

REPORT TO: Employment Learning & Skills Community

DATE 8 February 2021

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Enterprise,
Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Update Business Improvement & Growth
Team

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.0 The purpose of this report is to update Members on key activities being undertaken and or overseen by the Council's Business Improvement and Growth Team during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 Members will appreciate that during the last year, most of the team has been working on supporting local businesses during the pandemic and activities have been changed to reflect this. Some generic business support has continued, and this is summarised below.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- 2.1 Members note the activities and performance of the Business Improvement and Growth Team and how this aligns with wider national and city region strategies.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 1. Business Growth Programme – Phase 2

The Business Growth Programme (Phase 2 of the original LCRIBS programme) has been supporting SME's that deliver Business to Business, across the Halton Region. It is part of the Liverpool City Region's Growth Hub Programme, which supports businesses by offering fully funded specialist support through ERDF and Halton Borough Council funding. Businesses are offered an in-depth diagnostic to gauge the type of support required.

Business Growth Programme Phase 2. 1st January 2019 – 31st December 2021

Performance Targets:

Business Growth Programme Phase 2	Target Outputs
Business's Assisted (12 hr)	95
Jobs Created	95

Performance To date:

Number of Claims made to date – 40

Number of businesses currently being supported – 15

Number of businesses in the pipeline – 40

Number of businesses withdrawn – 43 broken down as follows:

- Not eligible – 7
- Not engaging – 33
- Unsuitable – 2

Total number of enquiries to date - 138

One major change to the support process in phase 2 has been the diagnostic process. This has changed from being completed by an external provider, to being completed in house.

2. Liverpool City Region Hospitality and Leisure Grants (HLG)

The impact of the Coronavirus is being felt in our communities in many different ways, and Halton's businesses have been severely affected with many losing several months of trade and many are still not fully operational giving the ongoing restrictions and lockdowns.

A presentation was provided to PPB on 16 November 2020 reporting on HLG round 1, setting out how HLG provided by Liverpool City Region, and administered by the six Local Authorities was to rolled out.

A presentation to the PPB will update on how HLG round 1 & 2 has gone some way to support local businesses.

It will provide details on the emerging HLG round 3 and top up grants. This is likely to be launched in early February 2021.

3. Growth Platform

During the past year the Growth Platform has concentrated on working with businesses and designing solutions to meet business needs, especially important during the pandemic. They have been providing support to ease business progress through the pandemic and help emerging from Covid-19 for businesses into post-Covid-19 Support:

Covid-19 Support

Covid-19 Business Advice

Covid-19 Legal and professional services advice

Growth Hub Enquiry management

Business Growth Programme

Post-Covid-19 Support

Covid-19 Recovery Grants

New Markets Support

Officers within the business support team have been liaising with colleagues in the Combined Authority and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure that activities are complementary and do not duplicate existing provision.

4. One Front Door

Mid-way through this financial year there was a change of staffing in the delivery structure of One Front Door providing the Board and management with the opportunity to review the way in which the service operates. This also provided the opportunity to challenge operating practices and review activity. The investment context of the last 12 months is the pandemic and curtailment of business travel opportunities. The revised headline targets are to contribute to increasing the Liverpool City Region's share of UK investment projects from 1.5% to 2% within 3 years and create a target to generate 400 leads per annum for investment.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Supporting Phase 3 of the Business Growth Programme will align with the Council's priorities in improving the economic growth. The programme will do this by aiding SMEs within the Halton area to grow, develop, become more sustainable and increase jobs.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Business Growth Programme is currently aided by the ERDF. The Liverpool C.A. are discussing Phase 3 of the programme and how businesses will benefit support business moving forward. Phase 3 of the programme will potentially run from the period of 1st January 2022 until 30th June 2023 and will require match funding of £85,799.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton**
Growth in the LCR business base will result in greater employment opportunities for the Borough's young people.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Growth in the LCR business base will result in greater employment opportunities for the community of Halton.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Access to sustainable employment will impact positively upon the health of the Borough.

6.4 A Safer Halton

No implications.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

No implications.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The Business Growth Programme aims to support 95 SMEs to ensure growth and sustainability. Since the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 businesses went into panic; as they emerged out of the first lockdown, more support was required in the areas of digital marketing, strategic sales and marketing and also strategic business planning, indicating that businesses required support to reach a wider market and in some cases alter their business strategy. The impact of COVID-19 has hit the Global economy hard; businesses would benefit from the support that the Business Growth Programme could offer moving forward into Phase 3.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no equality and diversity issues.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

'None under the meaning of the Act.'