

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 27 AUGUST 2002

SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE PROPOSALS “BUSINESS GATEWAY”

Report by Director of Development Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To advise the Committee of proposals currently being promoted by the Scottish Executive for the extension of the Small Business Gateway to operate as the “Business Gateway”.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1** During 2000, the Scottish Executive established a “Small Business Gateway” (SBG) operating as a single brand on a national basis. Its role is to focus on start-up businesses and existing business of up to 25 employees in terms of providing a single door entry point into a range of support services including information, advice, counselling and training.
- 2.2** The Scottish Enterprise Network has responsibility for the delivery of the SBG services and in Ayrshire, this work is done under contract by Alba Smart Thinking Ltd.
- 2.3** In Spring 2001, the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning asked the Local Economic Forums to undertake a review of publicly funded Business support services in their areas and to report by 31 October 2002 on proposals for eliminating duplication and streamlining the provision of business support services.
- 2.4** Arising from that review process and the submissions made to the Minister, an “Expert Group” was asked to evaluate alternative models for a Business Gateway . Subsequently the Scottish Executive launched a consultation process in May 2002 on the proposal to create a “Business Gateway” for the Scottish Enterprise Network area.

3 THE BUSINESS GATEWAY PROPOSALS

- 3.1** It is proposed that the new Business Gateway will be operational from April 2003.

3.2 The Business Gateway proposals are built on what is deemed to be the success of the SBG, based on :

- a common brand used by all partners;
- a single first contact access number and web site;
- a range of core programmes with minimum service levels; and
- the provision of discretionary services at a local level.

3.3 The key recommendations for the Business Gateway can be summarised as follows :

- single brand with a focus on consistent and standard level of service;
- all local partners subscribing to underlying principles;
- core level of service accounting for at least 80% of all services with the local discretionary element of the services accounting for no more than 20% of all services (see para 3.4);
- discretionary services should be led at the local level;
- services should be grouped around “core services”, either available as “universal guaranteed “services available to all businesses on demand or as “targeted services” available on a selective basis. All other services should be “discretionary” based on specific need in specific areas.
- the branding should be based on the established branding for the SBG ;
- a common system for managing customer relationships should be established across all areas and made available to all Business Gateway partners;
- quality assurance and monitoring systems should be established across all areas and made available to all Business Gateway partners;
- a common level of adviser training through the Premier Adviser programme should be extended and made available to all Business Gateway partners.

3.4 The consultation document envisages that the role of the local authorities will be as follows :

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| • core services (universal) | the provision of property information and information / advice on planning licensing etc.; |
| • core services (targeted) | no direct role; |
| • discretionary services | provision (with the LECS) of business incubators / business property / loan and grant funding support / social enterprise support. |

4 COMMENTS ON PROPOSALS

- 4.1** The inclusion of Planning information and advice as a mandatory and core function of the Business Gateway is a proposal which would have significant implications for the local authorities, but about which there has been no discussion.
- 4.2** Broadly, the proposals for the allocation of responsibilities in dealing with local businesses are in line with the current practice of East Ayrshire Council in its working relationships with both the SBG and Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire. Accordingly, if the final proposals were consistent with those in the consultation, there would be minimal change in the way in which the Council's business support services are provided.

5 FINANCIAL, LEGAL, PERSONNEL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1** There are no immediate financial, legal, personnel or policy implications.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1** That the Committee:
- (a) note the terms of this report and;
 - (b) agree to support representations by CoSLA that planning information and advice should not be brought within the scope of the Business Gateway until there has been further discussion on the services to be provided and the implications for the Council.

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

12 August 2002 / jrs

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Building on the success of the Small Business Gateway : Towards the creation of a Business Gateway for the Scottish Enterprise Network Area.
Report to the Ministerial Taskforce for Local Economic Forums : May 2002

For further information please contact JOHN SPOONER, Business Development Manager on Extension 6143.

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AGENDA