

### **S34. BENEFITS OF BRINGING BUSINESS GATEWAY IN HOUSE**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services presenting an update on the benefits of bringing the Business Gateway service in house. The report had been requested by the Committee on 14 August 2014 (ref S22).

The report provided information on the activities and outputs of Business Gateway in the operational year 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. Direct comparisons for activity previously delivered externally were given and details of other activities for which there were not direct comparisons available were provided. The report gave examples of the benefits to businesses since the service moved in house.

Douglas Duff provided an overview of the report and stated that external European funding had been secured. The service had worked with Scottish Enterprise in developing support to businesses. To encourage local entrepreneurship assistance was provided to new businesses as well as after care support. Douglas Duff highlighted a case study where Business Gateway had reacted quickly, relocating and safe guarding jobs.

Members asked for information in regard to redundancies. Carron Smith stated that Partnership Action for Continuing Employment, the Scottish Government's initiative dedicated to helping individuals and employers with advice and support when faced with redundancy are the lead organisation. Planned redundancies are notified to the Scottish Government and then the Council. Intervention processes are initiated and officers work with employers to look at options. Support to aid transition is provided, such as to claim benefits or become self employed.

The committee asked if there was an annual cap on the number of loans approved from the BP Business Loan Fund. Carron Smith advised that a budget of £150,000 is held and applicants must demonstrate that they meet the criteria. She stated that the BP Business Loan Fund panel were often more sympathetic than mainstream lenders.

Members asked about the support and financial help offered by Business Gateway. Carron Smith stated that the start up loan fund offered up to £10,000 and could be used in conjunction with the BP Business Loan Fund.

The committee asked how many customers had been surveyed to give the 100% satisfaction rating in the report. Carron Smith stated that the figures reported were part of external quality assurance which provided periodic snapshots. In the reported figures 9 or 10 clients had responded.

Members asked for more information on the Association of Town and City Management award for Developing the Evening and Night-Time Economy, which was awarded to Falkirk. Douglas Duff stated that the business development division had worked to promote Falkirk Delivers and the Best Bar None awards. The use of taxi marshalling reinforced night time safety in the town centre.

#### **Decision**

**The committee continued consideration of whether the subject matter of the report is suitable for inclusion in the Council's scrutiny plan to the next meeting to allow consideration of all the reports requested on 14 August 2014.**