies: Community Investment That Works - [Yorkshireinbusiness](#)

**Lancashire:** All the business support mapping is being done at County level with [Boost Lancashire](#), who were one of the first UK business support hubs.

### West Midlands

[https://youtu.be/Sqo82FxAuFk?si=kuk\\_q2llluCnkOoe](https://youtu.be/Sqo82FxAuFk?si=kuk_q2llluCnkOoe)

<https://youtu.be/qtErsE8sAsM>

**Central South:** [Business South](#) promotes the region and attract investment to the Central South. £45,000 has been agreed for place partnership activity including attending events such as MIPIM, UKREiiF and Expo Real

**Greater Manchester:** [Greater Manchester's Business Growth Hub](#) (15,000+ businesses, 75% productivity improvement, £300m finance raised) operates through extensive public-private partnerships.

**Buckinghamshire:** [Buckinghamshire Business First](#) grew from 10 founders to 15,000+ members since 2011, serving as the central coordination hub for all county business support.

**Spelthorne Borough:** [Spelthorne Business Forum](#) uses a Community Interest Company model with 900+ members, demonstrating effective council-business collaboration.

**South Midlands:** [The South Midlands Growth Hub](#) successfully coordinates six Local Authorities with specialist partners.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

This comprehensive review of business support provision across Hampshire and the Solent has revealed a paradoxical situation: whilst the region boasts a plethora of organisations ostensibly providing business support, the reality for businesses seeking help is one of confusion, fragmentation and inconsistent access. The current landscape is characterised by significant geographic inequalities, with some areas enjoying multiple support options whilst others have virtually no dedicated provision.

The fragmentation extends beyond simple geographic disparities. Strong local identities have created separate operational silos across Portsmouth, Southampton, the Isle of Wight and the rest of Hampshire, limiting opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing. This division is compounded by the imminent end of UKSPF funding in March 2026, which threatens the sustainability of many current programmes and risks creating even larger gaps in provision.

Whilst overlaps exist, they are relatively limited and tend to focus on less frequent services such as bootcamps and business clinics. The more pressing concern is the absence of comprehensive, accessible support, particularly for start-ups requiring intensive guidance and sectors such as hospitality and leisure facing specific challenges. Rural communities are particularly underserved, despite available funding through the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

The ending of UKSPF funding, presents both challenges and opportunities for reshaping business support delivery.

## Recommendations

**1. Establish a Hampshire Business Support Partnership** Create a coordinated partnership bringing together key stakeholders from across the region to address fragmentation and improve collaboration. This partnership should include local authorities, business support organisations, chambers of commerce, universities and private sector representatives. Strong leadership and careful management will be essential to overcome existing regional divisions.

**2. Develop a Unified Digital Platform** Commission the development of a comprehensive, user-friendly digital platform that provides a single point of access to business support across the region. This platform should offer clear, up-to-date information, interactive tools to help businesses identify appropriate support and regular content maintenance to ensure accuracy.

**3. Address Geographic Inequalities** Prioritise the establishment of business support programmes in areas currently lacking local provision. Consider mobile or virtual delivery models to reach businesses in areas where permanent provision may not be viable.

**4. Secure Sustainable Funding** Work collaboratively to identify and secure alternative funding sources to replace UKSPF provision ending in March 2026. Explore opportunities for pooling resources across local authorities and leveraging private sector investment to ensure continuity of essential services.

**5. Enhance Sector-Specific Support** Develop targeted support programmes for key sectors, particularly hospitality and rural businesses. Consider establishing sector-specific hubs or networks that can provide tailored guidance and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

**6. Strengthen Rural Provision** Expand rural business support beyond the single hub at Hurstbourne Tarrant, utilising available Rural England Prosperity Fund resources to establish additional access points and mobile services for rural communities.

**7. Improve Service Coordination** Implement regular coordination meetings between service providers to reduce duplication, share best practices and identify opportunities for collaborative delivery. Establish clear referral pathways between organisations to ensure businesses receive comprehensive support.

**8. Focus on Prevention and Education** Shift emphasis towards educational and preventative support rather than reactive interventions, helping businesses build resilience and capability before problems arise.

**9. Monitor and Evaluate** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the effectiveness of business support initiatives, gather user feedback and ensure continuous improvement in service delivery.

**10. Plan for Future Needs** Develop forward-looking strategies to address emerging business support needs in areas such as digital transformation, sustainability and artificial intelligence, ensuring the region remains competitive and responsive to changing business requirements.

The successful implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment from all stakeholders, adequate resources and strong leadership to overcome existing fragmentation. However, the potential benefits – a more coherent, accessible and effective business support ecosystem – justify the investment required to achieve meaningful change across Hampshire and the Solent region.