



Subject:	Enterprise Support Service update		
Date:	9 April 2025		
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>			
Is this report restricted? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?			
After Committee Decision <input type="checkbox"/>			
After Council Decision <input type="checkbox"/>			
Some time in the future <input type="checkbox"/>			
Never <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>Call-in</b>			
Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>		
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) – the regional initiative to support business start-up and growth that is being led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the 11 councils.		
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>		
2.1	Members are asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note and endorse the progress to date on the delivery of the Enterprise Support Service across Belfast and beyond, with the objective of driving more and better businesses</li><li>• Note the update to the current funding position from MHCLG for the 2025/26 financial year</li></ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree to the provision of match funding from Belfast City Council of £314,415 to support delivery for the 2025/26 financial year</li> <li>• Agree to support the work to secure resources for delivery beyond March 2026.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	At the August 2024 meeting of this Committee, members were provided with an update on progress to operationalise and deliver the Enterprise Support Service which has been branded as Go Succeed. The service has now been operational for around eighteen months and has reached thousands of potential entrepreneurs and businesses across Northern Ireland.
3.2	By way of background, members will recall that Belfast City Council led on a successful funding application to the UK Government's Ministry for Community, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) for UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies (SPF) to support delivery. This provided £17 million of support for the period to March 2025; £12 million programme delivery and £5 million for small grants.
3.3	Belfast City Council, as lead for the service, has now secured additional funding via an application to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) of £9.2 million for the 2025/2026 financial year, ensuring continuity of the service. The focus over the next year, alongside delivery of the service, will be working to secure a more permanent funding source. The coming year is considered a "transition" year for Shared Prosperity Fund and work is underway within the NI government departments to consider how they will take a more direct management role in a future Fund from April 2026 onwards.
3.4	The service aims to be the go-to source for expert business advice across the region. It represents the councils' collective response to our statutory responsibility and offers a set of connected enterprise support services where individuals, entrepreneurs or businesses can access a continuum of support to meet their needs, depending on their stage of development. The concept is that the service will help people get the right support at the right time – and will also help maximise other available funding streams by helping businesses to navigate the complex support ecosystem.
3.5	<p>The service has been established to deliver across three core areas – Start, Grow and Scale – with tailored support for clients aligned with their growth ambitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Start:</b> this element of the service aims to identify individuals with entrepreneurial intentions as well as reaching those individuals who do not have an intention to start</li> </ul>

	<p>a business but could be encouraged to do so. There is specific, targeted support for a range of underrepresented groups. The menu of support available includes masterclasses, peer support networks and 1-1 mentoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Grow:</b> this element of the service provides support for existing businesses. 1-1 mentoring is allocated based on the business' potential to grow and innovate. Masterclass and peer support network activity are also provided to support existing businesses to make key decisions on issues such as entering new markets or accessing finance for growth</li> <li>• <b>Scale:</b> this part of the service is geared to supporting start-ups that have the potential to go on and generate at least £1m in revenue after 3 years. Support is delivered through 1-1 mentoring which aims to enable access to finance or further support through Invest NI, Catalyst or others.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>In addition to the tiered menu of support, small grants of up to £3,000 (up to 50% of capital costs) will be available to entrepreneurs or businesses accessing support through the service who demonstrate growth potential.</p>
3.7	<p>The delivery is underpinned by investments such as a wide-reaching marketing and communications campaign; a call handling service to deal with phone enquiries as well as an online portal to deal with online requests for support and a regional CRM system to enable tracking of client engagement across the service.</p>
3.8	<p><b><u>Regional Performance Update</u></b></p> <p>Since the service launched in November 2023, we have achieved the following by way of regional performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18,793 individuals 'reached' through a range of community outreach activities</li> <li>• 6,202 individuals/entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks)</li> <li>• 4,168 businesses supported through growth activity 1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks)</li> <li>• 1,595 entrepreneurs/businesses have accessed Go Succeed Grants since the launch in February 2024.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p>The service provides an opportunity for councils to deliver a consistent approach to enterprise, start-up and growth provision across the region. However it also has the flexibility to adapt to meet the specific needs of entrepreneurs and businesses within local areas. To</p>

	<p>achieve this, councils have developed local-level annual service plans which identify key areas of focus for outreach and delivery activities. This can include interventions to increase participation and address specific barriers faced by certain under-represented groups including females, individuals with a disability, ethnic minorities etc. It can also allow for targeted sector support activities such as those aimed at the tourism and hospitality sector or creative and digital sector support.</p>
3.10	<p><b><u>Belfast Performance Update</u></b></p> <p>Since the service launched in November 2023, we have achieved the following by way of Belfast performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,046 individuals 'reached' through a range of community outreach activities. This has included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sector specific events and self-employment academies for those in the hair and beauty industry including delivery of aspirational workshops and hands-on mentoring support for over 80 newly qualified individuals</li> <li>○ Delivery of a female-focused 'inspiring enterprise' event for a group of 100 female entrepreneurs providing practical support to starting or growing their enterprise</li> <li>○ Working with apprenticeship providers across Belfast to deliver aspirational workshops to 100s of 16–18-year-olds encouraging entrepreneurship as a very real and achievable pathway for consideration</li> <li>○ Facilitation of the '22 under 22' initiative, designed to unearth, recognise and fast track 22 exceptional potential entrepreneurs in the city</li> <li>○ Increasing awareness of enterprise among young people at the Young Enterprise Big Market event in St George's Market in December 2024.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 1,036 Belfast entrepreneurs supported through start-up activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks)</li> <li>• 756 Belfast businesses supported through growth activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks).</li> </ul>
3.11	<p>315 Belfast businesses have accessed Go Succeed Grants since the launch in February 2024, drawing down over £1 million. These grants have enabled businesses to purchase capital and/or revenue items which will support their future growth plans.</p>
3.12	<p>Critical to the service is the ability to deliver place-based activity and to be responsive to the needs of the local business community. In Belfast, there has been a series of targeted</p>

	<p>masterclasses for businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector. We have also put in place several information and support sessions to help businesses access other support services such as the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund and the Belfast Business Promise and have organised support clinics to help businesses interested in exploring new markets and introducing new technologies into their business. For the year ahead, planned activity includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Establishing, and building upon, relationships with key stakeholders across the city to put in place targeted interventions to engage with under-represented groups and work to overcome the barriers to starting or growing a business for those groups</li> <li>○ Continuing to raise awareness of the Social Economy sector, encouraging and supporting new and existing social enterprises and co-operatives as well as improving social value connections across the city</li> <li>○ Partnering with the council's Employability and Skills team to target self-employed sectors, including childminding, and delivering bespoke academies to break down barriers to self-employment.</li> </ul>
3.13	<p>Looking ahead, it is critical that funding is secured to enable this service to continue. The SPF funding is currently scheduled to run out in March 2026 and there is no future SPF funding approach beyond this date. There has been some engagement with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Minister has been vocal in her support for the service. However, at this point, DfE is not making a financial contribution to support the delivery of NIESS – although councils are using some of resources allocated to them from central government for the delivery of their statutory duty to provide start-up support as their match funding contribution to the overall funding pot. The councils have developed a detailed stakeholder engagement plan – including political engagement – for the coming months in order to drive home the value and impact of the service and to make the case to relevant departments to prioritise resources for future delivery. Local political support across the region will be critical in building support for this work.</p>
3.14	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Belfast City Council is currently acting as the lead council on behalf of the 11 councils for delivery of the service. To do so, we have established a delivery and management team which is fully resourced through the SPF funding. The overall indicative SPF budget for the 2025/26 financial year is in the region of £7.2 million revenue, with around £2 million in capital funding available across the funding period for grant support.</p>

3.15	<p>A condition of the funding from MHCLG is that projects include match funding as part of the funding package. Members will be aware that Belfast City Council has a statutory obligation to support the promotion of jobs through business start-up activity. Members are therefore asked to note and endorse Belfast City Council's Enterprise and Business Growth Unit contribution of £314,415 in match funding to the NI Enterprise Support Service in order to comply with both the funder's requirement and Council's statutory obligation. The contribution is based on an agreed formula across all council areas, calculated on the number of businesses to be supported.</p>
3.16	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>An equality impact assessment for the service has been completed. Local targets for delivery in each council area have been established and will be part of the contractual commitments with delivery partners.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
	N/A