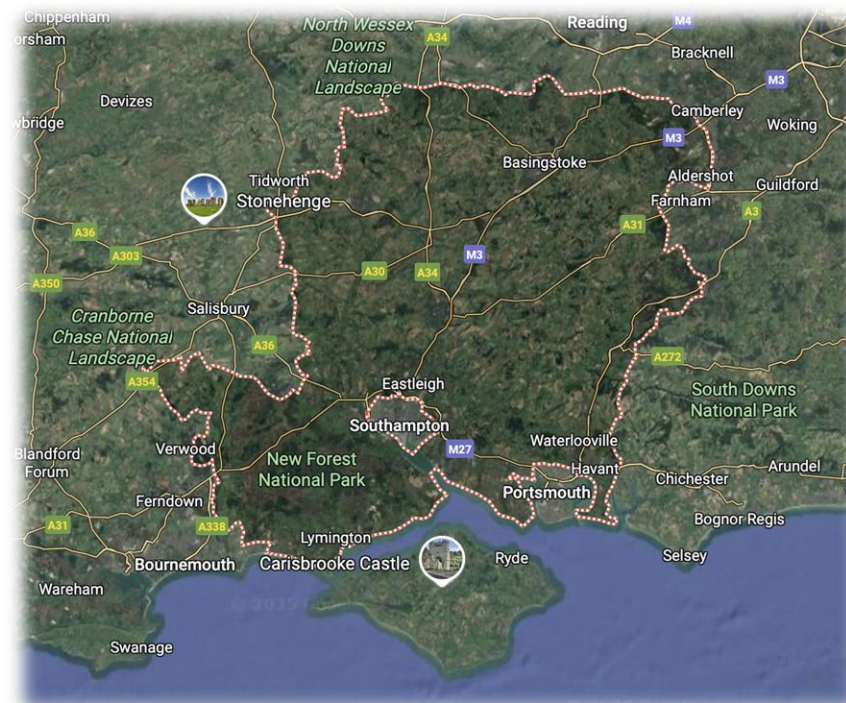


Business Support Landscape 2025

Hampshire and the Solent



Background, scope and methodology

Background: Business support across Hampshire is fragmented and confusing for SMEs, creating service duplication, geographic inconsistencies and evidence of poor user experience. The challenge is to streamline provision in alignment with the new Government Business Growth Service.

Scope: This project mapped all national and local business support across Hampshire and the Solent, identified gaps and overlaps in service provision, and explored establishing a collaborative Business Support Partnership model.

Methodology: We conducted comprehensive desk research of websites, directories, and funding streams, alongside targeted stakeholder interviews with providers, local authorities, and business networks. We leveraged personal networks to benchmark best practice and systematically mapped both public and private sector support provision.



Summary

Finding business support across Hampshire is challenging despite apparent abundance.

- **The Reality:** Whilst 129 organisations serve the region, most provide online information only - actual delivery is limited. Online resources are confusing, often outdated and difficult to navigate.
- **Geographic Issues:** Local delivery is fragmented with inconsistent coverage. Aside from ongoing Growth Hub support, most current provision depends on UKSPF funding, which ends on 31st March 2026, creating future uncertainty.
- **Regional Divisions:** Strong local identities mean Portsmouth, Southampton, Isle of Wight and rest of Hampshire operate in separate bubbles with limited collaboration.
- **The Challenge:** Businesses face confusion, duplication and gaps in support.
- **The Opportunity:** A Business Support Partnership could help to address these issues, but bringing stakeholders together will require careful management and strong leadership to overcome divisions.



Business support – local statistics

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Population (2021)</i>	<i>No. of businesses (2024)</i>	<i>High Growth</i>	<i>Business Births (2023)</i>	<i>Per head (average 267)</i>	<i>Business Deaths (2023)</i>	<i>Net</i>
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	-15
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

Key takeaway: The region's business birth rate (383 per 100k) is reasonably healthy, but the death rate (393 per 100k) slightly exceeds it, suggesting **businesses are struggling to survive** rather than failing to start.



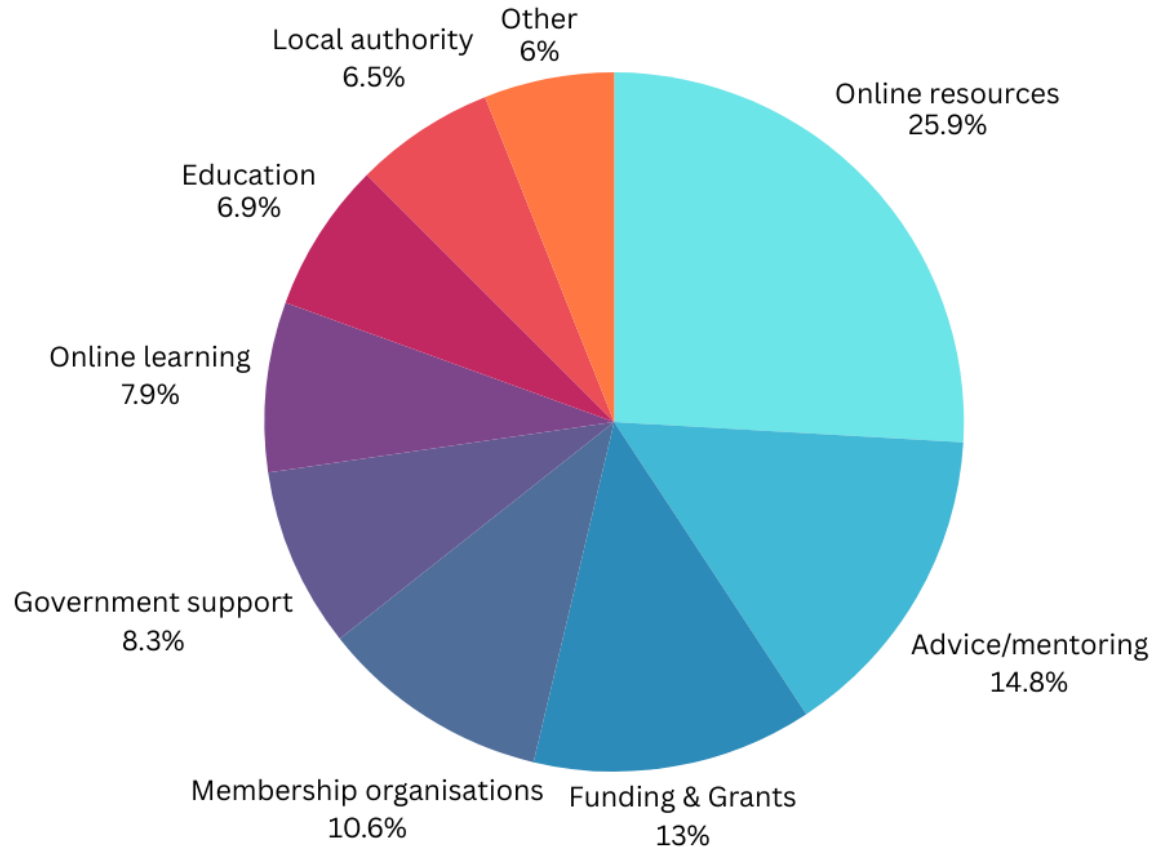
Business support overview

Searching online for business support can be a frustrating experience for business owners and startups. The sheer volume of information available creates a confusing maze of websites, directories and resources that often contradict each other or provide outdated details.

This digital clutter, amplified by AI that doesn't distinguish between current and historical information, makes it even harder to identify genuine, up-to-date support options.



Business support overview



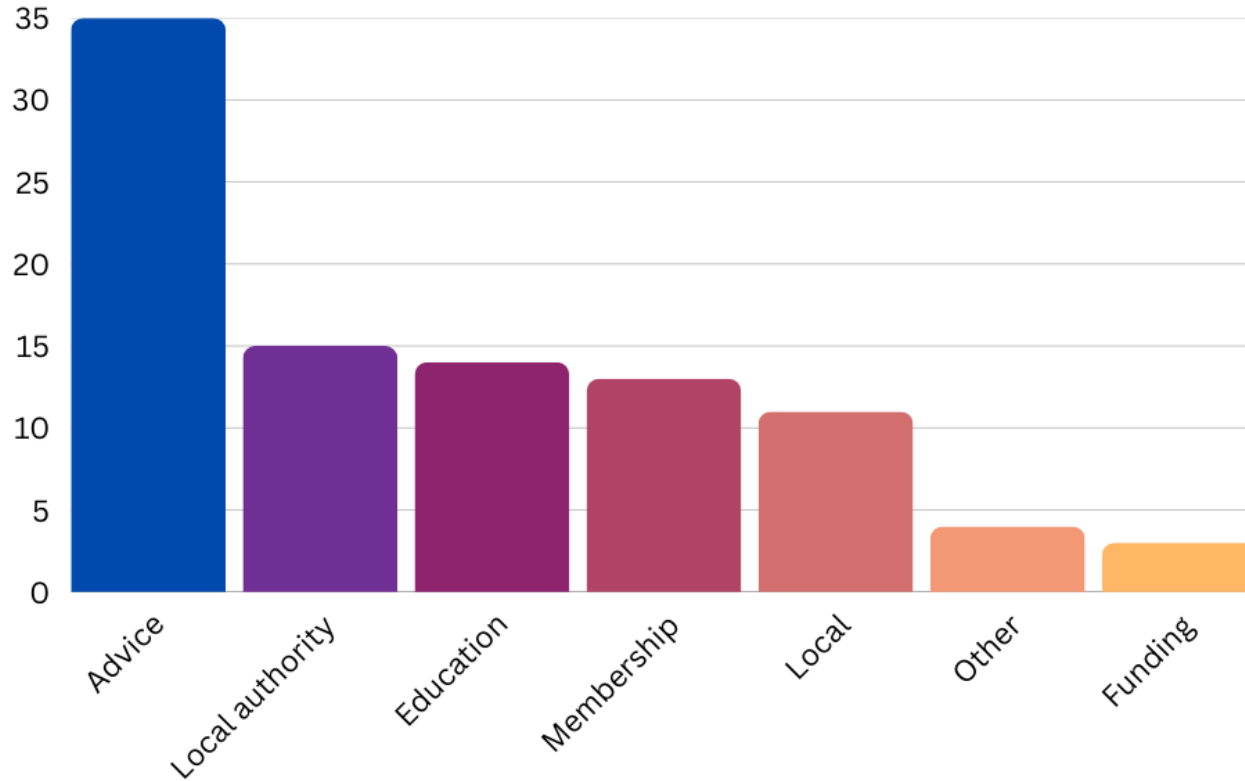
Available support

Online resources	56	25.9%
Advice/mentoring	32	14.8%
Funding & grants	28	13.0%
Membership organisations	23	10.6%
Government support	18	8.3%
Online learning	17	7.9%
Education/training	15	6.9%
Local authorities	14	6.5%
Other	13	6.0%
Total	216	100%

Key takeaway: Most offer information only, meaning businesses seeking face-to-face support have far fewer practical options than the headline figure suggests.



Business support – local channels



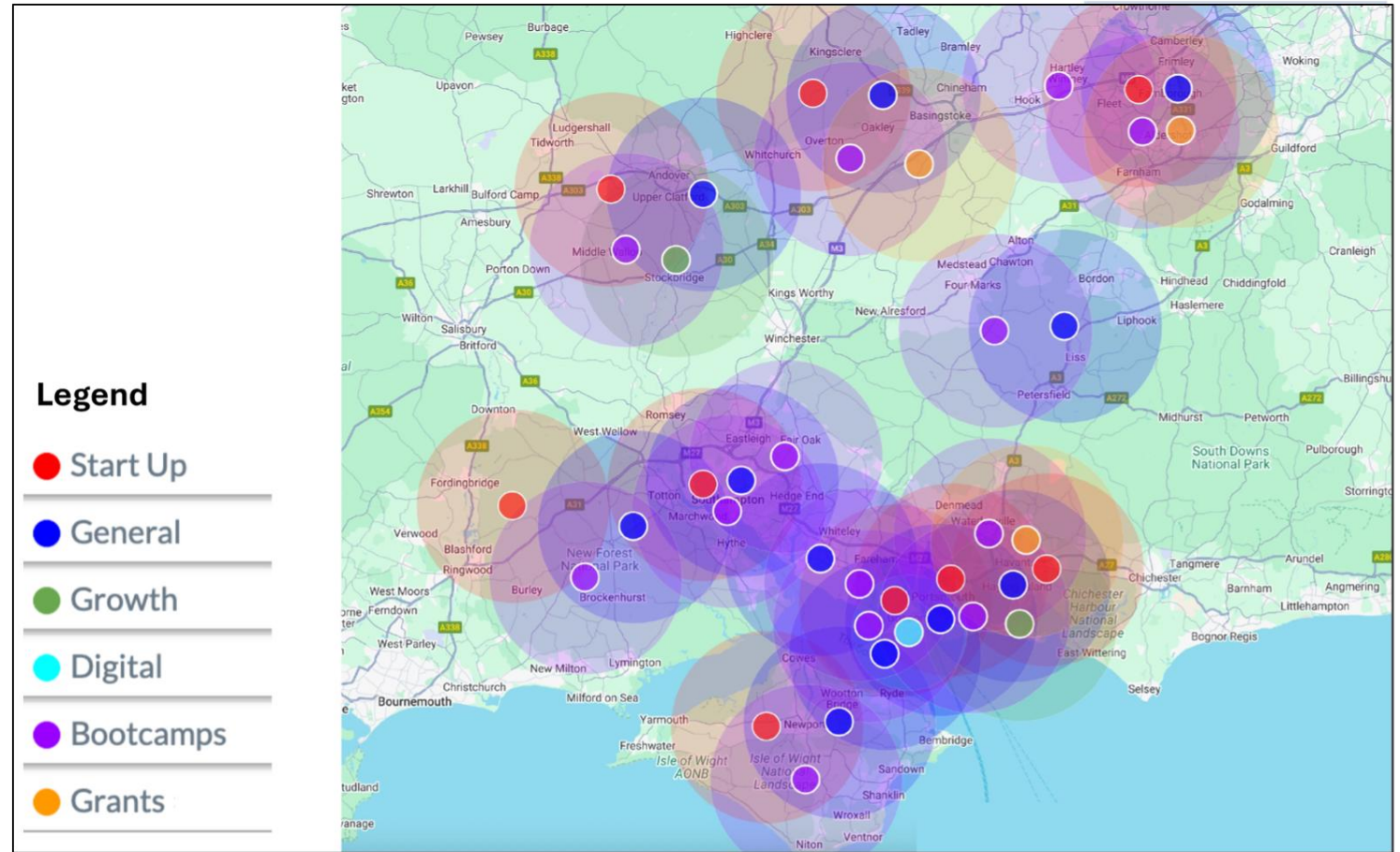
Advice/mentoring:	35	36.8%
Local authority:	15	15.8%
Education/training:	14	14.7%
Membership:	13	13.7%
Local organisation:	11	11.6%
Other:	4	4.2%
Funding:	3	3.2%
Total:	95	100%

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



Business support - local

- **Postcode Lottery**
Meaningful ongoing support is available in some areas but not others.
- **UKSPF**
Most programmes are funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund which ends on 31st March 2026.
- **Future landscape**
There is a need for replacement funding, consistent countywide coverage and more coordinated support.



Local partnership model

Background: Multiple organisations currently deliver business support across Hampshire and the Solent using various funding streams, creating a landscape where businesses struggle to navigate available services.

Need: The current system leads to service duplication, inconsistent geographic coverage and businesses being unaware of relevant support options.

Opportunity: A coordinated Business Support Partnership could create a 'no wrong door' approach, streamline referrals between providers, reduce duplication and align local provision with the Government's new Business Growth Service, positioning the region as a leader in integrated business support delivery.



Local partnership model

Successful Partnership Models Already Exist

Several regions demonstrate effective business partnerships delivering quantifiable outcomes.

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

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 Business Forum uses a Community Interest Company model with 900+ members, demonstrating effective council-business collaboration.

The South Midlands Growth Hub successfully coordinates six Local Authorities with specialist partners.

These proven models show that coordinated partnership approaches consistently outperform fragmented individual provision and create the 'no wrong door' experience businesses need.



GM Business
Growth Hub



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
BUSINESS FIRST



sbf.biz



South Midlands
Growth Hub



Partnership Model - Recommendation

Conclusion: While the local business support landscape appears fragmented on the surface, our mapping reveals a rich ecosystem of opportunity. With 95+ diverse providers, 75+ business centres, 100+ networking groups and expanding peer-to-peer networks, the area has strong foundations that simply need better coordination to unlock their full potential.

Recommendation: Establish a Business Support Partnership using proven models from Greater Manchester, Buckinghamshire, and South Midlands. This should create a central coordination hub whilst maintaining provider autonomy, develop regular communication between partners and align with the Government's Business Growth Service.

Benefits: Eliminate duplication, improve business experience through 'no wrong door' approach, strengthen collective impact whilst reducing individual costs.

Next Steps: Secure stakeholder commitment, establish governance structure, and pilot with willing partners.

