BREXIT BUSINESS SUPPORT DELIVERY IN NORTH DEVON & TORRIDGE

Aim

North Devon + (ND+) has been tasked by North Devon Council and Torridge District Council to run a 12-month project to provide appropriate guidance and support for SMEs in the North Devon and Torridge areas to prepare for Brexit. This paper outlines the intended scope and methodology for this work.

Background

- Two fifths (40%) of UK SMEs say that Brexit has significantly slowed their growth (Dun & Bradstreet, 'UK SMEs Brexit & Beyond' 2018).
- Over a third (37%) have cancelled or postponed plans as a result of Brexit (Dun & Bradstreet, 2018).
- In August 2019. it was reported that 30% of SMEs listed Brexit as their biggest worry (smallbusiness.co.uk 'Business challenges for UK small to medium sized companies, 27 Aug)
- Over half (54%) of the UK SMEs, admitted they had not prepared in any way for Brexit ahead of the 31 October 2019 deadline (Bibby Financial Services, 2019).
- In Q4 2019, small business confidence dropped to an eight-year low – the lowest since the last recession - with accommodation & food services the least confident sector of all (FSB 2019, 'Voice of Small Business Index' Q4 2019).

Local Authorities are natural focal points for local businesses and residents wanting to find out more, yet information currently available across Devon and Somerset is limited – at the time of writing, only four of the eight Devon District Councils provides or signposts information about preparing for Brexit and only one local event is planned to support businesses in northern Devon (funded by the LEP).

The requirement is address this support gap in northern Devon to help SMEs to access up-to-date information and guidance:

- To understand the impact on their business;
- To recognise actions they must take in order to prepare for Brexit;
- To increase their resilience; and
- To explore potential business opportunities.

Scope

ND+ will provide a range of information and support services in order to support local SMES to be ready for Brexit, to include:

- Provision of accessible information to help businesses navigate through the required changes and to comply with new Brexit requirements to reduce risks to their businesses.
- Signposting to sources of advice and guidance, linking to other support organisations and websites, and avoiding duplication – the project will not provide bespoke advice, but will make links to those who can.
- Alerting businesses to the opportunities and benefits of internationalisation and disseminating examples of good practice.

- Provision of both reactive and proactive services – responding to information queries from any sectors, but also reaching out to those sectors which are well represented in northern Devon, but may need additional assistance (e.g. tourism, agriculture, food & drink).

Methodology

ND+ is expected to develop and deliver appropriate services in consultation with a range of partners to avoid duplication and present joined-up support. Partners are likely to include, amongst others: District and County Council departments and officers, FSB, Chambers of Commerce, North Devon Manufacturers' Association, NFU, North Devon Marketing Bureau, Petroc, DTI, SWMAS.

Delivery methods and resources may include:

- A website/library suite of information and links
- A helpline for specific question and to signposting to further information
- Delivering content around key questions e.g.
    - Am I an exporter (including as part of a supply chain)?
    - How new regulations affect me?
    - What do I need to do to comply?
    - What are the new opportunities from Brexit for my business?
- Hosted events in northern Devon by ND+ or by partners (promoted locally by ND+), delivered by experts, including links to webinars and web videos
- Targeted presentations at trade and business organisation events and meeting
- Social media updates
- Press releases
- Dissemination of good practice case studies
- Links to other Business Support programmes and funding opportunities
- Proactive activities for sectors, where additional support might be required (e.g. agriculture, tourism, food & drink):
    - Bringing businesses together, facilitating group learning, including peer group visits
    - Bringing sector-specific speakers into the area in relation to compliance, opportunities, increasing resilience e.g. CAP replacement activity
    - Exploring collective opportunities for international market development, supply chain development and added value (e.g. reducing environmental impact, circular economy opportunities)
- Attending key events outside of the area to develop networking and to keep up to date, cascading information across the area
- Undertaking and disseminating local research about business awareness and readiness for Brexit, collating local management information to inform the development of services

Timescales

12 months from April 2020