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The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Michelle

Thank you for your letter of 8 July seeking an update on progress in relation to the Committee's recommendations regarding Business Gateway as part of its report on business support.

The then Cabinet Secretary for Finance, the Economy & Fair Work indicated in July last year that the Scottish Government was committed to ensuring that Business Gateway is part of a joined-up enterprise support system where businesses can get the right information, advice and support at the right time. That commitment remains and we have continued to meet to discuss these matters with local authorities, COSLA, the enterprise agencies and others to discuss alignment between local, regional and national business support and economic development.

The Scottish Government's response to the Committee's inquiry report stated that we would work with local authorities, which have lead responsibility for Business Gateway, while respecting local accountability and balancing local needs with national objectives. The focus of that work over the past year has been developing a common business support delivery environment with a view to improving the business customer experience through more effectively targeted and joined up support.

A Business Support Partnership Programme has been established, involving the enterprise agencies, Business Gateway and Skills Development Scotland. This group is taking forward a number of workstreams, including working towards a common data strategy that can underpin shared business support services across delivery organisations. It is also leading the development of a shared business engagement model that can support a joined up approach to diagnosing and meeting business needs. Local authorities and Business Gateway are playing a crucial role in that activity where a strong emphasis on place based

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approaches to business support and economic growth is driving the effort towards improvement in the overall business support landscape.

A practical example of one element of this work is the FindBusinessSupport website. The Committee will be aware of its public release in December 2019. Since then, the website has had around 400,000 users and 1.5 million page views and the numbers of available services on offer has doubled. The value of having a single website where businesses of all sizes and operating in different sectors and geographies could find advice and support relative to their specific needs has been of immense value during the COVID-19 crisis. The planned schedule for adding both organisations and content to the site has also accelerated and available services on offer has doubled. Looking ahead, through the Business Support Partnerships Programme work will continue to add content and grow the numbers of partners who are providing help and advice to Scotland's businesses during the vital restart and recovery stage and beyond.

The Committee will no doubt appreciate that the situation with regard to covid-19 necessitated a significant shift in focus and resource across the Scottish Government and its agencies, as well as local government, towards meeting the unprecedented public health challenges facing us. While those challenges have by no means gone, our efforts are very much being geared towards economic restart and recovery. In my most recent discussion with COSLA on 2 July, I noted that my Cabinet colleagues and I continue to be impressed with the skill and speed that local authorities have responded during this crisis and that includes through business support services.

Using the business and wider economic support infrastructure we currently have in place locally, regionally and nationally, I have indicated that I am keen to explore further what new measures we can take to support a sustainable recovery. That consideration will be taken forward at both official and ministerial level over the coming weeks and months.

I hope the Committee finds this update helpful.

Kind regards
Fiona Hyslop

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