

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

14TH APRIL 2011

SUBJECT:	BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CLLR HODSON
KEY DECISION? <i>(Defined in paragraph 13.3 of Article 13 'Decision Making' in the Council's Constitution.)</i>	YES

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report requests Cabinets authority to allow the Interim Director of Corporate Services to put in place a 3 month interim arrangement to continue the support services currently offered to Wirral businesses until a new delivery model can be developed.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 That Cabinet authority is given to the Interim Director of Corporate Services to put in place an interim arrangement to continue the business advice services currently offered to Wirral businesses until a suitable delivery model can be developed and procured as appropriate.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Since 2009, Wirral Council have had a contractual arrangement with Business Link North West to provide 3 businesses advisors to work within the office of Invest Wirral. This arrangement has worked extremely well, with the 3 advisors engaging with over 450 Wirral businesses, providing expert advice on business planning and other key business support issues.
- 3.2 The North West Development Agency (NWDA), along with all other Regional Development Agencies, will close on 31st March 2012. There is a process in place to ensure an orderly and effective closure over the next 12 months
- 3.3 The closure of NWDA will affect Business Link North West, which will cease its operations in November 2011. This will be replaced by a more streamlined national service that includes a website and dedicated advice via a national call centre. As a result of this, the agreement between Wirral Council and

Business Link in respect of the advisors working out of the Invest Wirral Offices, ceased on the 31st March 2011.

- 3.4 In its budget for 2011/12, Cabinet put a significant amount of investment into business support, recognising the need to support the private sector to grow and create new employment opportunities in Wirral.
- 3.5 In order to provide continuity to this extremely important element of the business support operation, Cabinet are asked to approve an interim arrangement to continue to fund two business advisors on a self employed basis via Egerton House Trust Ltd for a period of three months until a new arrangement can be put into place.
- 3.6 This arrangement will include a three month extension to the current agreement in place for event management services to continue the excellent work on the Wirral Business Forum which now has over 1800 members. The existing arrangement, which was with the Wirral Investment Network (WiN), will continue for three months at a cost £3,000. This arrangement will allow the Invest Wirral relationship managers to concentrate on engaging and supporting Wirral businesses.
- 3.7 This will allow Officers to work with other relevant departments, such as the Corporate Procurement Unit to put into place a longer term delivery model to support the work of Invest Wirral.

4.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 4.1 That Cabinet authority is given to the Interim Director of Corporate Services to put in place an interim arrangement to continue the business advice services currently offered to Wirral businesses until a suitable delivery model can be developed and procured as appropriate.

5.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 5.1 Supporting Wirral's businesses is one of the key aspects of the Councils strategy to stimulate economic growth and create new jobs for the residents of Wirral. Providing suitable business advice to those businesses that have the potential to grow is critical and supports the work of Invest Wirral.
- 5.2 Given the timing of Government decisions regarding the Regional Development Agencies, an interim arrangement is important to ensure that the businesses that need it, can still receive dedicated support and advice until a suitable delivery model can be established locally using the investment identified in Wirral's budget for 2011/12. It is essential to ensure that businesses don't fall between the two arrangements.

6.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 6.1 The agreement between Wirral Council and Business Link in respect of the advisors working out of the Invest Wirral Offices, ceased on the 31st March 2011. The Councils budget for 2011/12 put a significant amount of investment into business support, recognising the need to support the private sector to grow and create new employment opportunities in Wirral. This report seeks authority to put in place an interim arrangement until a more suitable arrangement can be developed.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 6.1 The main risk identified by this report is not being able to offer the same level of support as has been available in the previous financial year in terms of dedicated business advice aimed at helping businesses to grow and expand, creating new employment opportunities. The continuity of this business advice is crucial to providing on-going dedicated business advice to the companies that require it.

8.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The option of discontinuing the business support and advice for an 3 month period was considered but demand for the service has been demonstrated consistently and could adversely affect the relationships being developed with businesses as the council engages with them through the Wirral Business Forum.

9.0 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Invest Wirral, through the Wirral Business Forum and the sectoral cluster groups, engage with businesses on a regular basis, listening and responding to their needs as appropriate. The demand for quality business advice is high and the success of the previous project is clearly demonstrated with over 450 businesses being provided with business support advice by the Business Link advisors

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 10.1 No implications for the voluntary, community and faith sector have been identified as a result of the actions set out in this report.

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

- 11.1 The total cost of the three month interim arrangement will not exceed £30,000 and this will include calling on the services of two business advisors who operate on a self employed basis through Egerton House Trust Ltd, and also the event management services currently provided through WiN. Wirral Council will cover the costs of the advisors although no management or other fees will be payable. These costs are in line with what is currently paid for these services. The cost identified will also include the costs of the event management for the Wirral Business Forum for the same interim period.

11.2 The costs will be met from the allocated 2011/12 budget for support to businesses.

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report. The interim arrangement is to allow a continuity of service until another delivery model can be developed and procured as appropriate.

13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no equalities implications arising as a direct result of this report

13.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| (a) Is an EIA required? | No |
| (b) If 'yes', has one been completed? | N/A |

14.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

14.1 None arising as a direct result of this report.

15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct implications arising as a result of this report.

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APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

More information can be obtained by contacting Alan Evans

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

