

Title of Report:	Continuation of the Alchemy Programme
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	17th November 2020
For Decision or For Information	For Decision

Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	The Council will work with its partners to maximise business start-up opportunities and encourage existing enterprises to grow and prosperity
Lead Officer	Head of Service, Prosperity and Place

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£41,120 from January 2021 to March 2023
Included in Current Year Estimates	To be agreed as part of budgeting process
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	To be delivered by existing staff

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes	Completed for Alchemy 2 and continues

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to request Council's permission to award contract outside of process, for the next phase of Alchemy Programme.

2.0 Background

Following the successful delivery of Alchemy Business Support activity over the last 7 years, the Alchemy III Business Support Programme will be the Council's main business growth support provision offered to businesses (including social enterprises) in the Borough.

The proposed intervention will be tailored to meet participants' needs and designed in such a way as to fit into, and play a key role in, the continuum of business support provided by Council and partner organisations.

A successful application for funding from Invest Northern Ireland and the European Regional Development Fund under the EU Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014-2020 was made earlier this year. A grant offer of £164,480 @ 80% on maximum expenditure of £205,600 has now been secured. Council are required to match-fund 20% totalling £41,120 over the 2 year programme to March 2023.

Key Performance Indicators for the programme are:

- Recruit 170 businesses to participate on the programme.
- Deliver 510 days of one-to-one mentoring support.
- Deliver 4 group workshops or online workshops, with a minimum of 10 participants per workshop.
- Produce mid-term evaluation within 1 year of commencing the programme.
- Produce final evaluation by 30 September 2023.
- Undertake all reasonable endeavours to create 94 jobs as a result of support provided by the programme.
- Undertake all reasonable endeavours to refer at least 8 businesses to Invest NI, for their range of support mechanisms.

As a key element of the programme Council needs to appoint a contractor to deliver the one-to-one mentoring and the workshops.

3.0 Procurement of Contractor

As per the conditions of the funding, a competitive procurement exercise led by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) is now being carried out. It is intended that this exercise will lead to the appointment of a contractor by mid-January 2021. CPD have agreed that this should be a fixed price contract in line with the Letter of Offer from Invest NI, i.e. £205,600 and thus tenderers will be scored against a number of qualitative criteria.

In order to commence the contract as soon as possible after scoring has occurred, and to minimise the potential for a break-in-service, it is requested that Council agree to the appointment of the selected tenderer once CPD complete their exercise. Council would receive notice of the appointed contractor at Leisure & Development in February 2021.

The current Alchemy programme funded through ERDF and Invest NI has now almost exhausted its budget (6 months earlier than originally anticipated) due to the heavy demand from businesses earlier this year in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thus there is a need to bring forward the start of the new programme to as early as possible in the New Year. Without the new funded programme being in place, Council could either delay support to businesses requesting help or endure 100% of the cost for providing that support.

4.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Council would agree to allow the award of the contract to deliver key aspects of the Alchemy III Business Support Programme to the selected tenderer immediately upon the completion of the procurement exercise. This will in prevent a break in the Alchemy Process. A full tender report will be presented to Committee / Council immediately thereafter.