



Subject:	Supporting Business Start Up and Growth in Belfast - Update
Date:	12 October 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
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Restricted Reports	
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"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide members with a progress update on activity in 2022/2023 to support the development of new and existing businesses across the city through the Enterprise and Business Growth team. The report sets out key priority areas of work for the remainder of the 2022/23 financial year.</p> <p>The report also provides an update to members setting out a proposed interim approach to delivering business start up activity, pending confirmation of funding from a range of external sources to deliver a new model of support. In addition, it details a proposed intervention to</p>

	encourage more growth-focused and scaling businesses, building on a successful partnership model.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the Council's performance and contribution to delivering against Belfast Agenda ambitions to grow the Belfast economy, focusing on the current support for Business Start-up and Growth - Note and endorse the proposal to invest in the Way to Scale programme up to a maximum of £43,000 - Note and agree attendance of party group leaders, Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development and senior officers to attend the best practice visit for sustainability and circular economy in Dublin on the 4 November.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that within the 2022/23 period the Enterprise and Business Growth team have been working to develop and deliver a range of activity to support the growth and development of new and existing businesses across the city, aligned with the Growing the Economy pillar of the Belfast Agenda and Inclusive Growth Strategy. It also aims to align and add value to work underway through the Belfast Region City Deal, Innovation City Belfast and the Innovation and Inclusive Growth Commission. This range of activity was approved at the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on the 6 April 2022.
3.2	The 2022/23 financial year sees the conclusion of some of our most significant business support interventions funded through the European Regional Development Fund and Invest Northern Ireland. There is also a considerable programme of work underway to identify future resources to address future funding gaps to support the delivery of a new, more ambitious programme of start-up and growth support which seeks to revamp the current offer and increase the number, survival and growth rates of new businesses across the city. In addition to the developmental work required to achieve this we continue to deliver a range of supports for new and existing businesses across the city. Over the last six months, some of our key achievements have included:
3.3	<u>Enterprise and Start a Business</u> - We have worked with 514 individuals to help them test and develop new business ideas through a range of events and workshops across the city. This included events targeted at individuals who are currently economically inactive, and those from a range of underrepresented groups which aimed to promote a culture of enterprise and build skills and confidence. We also ran the Belfast Business Idea Award which was

	<p>designed to unearth, recognise, and help to fast track the best business ideas in Belfast. This year's competition was won by Insurin who received £2,500 and a business support package worth over £3,000. Four runners up also received a support package worth over £3,000.</p>
3.4	<p>Our business start-up activity has engaged 257 individuals, 223 of those developed a business plan through the Go For It programme, which supported the creation of 134 jobs. We provided additional support to 56 individuals through 1-1 mentoring and access to incentives of £1,500 to help kick start their business, and enabled test trading opportunities for 16 new businesses through our dedicated start up space at St George's Market.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Support for Social Enterprise and Cooperatives</u> - 22 organisations have been supported this year to date through one-to-one mentoring advice and guidance to develop new social enterprises and cooperatives. To increase awareness of the sector we have facilitated 1 Outreach Event, 2 Ideas Generation/Refinement Workshops and 1 Stakeholder Meeting. To further raise awareness of the Co-operative sector and increase engagement we facilitated, 3 Training Webinars and a fortnightly cooperative event.</p>
3.6	<p>In September we launched a pitching competition for social enterprises and cooperatives, successful applicants to the competition with pitch on Friday 11 November. 1 winner will be able to access a potential award of £10,000 to help with getting started or to grow, runners up will also access a range of support to help grow their enterprise.</p>
3.7	<p>In October we also launched the new youth project which will engage a minimum of 42 participants across 8 groups and will include support for young people to explore the concept of social economy and develop the skills required to establish an organisation in the sector.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Growing a Business</u>- Through our business growth support, we have delivered one to one mentoring to 188 businesses to help them to implement growth strategies and become more resilient. The type of support offered includes enhancing their digital and online presence, improving tendering skills and specialist support for businesses with high growth potential. We have also introduced environmental sustainability to test the demand after recent surveys suggested that this is a current priority for local businesses. 225 businesses attended 15 workshops and events.</p>
3.9	<p>74 companies across the region have been supported to implement new digital acceleration plans, 14 of whom are from Belfast. 17 Masterclasses and workshops have been delivered,</p>

covering key emerging technology areas including blockchain, immersive technology, robotics, and innovation strategy development.

3.10 Innovation Factory - Occupancy at the centre is now at 88%, the highest level to date. The centre has seen a high level of interest from new firms in sectors including TV/film, digital, engineering and green tech. Over the year 24 businesses have engaged in masterclasses and events at the centre. As part of IF's social and economic regeneration activity, 11 work placements have been facilitated by IF customers over the past 12 months, 117 FTE have been created this year and 76 Hours of business mentoring support has been provided. Plans are also underway to provide linkages between the centre and businesses on wider business support, we are also focusing on the social and regeneration aspect of the centre and how we can maximise the benefits of this.

3.11 City Vibrancy - In January 2022 we launched the Vibrant Business Destinations programme in partnership with DfC which aims to support local business associations to develop and deliver interventions that will drive footfall and create vibrancy in areas outside of the city centre. To date there have been 46 expressions of interest across the North, South, East and West of the city, this scheme is in place to October 2023.

3.12 Scaling and Growth - Officers have been working with the Council's innovation team to develop a programme of support for the creative digital sector that will help build capacity, networks and access to finance for creative digital companies working with new and emerging technologies such as immersive tech and virtual production. With new challenge funding and finance available through private sector partners for the development and prototyping of new products, services and experiences focused on immersive and virtual production, there is an opportunity to help local SMEs scale and innovate through building their capacity to bid and secure this new funding.

3.13 Investing in Belfast - Officers continue to work with our seven partner councils along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor (DBEC) to identify business and new collaborative opportunities. Belfast City Council is leading on the development of the strategy and action plan for the partnership, which will conclude in October 2022. Work will then take place to identify funding and resources to support the delivery of the action plan such opportunities through Peace Plus and Shared Island. Over the period we have successfully secured funding through Shared Island to deliver a feasibility study to support the development of regional innovation hubs across the DBEC area.

3.14	<p>In addition to this we have been further developing our partnership with Dublin City Council to enable shared learning and support the development of collaborative opportunities across a number of thematic areas including sustainability, circular economy, innovation and regeneration. Through this partnership we have successfully secured funding to assess feasibility of the development of a circular economy hub through Shared Island. Work is now underway to bring this forward.</p>
3.15	<p>To further develop the partnership, support shared learning a number of best practice visits will now be programmed aligned with the thematic areas identified. The first of these visits will take place in Dublin on the 4 November focussing on sustainability and the circular economy, it is proposed that attendees will include party group leaders from Belfast, the Chief executive, and relevant senior officers. Attendees from the Dublin City Council area will also include party group leaders and senior officer. The draft agenda will include a meet and greet in Dublin Civic Headquarters, a visit and briefing on the Dublin Heat Network along with a visit to the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun and Community Mobility Charging Hub. An invitation for the visit will be issued to members along with the final version of the agenda. Costs associated with travel to the event will be covered through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget. It is expected that Belfast City Council will facilitate a return visit in December/January.</p>
3.16	<p>Taking account of the wider strategic activity we continue to deliver for the entrepreneurs and businesses across the city through our entrepreneurship, business start, social enterprise and cooperative supports and business growth activity. Some new areas of programme development and delivery are as follows:</p>
3.17	<p><u>Future Business Support</u></p> <p>At the August 2022 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were provided with an update on the approach to deliver interim business start-up activity in 2023. The report noted that there was still a significant programme of work to do to seek the additional financial resources required to deliver new activity and to ensure that it can be operational once the current programme concludes in March 2023. Members were advised of ongoing engagement with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding the prospect of accessing resources through the Shared Prosperity Fund. However, given the timeframes to put in place new funding streams councils have had</p>

	to consider several options to put in place interim approaches until such resources are confirmed.
3.18	Following further engagement with DLUHC and the 10 other councils there has been agreement to extend the current delivery of the Go for It programme for an initial period of six months, until there is greater clarity on the financial position to support a new programme and until the commissioning process for delivery of the enhanced programme is completed. We expect to be in a position to launch the new business support service in September 2023. This approach ensures that councils have a mechanism in place to deliver against our statutory requirements relating to business start-up activity.
3.19	In parallel, work will continue to progress the enhanced approach to business start-up and growth support set out to this Committee in April 2022, with the ambition of phasing the new interventions in as resources are firmed up. Building on the business case we will coordinate our partners to ensure mechanisms are in place to roll out the service in 2023. This will include the implementation of a procurement framework to support future delivery and ensure while there is regional consistency across the model there are opportunities for councils to adapt support to meet local needs and align with internal working arrangements. We will also work to ensure that financial resources are in place to support our ambitions and deliver our statutory obligations through SPF, Invest NI, DfE and DfC.
3.20	<u>Innovation and scaling</u> We continue to work with partners across the city to develop interventions which encourage more businesses to scale and grow to turnover £3m+. This is a key challenge for us as highlighted through our Enterprise Framework, the 10X Economy vision, which identifies the need to drive up the rate of new business starts and create an environment that actively supports entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses.
3.21	Following the success of the Way to Scale Initiative in partnership with Catalyst Inc and Invest NI, officers have been working to enhance this to complement Belfast City Council's core Enterprise and Business Growth Support Programmes. Way to Scale provides support across a number of areas including internationalisation, access to finance, business modelling and sales strategy support for those businesses with the ambition to scale.
3.22	Through last year's programme, 40 businesses accessed support through a series of workshops and events with leading entrepreneurs from MIT in Boston. A further 9 companies

	<p>progressed on to the Entrepreneurship Development Programme at MIT in Boston, and a one week residential in Boston to develop market strategies and build network support to realise the growth ambitions of their businesses.</p>
3.23	<p>Building on the feedback from last year, it is proposed to support the Way to Scale programme for 2023 to support a new cohort of companies participate. The programme will be delivered in partnership with Catalyst Inc. and Invest Northern Ireland. The overall cost of the programme will be £180,000. Given the alignment with the ambitions set out in the enterprise framework, it is recommended that this is supported with Council funding of £43,000 to maximise the take-up by Belfast-based businesses. Invest NI, Catalyst Inc and the participating companies will cover the remainder of the costs.</p>
3.24	<p><u>Supporting Business Growth</u></p> <p>We will continue to engage with businesses across the city to better understand the challenges they face in the current climate and work to ensure that support is in place to overcome them. We are working to put in place a new procurement framework across our services to enable us to provide more agile supports that can adapt to the needs of the business community. Across the remainder of the financial year, we will look to enhance support for businesses to become more sustainable and resilient to ensure they can put mechanisms in place to overcome the implications associated with ongoing rising costs.</p>
3.25	<p><u>Investing in Belfast</u></p> <p>Across the remainder of the financial year we will focus on refreshing our City Investment Service to ensure that it provides the right support to new and potential investors in the City. We will also work to build on our partnerships in London and Dublin to identify new opportunities to profile the city for investment. Using the recommendations from the draft economic strategy we will also look to identify new cities to build partnerships with in order to increase opportunities for businesses in key growth sectors and to support the development of clusters in core technologies such as Fintech, MedTech, Advanced Manufacturing and Creative and Digital Industries.</p>
3.26	<p><u>Social enterprise and Cooperatives</u></p> <p>We have been working with internal and external partners to refresh our social economy action plan which aims to detail an integrated approach to supporting social enterprises and cooperatives, using multiple levers across the council to deliver cohesive support, with specific targets for engagement. Using the recommendations from the draft economic</p>

<p>3.27</p> <p>3.28</p>	<p>strategy we are also working to identify new support mechanisms for social enterprises and cooperatives to put in place more sustainable funding models, and access opportunities through council's new social value procurement policy.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The enterprise and business growth activities outlined within this report will be resourced through the existing Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23.</p> <p>The Way to Scale programme was included as part of the Enterprise and Business Growth budget for 2022/23, as presented to this Committee on 6 April 2022. This budget was included as part of the estimates that were approved by this Committee on 12 January 2022.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The unit is currently undertaking a process of equality screening on the overall work programme, this will ensure consideration is given to equality and good relation impacts throughout the delivery of this project.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents attached</p>
	<p>N/A.</p>