

EX95. BUSINESS GATEWAY & BUSINESS SUPPORT UPDATE

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Development Services providing an update on the Council's business support activity from April 2014 to September 2015, proposing participation in Business Loans Scotland and seeking approval for the implementation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Business Gateway programme for 2015-20.

The report provided an overview of business support services for the period April 2014 to September 2015 highlighting:-

- support type;
- growth businesses;
- customer satisfaction feedback; and
- the creation of, and Council's participation in, the Longannet Task Force.

European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) funding of £293,000 had been secured in June 2013 to provide additional support to services to enhance business support in the area. A programme for 2015 to 2020 aimed at encouraging business to grow and create jobs had been developed and submitted to the Scottish Government for approval. If successful this would create two posts – Business Advisor and part-time Economic Development Officer to manage all ERDF claims. Both posts would be funded from the ERDF funding.

The report provided an overview of financial support available to businesses through the Small Business Loans Grants Scheme; Falkirk Business Loan Fund (formerly the BP Business Loan Fund), East of Scotland Investment Fund (ESIF) and Business Loans Scotland. The latter is a pan Scotland fund which will replace ESIF funding. It was proposed that Falkirk Council joins the initiative, transferring the balance of ESIF funding in Falkirk to the new body.

Decision

The Executive agreed to:-

- (1) note the performance of Business Gateway and related business support activities since April 2014;**
- (2) note the changes to the BP Loan fund as set out in para 6.3 of the report and the use of an exception to competition under paragraph 5.8 of contract standing orders;**
- (3) note the conclusion of the East of Scotland Investment Fund;**
- (4) participate in the formation of Business Loans Scotland, transferring the ESIF balance of £172,123 over to the new fund;**
- (5) implement the ERDF Business Gateway Programme for the period 2015-20 when approved including recruitment of two additional members of staff as set out in para 8.2 of the report; and**
- (6) note the progress of the Longannet Task Force.**