

Regional Start Initiative	9th August 2016
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating Our Economy & Contributing To Prosperity
Outcome	Maximise business start-up opportunities
Lead Officer	Paul Beattie – Head of Prosperity and Place
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a further update on the progress of the transfer of Regional Start Initiative (Business Start programme) from Invest Northern Ireland to Councils, and make recommendation for an interim solution to delivery between end-October 2016 and October 2017.

Introduction

Members will remember previous reports from earlier this year, which outlined the delay in the new beginning of the business start programme – Regional Start Initiative (RSI). To recap from those reports:

- Council will continue to pay Invest NI through its current contract with Enterprise Northern Ireland to deliver RSI until October 2016.
- The process of application for LED funding to use against the Regional Start Initiative has continued with Councils across Northern Ireland.
- Once confirmed, the Councils were to tender for a delivery agent through the EU Journal, which is a three month process.
- Our subsequent target will be around 200 cases/business plans per annum over the lifetime of the programme – using European funding, INI funding and Council contribution.
- As reported, Council was to implement an interim solution for post October 2016, if required, through the Alchemy Programme, utilising the Enterprise Agencies' expertise to deliver.

Latest position

The latest position is as follows:

- Application for LED funding was made by all councils, as mentioned above.
- Invest NI has indicated that this will not be assessed until late September.
- In short, therefore, Council needs to implement an interim solution which will see the programme through to the commencement of the new programme – which is unlikely to now happen until October 2017.

Officers will shortly meet with the two Local Enterprise Agencies in the area to discuss this further. However, at this point, initial discussions have centred around:

- Continuing to use the two Local Enterprise Agencies for most of the new applications for the Business Start Programme.
- Working within current budget constraints and cost per business plan.
- Cost considerations and publicity considerations – efforts will focus on local publicity and a joint digital media strategy, coordinated through the Councils and managed in the interim by Derry City and Strabane Council.

Current solutions

Other councils are using a variety of approaches. Some are re-tendering for the interim period; others are using delivery through existing programmes, as Council will through the Alchemy programme; some have not yet decided on a method of delivery.

However, in the interests of continuity, officers would be keen to ensure that service delivery is maintained through the Local Enterprise Agencies. Part of this will also include the interim management of a digital media promotional package, managed by Derry City & Strabane Council on behalf of all the local authorities in Northern Ireland.

Invest NI reiterated the need for advisers to accept that all business plans will be subject to an appraisal consistent with Regional Start. It was agreed that Invest NI would circulate templates of best practice business plans and the grading system.

Recommendation

While the final timetable for moving forward is in flux, it is recognised that we require some form of business start function to continue. It is recommended that:

- Council continues to engage with the Local Enterprise Agencies, to put in place an interim arrangement for programme delivery through the Alchemy Programme, and within the current budgetary allocation.
- That this is monitored by staff for cost effectiveness, quality and delivery standards.
- That this interim arrangement is in place by end-October to ensure continuity.
- That Council continues to engage with the other ten councils to move towards a Northern Ireland-wide solution with a single brand and uniform delivery.