

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Director of Communities and Transformation
to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel
of 19 November 2024**

Subject: Business Support - Refreshed Ambition Programme Update

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Panel with an update on the delivery of the revised Ambition Programme, approved by Cabinet on 28 November 2023.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Panel notes the progress of the revised Ambition programme since its relaunch in April 2024.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The AMBITION Programme was first launched in 2013 to provide expert advice and support to both start-up and existing businesses. The AMBITION brand is now well established within the business support network. The programme was part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Council, until September 2023, with funding for the programme reverting to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) as of 1 October 2023.

- 3.2 The Cabinet of 28 November 2023, approved a revised Ambition Programme, which included three new product offerings, detailed below:

3.2.1 **Green AMBITION** - Green AMBITION has been developed to support business transition to new lower cost and greener sources of energy. This activity is delivered in collaboration with Business Energy Scotland and other expert advisors. Business Energy Scotland are funded by the Scottish Government to help small and medium sized companies to use energy more efficiently, reduce carbon footprint and save money. Following an energy audit, the Council provides grant assistance of up to £20,000 at a variable intervention rate of 60% to 100%. Value of grants is determined based on the scale of the project to be undertaken and economic benefit gained, particularly in respect of the number of jobs safeguarded and created.

3.2.2 **Digital AMBITION** - provides businesses with the tools and techniques to ensure they maximise their digital opportunities to compete, grow and project their brand to a wider than local audience. Companies are offered expert advice through the Ambition programme framework. Grant funding of up to £10,000 is made available at an appropriate intervention rate to support the implementation of recommendations made by the Digital

expert. Grant values are determined on the scale of economic benefits to South Ayrshire.

3.2.3 **Productivity AMBITION** – targets support to the manufacturing sector and helps businesses analyse their current processes, identify opportunities for improvement and introduce measures that increase operational efficiency, through process improvements, data capture and intelligence and investments in new energy efficient manufacturing technologies. Companies are offered expert advice in collaboration with the Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service (SMAS). Grant funding of up to £20,000 is made available at a 60% intervention to support the implementation of any recommendations made. Grant values are determined by the scale of the project to be undertaken and the economic benefit to South Ayrshire.

3.2.4 Of the three new products being offered, the greatest demand is currently more weighted towards the growth support product, however, the pipeline of projects coming through at time of writing this report is showing a greater level of Green and Digital support applications. Further data will be presented on this in the next performance report, identifying any emerging or sustaining trends.

3.3 Alongside the new products the core Ambition support programme continues to be offered.

- **Ambition to Grow** – supports business owners and managers to consolidate and grow their business. The current programme offers grants of up to £50,000. to support business growth opportunities, at up to a 100% intervention rate.
- **Ambition to Start** – provides business planning advice, access to workshops, expert help and grant assistance of up to £1,000. to those businesses with the ambition and ability to employ an additional member of staff within the first two years of trading.

3.4 In addition to adding new products to the Ambition Programme, the application process has also been updated. Applicants now make an application to the overall programme, rather than individual grant or support products. This change put the emphasis on the service to develop the most appropriate support programme for the business, including referrals to other business support agencies, and services where appropriate. This approach has been designed to maximise the support provided to customers through a single portal and single application form, maximising support for customers through a streamlined process.

3.5 The new Ambition Website was launched on 18 April 2024, allowing customers to submit online applications (see [Appendix 1](#)).

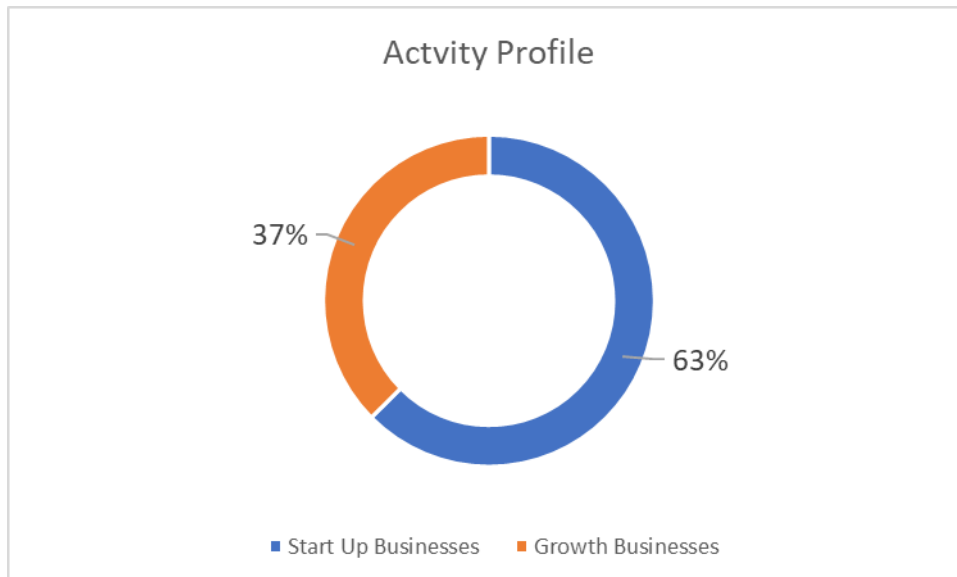
3.6 The AMBITION Programme is currently funded by South Ayrshire Council's Business Support funding allocation from the UK Shared Prosperity fund, the allocation of funding for Business Grants and Expert Help, 2024/25 is £340,000 - ie £300,000 for Business Grants and £40,000 for Expert Help.

3.7 However, there has been greater demand for Expert Help than originally anticipated and the Programme fund will therefore require to rebalance without exceeding the £340,000 overall funding allocation.

3.8 The original budget of £570,000. was reduced as part of the reprofiling of the UKSPF funds approved at cabinet of 23 April 2024. Link to background papers included at the bottom of this report.

3.9 A breakdown of activity for the period 1 April to 30 September 2024 is detailed below:

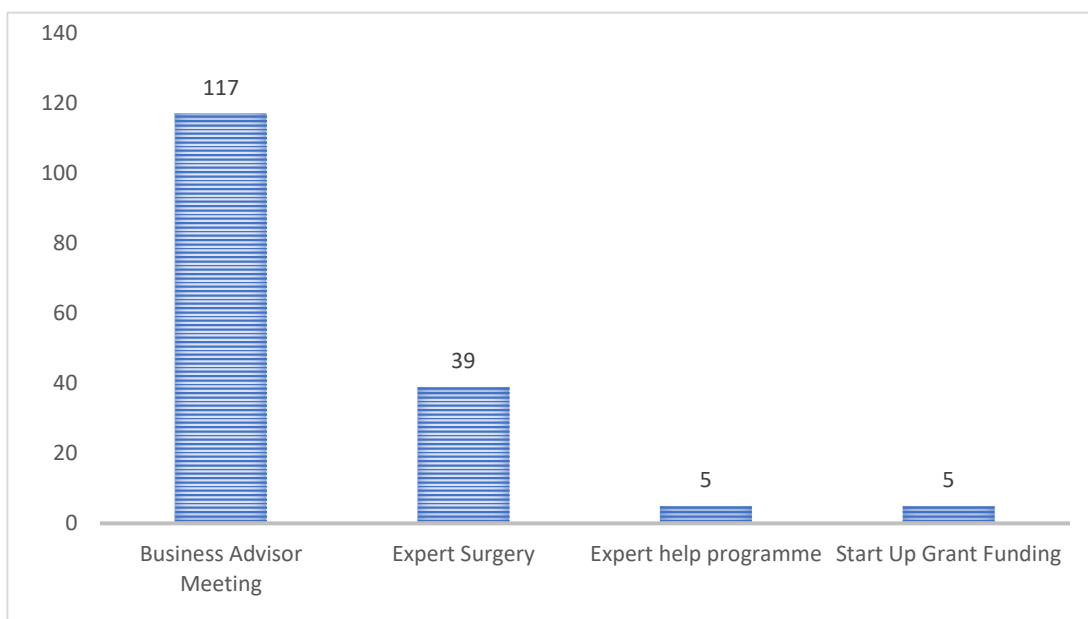
3.9.1 **Activity Profile (Chart 1)**



3.9.2 Since the programme relaunch in April 2024, **187** business have engaged and received support from the service of these, 117 Business were seeking support to start in business, 70 were existing business, seeking to grow their business.

3.9.3 **Start Up Business Support (Chart 2)**

The following chart provides a breakdown of the nature of support provided to Start Up Businesses.



3.9.4 **Chart 2 Information**

Business Advisor Meeting

One to One meeting with Business Advisor.

Expert Surgery

Three-hour surgery with expert (HR, Finance, Marketing, Digital)

Expert Help Programme

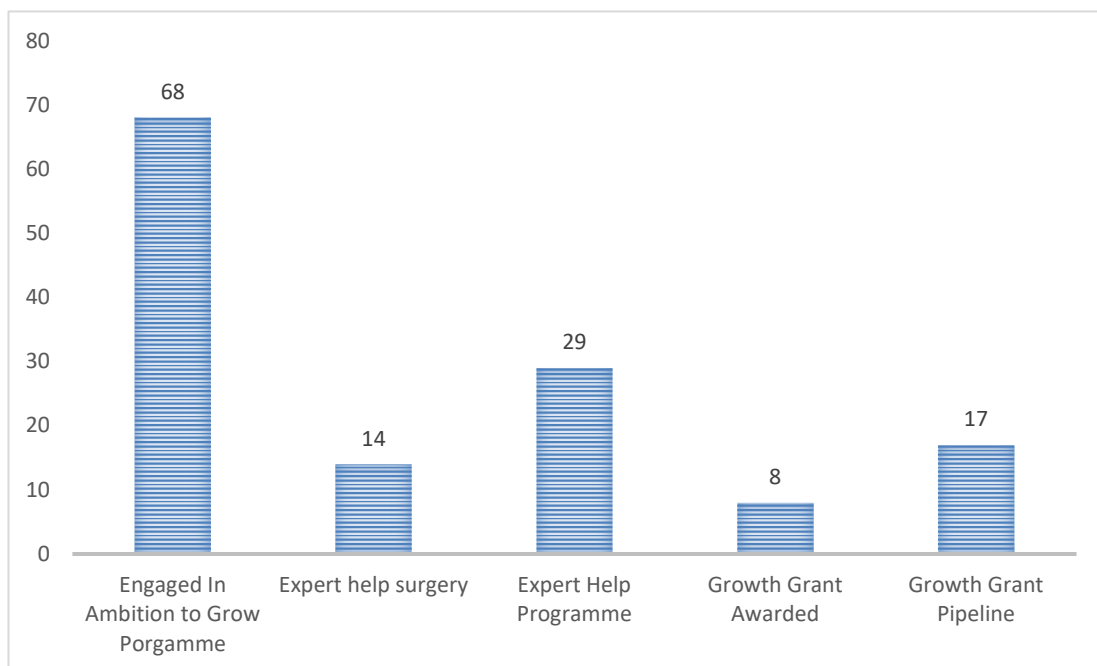
Up to 21 hours support from expert consultant in one of the following areas- Energy, Productivity, HR, Procurement, Marketing, Finance and Business Planning.

Ambition to Start Grant Funding

£1000 Start up Grant, provided to businesses that can demonstrate the ability to take on employees within their first two years of trading.

3.9.5 **Growth Business Support (Chart 3)**

The following table provides a breakdown of the nature of support provided to SMEs.



3.9.6 **Chart 3 Information**

Engaged in Ambition to Grow Programme

This is a count of all applications for Ambition to Grow funding.

Expert Surgery

Three-hour surgery with expert (HR, Finance, Marketing, Digital)

Expert Help Programme

Up to 21 hours support from expert consultant in one of the following areas- Energy, Productivity, HR, Procurement, Marketing, Finance and Business Planning.

Growth Grant Awarded

Number of businesses in receipt of a grant award from the Ambition Programme (Ambition to Grow, Productivity, Green, Digital)

Growth Grant Pipeline

Number of businesses working with Business Advisors on development of growth plans, likely to result in grant funding award.

3.10 Ambition Programme Budget Summary

3.10.1 Expert Help Provided

Opening Budget	Committed Spend	Balance Remaining	% Committed
£40,000	£51,104	(11,104)	128%

3.10.2 Ambition Grant Programme

Opening Budget	Committed Spend	Balance Remaining	% Committed
£300,000	£124,519	£175,481	41.5%

3.10.3 Combined Total

Opening Budget	Committed Spend	Balance Remaining	% Committed
£340,000	£175,623	£164,377	51.6%

3.11 The programme shows just over 50% of total funding committed after the first 6 months. There are currently 17 live applications, which are expected to result in grant awards.

3.12 An advertising campaign to promote the Ambition programme is scheduled to take place over 4 weeks in November 2024, which will include billboards, bus rears and bus shelters, along with a radio campaign. There will also be advertisements in the Winter publications of the 'North Carrick Community Newspaper' and the Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce publication 'Your Business'.

4. Proposals

4.1 The Panel is asked to:

4.1.1 recognise the high demand for 'Expert Help', which is now over the initial budget target of £40,000.00 However, this can be balanced across the overall Business Support Ambition programme;

4.1.2 note the rebalancing of the Business Support Ambition programme in recognition of the higher demand for Expert Help, by reducing the £300,000.00 Shared Prosperity Fund allocated to grant funding (also noting that the overall Shared Prosperity Fund of £340,000.00 will not be exceeded); and

4.1.3 acknowledge that progress is being made through the Ambition programme. Case studies are in development and impacts are being tracked including business start-up conversion rates, business growth and new jobs being created.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Not applicable. Overall budget remains on track.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 There are no risks associated with rejecting the recommendations.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report allow scrutiny of performance. The report does not involve proposals for policies, strategies, procedures, processes, financial decisions and activities (including service delivery), both new and at review, that affect the Council's communities and employees, therefore an equality impact assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to Priority 2 of the Council Plan: Live, Work, Learn/ Work and economy (Outcome 2).

13. Results of Consultation

13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.

13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Bob Pollock, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

Background Papers **Report to Cabinet of 28 November 2023 - [Business Support Refreshed AMBITION Programme](#)**

Report to Cabinet of 23 April 2024 - [UK Shared Prosperity Fund \(UKSPF\) 2022 - 2025](#)

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www.ambitionprogramme.co.uk



Do you have an ambition to start your own business or become your own boss? It can be a huge step, but we're here to help you set up and get on your way to becoming a sustainable and successful business in South Ayrshire.

Our Business Support service incorporates Business Gateway and together we can



GROW >



How to start growing

All you need to do is tell us a bit about your business. We'll then work with you to create a tailored package of support from ourselves and our partners. We'll also provide ongoing support for you as your business grows, offering advice and guidance whenever you need it.

To start growing your business please

APPLY HERE

