Project report on the development of a Single SME Portal

Overview:

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment is committed to reducing regulatory barriers to entrepreneurship and is leading on the to developing a single SME portal which will provide a platform for information and access to available supports and related information for SMEs.

Background:

Ireland's SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, published in January 2021, provides Government with a set of recommendations, directly from the business community, on how to build the best business and regulatory environment possible for SMEs and entrepreneurs. A key recommendation from that Report indicated the need for an SME Portal to lessen the administrative burden on SMEs identifying and accessing supports.

The Department's supportingsmes.gov.ie website has been in existence since 2015 promoting some 170 Government supports available to SMEs. The Department's indigenous agencies: Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Office Network amongst other avenues frequently refer entrepreneurs and SMEs seeking advice regarding available assistance in different sectors.

Scoping Exercise:

In the latter half of 2021, a scoping exercise was carried out across the Department to determine the level of existing websites addressing the needs of the small business sector. Utilising the existing supportingsmes.gov.ie website as a platform for future developments, the Department conducted a review of its functionality, streamlined its signposting to ensure visitors receive current point of contact information and worked with its ICT to establish a proactive path forward regarding timeline commitments, costs and serviceability.

Current Position:

The Department has drawn up a list of priority measures which it considers appropriate the delivery of an SME portal while addressing the changing needs of businesses. A web designer has been assigned to review these measures to take the project to its next step.

The new Portal will provide a consolidated platform to enable SMEs to access national and European supports and information.

The website will provide specific information regarding the priorities set out in the NRRP such as sustainability and digital transformation and linkages to EU website information regarding SME issues.

The current website questionnaire will be updated to reflect the changing nature of business and the supports available to assist those businesses.

There will also be targeted information on high level priorities arising from the SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan providing ease of access to information on topical issues such as Management Skills, Exporting, Access to Finance and Clustering.

The website will place a spotlight on the Department's agency providers to ensure there is a comprehensive coverage of indigenous enterprise supports.

Indicative timeline of actions

1. **Review existing sources of information for SMEs**

   - **1a:** Conduct mapping exercise across the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and its enterprise agencies to determine the level of existing resources of information for small business (Q3 2021)
   - **1b:** Review the current supportingsmes.gov.ie promoting some 170 Government supports available to SMEs (Q3 and Q4 2021)
   - **1c:** Research the use of SME information portals in other jurisdictions

2. **Make improvements to existing supportingsmes.gov.ie website**

   - **2b:** Streamline information and point of contact for all Government supports maintained on the website (Q4 2021)
   - **2c:** Review the functionality of the supportingsmes.gov.ie website and identify areas for improvement (Q4 2021)

3. **Develop concept for a Single SME Portal and progress necessary operational steps towards delivery**

   - **3a:** Develop concept of website as signposting tool to targeted information on topical issues, such as Skills, Access to Finance, Climate Action and Digitalisation (Q1 2022)
   - **3b:** Work with Department ICT to establish a way forward regarding timeline, costs and serviceability of an enhanced portal, having determined the improvements that need to be made to the existing supportingsme.gov.ie website to deliver an enhanced Single SME Portal (Q1 2022)
   - **3c:** Engage a web designer to discuss the requirements to fulfil the objective of providing a consolidated platform for SMEs supports from a service user approach (Q1 2022)
   - **3d:** Agree costs and delivery timeframe (Q1 and Q2 2022)

4. Launch of portal

- **4a:** Work with Department Communications Unit on the launch and promotion the new SME Portal (Q2 2022)
- **4b** Put in place communication channels with enterprise stakeholders to ensure that information is up-to-date, comprehensive and meets the needs of businesses
- **4c:** Use the Portal to highlight the Department's agency providers to ensure a comprehensive coverage of indigenous enterprise supports (Q2 2022)
- **4d:** Update the website questionnaire to reflect the changing nature of business and supports available to those businesses (Q2 2022)