

## Appendix 2 - Details of support currently provided by the Council

The majority of the direct support to businesses is provided through the Development Department but the Council also interacts with and supports businesses across a range of operational areas including food health, licensing, building control and planning.

There is a range of business support available through the Council, from pre-enterprise (thinking about starting a business) through to support for start up and support once operational, depending on growth needs (export development, marketing support etc.). The following provides an overview of current support from Council to businesses to enhance competitiveness and sustainability:

### Pre-enterprise

- **Start by Doing Initiative:** This programme will help 400 potential entrepreneurs annually to identify and define a business idea and will refer 200 of these onto the business start programme (below). Support is available to all residents in the Belfast City Council area; however there will be specific support allocated to under-represented groups. Officers from the Economic Development Unit are working with groups across the city to develop workshops and practical sessions.
- **The Belfast Enterprise Academy:** This programme is open to degree students from Queen's, Ulster University and Belfast Metropolitan College. During this enterprise support programme, participants work in cross-disciplinary teams to develop viable business ideas and business plans. It supports 25 participants annually and has a target to refer a minimum of 10 participants to the business start activity noted below. Each year, a high percentage of Enterprise Academy participants go on to start their own business when they complete their education. The Belfast Enterprise Academy has won a number of awards and was recently highly commended at the MJ Awards 2016 in London for the Innovation in Education, Employment and Training for young people category.

### Business start-up support

- **Go For It Programme:** As noted above, Councils now have statutory responsibility for business start-up support. The Regional Start Initiative, or “Go for It” programme, is being delivered in its current form to October 2016. In Belfast, the programme is delivered through the Enterprise Agency network and there are agencies based across the city. The 11 Councils have submitted a joint application to secure Invest NI and ERDF funding towards a replacement “Go for It” type programme. This is currently

undergoing an Economic Appraisal and is subject to funding award and public procurement. The regional programme will roll out as quickly as possible after October 2016. Officers are considering the most efficient and effective means available to the Council for interim delivery of the programme to meet the quality targets and timescales of the programme whilst protecting against a gap in service provision. The annual target for Belfast will be around 400 new business starts.

- It is proposed that the **new enhanced regional programme** will provide a range of workshop-based learning, business plan development and 1-2-1 mentoring support for participating individuals (the current programme focuses on business plan development only).
- The **Innovation Factory** operator will run a “Dragon’s Den” type programme for new business starts called “Pioneer 10”. Through this initiative, 10 new businesses will be supported through a structured programme focusing on topics such as Business Models, Planning for Profits, Sales and Marketing Essentials, Finance for Business, Financial Management and Strategy and Financial Planning mentoring. Participants will be able to avail of free hot-desk access at the centre for a set time period.

#### **Business Growth support: generic**

- **Business Growth Programme**: This programme is aimed at all business sectors but will be specifically targeted towards micro and small businesses currently trading for 1-2 years+, predominately within the local market and not in receipt of Invest NI assistance. Within this programme an average of 135 businesses per year will be supported, creating around 70 jobs per year. Participants can avail of up to 2 days 1-2-1 mentoring support. Participating businesses are allocated a specific mentor to meet their business growth needs. This support is also open to social enterprises. Participants may also be referred on to other sources of support such as Invest NI, Catalyst Inc. or the Universities and Colleges.
- **Procurement Support Initiative**: This programme is aimed at micro and small businesses (including social enterprises) that have little or no experience of selling to the public sector. An average of 30 businesses per year will participate on this programme. At present, most of the public sector bodies are working with the Council on this initiative and, as it progresses, we will work to look at how we can bring on other partners to create additional supply opportunities e.g. the key anchor institutions in the city.
- **Innovation Factory**: Once operational (from September 2016), the new business centre will provide business accommodation, business growth and business innovation services to support more than 100 small businesses. Innovation Factory tenants will work with an

expert business support organisation to constantly review their business' growth prospects and they will be able to access expertise and business support to help grow their business in terms of employment numbers, productivity and new markets. Innovation Factory will also deliver a range of business diagnostics to businesses, innovation related master-classes, collaboration and innovation initiatives aimed at tenants and non-tenants/users of the centre.

- **Links to employability activity**: Members will be aware that the Council supports a range of employability programmes, currently focusing on those furthest from the labour market. The principal objective of these programmes is to help participants to find employment. There are **opportunities to look at how small businesses in particular might benefit from work placements** by some of these employability participants, subject to training organisations being able to make the right fit between the candidate and the job needs.

#### **Business growth support: sector specific support**

- **High Growth sectors**: A targeted programme for new-start businesses (0-1 year trading) demonstrating high growth potential or requiring specific, specialist business start-up and early stage growth support will be delivered (funding still subject to EU approval). The programme is aligned to the needs of key growth sectors in Belfast such as professional services, health and life sciences, green technology, advanced engineering, creative, digital and ICT. Once operational, the programme will support 40 businesses or participants per year and has a target of creating 84 jobs. It is important to note that a range of other providers can also potentially provide support to these businesses so there will be a focus on signposting to other relevant provision, as appropriate, post programme completion
- **Social Enterprise**: Support is available to new and emerging social enterprises/social entrepreneurs and cooperatives through a programme tailored specifically to their needs. The programme will engage a minimum of 50 individuals/groups per annum and recruit a minimum of 30 participants to receive intensive support through workshops and 1-2-1 mentoring. This programme was launched in June 2016.
- **Creative and Digital Industries**: There is currently one programme to support 30 companies from the Creative and Digital Industries sector to increase their competitiveness through product development and expand their geographical markets. "The 140 Second Club" involves 30 pre-start and early stage businesses. Run by Ulster University, the programme provides participants with 10 workshops, helping them hone their business idea, with the aim of creating at least 10 new business starts.

- Links to **International Relations** activity: 15 CDI businesses have participated in the South by South West Trade Mission aimed at developing business linkages with the American market. The majority of these businesses have already been active in international markets so the challenge is to look at how the Council can help move more businesses into export markets, through business missions and international events, in conjunction with Invest NI.

The Council is only one player in this field and Officers work very closely with a range of organisations such as Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs), Invest NI, Catalyst Inc., Universities and Colleges, incubation facilities (such as E-spark) and specialist/sectoral business support organisations in order to maximise the impact of the **collective effort to support business start-up and growth**. This is particularly important in the context of constrained public finances. It is also important in terms of **signposting businesses to relevant support to meet their development needs and also in making the service more customer-focused**.

Given the scale of the challenge, it is important to acknowledge that changing the business start-up figures and improving growth rates is a long-term ambition which will require a range of interventions. These will include promoting the enterprise culture from an early age through school-based interventions, creating and profiling more positive role models working in small business and making the business support system easy to access. Council officers have been working to develop and put in place a number of support programmes, in partnership with others.

### **Innovation Factory**

One of the most significant investments (funded by Council, ERDF and Invest NI) has been the Innovation Factory which will open in September 2016. This development, when operating at capacity, will support almost 400 jobs across approx. 100 small businesses. Tenant companies will work with the operator to grow their business and they will be encouraged to graduate from the centre after an agreed period, freeing space up for new businesses.

The Innovation Factory will bring together a range of business advice, guidance and support services under one roof, providing a tailored package of support for small businesses. It will allow the Council to **“package” together a range of business support services** – comprising high quality business space as well as access to finance, mentor support and

networks – and could be a useful **focal point for many of the business support services** referenced in the Notice of Motion.

The Innovation Factory will also support the Council's "**inclusive growth**" agenda. The operator of the centre has committed to a significant programme of social regeneration activity. This includes schools partnerships, work placement and employment opportunities for long-term unemployed as well as student placement opportunities. In addition, the operator will adopt a "buy local" policy and is holding a "Meet the Buyer" event with potential suppliers across a range of services (landscaping, catering, property maintenance) in August 2016.

### **Business workspace**

The business workspace at Innovation Factory is the first investment by the Council in this type of support infrastructure. The business case for the Innovation Factory identified the **importance of high quality business space** in supporting business start and growth. It also pointed to the opportunity for clustering key sectors – particularly the creative and digital sectors – to encourage collaboration and build partnerships. While it was necessary for Belfast City Council to take the lead in securing the funding for the Innovation Factory, there are other models involving joint ventures and partnerships with private sector operators which can help bring forward developments of this type. The Council is currently **exploring the potential to work with the private sector to take forward relevant developments**, taking care to ensure that the process is open and transparent and that the Council can secure an appropriate return on investment.