The G12 group of leading Liverpool City Region business organisations, of which FSB is a founding member, has written to Mayor Joe Anderson calling for a grant fund to support small businesses. For several years SMEs in Liverpool City Region have been able to obtain grant support for job-creating investment from various Regional Growth Fund rounds. However, this important source of financial assistance to smaller firms will come to an end in March 2017.

The City Region has signalled that there will be a new Single Investment Fund utilising devolution funding. The outline for the City Region’s Single Investment Fund has a substantial minimum support figure and the G12’s view is that the majority of SMES are unlikely to be eligible for it.

The group has proposed establishing and SME grant fund starting at a much lower level of support.

The G12 has written urging the Combined Authority to consider further financial support for growth-oriented SMEs.

The letter, representing the group and signed by G12 Chair Frank McKenna, an FSB member who also chairs the organisations local policy group and is Chief Executive of Downtown in Business, argues a locally-managed SME grant fund of around £2m a year would improve the assistance for the vast majority of SMEs which are often not in priority sectors or large supply chains but which are a vital engine of sustained employment and economic growth.

The letter points to information provided by the Merseyside Jobs and Growth Fund, suggesting this is as a useful model going forward.

Statistics include £2.6m in grants awarded over 12 months (average grant of £38,000 with a range of grants from £6,000 to £75,000), £13m leveraged with grant support on average proving to be 17 per cent of project size and 509 jobs created at a cost of £5,108 per job. It also argues that 65 per cent of these business investments would result in an increase in business rates by expanding and improving premises, regenerating brownfield land, or moving to larger premises.

Party Conference season saw the Labour Party come to Liverpool and FSB was on hand to make sure the voices of entrepreneurs were heard clearly by MPs. In addition to our activities at other party conferences across the country, the Federation hosted a number of events in the city.

They included one on small business access to finance for growth featuring FSB National Chairman, Mike Cherry, and a Question Time-style session with Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, and Martin McTague, FSB Policy Director.

This year’s conferences coincided with FSB research showing declining business confidence. Turn to page 2.

A roundtable of FSB members took place in Liverpool as part of FSB research exploring the Northern Powerhouse agenda and small businesses. Local business owners were able to outline their issues, concerns and ideas in a bid to identify what the Northern Powerhouse could mean for SMEs in a project carried out by IPRR North on behalf of FSB’s National Policy Committee.

Questions posed by the research include: What are the key features of the Northern Powerhouse ‘landscape’, and what are their implications for small businesses? Read the story, page 11.
MEMBER GETS ON HIS BIKE FOR CHARITY

FSB member Mark Ferguson is biking from Wigan to Amsterdam in aid of Prostate Cancer UK as part of Laticis to Amsterdam, a fundraising initiative with Wigan Athletic and the Football League.

Mark hopes to generate serious money and last year the team had raised £20,000 by the time they had crossed the line at the Amsterdam Area - but also get people talking about the disease, particularly among men.

He said: “Prostate cancer affects one in eight men. It is quite serious really because so many men won’t talk about it.”

Mark, who owns Personal Will Services and is South Lancashire Director of Business for Breakfast, added: “The Football League have become involved to try to get men to speak about it to each other, as well as the football.”

Mark hopes to recruit a 35-strong team for the ride, which takes in Wigan, Barnsley, Hull, Rotterdam and Amsterdam and on the first day 12 cyclists signed up. With each pledging to raise £1,000 and many others involved in various rides at clubs across UK, the intention is to raise as much money as possible.

Mark looks forward to telling people who encounter the army of cyclists what it’s all about.

He said: “It will be a real sight, especially in Wigan. We will raise the profile of prostate cancer as well.”

Mark’s trip will take place from 8-10 June 2017.

Find out more about getting involved at www.laticis2amsterdam.co.uk Donate to Mark here: www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Mark-Ferguson8

REGIONS JOIN FORCES FOR CONFERENCE

FSB’s Merseyside, West Cheshire and Wigan and Greater Manchester and North Cheshire Regions came together to exhibit at the Northern Enterprise Conference 2016 held at the Victoria Warehouse, Manchester.

The conference, organised by the Liverpool-based Social Enterprise Network (SEN), convened organisations, businesses and individuals in the spirit of sharing knowledge, trading ideas and finding solutions to business issues. It aimed to help drive the devolution agenda in the north and demonstrate how the social sector can lead the Northern Powerhouse through innovation and values implicit in the social economy. Speakers included the Minister for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, Hazel Blears, who led a host of industry trailblazers including a round table discussion, and philosopher Philip Blond, Director of the think tank ResPublica.

There was a Dragons’ Den-style event which saw around £150,000 of investment made available to support great ideas.

KEY POLITICIANS LOBBIED BY NATIONAL FSB BOSSES

This year’s Labour Party Conference took place in Liverpool and FSB hosted a number of events to represent the priorities of UK small businesses.

FSB representatives and members joined other business bodies at a business groups reception at Revolution, Albert Dock, Anchor Courtyard, Liverpool.

Following opening remarks by Tom Clark, Editor of Prospect, the speakers were John McDonnell MP, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and Jon Trickett MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

The following day, FSB National Chairman, Mike Cherry, spoke at a joint FSB and Finance and Leasing Association Roundtable on Funding SMEs to deliver growth alongside FSB Members who shared experiences of searching for finance.

Later, FSB hosted a Small Business Question Time in partnership with The New Statesman. In this conversation style event saw Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell and Martin McTague, FSB Policy Director, quizzed about key policies crucial for small businesses.

Elsewhere, FSB also ran similar events at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham. In addition, FSB’s Westminster-based policy team has been engaging with new Prime Minister, Theresa May, and her team since she took office and a delegation of FSB members met Chancellor Philip Hammond in Downing Street. The meeting focused on policies to boost small business productivity.

These activities are timely in light of new FSB research showing that business confidence continues to fall.

The FSB Q3 Small Business Index (SBI) found business confidence in negative territory for the first time in four years, the second largest fall in confidence in the Index’s history, with the largest drop in the previous quarter of 2016 (Q2).

EX-ENGLAND STAR SHARES SECRETS

England rugby star turned entrepreneur Matt Cairns shared some of the secrets of growth at FSB Wirral Training on Tap - Planning for Business Success, which took place at Prenton Park, the home of Tranmere Rovers Football Club in Birkenhead, Wirral.

Matt, Adviser at PFP Wealth and a Director of preserve-making family firm Mammy Jamias, helped business owners plan for growth, including effective tax planning strategies and maximizing profits.

Discover more about what your local FSB Branch is doing, visit http://www.fsb.org.uk/regions/merseyside-west-cheshire-wigan/events
NORTHERN POWERHOUSE ROUNDTABLE IN LIVERPOOL

As part of an FSB research project exploring the role of the Northern Powerhouse and Small Businesses, a roundtable session took place in Liverpool recently.

The study, which has been carried out by research company IPPR North on behalf of FSB’s National Policy Committee, aims to provide clear and nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the Northern Powerhouse and the Region, and the implications for SMEs.

When published, the research will provide a high-level ‘map’ of the Northern Powerhouse as it applies to small businesses, identifying key strengths, risks and opportunities across the region.

It will also provide strategies for maximising benefit and influencing the future direction of the initiative at local, regional and national levels. These will include possible directions for further and more detailed research.

FSB representatives attended the launch of the Northern Powerhouse Economic Review, published during IFB2016 in Liverpool.

The Northern Powerhouse agenda recognises the economic potential of the north of England and brings a unique opportunity to harness investment. The Region is already a substantial economic actor with the potential for growth towards a genuine ‘rebalancing’ away from the dominance of London.

The North’s economy is worth £304b and would rank as the eighth largest in Europe if it were a country. Several of its sub-regions outperform national levels of productivity and the North already has numerous assets and institutions to support innovation, trade and growth.

Small businesses are crucial to the northern economy and must play a major role in its future.

However, discussions of the Northern Powerhouse tend to concentrate on the role of large companies and national or international investment. Despite their importance in local economies, value chains and labour markets, less attention has been given to helping small businesses access the opportunities created by the initiative.

GEARiNG UP FOR BIG FSB AWARDS NIGHT

Excitement is mounting for the second FSB Merseyside, West Cheshire and Wigan Business Awards which take place on Thursday, 1 December at the Crowne Plaza, Liverpool.

Launched last year to celebrate and reward exceptional small businesses from across the Region, the awards will feature 24 categories and are judged by business leaders from across the Region and the North-West, including sector specific categories, business of the year categories and awards for customer service, environmental best practice and export success.

Presented by the Federation of Small Businesses, together with Don’t Panic Events, the awards ceremony will attract around 300 entrepreneurs and business owners and it is set to be one of the Region’s premier business networking events. It will be hosted by Liverpool comedian and star of TV’s Phoenix Nights and Benidorm, Ted Robbins.

At last year’s inaugural awards, Liverpool’s H2 Energy Group bagged a hat-trick of trophies. The company was selected as overall winner and also scooped the Training and Development and Best New Business awards. Ryan Gorst, of Coaching Connexions, won Apprentice of the Year.

Ryan Gorst, Coaching Connexions, who won Apprentice of the Year at the 2015 Awards

Businesses benefit from guide to apprenticeships

FSB’s Liverpool and Knowsley Branch held an information-sharing event which was supported by Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub.

The event highlighted the benefits available to support small businesses interested in utilising the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Grant for Employment scheme.

A panel of experts sharing their skills and knowledge to support small businesses included Funding4Business’s Liz Curran, Vice-Chair and Secretary of FSB Wirral, and Claire Whitehead, Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship Hub Co-ordinator.

Meanwhile, Wigan Council’s flagship Business Apprenticeship Programme (BAP) is back for a limited time only. A small amount of funding is available to local businesses who wish to recruit an apprentice and where eligibility criteria is met.

The scheme was launched at the Wigan Business Expo 2014 with funding of £1.5m committed by the Leader of Wigan Council with the aim of generating apprenticeship opportunities for young people in the borough.

The programme has seen unprecedented demand since the launch with over 350 local businesses benefiting from grants of between £3,000 and £5,000.

Full details can be found at https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Business/Business-Support/Apprentices/Business-Apprenticeship-Programme.aspx

FSB held its most successful Twitter chat ever on the role of smaller firms and apprenticeships recently with more than 30 million page impressions recorded.

The session looked at apprenticeship reform and highlighted resources that support smaller businesses to hire an apprentice.
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FREE TRAINING ON OFFER IN CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON

The Cheshire and Warrington LEP Growth Hub offers free training for local small firms which have been trading for less than 42 weeks.

For those that qualify, the EU funded growth programme will facilitate training in a variety of key areas for firms in their infancy, including pre start-ups, with the programme delivered from South Cheshire College in Crewe.

The businesses must complete 12 hours of support and training as part of the programme, kicking off with a three hour, one-to-one session with a business adviser, followed by a further mix of four, two hour workshops which can be cherry picked.

They include How to Set Up a Business; Finances for Entrepreneurs; Marketing Strategies; Customer Service in the 21st Century; Recruiting the Right Staff; Managing Staff; Effective Comms; and Handling Complaints Effectively.

The programme completes with a two hour, one-to-one session to help businesses implement what they’ve learned during the programme as part of a business plan.

To find out more email: wrt.scc@acc.uk, or telephone: 01270 654 638.

NO SLOWDOWN FOR FSB

Even in the wake of the International Festival for Business there has certainly been no summer slowdown for FSB, both nationally and in the Merseyside, West Cheshire and Wigan Region, writes Chris Burgess, Regional Chairman. Amid continuing uncertainty following the fall-out of the Brexit vote I am pleased that establishing stability for small businesses has been the name of the game for our Westminster policy team, with our National Chairman, Mike Cherry, and Policy Director Martin McTague, supported by their excellent teams, continuing to press home the priorities of UK small businesses with national politicians.

In addition, local activists were able to participate at the recent Party Conferences, including the Labour Party one in Liverpool, giving members a platform to air their views and providing MPs with every opportunity to nail their small business credentials to the mast.

Locally, FSB Wirral and the Liverpool Branch held two excellent events aimed at arming small business owners with the tools to grow successfully and access information and funding for apprentices.

We also exhibited at two of the leading business events in the Region – the Liverpool and Wigan expos – meaning that thousands of entrepreneurs were able to find out about our Member Services and lobbying activity.

Finally, I am looking forward to the 2017 Liverpool City Region Mayoral elections and the next stages of the devolution process. As a founding member of the G12 group, we remain committed to providing local businesses with a powerful voice.

CHRIS BURGESS

FSB ACTIVISTS AT LIVERPOOL AND WIGAN EXPOS

FSB activists were on hand to meet delegates at two major local business events recently, the Liverpool and Wigan Expos.

Liverpool Business Expo - #LVBizExpo - featured motivational speaker Brad Burton and Jamie Moore, Salford’s real life Rocky, and Mark Asquith, the hot dog kid as well as networking.

In addition, FSB’s Wigan, Warrington, Widnes and St Helens Branch exhibited at the Wigan Business Expo, now in its seventh year and one of the largest business expos in the North-West, attracting over 1,000 visitors from across the UK.

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