



<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Alchemy Business Mentoring Programme</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	The Leisure & Development Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	21 March 2023
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	For Decision

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)</b>	
Strategic Theme	Local Economy
Outcome	Council contributes to increasing early-stage entrepreneurial activity and levels of business innovation
Lead Officer	Head of Service – Prosperity & Place

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	£84,000
Included in Current Year Estimates	n/a
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	31403
Staffing Costs	Within budget

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: not applicable
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: not applicable
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date: not applicable
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: not applicable
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: not applicable
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: not applicable

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

**The purpose of this report is to request a six-month extension of the Alchemy Business Mentoring Programme, delivered via the Multiple Supplier Framework Agreement. This is to enable provision of mentoring support to local businesses from 01 April 2023 to 30 September 2023, in the period following the end of the existing European-funded support, pending mobilisation of the new NI Enterprise Support Service.**

## **2.0 Background**

Since 2013, Alchemy has been operating across the Council area as a model to stimulate economic growth by providing support to local businesses, enabled by funding from both the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Council.

Alchemy aims to support start-ups, stimulate growth and increase the competitiveness of the local economy by making local economic development support accessible, individual, meaningful and flexible for participant local businesses. The programme delivers one-to-one bespoke business mentoring to meet identified needs, in line with growth ambitions.

This additional budget would enable delivery to continue under the Alchemy banner up until 30 September 2023. This represents a six-month extension of the current programme, prior to the launch of the new NI Enterprise Support Service which will support local businesses thereafter.

Examples of some of the specialist areas of support are:

- Strategic Growth
- Financial Management
- E-commerce
- Export/Import
- Product Development/Intellectual Property
- Tendering & Procurement
- Business Operations & Logistics
- Marketing & Sales

## **3.0 Programme Delivery Year To Date**

2022-2023: -

- 142 businesses supported to sustain and grow.
- 6 workshops delivered (77 participants attending).
- 21 jobs created to date\*
- 88 referrals to on route businesses to further support e.g., Invest NI, local colleges.

*\*Further job creation realization anticipated by end September 2023*

In 2022/23, Alchemy has also delivered sector specific support for local businesses via Tourism and Town & Village initiatives.

In respect of collaboration with external stakeholders, a key output for local businesses has been the partnership with Northern Regional College (NRC) which has enabled delivery of bespoke courses in response to local business needs identified via Alchemy. 42 businesses have accessed this free training support under the auspices of NRC's Skills Focus Programme.

In addition to this, Alchemy has assisted: -

- 20 businesses accessing Digital Acceleration Plans.
- 22 businesses awarded Innovate NI Accreditation.
- 11 businesses accessing Innovate Us support.

Members should note that, in the closing weeks of the current ERDF funded programme, a waiting list of businesses requesting business mentoring support is being collated and there is currently no provision in place after 31 March 2023.

#### **4.0 Cost**

The cost of £84,000 will enable up to three days (21hrs) mentoring support per participant business at a maximum cost of £1,050 each. This will allow up to 80 local businesses to benefit from one-to-one mentoring from 01 April - 30 September 2023, consistent with the current level of requests for support that the Alchemy programme realises.

Members should note that a procurement exercise is not required, as Council has already approved an extension of the Multiple Supplier Framework which will be utilised in the delivery of this support.

Council has also previously approved an extension of the supporting architecture used within the Alchemy programme, in the form of a website and customer relationship management system (CRM).

#### **5.0 Future Delivery Model**

As members are aware, the NI Enterprise Support Service funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund is expected to mobilise in September 2023 and will be utilised as the future delivery model for all NI Councils' pre-start, start, growth and scaling support.

#### **6.0 Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to Council a six-month extension to the Alchemy business mentoring programme via the existing Multiple Supplier Framework agreement from 01 April 2023 – 30 September 2023 at a cost of £84,000.