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**ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL**

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

**9 MAY 2024**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that

**LACER SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT: DIGITAL REVIEWS**

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

2.1 Following the Scottish Government provision in 2022 of £1.449m to Argyll and Bute through Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery (LACER) funds, £355k was allocated directly to two business grant schemes administered via

2.2 The Business Start-

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee approve the use of £34,365 earmarked for business grants within existing LACER schemes to provide additional fully funded digital reviews to assist the growth and recovery of small businesses in the area, particularly in remote rural communities.

### **4.0**

Total value of grants claimed and paid	£134,900.91
Total decommitted	£13,295.45
Allocated funds remaining	£20,099.09

4.7



**Customer Engagement and Interaction:** Effective customer engagement helps small businesses build lasting relationships and drives loyalty, so that customers do not just buy on price. A digital review can assess the quality and responsiveness of online interactions with customers. A proactive social media management strategy can help drive repeat business and foster loyalty.

**Website Performance and User Experience:** A user-friendly website is essential for capturing and retaining customer interest online. A digital review provides insights into website performance, usability, and search engine optimisation (SEO), helping to attract organic traffic and generate leads.

**Online Reputation Management:** Maintaining a positive online reputation builds trust and credibility. A digital review can help businesses monitor and

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- 4.25 With no new DigitalBoost funding available from the Scottish Government, the request is to use the remaining LACER funding earmarked for direct business support to continue the provision of digital reviews throughout 2024-25. An additional 45 businesses could be supported this way.
- 4.26 In particular, businesses in remote rural areas can benefit from this upweighting of the digital review programme. As the high quality support from a digital expert is provided virtually, there are no barriers to remote rural businesses accessing the support. Small businesses in remote rural areas play a key role in supporting the local economy and attracting and retaining an economically active population.
- 4.27 Through outreach activity by the Business Gateway business advisors and targeted marketing, the digital reviews can be promoted to businesses in remote rural communities. In spring 2024 Business Gateway advisers will be visiting Tiree, Coll and Islay to promote the support available, with plans for Cowal, Rosneath, Jura and Colonsay, Bute and Inveraray later in the year.
- 4.28 If demand for digital reviews is strong and the impacts are beneficial for recipients, they could be included in future externally funded business support programmes from March 2025, when the current UKSPF programme ends.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 This report provides Members with details of the proposal to use the remainder of the earmarked LACER business support allocation of just under £35k to expand the provision of digital reviews to support small business growth and recovery. This aligns to the agreed purpose of the LACER funds provided by the Scottish Government.
- 5.2 small businesses a host of benefits, including wider customer reach, cost savings, marketing opportunities, data-driven insights, and enhanced customer engagement.
- 5.3 The remaining earmarked LACER funds could provide digital reviews



6.3 Legal None.

6.4 HR 6096 BT /F1 12 Tf 1 0 .32 841.92 re W\* n BT /F1 12 Tf 1 0 0 1 36.6 644.14 Tm 0 g 0

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:

6.5.1 Equalities None.

6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty None.

6.5.3 Islands The digital reviews will be equally available to businesses across Argyll and Bute including the islands.