

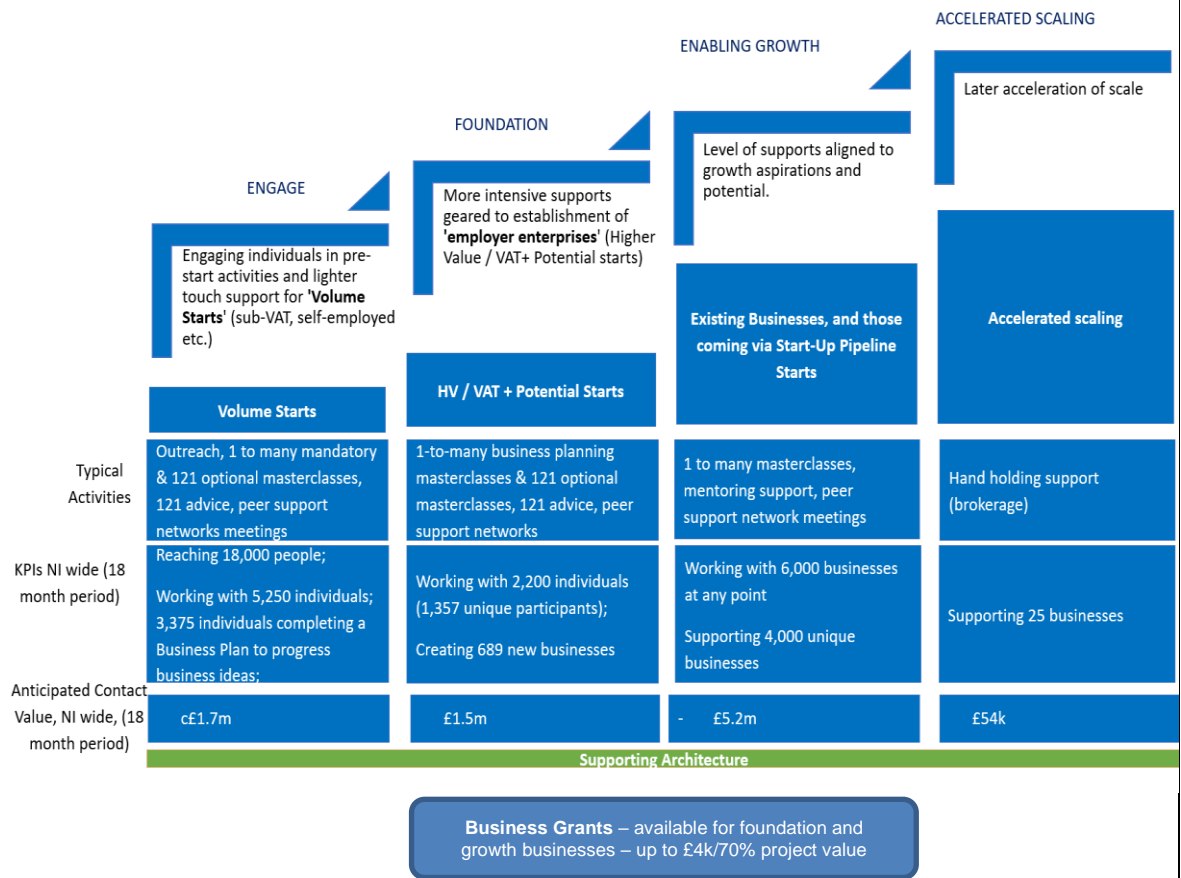


Subject:	Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service update
Date:	22 September 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the new Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NIESS) – the regional initiative to support business start-up and growth that will be led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the 11 councils.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note that the MoU for the NIESS has now been signed by the Chief Executive, enabling commissioning of service delivery and project mobilisation</li><li>• Note the planned go-live date for the new intervention</li><li>• Note that further updates on progress will be presented to members in due course.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	At the 17 February meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, members agreed that Belfast City Council should lead on the submission of the application to UKSPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) for the 11-council Enterprise Support Service (ESS) model. They also agreed that the council should lead on the future development and delivery of the service, subject to additional due diligence and risk management work being undertaken.
3.2	A further update was presented to the August 2023 meeting of the Committee, providing additional detail on progress to date on the procurement process and the funding drawdown and identifying an emerging risk due to delays in issuing the funding agreement/MoU by DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). In early September 2023, officers received the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) setting out the terms and conditions of the funding offer and this was signed by the Chief Executive.

3.3	<p>Having received the MoU, officers were able to proceed with the appointment of the contractors for the delivery of services to businesses, as well as the provision of support services such as marketing and communications and call handling. Following contractual standstill periods, initiation meetings are being scheduled with delivery partners in w/c 25 September 2023. It is expected that the “go live” date for the service will be 1 October 2023. However, given the necessary preparatory work required to mobilise a new service of this scale, it is likely that the more “formal” launch will not take place until early November.</p>
3.4	<p>As part of the funding application to DLUHC, resources were secured for a number of staff roles in order to support programme delivery and provide appropriate management and oversight for funders and all council partners. Recruitment for these roles is currently under way and staff should be in position for November/December 2023 (subject to notice periods).</p>
3.5	<p>In the interim, the development and mobilisation work is being led by existing resources within the Enterprise and Business Growth Team. The team has been supported by colleagues from across the council including Digital Services, Procurement, Finance, Legal Services, Information Governance Unit, Human Resources and Continuous Improvement and Audit, Governance and Risk.</p>
3.6	<p>During the early development work, staff from AGRS facilitated a risk workshop involving all support services across the council (as set out above) involved in this phase of the programme. It is our intention to repeat this exercise in the coming weeks as we move towards the mobilisation phase and the risks change. This will provide elected members and senior management with the appropriate levels of assurance around programme delivery. In line with previous commitments, regular progress reports will be brought back to Committee. Wider governance structures are also being established and these will include regular meetings with the contractors as well as quarterly oversight reporting through to the SOLACE Economic Development Group (comprising senior directors across all 11 councils) and to SOLACE as required.</p>
3.7	<p>As a recap, the service is being funded through the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). This is the DLUHC fund that was established as a replacement for EU funding (ERDF and ESF). One strand of funding focused on “Supporting Local Business”. The Investment Plan for UKSPF in Northern Ireland was launched in December 2022. At that time, the Plan proposed that a central component of the Supporting Local Business strand would be the 11 council Enterprise Support Service. An indicative financial allocation of £17million - £12 million</p>

programme delivery and £5million for small grants – was set aside for the service. UKSPF funding is available to March 2025 so the initial programme period will run from Autumn 2023 to March 2025. The service overview is detailed below:



3.8 The new service represents the ambition of all local authorities to deliver on our statutory responsibility around business start-up in a way that will make a real change over time, by working to address cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship and helping more businesses to start, grow and scale across the region. It can directly support our Belfast Agenda targets for job creation and economic growth and can also provide an important engagement mechanism to enhance business interaction with key investments, including those supported through City Deal.

3.9 Given delays in issuing the MoU, officers are working with contractors to identify how we can maximise the delivery of the service while acknowledging that not all support services and resources are yet fully functional.

3.10	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Belfast City Council will act as the lead council on behalf of the 11 councils for delivery of the service. To do so, we will establish a delivery and management team which will be fully resourced through the DLUHC funding.</p>
3.11	<p>The final budget is subject to completion of the relevant procurement exercises detailed above. The overall indicative SPF budget is in the region of £5million revenue in year 1 and £7million revenue in year 2, with around £5million available across the funding period for grant support.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></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