

# Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 22 February 2022

## Council Support to the Small Business Sector – Response to Motion by Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron

Executive/routine	Executive
Wards	All
Council Commitments	<a href="#">2, 3, 6</a>

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 The Policy and Sustainability Committee is recommended to:
- 1.1.1 Note the support currently offered to small businesses to become more sustainable and accessible; and
  - 1.1.2 Note the intention to create a communications plan, in early 2022, to ensure that local businesses are made aware, not only of the business benefits of considering sustainable and accessible business practices, but also the range of support available to them.

**Paul Lawrence**

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# Report

## Council Sustainability and Accessibility Support to the Small Business Sector – Response to Motion by Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report provides Committee with an overview of the support Council currently provides to businesses in Edinburgh to assist them improve the accessibility of their premises and overall sustainability of their business operations.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 Throughout the challenging trading and business environment created by the Covid-19 pandemic, several Council services have provided advice and support to small business owners and helped them understand the Covid-19 business support environment and funding available.
- 3.2 Business support is primarily led by the Council's Business Growth and Inclusion service through Business Gateway Edinburgh, which offers a range of free support to new and existing businesses in Edinburgh.
- 3.3 In addition to self-service information and resources available from the [Business Gateway](#) and [Planning to Start](#) websites, small business owners also have access to advice from experienced business advisers and can benefit from local workshops and seminars, covering a wide range of business themes, or seek ongoing support through various specialist initiatives, such as the [Digital Boost](#) programme, access support programmes such as Women in Business Growth Programme and Gateway to Investment.
- 3.4 The Council has, through its recently approved 2030 Climate Strategy and Economic Strategy, reinforced the importance of supporting businesses to a sustainable and inclusive recovery and on [28 October 2021](#), Council approved a motion by Councillor Lezley Marion Cameron which included a request for a report to Policy and Sustainability Committee "setting out what advice and practical support Council can give to the small business sector to assist them improve the accessibility of their premises and to improve the overall sustainability of their business operations."

## 4. Main report

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- 4.1 Business Gateway Edinburgh currently receive very few enquiries from businesses looking for support on sustainability or accessibility matters. This is either because businesses aren't currently seeking this support, or they are unaware that advice on these matters is available from Business Gateway.
- 4.2 It is recognised that, in order to increase awareness of, and an appetite for, inclusive growth, business advisers need to go beyond providing reactive support on business enquiries and look to pro-actively influence Edinburgh businesses on the business benefits of inclusive growth including Fair Work, Fair Tax, Living Wage, Sustainability and Accessibility.
- 4.3 All Business Gateway advisers are undertaking accessibility and inclusion Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training and two advisers have recently attended impact assessment training delivered by Scotland CanB. More advisers will attend future sessions to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to support and advise business owners around the benefits of, and approaches to, inclusive growth.
- 4.4 In order to better align delivery of the Business Gateway service with Council priorities around sustainability and inclusiveness, in early 2021 senior Business Growth and Inclusion team members were assigned strategic lead responsibility for several key target demographics and sectors to champion, including a focus on business founders with a disability, and the drive to net zero.
- 4.5 As part of their remit, the sector leads are mapping out the current support landscape and where there are gaps which can be filled by Business Gateway advisory services, as well as developing approaches for advisors to work proactively with businesses to support inclusive, sustainable growth.
- 4.6 As an example, the 'net zero lead' focus is not only on ensuring business support for companies with sustainable solutions but additionally how to influence all businesses to take steps towards reducing their carbon footprint and adopt circular business models. Similarly, the 'disabled founders lead' has expanded their remit to also understand accessibility issues and review how advisors work with businesses in improving access for people with disabilities.
- 4.7 Nationally, the Business Gateway National Unit have been undertaking work around digital accessibility due to the impact of Covid-19 on businesses moving to digital offering. A how-to guide for advisers and businesses has been developed and circulated and additional work on physical accessibility support is expected in 2022.
- 4.8 Joined up support and partnership working are key to raising maximum awareness of sustainable and accessible approaches and Business Gateway Edinburgh is a member of the Scottish Business Sustainability Partnership, which ensures strong links with sustainability focused support agencies such as Zero Waste Scotland and the Energy Savings Trust. Business Gateway Edinburgh is also a key stakeholder in Circular Edinburgh, a partnership project between the Edinburgh Chamber of

Commerce and Zero Waste Scotland and members (via the National Unit) of Inclusion Scotland, for the latest trends and insight around accessibility matters.

- 4.9 As part of the Council's wider Net Zero strategy, support has been provided for Business for Good, a new project launching in early 2022 to provide dedicated support to Edinburgh businesses looking to adapt to purpose driven business models relating to inclusion and sustainability.
- 4.10 As part of a comprehensive and complementary approach to supporting small businesses, an internal cross-Council 'Business Champions Network' was launched in 2020 and officers will continue to work through this to identify how other Council teams can offer proactive support in this area.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 5.1 A focused communication plan will be devised in early 2022 to ensure that local businesses are made aware, not only of the business benefits of considering sustainable and accessible business practices, but of the range of support available to them in this area.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 The Business Gateway service is resourced from within existing service budgets and there is no additional financial impact identified for the Council.

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 7.1 Support to small business owners has historically been driven by their immediate needs. As such the service offered by Business Gateway has always adapted and reflected the stakeholder requirements. The current delivery model goes beyond this immediacy by seeking to influence businesses to consider the short term and more importantly long-term benefits of adapting sustainable and accessible business models.

## **8. Background reading/external references**

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- 8.1 None.

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 None.