

WIRRALBIZ PROGRAMME - REQUEST FOR FURTHER 3 MONTH EXTENSION

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members agreement to extend the existing wirralbiz business start programme for the period 1st July to 30th September 2009 whilst the contracting process with the North West Development Agency (NWDA) for the provision of their Regional Business Start Programme is completed. This will ensure that there is no discontinuity of service to people in Wirral who wish to start their own business during this period.

2.0 REPORT

2.1 Members have been previously advised that the NWDA is introducing a Regional Business Start Programme as part of the Government's National Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) which was scheduled to commence at the start of the 2009/2010 financial year.

2.2 The process has proved to be complex and consequently more protracted than anticipated and in order to ensure that Wirral continued to provide business start support the existing complete wirralbiz programme was extended until 30th June 2009.

2.3 The extension was considered essential to maintain both the momentum and continuity of business start support which had built up over the past four years and successfully helped more than 1000 people start their own businesses.

2.4 Members approved the cost of this extension, £262,500, on 19th March 2009 and since 1st April 2009 the supplier Enterprise Solutions (NW) Ltd has continued to deliver the complete wirralbiz programme.

2.5 The wirralbiz programme provides an important element within Wirral's Investment Strategy by generating the conditions to create more sustainable businesses in Wirral. With the impact of the present challenging economic conditions the continuation of the complete wirralbiz programme is essential as a means of providing assistance to individuals affected by business closures by giving support to enable them to develop self employment opportunities as a way forward. This is a service available to any Wirral resident although it will continue to be focused on the most disadvantaged areas of Wirral.

2.6 At this time there is a growing risk that the NWDA programme will not be able to commence in Wirral on 1st July 2009 as planned as information to start the mini tender process to select a supplier for the newly created NWDA Supplier Panel is not yet available. The process is moving forward as confirmed by Cabinet's authorisation for Wirral Council to sign the indemnity required by NWDA before they will release essential information.

2.7 This report, therefore, seeks agreement to extend the existing complete wirralbiz programme for a further quarter from 1st July to 30th September 2009 to maintain continuity of support. The costs for this extended period will be £262,500 and this will be funded from the Working Neighbourhood Fund.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There is an allocation of £2.086m within the Working Neighbourhoods Fund to support the business start up programme in Wirral and the required £262,500 will be taken from this allocation.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are none arising from this report as wirralbiz is universally available to all members of the community within Wirral regardless of age, race or gender.

6.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no community safety issues arising from this report.

7.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 issues arising from this report.

8.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no planning implications arising from this report.

9.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The wirralbiz programme is universally available to all members of the community within Wirral but with emphasis on support for the hard to reach groups such as those receiving incapacity benefit, single parents, low income households, members of the BME community, women etc.

10.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The wirralbiz programme is fully inclusive being universally available to all members of the community within Wirral.

11.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

11.1 As a result of the universal impact of wirralbiz and its associated programmes this report will be of interest to all Members.

12.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 Background papers that have been used in the preparation of this report are held in the Regeneration Department.

13.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 It is recommended that £262,500 of funding from the £2.086m Working Neighbourhoods Fund allocation for the business start programme be approved to extend the Wirralbiz Programme from 1 July 2009 to September 30, 2009.

Alan Stennard
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