

**Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee  
Business Support inquiry - Inverness  
3 December 2018**

**Highland Council**

**Meeting hosted by: Andy McCann, Economy and Regeneration Manager and  
Danny Gallagher, Business Gateway Manager**

**Members in attendance: Jamie Halcro-Johnson, John Mason and Gordon  
MacDonald**

A range of topics were discussed with Highland Council including:

- Business Gateway services in the Highland Council area were brought in-house in 2016.
- There are 5 Business Gateway advisors, nine contracted specialist support companies (on the framework to draw from for growing businesses) and a contracted core workshop contractor.
- They have an annual operation plan and targets, which include the number of business start-ups and the number entering the growth pipeline.
- Business Gateway try to present as many businesses as possible to HIE, if the business could be eligible for account managed support. Many will not be accepted for account management for a variety of reasons including turnover, not key sector priorities etc.
- Communication between HIE and BG could improve to ensure that workshops and training are not run in the same area on the same topic within the same month or week causing confusion and duplication. Business Gateway Highland and Moray has a yearly published workshop programme available online.
- Highland Council acknowledged that HIE have more resource than BG and are better staffed, although BG work with a greater number of local businesses
- It was felt that for micro businesses the opportunity for a small grant investment is a gap in the current landscape.
- The core of Business Gateway's work is providing start-up support and assistance to micro and small businesses who have aspirations of growth.
- Business communities are active in the Highlands and perceptions of HIE and BG in the business community are a legacy of experiences being shared by word of mouth.
- Confusion arises as other non-BG agencies are advertising similar support to businesses.
- It was agreed that putting leaflets in local bank branches would be helpful. Highland Council felt that businesses were taken more seriously by the banks if they'd seen a BG advisor and created a business plan. BG have generally found the banks quite accommodating in the highlands area.
- The National Unit has been good at coordinating the marketing in the local areas.
- Although the budget for business support has reduced, Highland Council felt that they are running a more efficient service. The main gap identified was long-term strategic growth. It was felt that having sufficient resource to have a fulltime adviser working on growth would be beneficial.