

Economic Development

Service Overview

The Economy and Regeneration function within the Council is responsible for a wide range of economic, employability and business related services including Tourism and Film, site and buildings regeneration, employability services, Business Gateway (advisory services for start-up, existing and growing businesses), LEADER Programme (European funded community led rural development programme), European policy and funding. Other activity within the Council also relates to economic development, including place development and infrastructure investment (for example, planning, new industrial premises etc.). Therefore not only is the Council's remit and contribution to economic development wide ranging it also undertakes such activity in partnership with other public, third and private sector partners.

All our activity is linked to the Scottish Economic Strategy, the Highland Single Outcome Agreement and/or the Council's Programme – Working together for the Highlands 2012-2017.

The activity undertaken is shaped by local economic circumstances, needs and opportunities. For example, while the Business Gateway service is part of a national service and will look and feel as such, the services provided to business not only includes standard start-up business advisory services but also locally driven ones (e.g. tourism/social media).

Council and partner economic development services (for example, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland etc.) are typically focused locally on creating the conditions required to enable sustainable economic growth to take place. External economic factors have however a critical influence and will impact significantly on local economic performance, for example, number of start-up or growth businesses, or number of unemployed persons.

Council Performance

Highland like most parts of Scotland is slowly coming out of recession with corresponding improvements in the business growth and employment rates.

The improved performance of Council services between the 2012/13 and 2013/14 years in assisting a higher percentage of Unemployed People Assisted into work, does not necessarily relate to a higher level of activity or success rate of Council services (as the level of activity has effectively been constant over this period) but rather a reducing unemployment rate and hence higher percentage of people assisted.

In addition this indicator does not reflect the fact that Council employability services are also focused on supporting those individuals furthest removed from the labour market and the Council's unique contribution is to give clients the support they need to overcome barriers to help them move closer to employment, but also this could include returning to education or training.

One aspect of this work was recognised nationally by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and a programme which provided recruitment advice to micro businesses and offered a wage subsidy to employers to employ unemployed people, won a Gold Award in 2014. As part of its continuous programme of improvement, this programme has just been subject to independent evaluation including client and business survey/interviews and the findings will shape its successor programme.

What the Council is doing to improve services

Across the Economy and Regeneration team, each section measures performance and engages in different

ways with client/business groups to ensure that the services provided are fit for purpose and responsive to needs and opportunities. For example, the Business Gateway service is subject to a monthly external quality assurance programme; the LEADER Programme has just completed a route and branch review of the 2007-13 Programme to inform the 2014-2020 Programme including external and independent review; the Tourism team is currently undertaking a business survey to inform future activity; and the Employability team utilise external experts to independently review programme activities.

How the public can get involved

To ensure economic development services are responsive to local needs and opportunities there is a constant need to engage with business and individuals to identify their needs/opportunities and to help shape Council services and monitor performance. The targeted methods (direct survey with clients/businesses and focused workshops with current/future clients) adopted by the team to ensure that they reach those businesses or individuals who receive/need services is key to this. The Council also have an Economic Forum (business and partners) which meets quarterly to cover more general economic development issues and are active in meeting industry groups, for example, Destination Management Organisations, Inverness Business Improvement District.

Theme	Indicator Code	SPI - Benchmark	FY 12/13	12/13 Rank	FY 13/14	13/14 Rank
Economic Development	ECON1	Percentage of Unemployed People Assisted into work ECON1	2.65%	26	7.66%	22

For more information about our service plan and performance or further information on getting involved in helping to improve our services, please contact us on:

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