

# Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

**To: Leisure & Development Committee**

**Extension of Regional Start Initiative Delivery**

**13<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

**For Information**

**Report to Committee**

<b>Linkage to Interim Corporate Plan</b>	
<b>Strategic Themes</b>	Transition and Transformation Prosperity
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Paul Beattie – Head of Prosperity and Place
<b>Cost: (If applicable)</b>	N/A

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the delivery of the Regional Start Initiative.**

## **Background**

From 1 April 2015, responsibility for Business Start transferred to Councils. In order to give Councils time to prepare and create a programme fit for purpose, it was agreed with Invest NI to extend the contract for the current programme, which was initially for two years, for a further period up to 22 October 2015. For the period April to October 2015, Councils signed a Service Level Agreement with Invest NI for the delivery of the programme. This was agreed by Council in April 2015.

A working group, with representation from each of the eleven councils, has been meeting to assess options and to progress the task of creating a new programme which meets the needs of each of our areas. An independent economic appraisal is being carried out which will help inform the costs, targets and parameters of support which Councils can offer post October 2015.

The final report was due at the end of August 2015 and is currently at final draft stage with initial recommendations for a 3 year basic service on a regional basis across all of Northern Ireland and, that all eleven Councils would agree to work collaboratively to ensure a homogenous approach. The support to be offered would be a combination of advice, peer themed workshops and 1:1 mentoring to assist with business planning.

In order to meet the Programme for Government targets for job creation and to optimise funding opportunities, it is anticipated that a collective application for European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding will be made to the Local Economic Development measure - Investment for Growth and Jobs whereby ERDF will contribute 60%, Invest NI 20% with the remaining 20% to be match funded by Councils.

However the process of EU applications and gaining approval is somewhat complex and there is the possibility that the time for any application to be approved may be lengthy. Invest NI and Central Procurement Directorate have indicated that only after funding approval is granted, should Councils proceed to go out to tender. This would have led to a gap in service provision.

Figures for the current programme are only available for the period April to August, with an update due again in October. Against a period of targeting, set between April and October, figures from the August update show:

- 119 business plans have been delivered against a target of 130 (92% with 2 months to go)
- 81 jobs have been delivered against a target of 80 (101% achievement rate with 2 months to go)

A formal request for a further extension of the programme was made to the Department for Enterprise Trade and Investment, and Invest Northern Ireland. Early indications from Central Procurement Directorate suggest that this will be looked upon favourably.

This means that in the next instance, the current Regional Start Initiative will be continued by Invest Northern Ireland, with delivery continued through the existing Enterprise Agencies.

This situation will again need to be reviewed in March 2016. However, on the basis that a continuity of support is ensured, that a marketing programme will continue, and that Councils will continue to meet to develop a new programme which will require procurement, it is **recommended** that this situation continue until March 2016. A further review will take place, with early indications suggesting that, if required, a final extension could be available.

However, it is anticipated that the issues regarding EU funding, and the mechanisms associated with tendering this programme, should be finalised, which will allow Councils to take the programme forward independently of Invest NI.