



Report of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration Events and Tourism

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 19th December 2023

Support for Business

Purpose	To brief the Scrutiny Committee on the work being undertaken to provide support to local business in Swansea
Content	The report sets out the activities being undertaken to support business
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor	Councillor Robert Francis- Davies, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration and Tourism
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1. Overview

- 1.1 A thriving local economy is reliant upon a strong and resilient business base. In recent years there have been significant challenges to this, most notably through the Covid pandemic, war in Ukraine and more recently the cost-of-living crisis. As such, access to and provision of business support has been critically important and furthermore, it was recognised that Swansea Council has a vital role to play in developing and enhancing this offer.

In delivering a business support service, it is recognised that it should seek to contribute to several overarching objectives.

- To improve the number of, but more importantly the survival rates of new businesses, previously amongst the lowest in South Wales
- Growth of the indigenous business base
- Improved resilience of local business
- Attracting Inward Investment into the local economy
- Upskilling local businesses and their workforce

- 1.2 In response to this, in April 2021, the Economic Regeneration Team developed and launched 'Business Swansea'. This is a dedicated support service with the objective of improving the quality and uptake of business support in Swansea.
- 1.3 The Business Swansea programme delivers a combination of 'in-house' support as well as promoting the offer of partner organisations. This service being delivered through Swansea Council enables an 'honest broker' approach to businesses seeking support services.
- 1.4 Business Swansea seeks to address the issues of:
- Businesses being confused/overwhelmed by the changing programmes of business support available from a variety of sources
 - An assumption that business support was not available to them and/or was not appropriate to their needs
 - Businesses and business owners having insufficient resource available to research support available meaning often freely available support was bypassed.

2. Key Areas of Work

2.1 To address these issues, a broad range of activities that support local business have been introduced. These include:

2.2 Communication:

- Regular eNewsletters distributed to local contacts containing details of funding opportunities, upcoming events, business support and partners' updates
- Dedicated social media feeds on Twitter/X, Facebook and LinkedIn
- Attendance at local business networks and events at which details of locally available business support can be communicated
- Enable feedback from local businesses via business support needs surveys and case studies
- Distribution of the Swansea Business Guide to showcase local economic strengths, growth opportunities and business support availability.

2.3 Events:

- 'Power Hour' briefing events aimed at established businesses. Topics include Marketing, Employment Law, Accounting and Funding. Delivered through a hybrid, online/in-person programme format
- Introduction to Self-employment events offer a day-long workshop session covering the basic elements of starting and running a successful business. Topics covered include business planning, financial management and marketing
- Start-up Enterprise Club events aimed at pre-start and new businesses. Topics include Legal Issues, Social Media, Leasing Premises and Marketing. Online sessions for Power Hour and Start-up Club are recorded and uploaded to a dedicated Business Swansea YouTube Channel
- Drop-in Business Surgery allowing businesses to access advice and support on areas including business grants, business support (Business Wales),

training (Gower College Swansea) and finance (Development Bank of Wales)

- Net Zero training for businesses wishing to learn how to reduce their environmental footprint and associated energy costs
- Introduction of business to business networking events aimed specifically at food related business and tendering support events for businesses seeking improved access to public and/or larger scale contracts

2.4 Grant Support:

- Start-up and Pre-start support. Funded through a variety of sources including, UK Steel, Community Renewal Fund and more recently, the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund. These grants have provided seed funding to entrepreneurs who may have otherwise seen finance as a barrier to starting their own enterprise
- Business Growth Grant. Targeted at business offering a distinct new product/service where jobs are being created and/or safeguarded directly as a result.
- Website Development Fund. Available to businesses either launching a website for the first time or making enhancements (e.g. eCommerce) to a company website which already exists
- Carbon Reduction Grant. Available to businesses seeking to reduce the environmental impact of their premises and associated cost. May include energy generation (e.g. solar), energy conservation (e.g. LED lighting) or changes to business operations (replacing old, inefficient equipment)
- Supplier Development Grant. Available to businesses wishing to tender for public sector and/or larger scale contracts. Funds can provide training and/or sector accreditation to match tender requirements.

2.5 Partner Engagement

- In recognition that the Business Swansea service does not operate in isolation, enhanced relationships have been developed to reduce duplication/overlap and better coordinate business support activities. This has included regular partner liaison meetings of organisations operating locally.
- By working closely with local businesses and partner organisations, the Business Swansea Team is able to collect and relay important economic intelligence to inform future funding applications and delivery of business support.

3. Management and Resources

3.1 Business Swansea activities are delivered through the Planning and City Regeneration Service area's Economic Regeneration team, which is part of the Place Directorate.

3.2 The majority of activity currently being undertaken is now funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through the Business Swansea Anchor project . The creation of a dedicated Business Support Anchor project within the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has significantly improved the scope and scale of business support through the Business Swansea service.

4. Improvements and Impact

- 4.1 Through the UK SPF Business Swansea Anchor and the programmes within, the following outcomes are projected to be delivered by December 2024:
- 65 new enterprises created (Pre-start Grant)
 - 65 enterprises adopting new technologies (Website Grant)
 - 95 jobs created; 95 jobs safeguarded (Growth Grant)
 - 92 tonnes of CO² reduction (Carbon Grant)
 - 30 individuals receiving assistance to be enterprise ready (Introduction to Self-employment workshops)
 - 258 enterprises receiving non-financial assistance. Including access to training, business to business networking etc.

In the majority of cases, it is anticipated that these figures will be exceeded.

4.2 Communication:

The introduction of fortnightly business eNewsletters has been successful in raising awareness of support available locally. The distribution list has been steadily built throughout the past two years and is now close to 4000 local business contacts. In addition to promotion of Business Swansea activities, the newsletter has played an important role in raising awareness of locally available support from partners.

4.3 Business Grants:

Across the Community Renewal Fund and Shared Prosperity Grant Funds alone, 82 business grants have been issued to date across all funding programmes. It is noted however that the Shared Prosperity Grant Programme is still at a relatively early stage, and it is anticipated this number will increase substantially throughout 2024.

- 4.4 It is important to note that in addition to the grant funds awarded, these schemes have been instrumental in engaging businesses into existing support programmes which they may not have otherwise accessed without funding; this is particularly the case of the Pre-start Grant programme. Signposting pre-start grant applicants to start-up support in many cases significantly improves the quality of overall business planning, financial forecasting and business resilience as a result.

- 4.5 There have been several instances, particularly under the Shared Prosperity Fund where businesses funded for growth grants have previously been successful in applying for start-up funding. This graduation highlights the strong platform which these funds can provide, enabling future business growth, increased employment and development of local supply chains.

4.6 Business Events:

Since the inception of the Power Hour and Start-up Enterprise Club events, over 600 individual places have been booked to attend either in person or online via Teams. The Business Swansea YouTube channel has seen approximately 1800 views meaning that individual beneficiaries of these sessions either live or recorded is close to 2500.

5 Future Programme:

- 5.1 The Covid pandemic meant that the initial events programme was carried out online via Teams. However, throughout 2023 there has been a move toward a hybrid approach. It is anticipated that throughout 2024 and beyond, there will be an increased proportion of in-person events enabling improved interaction and networking opportunities.
- 5.2 In developing this programme of in-person events, there will be a focus on moving the location of these throughout the County. This will provide all businesses with a proportion of events/workshops which are geographically close to them.
- 5.3 Delivery of the SPF Business Growth Grant has identified the requirement for an additional Innovation Grant. Launching in early 2024, this will support existing businesses seeking to undertake prototyping, product testing and patenting.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. Finance Implications

- 7.1 There are no direct additional financial implications arising from this report on Council core budgets. Core economic regeneration activity is funded from existing core budgets, supplemented by temporary use of the Shared Prosperity Fund and by way of leveraged access to a range of government grants and support mechanisms

Appendices: None