

**Business Gateway - business support briefing**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Business Gateway is a national service, delivered via local authorities, providing free, confidential and impartial advice to new and existing businesses in Scotland.
- 1.2 Business Gateway makes an important contribution to the aim of growing Scotland's national economy and local economies by offering support and encouragement to both new start businesses and existing small businesses. It also enables local authorities to identify emerging businesses with high growth potential to ensure that such businesses are referred to the Enterprise Agencies for further support in their growth.
- 1.3 The national elements of Business Gateway support include a website and an advice service. The local elements of Business Gateway support include business advisers, workshops, information and guides, and referrals.
- 1.4 The 'unique selling points' of the service are that it offers:
  - an impartial, objective and confidential 'safe space' for clients to explore ideas and discuss problems
  - assistance to all businesses regardless of size or sector
  - strong local knowledge within the team
  - access to a wide network of contacts established across Scotland in both the public and private sector
  - support across all of Argyll and Bute, including its islands
  - the ability to put clients in touch with each other where appropriate
  - support given in various ways to suit the clients – face to face, email, telephone, workshops, factsheets, webinars
  - support that is totally free at the point of delivery
- 1.5 Since launching across the whole Argyll and Bute area in 2009, activity levels have increased and the council's in-house Business Gateway service has supported over 800 new start-up businesses and almost 2,500 existing businesses, delivered nearly 550 workshops, provided more than 3000 adviser meetings and handled more than 7,500 enquiries in total.
- 1.6 It is recommended that the Environment Development and Infrastructure Committee:
  - note the scope and scale of support available
  - promote the support to internal and external contacts as appropriate

- suggest any additional opportunities to further align the support with other council services engaging with businesses and other external partners.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Business Gateway is a national service delivered via local authorities, providing free, confidential and impartial advice to new and existing businesses in Scotland.
- 2.2 Business Gateway makes an important contribution to the aim of growing Scotland's national economy and local economies. It offers an opportunity to develop a large pool of new start businesses and to support and encourage existing small businesses. It also enables the Council to identify emerging businesses with high growth potential to ensure that such businesses are referred to the Enterprise Agencies for further support in their growth.
- 2.3 Since launching across the whole Argyll and Bute area in 2009, the council's in-house Business Gateway service has supported over 800 new start-up businesses and almost 2,500 existing businesses, delivered nearly 550 workshops, provided more than 3000 adviser meetings and handled over 7,500 enquiries.
- 2.4 The service has now become established but there is an opportunity to continue to raise awareness of the support on offer and identify where links to Business Gateway can be strengthened across the Council.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Environment Development and Infrastructure Committee:
  - note the range of support available from the Council's Business Gateway service
  - promote Business Gateway support to internal and external contacts as appropriate
  - suggest any additional opportunities to further align Business Gateway support with other Council departments engaging with businesses and other external partners

## 4.0 DETAIL

### Development of Business Gateway

- 4.1 Business Gateway was originally provided in lowland Scotland only by Scottish Enterprise (SE), with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) providing its own support for the Highlands and Islands area.
- 4.2 In 2008, the Scottish Government moved responsibility for the provision of Business Gateway services to local authorities, with the provider contracts in place transferring from Scottish Enterprise to lowland local authorities. At this time Helensburgh and Lomond remained supported by the Dunbartonshire Business Gateway contractor.
- 4.3 In 2009, Business Gateway was launched across the Highlands and Islands area, with most local authorities, including Argyll and Bute, opting to provide the support through in-house Council teams or similar.
- 4.4 When the historic lowland Scotland Business Gateway contracts ceased in 2012, responsibility for the provision of Business Gateway support for Helensburgh and Lomond transferred to the Council's in-house team, with one Business Gateway delivery area formed across Argyll and Bute.

### Resources

- 4.5 The Business Gateway services that must be provided by local authorities are specified in a Partnership Agreement signed by Scottish Local Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. This covers the minimum standard for a start-up advisory service and a growth advisory service. Further discretionary support to businesses can be provided under local services, including advisor support, specialist support and workshops.
- 4.6 Business Gateway in Argyll and Bute is allocated £274k per year from the Scottish Government for the provision of the services outlined in the Partnership Agreement. In addition, the Council provides £18k from the Economic Development budget. Due to the allocation process aligned to the historic delivery areas, an additional £70k per year is transferred from West Dunbartonshire Council's Business Gateway funding for delivery in the Helensburgh and Lomond area.
- 4.7 The team of 6.2 FTEs consists of one Senior Development Officer, two Business Support Officers and four Business Advisers (3.2 FTE), covering the whole of Argyll and Bute.
- 4.8 A small Business Gateway National Unit (BGNU) is hosted in COSLA, providing national marketing campaigns, performance reporting and quality assurance. In addition to the functions above, the BGNU provides advice and guidance to Business Gateway Contract Managers on operational processes and procedures and co-ordinates activity across Scotland.

## Core Business Gateway provision

- 4.9 The national elements of Business Gateway support include a website [www.bgateway.com](http://www.bgateway.com) and an advice service 0845 609 6611.
- 4.10 The local elements of Business Gateway support include business advisers, workshops and events, information and guides, and referrals.
- 4.11 One to one support is provided by a team of experienced business advisers who have all obtained the Premier Adviser accredited qualification and who have spent time in the private sector or running their own business. Across the adviser team there is a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience.
- 4.10 A range of workshops is provided in locations right across Argyll, including the islands. This includes start-up workshops (marketing, planning and finance), book-keeping, e-commerce, social media, customer care, craft business development, becoming an employer, managing staff and marketing. Plans for 2015 include the addition of new workshop topics including selling skills, business skills, funding, PR and pricing for profit.
- 4.11 Information and guides can be provided to clients. The team has access to a licenced database of guides which include industry profiles, business guides, legislative requirements and fact sheets. For example, guides on the types of business insurance required, the employment rights of employees, or sector specific guides covering micro brewing, outdoor activity or renting a chair for a hairdresser. A host of sample templates are also available covering practical issues such as partnership agreements, contracts of employment, or invoice terms and conditions.
- 4.12 Referrals to other support providers are an important part of the service. The team keep up to date with partner programmes and schemes and can signpost specialist support from a wide range of contacts. For instance, Scotland Food and Drink, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Association, Scottish Edge, eSpark and Interface.
- 4.13 Signposting sources of funding and support with applications is another key role. Within Argyll and Bute, referrals are made to a wide range of potential funders including The Prince's Trust, the SJ Noble Trust, commercial lenders, funding competitions such as the Scottish Edge, and occasionally alternatives such as crowdfunding or angel investment.
- 4.14 Subject to budget availability, local provision of expert help can also be available to growing businesses. Last year this included HR, marketing, ecommerce and growth strategy specialist advice.
- 4.15 The 'unique selling points' for the Business Gateway service are that it offers:
- an impartial, objective and confidential 'safe space' for clients to explore ideas and discuss problems
  - assistance to all businesses regardless of size or sector
  - strong local knowledge within the team

- access to a wide network of contacts established across Scotland in both the public and private sector
- support across all of Argyll and Bute, including its islands
- the ability to put clients in touch with each other where appropriate
- support given in various ways to suit the clients – face to face, email, telephone, workshops, factsheets, webinars
- support that is totally free at the point of delivery.

### **Additional support**

- 4.16 Using additional funding provided by the Council as match, European funding programmes have been utilised by the Business Gateway team to pilot business grant schemes. These included the LEADER funded Competitive Business Growth Programme in 2010-11 which offered start-up grants up to £1,000 and growth grants up to £3,000; and the ERDF funded Business Gateway Plus programme in 2014-15 offering growth grants up to £3,000.
- 4.17 Growth grant schemes in particular have been effective in engaging businesses with growth potential. Once engaged, these businesses can access other Business Gateway products as part of a pipeline of growing businesses receiving ongoing support and development to help them achieve their growth potential.
- 4.18 Building on the success of the earlier growth grant schemes, in March 2015 a Strategic Intervention application was submitted by Argyll and Bute Council for ERDF support for enhanced support to growth businesses via Business Gateway. This is currently pending approval by the Scottish Government. The total programme spend proposed is £597,525 to Dec 2018, leveraging £298,762 of ERDF funding. The Council match funding is provided by leveraging the annual budget allocated to core Business Gateway growth activity, with a small contribution from the Economic Development departmental budget.

The menu of support proposed includes specialist advice, growth grants, graduate placements, growth workshops, regional specific entrepreneurial support and key sector support. The support will be deployed based on business needs identified through engagement with a local Business Gateway adviser and is targeted at businesses with a projected growth in turnover of £50k+ anticipated over a three year period. The programme targets 216 unique enterprises being supported with a total of 862 interventions.

The programme aligns to a wider programme of support developed across Business Gateway regions nationally. Argyll and Bute Council will be the Lead Partner responsible for delivery across all of Argyll and Bute. Once Strategic Interventions for Lead Partners have been approved, operational applications must be submitted for approval before activity can commence.

The target date for launching Business Gateway ERDF activity nationally is October 2015, subject to approval timescales.

## Marketing

- 4.19 Business Gateway launched as a new brand across the full Argyll and Bute Council area in 2009. No database of businesses was available and awareness of the service had to be built from scratch.
- 4.20 Marketing activity funded by the Business Gateway National Unit includes national and local press adverts, PR, web advertising, local radio, cash machine ads and more recently TV ads. For the last few years Business Gateway has sponsored a monthly business page in the Helensburgh Advertiser, Oban Times, Argyllshire Advertiser, Campbeltown Courier and Dunoon Observer. As well as a banner advert, this sponsorship includes editorial which usually features a client case study.
- 4.21 Some of the national marketing activities targeting businesses such as posters, bus backs, train and tube banners do not reach Argyll and the local team continue to work with the national unit to explore opportunities. Last year this included the sponsorship of the craft tent at the Best of the West Festival, with 6 businesses winning a trade stand for the day courtesy of Business Gateway.
- 4.22 Local marketing activity managed by the local team includes press ads and ezines, normally bi-monthly.
- 4.23 As the service has been established, word of mouth recommendations have increased and an email list of over 3,000 contacts has been built up.

## Performance

- 4.24 Business Gateway reports two key measures quarterly which feature in the Council's Single Outcome Agreement (Outcome 1: The economy is diverse and thriving) and its Economic Development Action Plan – namely the number of new start-up businesses supported and the number of existing businesses supported. See 4.27. Data is available by Council administrative area.
- 4.25 In addition a further 3 measures are also reported via Pyramid – customer satisfaction, the survival rate of supported new start businesses after 12 months and the survival rate of supported new start businesses at 36 months. See 4.27. National benchmarks are used against all these measures. Data is available at an Argyll and Bute level only and is provided by national tracking studies managed by the Business Gateway National Unit.
- 4.26 More detailed performance is reported monthly to the Business Gateway National Unit for 17 measures, relating to the Business Gateway services outlined in the Partnership Agreement. See 4.27.

### 4.27 2014-15 results<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> PHVS: Potential High Value Start – a supported start-up with the potential to reach £70k turnover or employ

	2014-15 Target	2014-15 Result	Status Indicator
<b>Council Scorecard</b>			
Start-ups supported	110	112	Green
Existing businesses supported	300	747	Green
Customer satisfaction	85%	86%	Green
12 month survival rate	75%	89%	Green
36 month survival rate	60%	71%	Green
<b>BGNU Performance measures</b>			Green
Start-ups supported	110	112	Green
PHVS Supported	8	10	Green
HVS Supported	3	4	Green
Starts into GAS	2	5	Green
Existing Businesses into GAS	10	11	Green
Starts into GP	1	3	Green
Existing Businesses into GP	6	2	Red
Starts into AM	0	2	Green
Existing Businesses into AM	3	1	Red
Local expert help	12	10	Red
Local advisory services	345	506	Green
Start-up events	20	19	Red
Start-up event attendees	100	90	Red
Growth events	5	27	Green
Growth event attendees	30	217	Green
Local events	40	62	Green
Local event attendees	240	501	Green

The cumulative projected FTE (full time equivalent) jobs created (including the owner) within start-ups supported by Business Gateway last year was 128.5

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one or more staff within 18 months, who has agreed a Growth Action Plan with an adviser

HVS: High Value Start - a supported start who has achieved turnover of £70k or taken on one or more staff within 18 months after agreeing a Growth Action Plan with an adviser

GAS: Growth Advisory Service – for clients with the potential to increase turnover by £100k or more within 3 years who have agreed a Growth Action Plan with an adviser

GP: Growth Pipeline – for clients with the potential to increase turnover by £200k (HIE area) or £400k (SE area), referred by Business Gateway and subsequently accepted for supported by HIE or SE after review

AM: Account Management – for clients referred by Business Gateway and subsequently accepted for full account management by HIE or SE after review

Local expert help: Specialist advice on HR, marketing, eCommerce or growth strategy

Local advisory services: Unique clients accessing adviser support, where the client does not meet the growth threshold for PHVS, HVS, GAS or GP support

Local events: workshops that are not included within the core Business Gateway start-up or growth workshop catalogue



- 4.28 In addition, the management information monitored by the team provides a further level of detail on performance including enquiry levels and adviser meetings, also available broken down by Council administrative area.

Measure	2014-15 result
Start-up enquiries	495
Existing business enquiries	222
Event booking enquiries	943
Total enquiries	1660
Adviser meetings with clients – start-up	357
	227
Total adviser meetings	584

- 4.29 Qualitative performance information is also available via the feedback sheets issued at all Business Gateway workshops, and the results of the monthly quality assurance programme. This monthly programme, run by the Business Gateway National Unit, issues an email survey to every single contact that has used the Business Gateway service in the previous month, whether through the local office, workshop, website or enquiry service.
- 4.30 Over 60 case studies of clients supported by the local Business Gateway are available – see Appendix 1 for two examples.

### **Overview of other support provided by Business Gateway team**

- 4.31 Business Gateway advisers also provide the Council's required support for applicants to the West of Scotland Loan Fund (WSLF). WSLF is a unique consortium of twelve west of Scotland Local Authorities working together to provide loan finance to new and existing small to medium sized enterprises within the west of Scotland. One officer is responsible for appraising WSLF applications and represents Argyll and Bute Council at the WSLF Officers Group meeting. This function is expected to continue with the proposed pan-Scotland local authority loan fund.
- 4.32 Similarly the Business Gateway advisers provide support to applicants for the UK Government funded pilot Start Up Finance Scotland scheme (SUFS). This provides access to finance to would-be entrepreneurs, offering loans and mentoring support to help set up their business. Advisers are responsible for appraising applications prior to full approval by the finance provider, the Start Up Loan Company (SULCO) and for aftercare support
- 4.33 Business Gateway also provides support to Argyll and Bute based businesses using Scottish and Southern Energy's (SSE's) online tender portal to bid for work. Any business that fails to meet SSE's policy requirements such as health and safety or quality, is automatically referred to Business Gateway for help in addressing this.

## **Supporting other Council activities**

- 4.34 The team works closely with the Council's procurement team to support local businesses tendering for public sector contracts. This includes attending 'Meet the Buyer' events for key contracts, such as the recent Dunoon and Rothesay CHORD works events and support to individual businesses with the tender process. In addition, the Business Gateway team works jointly with the procurement team on the promotion of and event scheduling for the Supplier Development Programme (SDP), which offers free support to all Argyll and Bute based SMEs.
- 4.35 The team also liaises with Regulatory Services and in particular the business advisers have developed links with some of their counterparts in Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing.
- 4.36 Within Economic Development, the team worked very closely with the Employability team to promote the Employer Recruitment Incentive to businesses when it was live, and continue to refer relevant clients to the Council's Social Enterprise team.
- 4.37 There is potential for increased referral of clients engaging with the wider Council and this will be an area of focus moving forward. For instance, growth businesses engaging with Planning, Non Domestic Rates, Estates, Waste Management and Regulatory Services.

## **Enterprise Agencies**

- 4.38 Business Gateway provides a broad level of support to a very wide client group, with no one excluded from the entry point services based on size, ambition, location or sector.
- 4.39 Business Gateway works closely with both of the Scottish Government's enterprise agencies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Scottish Enterprise (SE). These agencies both have a distinctly different role to Business Gateway, with their support focused on key sectors and businesses with the highest growth potential. Businesses are accepted by the enterprise agencies for support on a case by case basis.
- 4.40 HIE's role is "to lead regional growth and development, to seek investment opportunities that will be a catalyst for change, and to ensure that the Highlands and Islands derives maximum benefit from existing and emerging opportunities".<sup>2</sup>
- 4.41 HIE's priorities are:
- supporting businesses and social enterprises to shape and realise their growth aspirations
  - strengthening communities and fragile areas
  - developing growth sectors, particularly regional opportunities
  - creating the conditions for a competitive and low carbon region<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Page 3 BUILDING OUR FUTURE - HIE Operating plan 2014-2017

<sup>3</sup> Page 7 BUILDING OUR FUTURE - HIE Operating plan 2014-2017

- 4.42 In terms of business support, HIE adopt an account management approach, focusing their efforts on organisations with the most aspiration and potential to grow. HIE's interventions focus on leadership and entrepreneurship, international trade, inward investment, innovation, marketing, digital opportunities and access to finance.
- 4.43 The seven sectors HIE focus on are food & drink, creative industries, sustainable tourism, financial and business services, energy, life sciences and universities, identified by the Scottish Government as offering particular growth potential.
- 4.44 Clients can be referred by Business Gateway to HIE for account management where the business operates in a key sector and has potential to increase turnover by £200k or more within the next 3 years. If accepted by HIE, the business can access their range of advice and financial assistance, bespoke to their needs. HIE consider a range of variables such as additionality, displacement, employment potential, innovation, internationalisation and location in addition to the sector and growth potential, before making a decision whether to accept each business on a case by case basis. To date, 12 businesses referred by Business Gateway in Argyll and Bute have been accepted into account management by HIE.
- 4.45 Where a business has growth potential but is not yet ready for account management by HIE, Business Gateway can request HIE accept them into 'Growth Pipeline' where they can access HIE advisory support but not funding, as well as Business Gateway support. Clients entering this Growth Pipeline must also show potential to increase turnover by £200k or more within the next three years.
- 4.46 Outside of the Growth Pipeline/Account Management model, HIE offer some specific support interventions around innovation, exporting and digital engagement that can be accessed more widely. Typically this would be workshop support rather than intensive one to one support.
- 4.47 Scottish Enterprise (SE) has a similar remit to HIE "We want to stimulate Scotland's economic ambition – creating an innovative, high-wage and highly productive economy with a competitive, international market presence and a focus on high value opportunities".<sup>4</sup> SE's growth sectors are Food and Drink, Life Sciences, Energy, Tourism, Creative Industries, Financial and Business Services and Technology and Engineering.<sup>5</sup>
- 4.48 SE also operates a growth pipeline and account management model, although with different growth thresholds for entry compared to HIE. Clients referred by Business Gateway to SE for Growth Pipeline or Account Management support must be projecting a minimum increase in turnover of £400k within the next three years. Last year 1 client in Helensburgh and Lomond (SE area) was accepted by SE into Growth Pipeline.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/about-us>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/knowledge%20hub/articles/publication/business%20plan%202014%20to%202017?anchor=q=business%20plan>

- 4.49 Business Gateway's ERDF funding application to provide enhanced support to growth businesses, referred to in 4.18 has been designed to increase the support available to businesses with growth potential who are not yet demonstrating the growth required for enterprise agency support.
- 4.50 For some projects, Business Gateway, HIE and SE are collaborating, such as the National Digital Engagement Programme (NDEP) and the Digital Voucher Programme. This requires participation by local Business Gateway officers in national project groups.

The NDEP, delivered by partner organisations including SE, HIE and Business Gateway, seeks to raise awareness and knowledge of digital technology as it effects SMEs. The programme, due to launch later this year, will offer digital health checks, online guides, webinars, workshops and one to one specialist support to help businesses develop their technical ability. The programme will access Digital Scotland Business Excellence Partnership (DSBEP) funding from the Scottish Government.

The Digital Voucher Programme, which also accesses DSBEP funding, offers a grant of up to £5k to eligible businesses to help them implement ecommerce, digital or ICT projects that will help them grow their business.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Argyll and Bute Council's Business Gateway provides free and confidential support to both new and existing businesses across the area. The Council has no other dedicated business support resources.
- 5.2 The support provided links directly to the Council's SOA Outcome 1: The economy is diverse and thriving.
- 5.3 The services that must be provided are outlined in a Partnership Agreement.
- 5.4 Business Gateway provides a broad level of support to a very wide client group, with no one excluded from the entry point services based on size, ambition, location or sector.
- 5.5 The Business Gateway team have close links with HIE and SE, working to identify businesses with significant growth potential.
- 5.6 The service has now become established but there is an opportunity to continue to raise awareness of the support on offer and identify where links to Business Gateway can be strengthened across the Council.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

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|-----|------------------|--|
| 6.1 | Policy           | Business Gateway provision aligns to the Council's SOA and Economic Development Action Plan.   |
| 6.2 | Financial        | Business Gateway works within its allocated budget and wherever possible, uses this as match to lever in additional European funding to enhance services.  |
| 6.3 | Legal            | Business Gateway delivers against the service specification outlined in a Partnership Agreement signed by Scottish Local Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise.   |
| 6.4 | HR               | Business Gateway support is delivered by an in-house Council team, with external contractors procured as appropriate.  |
| 6.5 | Equalities       | Business Gateway has no adverse impact on key equality groups and the support can positively help disadvantaged individuals move into self-employment. The service provided complies with all Equal Opportunities policies and obligations.                            |
| 6.6 | Risk             | There is limited risk for the Council as the team has the skills and resources needed to deliver the required Business Gateway service. If budgets were to be reduced there is a risk that the service would not be able to deliver against the Partnership Agreement. |
| 6.7 | Customer Service | Business Gateway customer satisfaction levels are routinely independently monitored and reported on the Council's scorecard. Feedback is used to improve the customer experience wherever possible.  |

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## KINTYRE EGGS - EXPANSION HELPS FARM CRACK NEW MARKETS



A Kintyre farm that sells its eggs to customers across Argyll is expanding further this year after investing in state-of-the-art equipment.

Kintyre Eggs, run by Hannah and Will Jones, was set up after Hannah spotted a gap in the market for fresh, free range eggs straight from the farm.

Starting with 500 hens, they began supplying local shops and people, but with demand increasing on a weekly basis, they had to quickly build more hen houses and are now only months away from having 3000 hens on their land.

With support from Argyll and Bute Council's Business Gateway service, Kintyre Eggs is continuing to grow and expand beyond the region.

Hannah said: "We never expected this demand when we first began selling our eggs. I felt our eggs tasted so good and that people were missing out by not using eggs from hens living right here in Kintyre. We keep the hens in small flocks, feed them a premium whole grain blend and they forage in fields overlooking the Kintyre coastline. In return the hens are laying beautiful eggs with golden yolks. The response from the outset from local businesses and people was great, but we never imagined we would be selling as much as we are now and to businesses outwith Argyllshire.

"After receiving a Business Gateway Plus growth grant we were able to buy equipment that has allowed us to collect and sort our eggs a lot easier and quicker. This is crucial now that we have grown so we can continue to supply a high quality egg that meets the standards our customers have become accustomed to. The grant enabled us to increase hen numbers and by the end of this year we will have 3000 living on our land. For our eggs to be in shops from Campbeltown to Oban and beyond to Glasgow is fantastic and we expect to expand our geographical reach to meet demand."



In order to continue offering their customers something new, Hannah and Will are in the process of opening a farm shop. This will sell eggs, vegetables, farmhouse baking and cut flowers, all of which are produced on the farm and have previously been sold at their honesty-box farm stall.

"As well as the grant from Business Gateway, our adviser signposted us to the SJ Noble Trust which awarded us further funding, enabling us to start building the farm shop. Business Gateway's help has been crucial and it's great to know that they are always on hand to offer advice and support."

## M&T BUILDERS MERCHANTS - STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

A builders' merchant that has been working from the same site in Helensburgh since 1978 is aiming to grow even further as the company looks to the future.

M&T Builders Merchants, an independent company selling to both the building services trade and general public, was set up 37 years ago by The Trail family.

Now run by son Alan, the business employs nine members of staff. With support from Argyll and Bute Council's Business Gateway, the business is continuing to focus on providing the best customer service as it grows.

Alan Trail said: "I took over the company about 15 years ago when my mum retired but I have worked in the business for nearly 30 years having started helping out on a Saturday while I was still at school. My mum ran the company which in those days was unusual in this industry. Although she had been a primary school teacher, she, along with my dad who ran a construction company, saw the potential for a merchant in the area.

"We pride ourselves on providing a personal and friendly service that you don't always get at large stores and national merchants. Keeping a large and varied stock of both light and heavy side materials we try as often as possible to have in stock what our customers require. At the moment we own two lorries which deliver to both sites and clients' homes."



Alan is completely dedicated to his staff and offers training to ensure that they have excellent product knowledge and consistently provide high quality customer service.

Alan added: "We have a great level of staff retention here and I would like over the next year or so to give

them further training as I feel this will improve the service we provide and help with sales. Six team members attended a Business Gateway World Host training day as we understand the importance of great customer service. Being a World Host business is fantastic and our staff came back with a new look on how they deal with different situations to everyday working. They all enjoyed the course and are now more aware of how everything they do reflects on the business."

The local Business Gateway team are committed to offering support in the areas that local businesses have identified as important.

Ann Scott, Business Adviser for Business Gateway said: "Customer care training remains a crucial issue for many business owners and our World Host workshops help small businesses to address this. We recently ran a World Host workshop in conjunction with the Helensburgh Chamber of Commerce, aimed at ensuring staff are always learning something new and can deal with situations in different ways. It's really good to hear that the M&T Builders Merchants staff who attended are already using what we covered to good effect".