



<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Alchemy's 'ACTIVATE' Pilot Programme</b>
<b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>	<b>Leisure &amp; Development Committee</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19 October 2021</b>
<b>For Decision or For Information</b>	<b>For Decision</b>

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2021 -25)</b>	
<b>Strategic Theme</b>	<b>Local Economy</b> (Linked to Community Plan Population Outcome "A Thriving Economy")
<b>Outcome</b>	Council contributes to increasing early stage entrepreneurial activity in line within the norm for Northern Ireland Council contributes to increasing business start-up and survival rates Council contributes to improving levels of business innovation in the Borough
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Economic Development Officer - Alchemy

<b>Budgetary Considerations</b>	
Cost of Proposal	£9,150.00
Included in Current Year Estimates	<b>YES/NO</b>
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	31403
Staffing Costs	Existing Staff Time

<b>Screening Requirements</b>	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date: Not applicable

## **1.0 Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to inform Members about a successful pilot programme created and delivered this summer through the Alchemy mentoring programme called 'ACTIVATE' and to recommend that the ACTIVATE programme is included in the future business development plan for Prosperity & Place and budget allocated accordingly.

## **2.0 Background**

In June 2021, the ACTIVATE pilot programme was created to support start-up businesses that have participated in Invest NI's 'Go For It' programme with operationalising their business plan, in particular guiding them with the knowledge of how to do this. Focus was given to business set up, finance, HR, sales, marketing and social media.

Upon completion, the programme participants were provided with a six-month action plan outlining the next steps needed to be undertaken to bring their business idea to reality and/or grow their business. Some participants had begun trading early to midway through the programme and were provided with more niche mentoring support tailored to specific areas in particular marketing and business growth.

Council invited all past participants of the 'Go For It' programme in the last 2 years to complete a survey if interested to apply for the pilot scheme. 50 responded with over 20 being referred to the current Alchemy LITE and Growth programmes (as they were more established and could benefit from business growth support). The remaining 30 respondents were offered the new pilot ACTIVATE programme.

## **3.0 Progress / Plans**

The pilot programme progressed with 18 business owners at varying stages of the start-up lifecycle. Knowledge gaps that were acting as a barrier across the areas of business set up, finance, HR, marketing, sales and social media were identified. These were addressed through a series of two-hour workshops and seven hours of one-to-one mentoring.

### **3.1 Programme content:**

1. Business status review audit was carried out with each participant by an Alchemy mentor to assess the status of their business journey and to provide a series of recommended strategic actions for the business.
2. Six workshops-
  - a. Workshop one – Becoming Self Employed and employing people.
  - b. Workshop two – Basic book-keeping and reducing business costs.
  - c. Workshop three – Creating an effective marketing strategy.
  - d. Workshop four – Selling your product or service.
  - e. Workshop five – Using Facebook for business.
  - f. Workshop six – Photography, video, and graphics for social media.
3. One day (7hrs) of one-to-one mentoring was provided for each participant based on the needs of the business. Outputs included mentoring sessions via Zoom and a six-month start-up action plan.

#### **3.1.1 Key outputs:**

- 18 participants registered and completed the programme.
- Eight participants have started to trade because of Activate support.
- Seven participants are planning to start trading within the next six months.

- One participant is planning to start trading within the next 12 months.
- One participant was referred and is now participating in Innovate US because of Activate.
- Four participants were referred and are now participating in Digital Causeway because of Activate.
- Seven participants that plan to start trading within the next six months are likely to register for Alchemy and/or Digital Causeway in the future.
- Workshops were delivered live via Zoom and recorded with links to the recording being shared after the workshop. For those not able to attend online workshops, they watched via Zoom at a time convenient to them.

### **3.2 Programme Costs**

Total programme costs were £9150 plus VAT and officers would be keen to deliver the programme again.

### **4.0 Recommendation**

It is recommended that following the success of the pilot ACTIVATE programme that this be included in the future business development plan and budget allocated accordingly at £10k per annum.