

South Somerset District Council – Economic and business support response to Covid 19

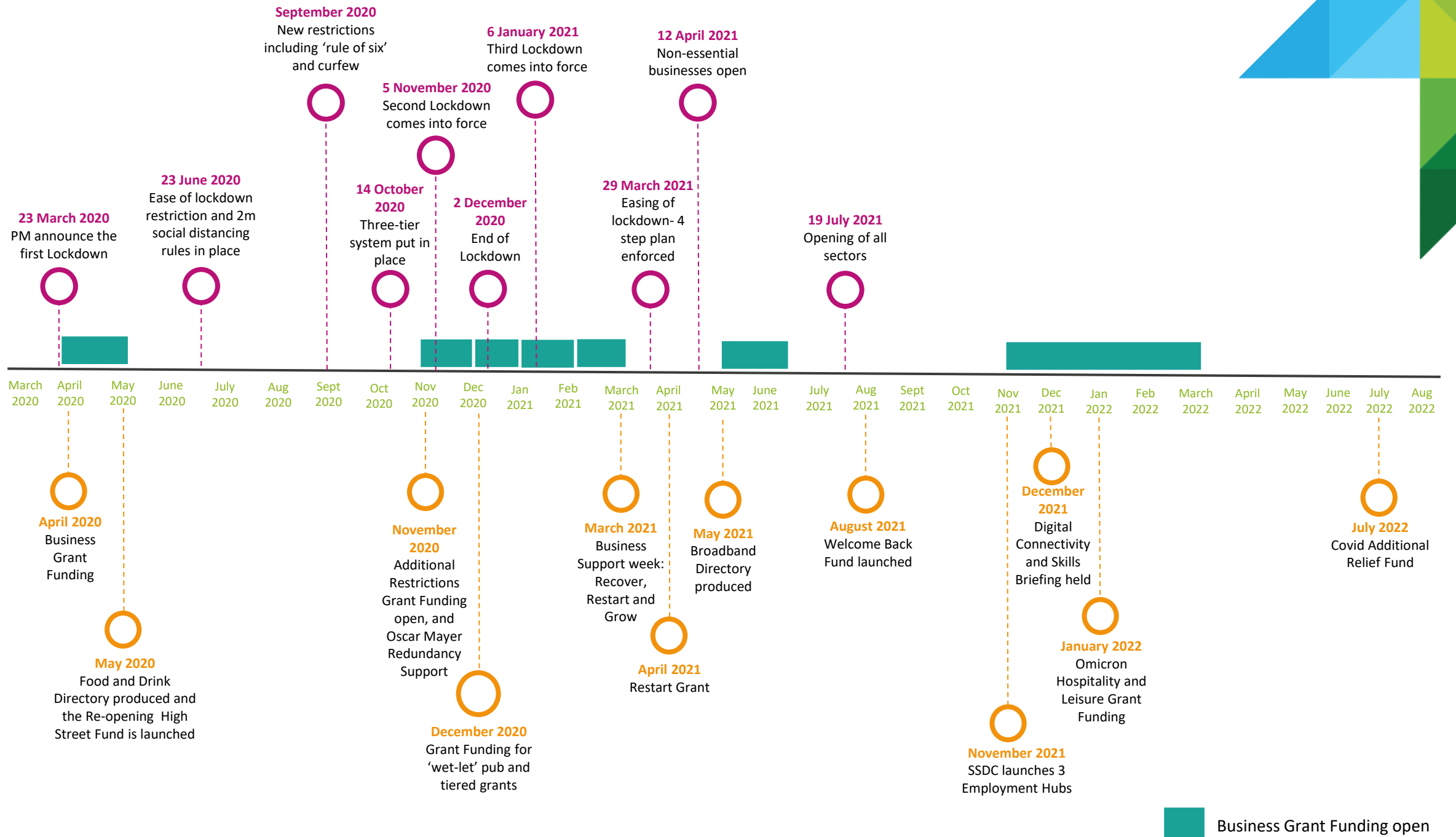
September 2022

Aim

To provide an overview to Members on the economic response to Covid 19 and to celebrate and reflect upon the swift and effective measures taken to support local businesses.

The presentation will cover:

- Business Grants
- Food and Drink Directory
- Supporting high streets and town centres
- Oscar Mayer redundancy support
- Business Support Week: Recover, Restart and Grow
- Broadband Directory
- Employment Hubs



 Business Grant Funding open

Business Grants

During the course of the pandemic South Somerset District Council administered in excess of **£72m of grant funding to over 3,500 businesses** with over 17,000 payments made.

The Council made the decision to prioritise businesses and implemented a one team approach to ensuring money was distributed as quickly as possible whilst following Government guidance.

We have been praised for how swiftly schemes became live and have always received strong audit reviews, reflecting the robustness of relevant processes.

Business Grants

Date	Intervention	Output / Outcome
April 2020	Business grant funding (Small Business Grant Fund + Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund)	3,100+ businesses £39m+ funding distributed
November 2020	Business Grant Funding (LRSG)	1400+ businesses £2.1m+ funding distributed
December 2020	Grant funding for 'wet-let' pubs	119 businesses £120k+ funding distributed
December 2020	Business Grant Funding (LRSG Tiers)	1200+ businesses £1.1m+ funding distributed
December 2020	Business Grant Funding (Closed)	1390+ businesses £6.3m funding distributed
January – February 2021	Business Grant Funding (LRSG)	1390+ businesses £3.1m funding distributed
February – March 2021	Business Grant Funding (LRSG)	1390+ businesses £3.3m+ funding distributed
April 2021	Restart Grant Funding	1200+ businesses £8.7m+ funding distributed
November 2020-March 2022	Additional Restrictions Grant Funding	3,100+ payments made (some repeat) £6.4m funding distributed
January 2022	Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant Funding	500+ businesses £1.6m+ funding distributed

Business Grants

What businesses said:

“Just to say thank you very much for all your financial help during the past 2 years it has been a great help keeping our business going”

“Thank you reviewing our application and taking the decision to grant the ARG Omicron Grant. This will be of considerable assistance to us at this difficult time and is much appreciated.”

“I am not sure to whom to direct my thanks for the successful grant application. It is greatly appreciated, so please pass my humble thanks on to your Grants Team, our Government, SSDC and your good self for your consideration and generosity.”

“You are just amazing! THANK YOU SO MUCH for your help in meeting the Omicron Discretionary Grant application deadline. Please pass my sincere thank you to the IT team for the rescue. It is much appreciated.”

“Thank you very much for the information. SSDC have been really efficient all the way through this nightmare. ”

Food and Drink Directory

In April 2020 the Council produced a Food and Drink Directory that promoted over 100 local businesses that were open and providing a critical service to local residents through the lockdown period.

The directory was a great success and fulfilled 3 key short term aspirations:

- To serve our local communities by providing local alternatives to acquiring essential items
- To support local businesses during a difficult period
- To alleviate pressures from supermarkets and to minimise the risk of not being able to social distance when shopping

The directory and subsequent online map is contributing towards longer term objectives including:

- A strengthened food and drink sector within South Somerset
- The creation of new supply chain opportunities for local producers
- A reduction in food miles, leading to environmental benefits
- A reduction in the use of supermarket visits, leading to a reduction in travel and environmental benefits
- Some research states that local food is of a better quality and holds higher nutritional values which will lead to health benefits for local residents

Food and Drink Directory

What Members said at the time:

Cllr John Clark, portfolio holder for economy, said: “The Coronavirus pandemic has placed a number of restrictions on businesses to protect public safety and reduce the risk of infection. Many businesses have had to turn to online sales or takeaway deliveries following the closure of pubs, restaurants and shops.

As such, they really are still providing a positive service to customers and we should be proud of them. The aim of our directory is to provide a guide for residents to where they can find excellent local produce and support local businesses.”

Councillor Sarah Dyke, portfolio holder for the environment who spearheaded the creation of the directory, said: “This is a brilliant guide to the local produce which is available and it plays an important environmental role too. As well as stimulating the local economy, the directory will help to reduce the amount of food brought into the region reducing traffic and food miles, helping to reduce our environmental impact which is one of the key ambitions of South Somerset District Council.”

Supporting our town centres

Throughout the pandemic South Somerset District Council have prioritised the support of town centres and local businesses. Government provided the council with £289,000 of funding to facilitate the safe re-opening and recovery of local towns.

Our priority was to ensure that town centre visitors and business felt confident to use the high streets, so we initially focused on enabling towns to re-open safely. This was done through the use of Covid 19 wardens and additional signage that reminded people to social distance where possible.

As the pandemic progressed, our activity shifted to encouraging people back to the town centres and we focused on facilitating events and town centre marketing.

We worked in partnership with town councils and business groups to ensure spend was relevant for local areas.

Re-opening the High Streets Safely

Town Centre examples:

Crewkerne hosted a free Comedy night on Friday 25th March 2022, over 100 people attended the event and the local hospitality businesses reported their venues were packed for pre-event food and drink. The event proved so successful that Crewkerne Town Council will be organising more in the future using other funds.

Chard Town Council arranged a Street Carnival to take place on Saturday 8th October 2021, this was a free all-day event where there were a number of stalls selling local goods or sharing interesting information. A programme of entertainment was also provided throughout the day and into the evening. Visitor numbers increased from 3,300 the previous Saturday to just over 7,000 on the day of the event

Other examples of how the money was spent include the purchase of new street furniture, a photography commission to create a portfolio of quality pictures for use in marketing material for the towns and some professional advice for the Town Councils on how to improve their street markets.

Oscar Mayer Redundancy support

In October 2020, Oscar Mayer in Chard contacted South Somerset District Council to provide advanced notice that they would be closing their site in Chard. As soon as that meeting was held, it became a priority for the council to work with Oscar Mayer to mitigate the impact on it's employees.

Oscar Mayer had been located the town centre for nearly 40 years and employed over 850 individuals.

The pandemic was one of a number of reasons the site was closed with changing consumer habits making the site commercial unviable.

It's worth saying that the Oscar Mayer team were incredibly receptive to SSDC's offer of support and an excellent partnership was formed to mitigate the effect of redundancies and the secondary impacts on individuals.

Oscar Mayer Redundancy support

South Somerset District Council's interventions:

- Redundancy Task Force convened with key support organisations within 24 hours of the announcement being made public.
- Online skills assessment offered to all Oscar Mayer employees with over 600 completing
- Appointments facilitated with National Careers Service to explore career and education opportunities.
- An on-site support hub was created to provide a single point of information and support for staff with regard to employability skills, careers support, free training opportunities, job and apprenticeship vacancies, mental wellbeing support, applying for benefits, housing information around maintaining a tenancy or mortgage.
- Organised local training partners to provide English language courses for employees.
- Provided information on moving into self-employment or setting up a business
- Arranged for a priority system for Citizens Advice with translated supported callers when contacting SSDC contact centre for support with Council Tax Support and Housing.
- A Covid secure careers fair held with 6 local employers
- Worked in partnership with skills and training providers to facilitate sector based work academies to provide short courses to individuals looking to retrain with an outcome of guaranteed interviews

Oscar Mayer Redundancy support

As a result of SSDC's intervention:

- All Oscar Mayer employees were offered an in-depth interview to assess their options and identify training and employment opportunities.
- Partners came together to deliver a holistic offer of support and SSDC co-ordinated this to make it accessible to Oscar Mayer employees.
- Local businesses were able to access a talented pool of workers keen to develop their careers in Chard.
- **Ultimately, only 10% of individuals went on to claim out of work benefits and we envisage that these individuals have now proceeded to find employment.**

Business Support Week: Recover, Restart and Grow

In March 2021, we partnered with Mendip District Council to host over 100 businesses at 15 different business support events to support with their recovery and growth ambitions.

The majority of sessions were available to all businesses however we targeted several workshops to retailers, providing them with the knowledge of how to trade differently during the lockdown periods.

Sessions included:

- How to sell online
- Digital marketing strategies
- Exporting from the UK
- Circular economy – what it means for your business
- Tech Nation – fuelling growth
- Pump, prime and profit
- Shaping future high streets
- Talking Tourism

Business Support Week: Recover, Restart and Grow

Our Partners:



Business Support Week: Recover, Restart and Grow



What businesses said:

“Made me feel really excited about trying new Social media and gave me more confidence about using and linking Shopify”

“I have learnt enough to decide which social media platforms I shall avoid and which ones I shall consider further. Also, it was useful to discover the recommended approaches which are most likely to be effective on the platforms.”

“I definitely understand apprenticeships much more than I did and will seriously consider these.”

“I have achieved a broader understanding of the options to be considered for online sales, along with an in-depth look at one particular provider which was extremely informative, particularly regarding cross-platform sales.”

“Its really nice to have something for our local area.”

Broadband Directory

Throughout the pandemic our broadband connections became increasingly important. Whether it was for working from home, communicating with others, online shopping, gaming or keeping in touch with the latest news. Decent broadband became even more of an essential for every day life.

SSDC produced a directory that provided information on:

- Different technology including which was / is most suited for different locations
- A list of broadband providers active in the local area
- Grant schemes available from Government and Connecting Devon and Somerset to increase connectivity

The directory was produced and promoted and became the focus for several digital events that were held in partnership with broadband providers and digital skills providers.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, **1,200 Gigabit Vouchers** have been allocated in South Somerset. This will leverage over **£2m of digital infrastructure funding into the district** in addition to the Connecting Devon and Somerset contract and private investment.

Employment Hubs

During the pandemic South Somerset saw the number of individuals claiming out of work benefits increase by over 100% to 4,500 people. At the time, we did not know how the labour market would develop. We were increasingly concerned with the end of the furlough scheme being predicted to see unemployment increase further.

The Council had learned a lot through supporting Oscar Mayer and decided to replicate and expand this process to all individuals across South Somerset.

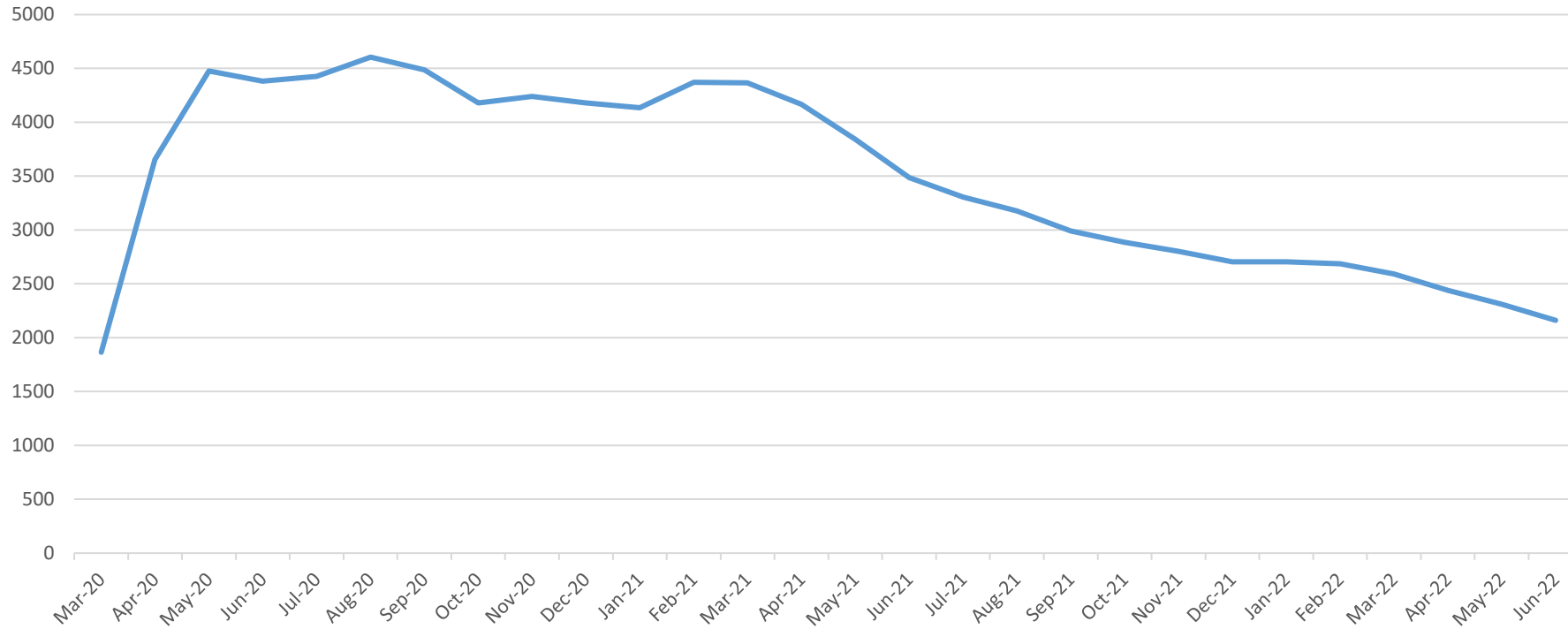
This was done through the creation of three employment hubs.

Month	Individuals claiming out of work benefits	Percentage of individuals claiming out of work benefits
February 2020	1800	1.9%
May 2020	4500	4.7%
June 2022	2100	2.3%

Employment Hubs



Out of work benefits claimants South Somerset



Employment Hubs

The hubs are a 'one stop shop' for holistic employment and skills provision across the District, designed to help residents to seek employment and learning opportunities. SSDC has partnered with Abri to deliver the employment support to individuals after a successful funding bid to the DWP.

Locations:

- Chard Library
- Yeovil Library
- Wincanton Balsam Centre

Purpose:

- To Help residents age 16 + to identify their work and learning options
- To support the transition to work or new employment
- Reduce levels of unemployment across the district
- Provide holistic opportunities including well being, learning, workshops and health walks



Employment Hubs

What's been delivered?

It's important to note that the hubs are not a recruitment agency and although we have a strong labour market, our role is not to move people from one job to another. The individuals that we are targeting and supporting often require significant interventions to enable them to become work ready.

To date we have had:

- 183 engagements with the hubs
- 250+ attendees at recruitment events
- 115 of which have completed an assessment and produced an action plan
- 27 moved into employment (as a direct result of an intervention)
- 29 accessing education and training (as a direct result of an intervention)
- 3 Job fairs, with 46 employers and 291 job seekers attending

Employment Hubs

Case Studies

Person A came into the hub and worked with the Employment Coach who delivered employability support, including CV update and job searching. Due to an officer from Positive People being present at the hub, he was referred for a job opportunity that had been placed with the officer within a local supermarket. Person A was offered an interview for the post and secured the position, starting the same week.

Person B is a Ukrainian refugee her host family sent her to the Hub in Yeovil for employment information advice and guidance. We helped Person B develop a CV for job seeking. We uploaded this to a job seeking site and she was shown how to access this on her phone. In partnership with Person B, we applied for a number of vacancies until she was able to do this independently.

Person B had 6 interviews and successfully secured a job in the Yeovil area near to her host address.

South Somerset District Council – Economic and business support to Covid 19

"The response by our officer team to the challenges of Covid to businesses and individuals has been as broad as it has been impressive. This has involved not just the Economic Development team but many other teams within SSDC and they should be very proud of the achievements." – **Cllr John Clark, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Commercial Strategy**

