

BUSINESS GATEWAY – INFORMATION PAPER

1. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

At the June MAKI Area Committee meeting, Members had a discussion about Fragile Communities, as a result of which they agreed the following points:

- More engagement with local businesses
- Continuous support for small businesses not just new burgeoning businesses.

The purpose of this information paper is to provide the MAKI Area Committee with an update on the support that the Council's Business Gateway team can provide to businesses in the area and the methods used to engage them.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The KIWG notes the content of this paper.

3. KEY ISSUES TO NOTE

3.1 Current support to new and existing businesses

Business Gateway can provide support to all small and medium sized enterprises in MAKI, regardless of the business's age, volume of staff employed or turnover. This support takes the form of access to one to one advice from a business adviser, workshops to develop specific business skills and access to business information.

To help all businesses access support, particularly those in rural or island communities, Business Gateway offers:

- A comprehensive website of business information including a range of self-help interactive tools at www.bgateway.com and a national enquiry line
- Adviser clinics held across the region. For MAKI, clinics have been held in Islay, Campbeltown, Lochgilphead, Jura and Inveraray
- Adviser appointments at client premises if appropriate eg. Advisers have met clients in Clachan, Gigha, Kilberry, Southend, Ardfern
- Workshops delivered not just in Argyll's key towns but on islands where demand exists. Workshops have been delivered on Bute, Islay and Tiree.

More detail on how Business Gateway provides support is attached as an appendix.

Any business looking for support to start, survive or grow can access Business Gateway support, including meeting a business adviser. This is different to Lowland Scotland where one to one advisory services are restricted to those with prescribed levels of growth potential. A more flexible approach has been adopted across Business Gateway in the Highlands and Islands area due to the economic profile of

the area, giving Business Gateway the ability to support all businesses with potential to benefit the local economy. Additional adviser focus is given to clients with growth potential.

Business Gateway can signpost businesses to appropriate sources of funding, including the Council's pilot Competitive Business Growth Programme, which is administered by the local Business Gateway team.

3.2 Current business engagement activity

As a new service in MAKI following the launch in July 2009, Business Gateway has pro-actively raised the profile of the service and engaged with the business community via several methods:

- a) Building and maintaining a referral network** (see page 12 of appendix)
- Developing a broad base of contacts with organisations that engage with SMEs, explaining the support on offer and encouraging them to refer clients to Business Gateway as appropriate e.g. banks, solicitors, estate agents, accountants, FSB
 - Working with partner organisations which provide specialist support to SMEs to agree referral processes and client support eg, Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland
- b) Marketing**
- Sponsorship of the business pages in the local press – monthly advert and text within the page (Argyllshire Advertiser, Campbeltown Courier & Oban Times cover MAKI)
 - Press releases sharing examples of the support provided to clients and the business benefit this produced for them
 - Advertising of Business Gateway workshops, roadshows and adviser clinics in the local press (Argyllshire Advertiser, Campbeltown Courier, Oban Times, The Ilead) and online (Kintyre Forum, HI Arts website)
 - Enterprising Argyll Roadshow in September 2010 included Campbeltown, Inveraray and Islay venues and promoted not only Business Gateway support but wider support as up to 12 partner organisations attended including FSB, VisitScotland, Skills Development Scotland and the Council's Social Enterprise team
 - A bi-monthly ezine to the Business Gateway database of c1300 contacts (enquirers, businesses supported and the partner/referral network) to keep them updated on the support on offer
 - Business Gateway national unit marketing activity has included press ads in local and national titles, online advertising and radio ads

c) Participation in business groups/forums/events

Attending various forums, whether ad hoc or as a permanent member, helps Business Gateway to engage with the wider business community and stakeholders. For instance:

- Argyll and Bute Agricultural forum
- Kintyre Initiative Working Group
- Strategic Tourism Partnership
- Mid Argyll Chamber of Commerce

3.3 Current impact

An increasing volume of clients has been supported by Business Gateway in its second year, with enquiry volumes overall rising from 755 in 2009-10 to over 1,500 in 2010-11, demonstrating a greater engagement with local businesses and prospective entrepreneurs.

Business Gateway performance data for 2010-11 covering MAKI:

- Excluding workshop bookings from enquiries, MAKI provided 34% of client enquiries, of which 65% were start-up enquiries (91) and 35% were existing business enquiries (48). This compares to an average across MAKI/OLI/CB of nearly 70% of enquiries being start-up
- 8 start-up workshops and 17 existing business workshops/events were delivered in MAKI, with over 150 attendees in total. Locations included Inveraray, Islay, Campbeltown and Lochgilphead.
- 27 new starts were supported (31% of total start-ups)
- 134 existing business were supported with advice or workshops (36% of total existing businesses supported)
- 9 MAKI based businesses are included in the Business Gateway growth pipeline (31% of total growth pipeline)
- 309 clients in the MAKI area are on the ezine contact list

In terms of approvals for the Competitive Business Growth programme, 3 start-up grants have been approved for MAKI (one third of the total) and 2 growth grants (one third of the total).

4. NEXT STEPS

Although engagement and support to businesses in MAKI has grown year on year, Business Gateway recognises the importance of continuing to increase engagement. Several activities are planned to support this objective:

- A review of the island/fragile/rural area adviser visit programme. Following the success of the 'Meet The Adviser' sessions on Islay, the Campbeltown pilot will be continued to try and build momentum and sessions in Lochgilphead and Colonsay will be introduced. Sessions will be repeated on Jura

- The potential for a joint event with HIE in Campbeltown to engage the business community and encourage networking is being explored
- A number of potential new workshops are being researched to try and broaden the appeal of Business Gateway, particularly to existing businesses
- Links to other Council departments engaging with businesses are being strengthened to better identify opportunities to support clients e.g. Trading Standards/Environmental Health
- Word of mouth referrals are being encouraged based on the high levels of client satisfaction
- Sponsorship of the monthly business pages in the local press will continue
- Relationships with referral organisations and partners will be maintained and new contacts explored
- Refreshed Business Gateway pages on Argyll and Bute Council's website
- Additional marketing activity will be explored e.g. a test mailing to businesses who have not engaged with Business Gateway

5. CONCLUSION

The KIWG notes the content of this paper.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Policy	None
Financial	None
Personnel	None
Equal Opportunities	None
Legal	None

For further information contact:

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