

To: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE		Subject: BUSINESS FOCUS: EVALUATION
From: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT		
Date: 23 APRIL 1998	Ref: DW/REP 390	

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report seeks to advise members of the results of a recent evaluation undertaken of 'Business Focus'.

2 Background

- 2.1 'Business Focus' has been published ten times a year since June 1998; the twentieth edition is currently in production. It is distributed directly to some 4,300 businesses on the Council's business listings database, and achieves a wider circulation through the Lanarkshire Development Agency, local Enterprise Trusts, libraries and Council offices. It is also used in information packs for civic visits, visiting academics, conferences and promotions.
- 2.2 Produced by the Economic Development Unit and designed by the Graphics Team within the Planning & Development Department, it seeks to raise awareness of the diversity of economic development within North Lanarkshire and to provide information of interest to the business community. The publication highlights the Council's economic development effort and provides a platform to advertise the Council's programme of grants, loans and initiatives, together with the extensive property portfolio. It is also used by other Council departments that need to communicate regularly with the North Lanarkshire business community. It highlights success stories within the local business community and promotes examples of best practice. 'Business Focus' has been designed to convey an authoritative, professional, stylish yet accessible image.
- 2.3 Since its inception, 'Business Focus' has been evolving to reflect the perceived requirements of its readers. Maurice Smith, Business Editor at BBC Scotland, has been a contributor since February 1997, providing in-depth comment on a current business topic. Ian Watson of Watson Dunne and Company has also been providing a regular financial column since that issue. The Hot Seat was introduced in the Christmas 1996 edition, and profiles an individual of interest to the local business community. 'Perspectives', introduced in March 1998 is an occasional series which will consider the implications of major economic issues. Feedback from readers and anecdotal evidence has suggested that the publication is providing the type of information required by the business community, but it was felt that after nearly two years it would be appropriate to measure how far it was achieving its objectives. Such research would allow 'Business Focus' to be tailored more finely to the needs of its readers, and assess whether the Council was receiving value for money.

Readership survey methodology

- 2.4 In February 1998, Forgewood Market Research was commissioned to undertake a telephone survey of a sample of businesses in the area in an attempt to determine the impact of 'Business Focus' and opinions on the publication.
- 2.5 A sample of 200 businesses across North Lanarkshire was selected to represent the industrial spread of the area. A short questionnaire was produced and the interviewers completed the questionnaire with a senior member of staff of each of the businesses contacted. The interviews were carried out over a ten day period in March 1998. A copy of the questions asked is attached at Appendix A.

Survey results:

Readership

- 2.6 Over 80% of the respondents reported reading Business Focus. This is a very high figure for an unsolicited publication. The main reason given for those not reading it was lack of time. Nearly two thirds reported that the publication was read by at least one other member of staff. This is a high readership rate.

Regular features

- 2.7 Respondents were asked a series of questions on features which appear regularly in the publication. They were asked how often they read the features; the responses are outlined in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1:

Table 1: How often do you read? (percentages)	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Harry Conroy Interview	14	27	35	24
Money Matters with Ian Watson	15	28	33	24
Maurice Smith	12	14	39	35
International Trade	12	27	40	21
The Hot Seat	16	30	34	20

The most read feature was 'The Hot Seat'.

- 2.8 Respondents were asked to comment on the *length* of these features. Over 90% of those surveyed responded that the features were the correct length, indicating that an overwhelming number are happy with the structure of the articles.
- 2.9 Respondents were then asked their opinion about the *content* of these regular features. The results are set out in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2:

Table 2 - Opinion of Features (percentages)	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Harry Conroy Interview	8	73	20	0
Money Matters with Ian Watson	6	68	25	0
Maurice Smith	6	67	25	1
International Trade	7	65	28	0
The Hot Seat	8	69	23	0

All the features received a rating of good or better from at least 70% of the businesses, with virtually none rating them poor.

New features

- 2.10 Respondents were asked which of a range of topics they would like to see featured in 'Business Focus'. Table 3 lists the answers given. Respondents were allowed to give more than one answer.

TABLE 3:

Table 3 - What other regular features? (percentages)	
Monetary Union	40
Budget Implications	74
Personal Pensions	55
Other	8

- 2.11 When asked specifically, 69% said that they would like to see more features on the work of North Lanarkshire Council's Economic Development Unit. Of these, nearly 90% reported that they would like to see more on the training and business development programmes, 74% on financial assistance programmes and 28% wanted more information on the international trade programme.
- 2.12 Respondents were offered a list of topics which they would like to see featured in future issues. Table 4 lists these responses. Respondents could give more than one answer.

TABLE 4:

Table 4 - Which Topics (percentages)	
Exporting	24
Sectoral Reports	20
Economic Trends	64
Other	3

Under the 'other' category, respondents cited new businesses, environmental issues and smaller businesses.

Size and frequency

- 2.13 87% of those surveyed thought that, at eight pages, 'Business Focus' was the right size. When asked about the frequency of issue, 84% replied that ten times a year was appropriate.

General

- 2.14 Respondents were asked if they had any general comments they wished to make, and 55% gave responses. The most numerous response was that Business Focus was a good publication, including positive comments about the design and style. Other notable responses were requests for more information on smaller and newer businesses.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 This independent research demonstrates that over the last two years 'Business Focus' has established itself as an informative and useful publication which is widely read and well received by the local business community. Its high readership rate provides a strong platform for the Council's economic development work in its widest sense.
- 3.2 The survey shows that the editorial team has pitched the style, content, size and frequency of the publication at the right level. Future editions will be adapted to reflect the topics, such as more information on new or smaller businesses, raised by respondents.
- 3.3 'Business Focus' would appear to offer North Lanarkshire Council a good return on its investment by providing a professional, positive, pro-active face to its economic development effort, and establishing an effective channel for publicising activity.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 That members note the contents of this report


Stanley C Cook

Director of Planning and Development

30 March 1998