



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL  
ON TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 6.30 PM**

<b>In the Chair</b>	:	Councillor B Mallon
<b>Committee Members (In person)</b>	:	Alderman – M Cosgrove Councillors – M Cooper, E McLaughlin, M Stewart and B Webb
<b>Committee Members (Remote)</b>	:	Councillor – M Ní Chonghaile
<b>Non-Committee Members (In person)</b>	:	Councillors – N Kelly and R Kinnear
<b>Non-Committee Members (Remote)</b>	:	Councillor – H Magill
<b>Officers Present</b>	:	Director of Economic Development and Planning – M McAlister Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development – M McKenna Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure – S Norris ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson Member Services Officer – A Duffy

**CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the September Meeting of the Economic Development Committee and reminded all present of recording requirements.

## 1. APOLOGIES

Councillor J Burbank

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 3.6 - Councillor B Webb

## 3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

### 3.1 ED/ED/313 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (LEP) UPDATE & ACTION PLAN

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the progress of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and the development of the Year 1 Action Plan.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

Members were aware that the former Department for the Economy Minister, Conor Murphy MLA launched a Sub-Regional Economic Plan on the 1st October 2024. The Plan outlined how the Department would work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholders to establish Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) between Oct-Dec 2024 in each Council area.

The LEP was tasked with co-designing a plan which would identify actions and develop projects that aligned with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Council Economic Development Strategy and Invest NI Business Strategy. These would be developed with advice from the Department for Economy (DfE) and Invest NI, and they would be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology.

To support the delivery of these plans the Minister launched a £45m Regional Fund which seeks to address regional imbalance. Each Council area in Northern Ireland would be granted an allocation to support their individual action plan.

The Department had indicated that, for Antrim and Newtownabbey, up to £956,000 per year would be allocated, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years. This remained the joint lowest allocation across Northern Ireland. It was expected that 30% (£259,500) of this would be made available in Year 1 i.e. 2025/26.

#### 3. Previous Decision of Council

In November 2024 Members agreed to establish the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership as a Working Group of the Economic Development Committee.

In January 2025 Members agreed the Membership of the LEP including all eight members of the Economic Development Committee; and agreed the recruitment of temporary staff to service the LEP using associated funding.

In May 2025, members formally approved the proposed action plan and delegated the necessary authority to progress the Letter of Offer (LoO) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), enabling the next stages of implementation to proceed in line with agreed governance arrangements with the Department for the Economy.

#### 4. Updates

##### **Terms of Reference**

In March 2025, guidance was issued to Councils in relation to the Membership of the LEP. This new guidance indicated that representation from the Community and Voluntary Sector was now a mandatory condition. Upon seeking clarification, it was indicated that the Local Enterprise Agencies, who operate as social enterprises, could not fulfil this criterion and that additional Community and Voluntary input would be required.

Given this requirement the LEP Board recommended that initial correspondence be issued to Colin Jess, CEO, of Social Enterprise Northern Ireland to either come onto the LEP Board or to nominate a suitable representative. This invitation had been sent and accepted.

##### **Departmental Guidance**

On the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2025 a session was hosted by the Department and Invest NI to provide further guidance on the development of the action plans and the progress of the LEP programme to date. The key headlines from this session included:

- The business case for the Regional Balance Fund has moved through the internal approval process and now will go to economists in the Department of Finance for final approval.
- Project business cases won't need to come to the Department for approval, instead Councils can approve these internally.
- The focus of the Regional Balance Fund and therefore the LEPs will be on productivity and tradeable services. This is to make a clear distinction between the work of LEP and the work of the Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs).
- The objectives of the overall Regional Balance Fund were
  - 5% increase in tradeable businesses
  - 10% increase in Invest NI client companies
  - Growth in median wages.
- Potential Interventions include:
  - Commercial property/land
  - Entrepreneurship support
  - Sectoral entrepreneurship support
  - Scaling support
  - Sectoral scaling support

- R&D investment
- Energy efficiency
- Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills
- Sectoral cluster development
- Activities outside the scope of support included:
  - Primary Agricultural Production
  - Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors
  - Steel
  - Coal Sector
  - Shipbuilding
  - Synthetic fibres
  - Transport sectors and related infrastructure
  - Energy generation, distribution and infrastructure

### **MOU/Letter of Offer**

DfE officials had indicated that, once the business case was approved by the Department of Finance, Councils would be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department for Economy to deliver the programme.

The final MOU was received in August 2025 and, subject to the appropriate due diligence, it would be signed, and the Council would enter into a formal agreement with DfE.

Alongside the final MOU, updated guidance was received which highlighted several key changes to the mechanics of the programme, namely.

- **Funding** - Earlier in the programme development, it was understood that the year 1 allocation would be 30% rather than 100%, to allow for Council/LEP ramp-up of activity. This would be offset by Year 2 and Year 3 allocations of 120% and 150% respectively. This was now not the information from the Department, with no funding secured for Years 2 and 3, therefore any underspend in Year 1 would be lost and not recoverable.
- **Multi-Year Projects** - Given the change in funding, it was unclear whether projects that span the whole programme could be funded.
- **Consultancy** - Early in the programme development, DfE indicated that consultancy support would not be eligible. Further guidance now indicated that some consultancy would be permitted however any contract over £10,000 would require Ministerial approval. Similarly, the Department were yet to confirm whether delivery partners procured would constitute consultancy.

### **Action Plan**

At the LEP Board meeting on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April, a detailed discussion was undertaken in relation to the priorities for delivery in Year 1 of the LEP, given the indicative £300,000 budget that would be made available. The long list of actions presented was informed by the work carried out in the Task and Finish Groups over the last few months. A meeting of the LEP Board was planned for first week in September 2025 to finalise the Year 1 Action Plan.

A copy of the proposed Year 1 Action Plan was circulated.

A few of the projects proposed in the Action Plan could be delivered in Year 1, providing that additional clarity from the Department is forthcoming. These included.

<b>Theme 1 – Investment &amp; Strategic Employment locations</b>	
Go Global – Skills, Business & Connectivity	Outreach, to support the success of AMIC and access to opportunities for local businesses and residents; Programme of engagement for residents to better understand the development and future of Global Point; Programme to engage and enhance business readiness to be involved in the opportunities through AMIC and Global Point through training, apprenticeships and other activities.
Development of “best in class” promotional materials for key investment locations in the Borough	Highlighting strategic selling points to potential investors e.g. AI, 5G, Waste Management, Energy Co-operation etc
<b>Theme 2 – Green Economy</b>	
Cluster Formation - Energy	A scoping exercise to gather intelligence on the resources being consumed at key employment locations across the Borough and to consider ways in which better collaboration and co-operation could lead to efficiency and cost benefits.
Green for Business Programme	Mentoring and grants for new green technology installation to support businesses in meeting climate and supply chain demands
<b>Theme 4 – Sector Development &amp; Productivity</b>	
Business Digitisation Programme	Aimed at improving the productivity of businesses through financial grant aid support for operational projects.

It was hoped that these projects could be progressed at risk to give the Council LEP the best opportunity to utilise Year 1 funding however, the latest guidance indicated that any outlay ahead of the Letter of Offer would be non-recoverable.

#### 5. Financial Position/Implication

As outlined, there was now uncertainty as to whether any underspend “In year” would roll forward, and the Council await further clarification.

The Department had indicated that around £135,000 per year should be allocated to the administration of the programme and this would include the recruitment of additional staff. It was anticipated that all administration costs would be covered from this source and there was no anticipated additional

cost to Council. Recruitment update was that the LEP Officer and Project Support Officer had now been appointed.

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin  
 Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members:**

- a) Note the update on the Local Economic Partnership**
- b) Approve the preparation of Year 1 projects at risk, in anticipation of a LoO and MoU from the Department, and confirmation of the 3-year funding provision from the department.**

*ACTION BY: James Martin, Local Economic Partnership Officer.*

*Councillor Kinnear who had been remote joined the meeting in person at this point.*

### **3.2 ED/ED/264 WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME UPDATE**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Schools Work Experience Programme 2025-2026 including the appointment of the delivery partner and key updates to the programme’s format.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

Members would recall that the Work Experience 2023/2024 programme, led by the Council alongside Workplus Ltd was Northern Ireland's pioneering work experience initiative. Working with employers, teachers, students and parents this innovative, first of its kind programme, delivered meaningful, structured work experience opportunities for students based on their actual career aspirations. This dynamic programme supported students to make informed education and career choices, demonstrated the breadth of opportunities available within our local area and streamlined the placement process for all participants. The 2024/2025 programme followed on from this success, with an even greater focus and participation from the local SEN schools.

The table below shows figures for the pilot programme (2024) and Phase 2 (2025):

	<b>Pilot (2024)</b>	<b>Phase 2 (2025)</b>	<b>Change from 2024-2025</b>
<b>Mainstream schools participating</b>	2	5	↑
<b>SEN schools participating</b>	4	5	↑
<b>Businesses signed up</b>	28	38	↑
<b>Placement opportunities created (mainstream)</b>	91	100+	↑
<b>Placement opportunities created (SEN)</b>	30	70+	↑

Some key learning from the previous two years of the programme are as follows:

- One of the biggest challenges of the programme had been finding an efficient way to align the programme with the work experience schedules of the mainstream schools, who all work differently from one another. This had created issues with engagement and non-attendance of pupils to work placements, which had a knock-on effect on employers.
- Employers have found the programme invaluable to increase awareness of their business profile amongst young people and ignite interest in their business and industry.
- The engagement from SEN schools had demonstrated the need and value in driving work placements for SEN pupils. This has had the dual advantage of providing valuable insights into the working world for the pupils and built confidence in their ability to seek employment in the future but had also encouraged employers to consider their organisation's inclusivity capabilities.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

Approval was granted by Members at the May 2025 Economic Development Committee to proceed with the procurement exercise for phase 3 (2025/26) of the Work Experience Programme 2025/2026.

### 4. Programme Updates for 2025/2026

#### Procurement

In line with the report to the Economic Development Committee in May 2025, quotations were invited from 9 different suppliers and one bid was received. The received bid was compliant with all the requirements and within the £50,000 budget allocated for the programme. On this basis, it was proposed to appoint Workplus Limited for the 2025/2026 delivery period.

#### Programme Changes

To build upon the learnings of the previous programme and the feedback received from the schools involved and those not involved, some enhancements to the programme have been made. These enhancements were aimed at maximising the efficiency, outcomes and value gained from the programme and to make it as straight forward as possible for young people, schools, and businesses to be involved.

The 2025/2026 programme would now be split into two separate but related strands of activity. Part 1 would focus on the work with mainstream schools and Part 2 would focus on the SEN sector.

- Part 1: Empowerment of mainstream schools and employers to connect through showcasing of work placement opportunities - The Provider shall

develop and deliver a programme that enables mainstream schools and employers to connect effectively, with the purpose of increasing awareness and uptake of work placement opportunities. The process for both schools and employers would be designed to be as straightforward, accessible, and streamlined as possible, minimising administrative burden and maximising participation. Activities would include the structured showcasing of placement offers and the facilitation of direct engagement between pupils and employers. Outcomes would include demonstrable increases in the number, diversity, and quality of work placement opportunities accessed by mainstream pupils.

- Part 2: Delivery of SEN-Focused Employment Pathways - The Provider would design and implement a range of tailored, sector-based work experience opportunities for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), ensuring alignment with individual abilities, aspirations, and progression plans. Provision would include short, supported taster sessions, medium-term experiences, and extended, goal-driven placements, each underpinned by appropriate guidance and in-placement support. Outcomes would include measurable improvements in pupils' workplace skills, confidence, and progression into further education, training, or employment.

These two strands had been designed to maximise engagement and to continue to increase participation. Specifically, within each strand the key components were as follows.

Part 1: Mainstream	Part 2: SEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Providing an accessible and streamlined mechanism</b> for mainstream pupils to access valuable work placements, ranging from focussed, supported opportunities to more independent ("hands-off") arrangements.</li> <li>• <b>Conducting proactive school engagement</b> to raise awareness of available employer placement opportunities and encourage schools to actively support pupils in securing them.</li> <li>• <b>Engaging employers</b> early in the academic year to showcase their career pathways and work experience opportunities across a variety of sectors.</li> <li>• <b>Offering a straightforward process for employers</b> to make placement opportunities available to mainstream schools and pupils, inspiring career</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delivering sector-based taster sessions</b> and insight days across a variety of industries for SEN pupils, providing initial exposure to workplace environments.</li> <li>• <b>Facilitating multi-day work placements</b> in different sectors for SEN pupils who are ready to transition into more sustained workplace learning.</li> <li>• <b>Providing guidance and support to employers hosting SEN pupils</b> to build confidence, ensure appropriate adjustments, and maximise the value of each placement.</li> <li>• <b>Coordinating pre-placement engagement between SEN schools and employers</b> to match opportunities with the needs, abilities, and aspirations of pupils, and ensure placements are suitable for both parties.</li> </ul>

<p>aspirations while developing pupils' workplace learning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Offering a straightforward process for schools</b> and pupils to enquire and take up placement opportunities and complete the necessary paperwork and processes in advance.</li> <li>• <b>Implementing a clear marketing and communications plan</b> to promote opportunities, events, and outcomes to all stakeholders.</li> </ul>	
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5. Financial Position/Implication

The total cost of the programme being delivered was £50,000. This would be met through the existing Economic Development budget.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

No screening exercise required.

7. Governance

The project would be managed by the Economic Development Team.

At the request of a Member, the Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure agreed to supply a list of schools involved in the work experience programme.

The Chair and Councillor Cooper expressed their thanks and that of the Committee to Officer Jill Murray for her involvement in running this programme.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper  
 Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

**a) The appointment of Workplus Limited as the delivery partner for the 2025/2026 Schools Work Experience Programme at a cost of £50,000 to be met through the Economic Development budget.**

**b) Note the updates to the programme format and delivery.**

*ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development*

**3.3 ED/REG/090 TOWN CENTRE MARKETING AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING PROGRAMME**

1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the delivery of a seasonal Town Centre Marketing Campaign and a Visual Merchandising Programme in the current 2025/26 financial year.**

## 2. Introduction

This report outlined a coordinated approach to support town centre businesses through seasonal targeted marketing campaigns and a visual merchandising programme. The proposals aim to raise the profile of the Borough's five town centres (Antrim, Ballyclare, Crumlin, Glengormley and Randalstown) as vibrant destinations while equipping local businesses with practical skills to enhance their store presentation and customer experience.

## 3. Background

Officers had been proactively engaging with local businesses over the last number of years to understand how best the Council could support them to grow and maximise their sales potential. This engagement, alongside initiatives such as town centre marketing, shopfront improvement programmes, and collaboration with the Town Centre Chambers of Commerce, had highlighted the need for continued town centre marketing and practical assistance with visual merchandising.

The 'Embrace Your Town' brand was developed in April 2024 to inspire community pride, encourage residents to support and reconnect with their local town centres, and stimulate local economic activity. The brand serves as an overarching identity for all five towns, while allowing for the promotion of each town's unique strengths and character, and has been very well received.

Since its launch, three seasonal campaigns - Spring 2024, Christmas 2024, and Spring 2025 have been delivered with funding support from the Department for Communities (DfC), helping to raise awareness and engagement across the five towns.

Feedback from these campaigns and ongoing business engagement had indicated that while marketing activity drives interest in the town centres, some businesses lack the skills and confidence to present their products in the most appealing way. The marketing agencies reported challenges in capturing quality footage of some businesses due to poor store presentation, which highlighted the importance and need for targeted visual merchandising support.

## 4. Proposed Programme

To build on the success of previous initiatives, Officers were proposing a two-part programme combining targeted town centre marketing with a visual merchandising business support programme.

### 1. Seasonal Marketing Campaigns

Two marketing campaigns would be delivered during key trading periods – Christmas 2025 and Spring 2026 – each running for four weeks. Activity would include radio advertising, out-of-home (OOH) placements, and social media promotion to position the town centres as vibrant and welcoming destinations.

## 2. Visual Merchandising Business Support

An experienced visual merchandising consultant would be appointed to deliver a support programme. The programme aims to equip businesses with the skills and confidence to improve their window displays, in-store layouts and overall presentation. The programme would also promote the use of Embrace Your Town branding in-store and online to create a more cohesive and engaging town centre experience.

The programme would be delivered through two in-person workshops and one online session per seasonal campaign (Christmas 2025 and Spring 2026), resulting in a total of six workshops. This workshop format would maximise participation, allowing more businesses to receive practical, creative, and outcome-focused support in the following areas:

- Visual merchandising and seasonal displays.
- Improve internal store layouts for better customer flow, product visibility, accessibility, and shoplifting prevention—creating a safer and more commercially effective retail environment.
- Digital visibility and display promotion.
- Incorporating 'Embrace Your Town' branding in shopfronts and promotional materials.

In addition to the workshops, up to 25 businesses (five per town for each season) would be able to avail of tailored one-one mentoring following workshop participation. Businesses would be selected in consultation with the local Chambers of Commerce and Business Networks and based on interest, need and engagement levels.

Each participating business would receive visual branding materials for their window displays. These materials would reflect the 'Embrace Your Town' campaign and be suitable for a range of retail settings, enhancing campaign visibility across the five towns.

The project would also include the purchase of branded assets – such as a gazebo, branded tablecloth, pop-up banners, shopper bags and promotional items to support attendance at town centre events and business engagement sessions. These assets would ensure a visible campaign presence and increase awareness by encouraging direct interaction with the brand.

Together, the marketing activity, visual merchandising programme and branded assets would form a cohesive, place-based programme designed to boost civic pride, support local businesses and contribute to the long-term revitalisation of our town centres.

## 5. Previous Decision of Council

Members were reminded that, whilst approval was given at the June 2024 Economic Development Committee for a Business Merchandising Support Programme with a maximum budget of £25,000 in the 24/25 financial year, it was not possible to deliver the programme within the timeframe.

## 6. Financial Position/Implication

The indicative budget for this programme was £65,000 (see table below) and had been included within the 2025/26 Economic Development budget:

<b>Item/Activity</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Visual Merchandising Business Support	£30,000
Seasonal Marketing Campaigns	£25,000
Branded Assets/Promotional Items	£10,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£65,000</b>

## 7. Governance

All elements of the programme would be procured in line with the Council's Procurement procedures.

In response to a Member's query regarding the promotion of social media presence being a mechanism to support increased footfall, the Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure clarified that there were dedicated workshops that retail sector businesses could avail of and agreed to raise the awareness of this support.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members approve £65,000 from the existing 2025/26 Economic Development budget for the seasonal Town Centre Marketing and Visual Merchandising Programme.**

*ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer*

### 3.4 **ED/ED/282 CCTV PROGRAMME GRANT AWARDS**

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the issue of Letters of Offer to nine business applicants under Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme, at a value of circa £17,282.**

## 2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that, in August 2021, the Council approved a 'CCTV Grant Programme', providing town centre businesses with financial assistance to install external, public facing CCTV systems and associated equipment.

The programme focused on supporting local businesses, reducing anti-social behaviour and crime hot-spots, and improving the safety and well-being of the public within our town centres.

Of 245 Expressions of Interest received Borough wide, 30 were converted into full applications totalling more than £49,000 in grant funding to help those businesses install their required CCTV equipment.

<b>Town Centre</b>	<b>Number of EOIs</b>	<b>Completed Projects</b>	<b>Spend</b>
Ballyclare	20	4	£4,222.65
Crumlin	15	8	£16,335.25
Randalstown	29	4	£6,735.00
Antrim	33	6	£9,509.27
Glengormley	27	8	£12,833.26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>£49,635.43</b>

Officers conducted post-project on-site inspections with the PSNI, to check that businesses were utilising their CCTV system correctly, offer assistance and guidance to businesses and confirm the accuracy of the CCTV system's date and time configurations. Feedback from the businesses and the PSNI was very positive.

## 3. Previous Decision of Council

In February 2022, a budget of £327,500 was approved for the CCTV scheme of which £49,635.43 was awarded in Phase 1.

At the 10 September 2024 meeting of the Economic Development Committee approval was granted for the launch of Phase 2 of the Business CCTV Scheme with a budget of £49,000. Phase 2 encompasses an open call approach and prioritises the PSNI's suggested areas at the application scoring stage, via a scoring matrix.

Following completion of Phase 2 of the Business CCTV scheme, Officers intend to undertake a robust post-project evaluation of both Phase 1 and Phase 2. The evaluation would consider the scheme's outputs and outcomes against value for money and effectiveness.

A report on the evaluation would be provided for Members' information and direction in due course.

## 4. Key Issues for Consideration by Members

Ten applications to Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme had been received to date, as below.

Town	Business	Grant requested
Antrim	Parkhall Chippy	£2,500 (maximum grant)
	Karl Group - Space Antrim	£1,483.50
	Training Solutions NI	£1,418
	Muckamore Cricket Club	£2,500 (maximum grant)
	Antrim Enterprise Agency	£2,500 (maximum grant)
	Impact Fitness and Recovery	£1,237.50
	Wrays Funeral Directors	£2,500 (maximum grant)
Glengormley	Tramways Medical Centre	£2,500 (maximum grant)
	Mallusk Enterprise Park	£690
	Nortel Athletic and Social Club	£2,500 (maximum grant)
<b>Total</b>		<b>£19,829</b>

While Officers were continuing with the assessment of these applications and querying a number of finer details within the applications and price checks provided, the initial grant assistance requested was in the region of £19,829. This figure may reduce as assessment of the applications progresses against the eligibility criteria.

Upon completion of the assessments, Officers would issue Letters of Offer where appropriate and provide Members with an update in due course. Officers were considering further, targeted promotion in Crumlin, Randalstown and Ballyclare to encourage applications in those areas.

#### 5. Financial Position/Implication

Upon approval of the maximum grant assistance of £19,829, £29,171 would remain in the CCTV Phase 2 budget. The scheme would remain open until funds have been exhausted.

#### 6. Governance

The project would be delivered by the Economic Development section.

Proposed by Councillor Stewart  
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

**that delegated authority be granted to Officers to issue Letters of Offer to the ten listed businesses to a maximum value of £19,829.**

*ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development*

### 3.5. ED/REG/089 VACANT DERELICT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the launch of a new Vacant Derelict Improvement Scheme for properties in the Borough's five town centres.**

## 2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that, as part of the Council's ongoing commitment to Town Centre Regeneration, several schemes had been implemented over the last number of years.

Approval was now sought for the launch of a Derelict Vacant Improvement scheme to address derelict, vacant and unkempt properties in the five main Borough towns.

The proposed scheme would complement the completed and ongoing initiatives and investments in the town centres, including the Shopfront Improvement Programme.

The new proposed scheme would seek to provide support to over 30 property owners across the Borough whose property was on a main street or arterial route and was in a poor state of repair.

## 3. Key Issues

### Scale and Scope of the Programme

Through the Shopfront Improvement Programme, the Council and the Department for Communities (DfC) had invested almost £500,000 in shopfront improvement grants for businesses over the last two years, supporting over 80 businesses in each town.

Consistent feedback from those receiving funding was that the impact of their improvements was greatly diminished by the negative appearance of vacant property in the town.

As a result and to tackle this issue, the proposed project would offer two types of support to owners of vacant former commercial property in the town centres.

- General maintenance e.g. weeding, painting and cleaning
- Graphics treatment e.g. window vinyl

It was anticipated that each property could benefit from up to £6,000 of support at an 80% intervention rate with the property owner contributing the remaining 20%, which would continue to improve the visual appearance of our towns and reduce issues such as ASB by making properties more secure. Whilst the exact number of properties had yet to be confirmed, based on a survey of vacant commercial property in the town centres, Officers estimate that a maximum of 34 properties would be eligible to apply.

TOWN	NO OF PROPERTIES
Antrim	11
Ballyclare	9
Crumlin	8
Glengormley	1
Randalstown	5

A funding application made to the Department for Communities (DFC) for £204,000 had been successful and a Letter of Offer had been received. The LoO outlined that DfC would be contributing 90% of the total project costs and a 10% match contribution would be provided by the Council.

By fostering greater business confidence and improving the visual quality of our town centres, the Council aims to stimulate new private sector investment, leading to sustainable job creation and expanded commercial opportunities for the benefit of local businesses and residents alike.

The scheme must be delivered within the current financial year (by 31 March 2026).

#### 4. Financial Position/Implication

The DfC funding application had been based upon 34 properties across the five main Borough towns being addressed by the scheme. Based on this cohort of properties, the total anticipated budget for the Derelict Vacant Improvement Scheme was £204,000. This has been calculated based on a maximum of £6,000 per property at an 80% intervention rate.

#### 5. Governance

The scheme would be managed by the Economic Development team.

Any procurement exercises relating to the appointment of any appropriate contractors or suppliers would be conducted in accordance with existing Council procurement policy.

All engagement with private landlords and property owners would be overseen by the Economic Development team who would seek consent for any works to be undertaken.

#### 6. Summary

Approval was sought for a new vacant Derelict improvement scheme to be rolled out in each of the five main Borough towns within the current financial year. The works would be external, cosmetic and/or remedial to help improve the visual appearance and appeal of the town centres.

In response to a Member's query regarding the potential challenge in identifying and engaging owners of derelict properties, the Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure explained the steps that would be taken and clarified that officers would report back on any challenges encountered.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning sought to seek clarification from the Department regarding their requirements for clawback of funding should properties be sold within a specified period.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

that Members approve

**(a) The signing of the LoO from the Department of Communities for £183,600 for the Vacant Derelict Improvement Scheme**

**(b) A match funding contribution of £20,400 from the economic development budget 2025/2026**

**(c) The Vacant Derelict Improvement Scheme as outlined with a maximum grant per property of £6,000 at an 80% intervention rate.**

*ACTION BY: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer*

*Councillor Webb declared an Interest in Item 3.6 at this point.*

### **3.6 ED/REG/083 OUT OF TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME GRANT AWARDS**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval to award one grant under the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme and to propose further amendments to the eligible areas.**

#### **2. Introduction / Background**

The aim of the Shopfront Improvement Programme was to visually enhance commercial areas outside town centres, improving the overall appearance of the street and changing the way residents and visitors view local retail areas. It was envisaged that this would ultimately attract more shoppers and boost local trade.

The programme covered minor works to include painting, signage, window dressing and other visual improvements. Major structural works were not covered under this scheme.

Eligible businesses/property owners could apply for a grant of up to £4,999, at a grant rate of 80%.

#### **3. Previous Decision of Council**

Members were reminded that approval was granted for the Out-of-Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme with a budget of £250,000 and agreed that the programme would be implemented in stages over the Council term 2023-2027, with businesses in Abbots Cross, Hillview, Monkstown and Carnmoney Village invited to submit an application under Phase 1.

In June 2024, Members agreed that Phase 2 of the programme should be launched to cover areas not eligible under Phase 1. A programme budget of £139,743.55 was also approved.

In March 2025 at the Economic Development Committee, Members approved the implementation of Phase 2 on a rolling application basis, subject to availability of funds, and that the eligible areas of the programme be extended to include the Local Centres as detailed in the table below, as defined in the Local Development Plan 2030, Draft Plan Strategy.

1. Ballyduff	8. Mayfield
2. Beverley Road	9. Merville Garden Village
3. Cloughfern	10. Mossley West
4. The Diamond (Rathcoole),	11. Richmond
5. Jennings Park	12. Greystone
6. Kings Park/Kings Crescent	13. Parkhall
7. Mallusk	

#### 4. Grant Award

Members were advised that Phase 2 of the programme opened for online applications on 16 June and call 1 closed on 25 July 2025. To be eligible to apply, applicants needed to be located within one of the approved eligible areas.

Members were advised that 1 application was received with a financial request of £2,640.

#### Application Process and Timeline

This was a rolling grant process open throughout the current 2025/26 financial year.

Funding would be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications would be considered in the order they are submitted, and each would be assessed and brought to the next available Economic Development Committee meeting for approval as outlined in the table below:

<b><u>Call number</u></b>	<b><u>Closes</u></b>	<b><u>Assessment Period</u></b>	<b><u>Economic Development Committee</u></b>	<b><u>Notification of Outcome</u></b>
<u>1</u>	<u>Friday 25 July 2025</u>	<u>August 2025</u>	<u>Tuesday 9 September 2025</u>	<u>W/C 6 October 2025</u>
<u>2</u>	<u>Friday 26 September 2025</u>	<u>October 2025</u>	<u>Tuesday 11 November 2025</u>	<u>W/C 1 Dec 2025</u>
<u>3</u>	<u>Friday 28 November 2025</u>	<u>December 2025</u>	<u>Tuesday 13 January 2026</u>	<u>W/C 2 February 2026</u>

## Assessment

Applications and allocation of funding were based on a Pass/Fail method as outlined below:

- i. Value for Money (demonstrated through provisional procurement).
- ii. Need for the project.
- iii. Impact on Streetscape.

Details of the proposed successful applicant were circulated.

## 5. Programme Updates

Since Phase 2 opened for applications in June 2025, several applications had been received for shops currently outside the eligible areas. These shops were not within the 'Local Centres' as defined in the programme or within the current Town Centre boundary which would make them eligible for the Town Centre Shop Front Improvement Scheme.

Some of the applicants were located on main streets leading into town centres and others are located close together with two or three other shops serving a local population but were not officially categorised as Local Centres under the Local Development Plan.

Given this, Officers were seeking approval to further extend the scheme to offer more businesses the opportunity for support.

There were two separate elements to these proposed changes.

- i. To include the last remaining Local Centres as outlined in the Local Development Plan
- ii. To include businesses located outside the Town Centres and outside of the recognised Local Centres providing that they:
  - a. Are street facing and would have a positive visual impact on the area.
  - b. Are co-located with several other shops or services nearby (i.e. they don't sit alone)

Under the first element the scheme would be opened to the three remaining local centres of Ballynure Village, Parkgate Village and Toome. This would allow a further 30 businesses to access the scheme.

Under the second element, it was estimated that this would allow a further 20-30 businesses into the scheme. A list of the areas included because of these changes has been circulated for Members.

At this stage there were no further financial implications and if approved, revised guidance notes would be issued on the Council website and social media pages.

## 6. Finance

The overall programme budget for Phase 2 was £139,743.55. Should Members approve the 1 eligible application the remaining budget would be £137,103.55.

## 7. Governance

The programme was managed by the Economic Development Team and applications were being processed through the Grant Funding Unit. Successful applicants would be paid their grant retrospectively and would be required to follow Council's grant verification process.

## 8. Summary

This report made one grant recommendation under the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Scheme and made further recommendations relating to changes to the eligible areas under the programme.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Stewart and agreed

**that Members approve:**

- a) The award of £2,640 to the successful applicant under Phase 2 of the scheme**
- b) The extension of the scheme to the 3 remaining Local Centres of Parkgate, Ballynure and Toome**
- c) The extension of the scheme to the 11 areas outlined located outside the Town Centres and outside of the recognised Local Centres.**

*ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer*

### **3.7 ED/ED/277 TOWN CENTRE SHOP FRONT PROGRAMME**

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to:**

- Provide Members with an overview of the DfC Urban Shop Frontage Scheme Phase 3 call.**
- Update Members on the levels of claims paid out to local businesses to date; and,**
- Seek approval for the latest grant awards (under Tranche 6).**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

Members had been regularly updated with details of the town centre shopfront improvement programme. This report covered Tranche 6, with an

additional 6 applications presented for review and approval. Following a Project Board meeting, further grant awards of £20,618.40 were now brought before Committee for approval (see Table 1, below).

<b>TABLE 1: Tranche 6 Awards</b>			
<b>Ref No</b>	<b>DEA</b>	<b>Name of Business</b>	<b>LoO Amount</b>
B056	Ballyclare	The Cedar Tree Florist	£ 2,002.40
B059	Ballyclare	Jacqi's Barber Shop	£ 4,999.00
		<b>(Ballyclare) Total:</b>	<b>£ 7,001.40</b>
R031	Dunsilly	The Wedding Centre	£ 4,999.00
		<b>(Randalstown) Total:</b>	<b>£ 4,999.00</b>
G024	Glengormley Urban	The Khayber Restaurant	£ 4,368.00
		<b>(Glengormley) Total:</b>	<b>£ 4,368.00</b>
C009	Airport	Turkish Barber	£ 2,250.00
C010	Airport	MG's Hardware Store	£ 2,000.00
		<b>(Crumlin) Total:</b>	<b>£ 4,250.00</b>
		<b>Tranche 6 Total:</b>	<b>£ 20,618.40</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 1):</b>			<b>£ 47,096.94</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 2):</b>			<b>£ 99,003.16</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 3):</b>			<b>£ 153,937.62</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 4):</b>			<b>£ 58,544.25</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 5):</b>			<b>£ 14,299.00</b>
<b>Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 6):</b>			<b>£ 20,618.40</b>
<b>Rolling Programme Total, as at 26/8/2025:</b>			<b>£ 393,499.37</b>

Following a process where Letters of Offer had been issued to approved applications to date, officers were now processing grant claims that had been received in respect of works undertaken.

To date, 30 local businesses had received £83,783.10 in successful grant claims, and officers continued to prioritise payout subject to appropriate verification and quotation checks.

The current Phase 3 call opened on Friday 20 June 2025 and closed on Friday 29 August 2025. To date, 22 applications had been submitted for consideration. Officers would be aiming to have these and any remaining outstanding applications assessed ahead of the November 2025 Economic Development Committee meeting.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

In May 2025, Council approved the previous update report which endorsed the fifth tranche of grant awards (to a value of £14,299) for 6 additional

businesses, as well as formally approving the receipt and signing of the Letter of Variance from the Department for Communities, extending the programme into the 2025/26 financial year.

Finally, the approved report also enabled officers to progress with the rollout of Phase 3 of the programme, committing up to an additional £30k from the Economic Development budget, matching any additional contribution from the Department for Communities.

#### 4. Financial Position/Implication

Under this programme, officers had approved payment claims for £112,073.18 to 30 local businesses to date, amounting to £83,783.10 in grant award.

#### 5. Governance

The Economic Development team was managing the programme.

#### 6. Summary

The report offers an update for Members in respect of the project to date, including the level of current grant claims paid out and the status of the final Phase 3 call.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile  
Seconded by Councillor Stewart and agreed

**that Members note the update on the scheme and approve the grant awards to the Tranche 6 recipients totalling £ 20,618.40.**

*ACTION BY: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer*

### 3.8 ED/ED/276 REVITALISE PROGRAMME UPDATE

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Council's Revitalisation Programme and to seek approval to move to the next phase of the project's development.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

In 2024, Officers engaged with the Department of Communities (DfC) in relation to a large-scale capital scheme to target small areas of each town centre which required work to improve their visual appearance and to make them more accessible and safer.

These projects had been shaped through community engagement, aiming to transform underutilised spaces into more vibrant and functional public areas.

The revitalisation scheme would include improvements such as:

- Installation or enhancement of street furniture (e.g. benches, tables, bins).
- Urban planters and planting schemes.
- Illumination scheme.
- Street art installations.
- Boundary enhancement scheme (e.g. hoarding, fencing, soft barriers); and,
- Paving.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

In October 2024 approval was granted for a funding application to be submitted to the Department of Communities for financial support towards the Revitalise Scheme.

### 4. Update and Concept Designs

#### Site Selection and Proposed Works

The Council wishes to utilise the funding to deliver bespoke solutions for each of the identified sites, aimed at improving pedestrian connectivity, enhancing integration between people and place within the built environment, and creating safer and more vibrant town centres for both residents and visitors.

The project had several key objectives as follows:

- **Revitalisation of Underutilised Spaces:** Transform underused public spaces into more functional, engaging, and productive areas for the benefit of the community and local businesses.
- **Support for Local Businesses:** Encourage foot traffic, dwell time and local trade in town centres by creating more attractive and accessible places.
- **Improved Visitor Experience:** Enhance the aesthetic appeal and functionality of the town centres to attract more visitors, improve the visitor experience, and encourage visitors to stay longer.
- **Urban Green Infrastructure:** Integrate green elements into town centres, enriching the urban environment.
- **Improve Safety:** Strengthen the sense of safety along access routes to shopping areas and pedestrian pathways.

The key sites to be addressed are detailed below:

Site
Hall's Entry and Lough Road Car Park, Antrim
Scotch Quarter, Antrim
Harrier Way, Ballyclare
North End, Ballyclare
Farmley Park, Glengormley
Cashels Lane, Randalstown
Crumlin Community Garden, Crumlin

## Concept Designs and Feedback

The concept designs for each site were tabled at the meeting for Members to consider, these concepts had been based on several key sources of information:

- The Borough Masterplan and subsequent consultation
- Feedback from Town Centre Businesses surveyed during 2024

The concepts were on display boards outside the Council Chamber this evening. A detailed feedback workshop for Elected Members would be hosted by the team in Mossley Mill on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September to gather Member feedback from all relevant DEAs.

Once this feedback is received it would be incorporated into the designs and final concept drawings produced. These would be brought back to a future meeting of the Economic Development Committee.

## Next Steps

The next steps in the process included:

- Turning the final concept drawings into architectural drawings, to carry out the necessary technical reports e.g. flora and fauna impact, light pollution impact, ground surveys etc. and to submit any relevant planning permissions that may be required.
- Officers would be working closely with DfC to revise the funding package for the project to take account of the final costs included within the pre-tender estimate.
- A public consultation exercise would be undertaken likely to be later in the autumn with associated consultee events.

## 5. Financial Position/Implication

At present, the estimated budget for the scheme was £1,000,000 of which 90% (£900,000) would be secured from the Department of Communities and 10% (£100,000) would be funded through the Council's Economic Development budget. This would be phased over the next two financial years 2026/2027 and 2027/2028.

The Council had already committed £45,000 to the development phase of the project, which was provided for within the 2025/26 budget/

## 6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

These would be carried out at the relevant time, if required.

## 7. Governance

The project would be managed by the Economic Development team working alongside the Capital Development Team.

## 8. Summary

The Revitalise Programme would see the revitalisation of seven distinct sites across the five town centres in the Borough to help improve the visual appeal of the towns as well as the safety and security of residents.

Moved by Councillor Stewart  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

### **that Members:**

- a) Note the update on the Revitalise Programme including the date of the Member Workshop on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September.**
- b) Approve the project to proceed to the next stage of development including the undertaking of all required technical surveys and preparatory work.**

*ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer*

*Councillor Magill joined the meeting remotely at Item 3.9.*

## **3.9. ED/DI/005 ASK MENTORING PILOT CAPITAL GRANTS AND TENDER APPOINTMENT**

### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to seek approval for a pilot of the ASK Capital Grant Programme, including the proposed delivery model, eligibility criteria, and budget.**

### **2. Introduction/Background**

The ASK Mentoring Programme had successfully provided tailored mentoring support to businesses across the Council over the last year since its relaunch in 2024. Since its inception in 2013 over 700 businesses had been supported by the ASK Programme.

To ensure businesses could implement the recommendations arising from mentoring, the Economic Development team had developed the ASK Capital Grant Programme, which aimed to support innovation, digital enablement, resilience and growth through small-scale capital support.

### 3. Ask Capital Grant Programme Overview

The grant would offer between £500 - £1,500 per business at an 80% intervention rate (ex VAT).

- To be eligible, businesses must be trading for 6+ months, located in the Borough, and have participated in the ASK Mentoring Programme.
- Grant expenditure must be aligned with mentor-identified needs and be delivered within 6 months of the Letter of Offer.
- Expenditure included digital tools, innovation enablers, and IT infrastructure, excluding staff costs, hospitality, or retrospective spend.
- Applications would follow a staged process: Mentor Referral → Application → Officer Assessment.
- The total programme budget for FY25/26 was indicated at £50,000, with a rolling call until March 2026.

The Ask Capital Grant had been designed to complement, rather than duplicate, existing provision under externally led programmes such as Go Succeed. While Go Succeed primarily supports early-stage business growth through standardised interventions, the Ask Capital Grant delivers targeted financial support linked directly to the bespoke outcomes of the Council's own ASK Mentoring Programme. This ensures that funding is deployed in a way that reflected locally identified needs, such as innovation, resilience and digital transformation projects that fall outside the scope of Go Succeed.

Eligibility checks and governance controls ensure businesses were not in receipt of public funding from multiple sources for the same purpose.

### 4. Financial Position/Implication

The programme would operate within a fixed allocation of £50,000 from the existing Economic Development budget. Maximum individual awards would be capped at £2,500. Applications would be assessed for value for money based on quotation and procurement standards.

### 5. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

The programme had been screened and does not require a full EQIA or Rural Proofing assessment at this time. Applicants from all rural and urban areas would be equally eligible and supported.

### 6. Governance

Governance aligns with existing Council capital grant protocols. All successful applicants would be subject to clawback terms, conflict of interest declarations, and post-delivery audit. It was recommended that grant approvals be delegated to officers, following internal assessment and verification. Where necessary, applications may be brought to the ED Committee.

## 7. Summary

This report outlined the rationale and delivery model for the ASK Capital Grant Programme. It supports businesses in implementing the outcomes of ASK mentoring support and promotes wider strategic goals of resilience, digital adoption, and innovation-led growth.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile  
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed

**that the 'pilot' ASK Capital Grant Programme at a cost of £50,000 be met through the Council Economic Development budget 2025/2026.**

*ACTION BY: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer*

*Councillor Kinnear left and returned to the Chamber during Item 3.10.*

### **3.10 ED/ED/302 ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW MODEL BETWEEN COUNCIL AND LOCAL ENTERPRISE AGENCIES - UPDATE**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the work completed by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in relation to the establishment of a new model between the Council and Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) to improve local performance in innovation and entrepreneurship and increase the quality and quantity of workspace across the Borough.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

Members would be aware that approval was previously granted to proceed with the appointment of a suitably qualified and experienced individual/team to advise on the creation of an ambitious support model to improve local performance in innovation and entrepreneurship and to increase the quantum and quality of workspace available across the Borough to include business incubation facilities.

In December 2024 a methodology was agreed with SIB to deliver the assignment. This brief included the following key elements:

1. Initial stakeholder engagement and desk-based research to establish key objectives and outcomes required from setting up a new partnership arrangement between the Council and enterprise agency. Stakeholder meetings to be held with the Council, the 3 local Enterprise Agencies as well as other external bodies as agreed with the Council.
2. Undertake a review of the current legal framework that partners are operating in, including Council and Local Enterprise Agency current powers and structures.

3. Set out the required regulatory compliance including public procurement and any subsidy control implications as well as setting out the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
4. Research and present an option analysis detailing the spectrum of potential partnership models which the council and LEAs could participate in to achieve the desired outcomes, from low commitment collaboration (e.g. common branding) to more complex legal structures which require high levels of commitment (e.g. formal service level agreements, establishing a new entity such as a Special Purpose Vehicle).

This piece of work would specifically consider whether the Council could legally establish a new body such as a SPV, setting out what the implications might be for both the Council and the local enterprise agency working as partners.

5. Each of the options identified would highlight, where relevant, increasing levels of legal and financial governance requirements, and would outline the potential delivery models, any examples of best practice which already exist, key risks and benefits, due diligence required, the treatment of assets etc. This appraisal may include an option of a staged approach, moving from a collaborative working arrangement to a more formal arrangement over time.
6. Options may include a model which comprises the Council and one enterprise agency, as well as options to include the Council and up to the three enterprise agencies.
7. Where appropriate scope out the initial core elements of what should be included in a financial model for each of the options (e.g. cost structures, funding agreements and potential for revenue generation, explore options for financial sustainability).
8. A decision matrix would then be developed which evaluates each option based upon key factors which may for example include ease of implementation, cost, risk, achievement of outcomes, legal requirements etc. Please note, these decision factors would be agreed in advance with the Council and LEAs.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

Approval was previously granted in November 2024 to proceed with the appoint of a suitably qualified and experienced individual/team to undertake this assignment.

### 4. Update on Progress

The purpose of the report was to determine the appetite and desire for further, enhanced collaboration between the Council and the three LEAs that operate in the Borough, namely Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited, Mallusk Enterprise Park Limited and LEDCOM.

All four organisations share a responsibility and common objective to foster and prioritise the development of the local economy. This collaborative duty involves creating the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth, supporting entrepreneurship, and enhancing employment opportunities within the community.

Ideally, the service and customer journey offered to entrepreneurs and businesses across the Borough would be the same regardless of where they are based and which of the four organisations provided the initial support. However, over the last number of years it had become apparent that the provision of service across the Borough was not joined up and not equitable. For instance, some of the issues identified were as follows:

- **Geographic Coverage** - Enterprise support provision was uneven across the area, with stronger activity concentrated in certain towns and much more limited visibility and engagement in others. This creates gaps in access to support for businesses depending on their location.
- **Competition and Data Sharing** - Enterprise agencies operate independently and compete for contracts and clients. This competitive environment limits collaboration reduces opportunities for cross-referral and restricts the sharing of valuable client data with each other or with Council.
- **Quality of Mentoring** - A range of experienced business mentors are available, but the quality of support is inconsistent and not monitored through a shared framework. Specialist expertise within agencies was not fully utilised because referrals between providers were limited.

## 5. Findings of the Report

The full report was circulated; however, the overarching finding was that, at present, only Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited was open to exploring a further enhancement of the operational relationship with the Council which would result in either the creation of a new legal entity or a formal partnership agreement. A copy of the letter received from Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited was circulated for Members information.

Both LEDCOM and Mallusk Enterprise Park had indicated that they could not support this work. There were several reasons outlined for this including:

- a) Loss of own brand and company structures.
- b) Increased confusion within the business community with additional or new partnerships created.
- c) Existing tensions between the LEAs and their culture and approaches.
- d) Potential loss of the experience and dynamism of the independent boards that operate the LEAs.
- e) Loss of agility and quick decision making.

MEP and LEDCOM did indicate support for the concept of working together with the Council as part of an informal partnership arrangement. With such informal partnership arrangements (e.g. co-ordination of activities, voluntarily agreeing to joint marketing arrangements) there was no formal legal structure or legally binding commitment.

Officers were cognisant that since the beginning of this work Antrim Enterprise Agency had always shown a willingness to enter into a formal partnership agreement including a move away from their own branding and organisational structures. Whilst the other two agencies did not wish to pursue this, one option open to Members would be to continue to develop this relationship with Antrim Enterprise Agency alone however this may undermine the overarching objective of geographic coverage.

## 6. Next Steps

Having considered the proposals provided and information contained in the report and discussed with the partners across the project it was proposed that a 12-month pilot partnership initiative be undertaken to support enhanced collaboration between the three LEAs and the Council. Whilst the mechanics of the programme would be reviewed, fundamentally it would involve the following:

- Quarterly meetings to share information and client data including insights on business support activities.
- Identify common challenges and opportunities facing the local economy and how we can collectively respond to them with our shared resources.
- Improve co-ordination of outreach and engagement with local businesses particularly in the areas currently deemed to be under serviced.
- Formalise a business referral pathway across the borough to ensure that businesses are directed to the most appropriate support.
- Developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to outline roles, responsibilities and shared objectives.
- Identify strengths and gaps in current enterprise support ecosystem and undertake customer journey mapping.
- Evaluate alignment with local economic strategy and priorities - this can feed into wider strategic plans such as the Council's new Economic Development Strategy, the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) action plan and the LEAs Business Plans.

## 7. Governance

The project was being managed by the Economic Development team.

## 8. Summary

This report provides an update on the work completed by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in relation to the establishment of a new model between the Council and local enterprise agencies to improve local performance in innovation and entrepreneurship and increase the quality and quantity of workspace across the Borough.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members approve the development of a 12-month pilot project as outlined to further enhance the relationships between the three enterprise agencies and the Council. At the end of the pilot consideration can then be given to a more formal partnership arrangement if this is the agreed direction.**

*ACTION BY: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure and Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development*

### **3.11 ED/ED/198 WORKSPACE DEVELOPMENT FUND - LEDCOM**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to outline a request from LEDCOM (Local Economic Development Company) for additional financial support from the Council's Workspace Development Fund towards the refurbishment of Foundry House in Ballyclare.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

Members would be aware that on 29 March 2021 the Council established a Workspace Development Fund. The fund was set up to support the development and delivery of a complementary network of modern, accessible, fit for purpose accommodation to meet the needs of businesses, aligned with the Council and Levelling Up Funded workspace projects in Glengormley and Antrim.

LEDCOM was one of three Local Enterprise Agencies in the Borough. They provide services from their Ballyclare location. LEDCOM applied to the fund in 2021 to support a workspace development project in Ballyclare.

#### **3. Previous Decision of Council**

In November 2021, the Council agreed to provide LEDCOM with up to £200,200 to deliver a 7,800sq/ft. refurbishment and create 200 business start-ups with c.300 jobs to be created at Foundry House. As part of this agreement, LEDCOM was required to commit £65,000 of match funding to purchase the building.

In November 2024 an extension to the project Letter of Offer up to 30 September 2025 was approved by the Council. Subsequently, following an additional extension request from LEDCOM, an additional extension was approved by Members on 13 May 2025 to the original letter of offer which extended the project until 30 September 2026.

#### **4. Key Issues**

##### Purchase of the Building

On 11 October 2022, LEDCOM received their letter of offer and completed the acquisition of Foundry House. The purchase of Foundry House constituted their £65,000 match funding contribution to the original Letter of Offer.

### Increasing Capital Costs

Over the last number of months LEDCOM had completed a tender evaluation process for contractors to complete the capital build works. The estimated cost for the project as per in the tender exercise was now understood to be approximately £400,000.

Given the significant increase in costs, LEDCOM had committed a further £50,000 to the project taking the total funding secured at this point to £250,200 (i.e. £200,200 from ANBC and £50,000 from LEDCOM). This still leaves a £150,000 shortfall of the estimated £400,000 that would be required to complete the works to the building.

LEDCOM had actively pursued other financial support through engagement with various government departments however, to date no further funding has been secured.

Members can view the circulated financial update / business case update received from LEDCOM.

Given the £150,000 shortfall, a further request had been made to the Council in relation to the Workspace Development Fund of which £200,200 was already committed. The request asks the Council to consider providing an additional £100,000, which would be matched by £50,000 from LEDCOM

Several options had been considered to meet the shortfall as outlined below. Members views were now sought on providing additional financial assistance to LEDCOM for the project.

A summary of the revised proposal was included below:

Source	Original Contribution	Option 1 Council provide additional £100,000	Option 2 Council provide additional £75,000
ANBC	£200,200 (88%)	£300,200 (75%)	£275,200 (69%)
LEDCOM	£50,000 (12%) *	£100,000 (25%)	£125,000 (31%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>£250,200</b>	<b>£400,200</b>	<b>£400,200</b>

*\*This does not take into account the £65,000 committed to purchase the building.*

### 5. Summary

Additional funding to the Foundry House building works was sought due to an increase in construction and labour costs. A shortfall of £150,000 had been identified and a request to help with meeting this amount has been

submitted. Officers had explored options to fulfil this request as outlined. Committee was asked to consider the updated project information received from LEDCOM following their tender exercise.

Moved by Councillor Cooper  
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed

**that the Council provides £100,000 additional funding to meet the shortfall and that the current clawback arrangements terms be reviewed and included in the revised letter of offer.**

*ACTION BY: Chris Doyle, Investment Officer*

*Alderman Cosgrove left and returned to the Chamber during Item 3.12.*

### **3.12 ED/ED/249 SISTER CITY STAFF EXCHANGE PROGRAMME**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to seek Members approval for the commencement of the Sister City Staff Exchange Pilot Programme and the associated budget of £25,000 to be met through the 2025/2026 Economic Development budget.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

A long-standing relationship has developed with the Council's Sister City in Gilbert, Arizona, following the signing of a Twinning Agreement on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1998. This was further strengthened by the signing of a further proclamation on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022.

The relationship had been built on strategic economic and social connections including:

- The reorganisation of planning and economic development services.
- The reorganisation of leisure services
- Potential for strategic relationship between the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre and Arizona State University
- Skills, Apprenticeships and Student Exchange.
- Organisational development including Officer and Member Exchanges
- Waste Management and recycling rates
- Strategic links between businesses
- Strategic links between charities e.g. NI Children's Hospice and Phoenix Children's Hospice

The Council had benefited from the relationship with Gilbert including the following:

- A new, strategic approach for ANBC leisure operations including the introduction of the family oriented 'MORE' membership
- A more joined up approach to Planning and Economic Development

- An open-door policy for investors which seeks to maximise opportunity for the Borough in accordance with planning policy
- Renewed focus on advanced manufacturing, workspace and skills development
- Regeneration of town centres informed by Gilbert plans for the downtown Heritage district
- Significant USA investment in local businesses as a direct result of the relationship with Gilbert

In July 2024, the Council's Elected Members noted the success of the relationship and the actions resulting from the most recent visit in May 2024.

Specifically, it was agreed that a new staff exchange programme should be initiated involving a small number of officers from key departments in each Council taking part. These officers should work in key services which the Council wishes to prioritise to enhance performance. This would also coincide with a short civic visit of the Mayor accompanied by an appropriate officer.

### 3. Proposed Exchange Programme

This report sets out the details of the proposed scheme including key staff, rationale for the staff exchange and timings.

It was proposed that four members of ANBC Staff would participate in the pilot of the staff exchange programme

- Head of ICT
- Head of Organisational Development
- Local Development Plan & Enforcement Manager
- Organisation Development & Employee Engagement Manager

Each member of staff travelling to Gilbert would be embedded within the counterpart team in Gilbert Town Council for an immersive and focused period of learning and observation.

Specific areas of interest included:

Department	Areas of Interest
ICT	Artificial Intelligence (AI) within Local Government focusing on how it can address community needs, enhance operational efficiency, and deliver innovative solutions, all while ensuring effective governance and resilience, particularly in areas like cybersecurity.
OD	Employee engagement, well-being and customer experience will be the key focus including gaining a better understanding of Learning and Development, Health and Wellbeing, Reward and Recognition, Leadership & Employee Development.
Planning	Key learning areas will include the zonal planning approach taken in Gilbert and how that promotes development across industrial and residential uses. As

	the Council's own Local Development Plan enters the call for sites period this could be a key opportunity to learn from a different, but very successful system.
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The proposal was that the staff travel to Gilbert in Q1 2026 spending approximately ten working days embedded in the Gilbert Team. It was anticipated that the Gilbert Team would then undertake their visit during the new financial year.

At the same time as the exchange visit, it was planned that a short Civic visit would be scheduled. It was anticipated that the Mayor and an accompanying Officer would travel to Gilbert for 2-3 days to further strengthen the partnership between our two regions.

#### 4. Financial Position/Implication

A budget of £25,000 was required to support the arrangements for the staff exchange and the Mayoral visit. These costs would include flights, accommodation and subsistence.

Proposed by Councillor Webb  
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

**that Members approve the Pilot Sister City Staff Exchange Programme for four officers and a Civic visit to include the Mayor, Chair of ED Committee (or their nominees), accompanied by a relevant officer in Q1 2026 at a cost of approximately £30,000. It was further agreed that any additional Members who wish to participate may do so through self-funding.**

*ACTION BY: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure*

*Councillor Cooper left the Chamber at Item 3.13.*

*Councillor Webb left and returned to the Chamber during Item 3.13.*

### 3.13 **ED/REG/079 SMALL SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME UPDATE**

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Small Settlements Programme and to seek approval for a change of scope in relation to the proposed project in Templepatrick.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

In February 2022, the Council was successful in securing £968,000 from the Department of Communities, Department for Infrastructure and the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs under the COVID-19 Small Settlements Recovery Fund, split over five areas as detailed below.

- Shop Front Scheme - £120,000
- Illumination Scheme - £180,000 (Templepatrick only)

- Environmental Improvement Scheme - £483,000
- Artwork, Signage, Interpretation - £126,000
- Programme Delivery - £51,000

The scheme objectives were as outlined below:

- Encourage people to live, work, visit and invest in the areas.
- Encourage people to make more environmentally friendly choices.
- Encourage greater health and wellbeing in our communities.
- Support local businesses through increased footfall and sales.

To date the Council had successfully delivered most of the programme.

- **Shopfront Revitalisation Scheme:** The scheme provided grant assistance to eligible property owners and tenants to enhance the appearance of their shopfront. A total of 17 businesses benefited from the support, and the scheme had now been successfully completed.
- **Illumination Scheme:** The scheme successfully illuminated several key landmark buildings in Templepatrick, enhancing civic pride and creating a greater sense of welcome.
- **Environmental Improvement Scheme:** The scheme had delivered a comprehensive range of enhancements aimed at creating more attractive, accessible, and welcoming public spaces. Works included the development of new walking and cycling trails, upgraded seating areas, enhanced planting, as well as improvements to paving and resurfacing. These upgrades were implemented across the following key sites: Doagh Square, Templepatrick Roundabout, Anderson Park, and Burnside Riverside Walk.
- **Artwork, Signage, Interpretation:** This scheme included the installation of public art across Templepatrick, Doagh, and Burnside.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

- **July 2022** - approval to proceed with the Covid Recovery Small Settlement Regeneration Programme (CRSSRP).
- **May 2023** - approval to appoint Hatty & Young Ltd for the public art commission in Templepatrick, Doagh, and Burnside at a total cost of £126,000.
- **February 2024** - approval to appoint ID Verde UK Ltd as contractor for the Environmental Improvement Scheme (EIS) and to increase the scheme's budget to £545,624.
- **March 2025** – approval to remove the Templepatrick element of the artwork scheme due to issues of cost and deliverability.

#### 4. Proposed Changes to the Programme

One of the key elements of the artwork programme was the design, construction and installation of an aircraft sculpture on the Paradise Walk roundabout in Templepatrick.

During the planning/development process, it became clear that sufficient funding was not available to complete the scale of project required.

In March 2025 a decision was made by the Council not to proceed with the aircraft artwork and to terminate the artwork provider contract following the completion of work in Doagh and Burnside.

#### Proposed Works in Templepatrick

As part of the Council decision a commitment was made with the Elected Members that new, revised proposals would be put forward to utilise the remaining budget in Templepatrick. Council Officers from Economic Development have been engaged with colleagues from Parks and Open Spaces to understand the scope of the projects that could be undertaken.

The following has been proposed:

1. **Paradise Walk Roundabout Environmental Improvement Scheme** – as part of the original proposed works there was a small-scale environmental improvement scheme for the Paradise Walk roundabout that was intended to complement the aircraft sculpture. With the aircraft not proceeding it is proposed to complete a more enhanced environmental improvement scheme with core elements around additional planting, boundary treatment and works to improve access for maintenance.
2. **Environmental Improvement Scheme at Wallace Park** – Wallace Park is the main public amenity space in Templepatrick and serves the entire community being closely located to the primary school and churches etc. Our proposed works would include:
  - a. Resurfacing and lining of the existing car park to improve overall condition and usability, this would include enhancing DDA access compliance by installing drop kerbs where required.
  - b. Installation of additional fencing and gates around the perimeter of the pathways to improve safety and site security
  - c. Installation of additional and upgraded furniture including benches, picnic tables and bins etc.

#### 5. Financial Position/Implication

The total value of the COVID Recovery Small Settlements Programme was £960,000 spread across the core elements of the project. This included a £96,000 contribution from the Council.

To date, with fluctuations in projects costs within the environmental improvement scheme, and the termination of the airplane sculpture the anticipated underspend across the programme was £103,057.26.

The proposal was to use this remaining balance to support the revised works in Templepatrick. There would be no further financial contribution required.

## 6. Governance

To date, this Programme had been managed by the Council's Economic Development team, working closely with the Capital Development Team as project lead for the Environmental Improvement Scheme.

The team had significant experience in delivering projects of this nature for Council.

## 7. Summary

This report seeks approval to utilise the £103,000 underspend across the Small Settlements Programme to complete alternative works in Templepatrick at the Paradise Walk Roundabout and Wallace Park as outlined.

Moved by Councillor Ní Chonghaile  
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed

**that Members approve the revised Small Settlements Scheme for Templepatrick including the works to the Paradise Walk Roundabout and the Environmental Improvement Scheme at Wallace Park utilising the £103,000 underspend.**

*ACTION BY: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure*

*Councillor Cooper returned to the Chamber at Item 4.1.*

## 4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

### 4.1 ED/REG/065 GLENGORMLEY PUBLIC REALM SECTION 75 EQUALITY SCREENING

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Section 75 Equality Screening outcome for the Glengormley Public Realm Scheme.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded of the proposed public realm scheme for Glengormley. The scheme involves major enhancements to the streetscape along the centre of the Town, primarily along the Antrim and Ballyclare Roads as per the site location plan (circulated).

The Project included the installation of new granite paving and new street lighting and feature lighting, undergrounding of overhead utility lines, new street furniture and soft landscaping. The carriageway would also be resurfaced following completion of the pavement works.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

The major planning application for the project was approved in September 2023. The project forms part of the package of physical and economic regeneration submitted to DLUHC as part of the successful application for Levelling Up Funding.

### 4. Key issues

As part of the Council's responsibilities to identify and address potential implications and promote equality of opportunity and good relations, as required by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Glengormley Public Realm Scheme had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an EQIA. A copy of the Section 75 Equality Screening Form was enclosed.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members note the outcome of the Section 75 Equality Screening for the Glengormley Public Realm Scheme.**

*NO ACTION*

## 4.2 **ED/DI/001 DIGITAL FACTORY ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME UPDATE**

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to provide a final account of the Digital Factory Accelerator Initiative in partnership with Leading Manufacturing Accelerating Change (LMAC) and Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) - supporting local manufacturing businesses with digital transformation support.**

### 2. Background

The Digital Factory Accelerator for Manufacturers was originally launched by the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC) in partnership with the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) and Invest NI. It offered comprehensive support to manufacturers looking to enhance their digital manufacturing readiness using the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI). During this programme 31 businesses participated, however only 1 of these was in Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council area. Therefore, utilising the format of this programme approval was granted to extend this opportunity to manufacturing businesses within the borough.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

In June 2024, Members approved the pilot programme at a cost of £30,000.

#### 4. Key Issues

Out of the programmes estimated 5 businesses (due to allocated budget), 4 successfully completed work on the programme. They were:

<b>Business</b>	<b>Date completed</b>	<b>Business Size</b>	<b>Business Type</b>
Golden Popcorn	February	SME	Food manufacture
W&G Baird	April	SME	Printing
RLC	April	Medium	Aerospace
MIVAN	May	Medium	Joinery

Powered by the SIRI Assessment (Smart Industry Readiness Index), the businesses received a comprehensive breakdown of their digital maturity levels through benchmarking, reports and presentations. This was achieved by undergoing 2 full days of interviews with key members of staff, including a factory tour. Building on their expertise and knowledge in manufacturing, this work then provided the basis for the delivery partners recommendations. The assessment itself was broken down into 12 dimensions and these categories were further broken down between the headings Process, Technology and Organisation.

Some businesses scored weaker on technology, particularly connectivity. Others were described as having a low level of digital maturity due to relying on manual paper-based processes. One business, W&G Baird, was listed as having a high level of digital maturity at world leading level – with more focus required on organisation. These benchmarks included a full debrief from LMAC detailing alternative support mechanisms and highly targeted guidance, such as types of technology to implement and other business recommendations. This was presented using high level roadmaps and included projections. For example, if MIVAN implemented the suggested alterations, there would be an estimated 12-17% reduction in direct labour costs, with an additional 3-5% reduction in raw material cost. The evaluation report was circulated for Members attention.

Feedback on the programme had been overwhelmingly positive. Out of the 4 businesses, 3 have conducted video case studies detailing the support the programme offered.

Sean McClinton, Managing Director of Golden Popcorn:

*"We went through the SIRI assessment and straight away we looked at a programme we had been considering - an MRP System - and we just went for it and decided there was so much value in it after going through this programme. We were able to look through the digital transformation side of things in a totally different light. The council were fantastic, we've had support from them from day one and now we've dealt with them on numerous projects and they've been really really good."*

Chris Wilson, heading of Manufacturing at MIVAN

*“We found the SIRI assessment was a really good tool. We found LMAC very knowledgeable and they were really able to get under the skin of the business. They were able to ask questions that we maybe wouldn’t have asked ourselves and throughout that whole process we looked at our data in a different way. I think it’s really good to work with the council because they see opportunities that we might not know of.”*

Trevor Brennan, Finance Director and Partner of W&G Baird Ltd

*“It couldn’t have went any better. We learned that we need to discover what we need out of our information and how we can use that data. Working with the council was great, it was very smooth. Clear and timely communication. The council made it very easy to discuss aspects of the programme.”*

Future Activity

Utilising the remaining budget, the team would be hosting a workshop in collaboration with LMAC titled “Transform Together”. The goal of this event was to help local manufacturing businesses discover what manufacturing digitalisation support could be provided. This would inform the next generation of digital support for local manufacturing businesses, grounded in real-world challenges and opportunities. Details about the event were circulated for Members attention.

The event was scheduled to take place on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2025 in Mossley Mill and promotion for this event was ongoing.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The funding approval for the pilot initiative was £30,000 and was accounted for within the Economic Development 2024/25 budget. £24,000 had been paid to the delivery partner, LMAC, on completion of key programme milestones. £1000 was assigned at the start of the programme for promotional activities and the remainder of this budget would be utilised for the Transform Together manufacturing workshop. Below is a record of current expenditure on the programme.

<b>Cost Area</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Programme costs for the 4 businesses on completion	£20,000
Project management cost to delivery partner (paid upon completion of evaluation report)	£2,000
Pre-Briefing session to delivery partner for delivering workshop	£2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£24,000</b>

6. Governance

The initiative was being managed by the Economic Development team.

## 7. Summary

The Digital Factory Accelerator initiative aimed to support local manufacturing businesses in their digital transformation. By providing comprehensive assessments and tailored roadmaps, the programme enhances the competitiveness and growth of the manufacturing sector in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough. The programme had strong interest from micro, SME and larger businesses and continues to provide a key service to local businesses as they consider the grant and development of their business.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members note the update on the Digital Factory Accelerator programme.**

*NO ACTION*

### **4.3 ED/DI/004 DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY (DSIT) REGULATORS PIONEER FUND (RPF4)**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to inform Members that the Council is listed as NI's coordinating partner for a cross-jurisdictional submission to the UK Government's DSIT Regulators' Pioneer Fund (Round 4), in partnership with Caerphilly County Borough Council (lead applicant on behalf of all Welsh councils), Glasgow City Council (on behalf of all Scottish councils), and to provide Members with an update on this exploratory bid.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

The Regulators' Pioneer Fund (RPF4), administered by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT), provides funding to regulators and local authorities to pilot and implement innovative regulatory approaches to projects that focus on creating a regulatory environment that fosters business innovation and investment.

The Council had been engaging with a range of technology providers specialising in mobile signal data collection, on a proposal to conduct real-world mobile coverage mapping across Northern Ireland. This live mobile network coverage data would help inform future planning, investment, and regulatory decisions. Simultaneously, Caerphilly County Borough Council had been developing a similar proposal for Welsh Councils.

Caerphilly CBC had now confirmed its intention to act as lead applicant for a joint Wales–Northern Ireland and Scottish submission, with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council coordinating on behalf of Northern Ireland. This bid aligns with regional priorities under BRCD, MAP NI, and economic development.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

N/A – this is a new opportunity seeking external funding.

### 4. Key Opportunities

The Council would act as the coordinating partner for all eleven Northern Ireland councils, engaging through the established Digital Champions Subgroup network.

The bid involves no financial contribution from the Council or partner councils. Participation provided access to independently validated mobile signal data, supporting economic development, digital infrastructure planning, and public service improvement.

The project aligns with existing Council strategies and regional digital ambitions.

The application deadline was the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025; and following initial proactive engagement with NI councils a Tri-Nation bid was submitted.

### 5. Financial Position/Implication

There are no direct financial implications. The Council's participation was limited to coordination and engagement activities, within existing resources.

### 6. Governance

The proposal would be coordinated in line with existing Digital Champion Subgroup governance structures, ensuring transparency and cross-council representation. Updates would be provided to Members as the project progresses and when a funding outcome was known.

### 7. Summary

This funding opportunity represents a strategic chance for the Council to enhance its leadership role in digital innovation while delivering tangible benefits for the Borough and Northern Ireland as a whole. Participation would provide valuable data, strengthen regional collaboration, and ensure local interests were represented in a high-profile UK Government initiative.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members note the opportunity presented by the RPF4 and the Council's coordinating role for Northern Ireland.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.4 ED/ED/284 FUNDING SIMPLIFICATION – LETTER FROM MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES & LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on a letter received regarding Funding Simplification and the new Local Regeneration Fund.**

##### **2. Summary**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2025, a letter was received from Alex Norris MP – Parliamentary Under Secretary for Building Safety, Fire and Local Growth regarding Funding Simplification and the new Local Regeneration Fund.

This letter informs that the department were consolidating the MHCLG Levelling Up Fund, Town Deals and Simplification Pathfinders Pilot Fund together into a single funding pot. This reform would increase flexibility to adapt schemes to local needs.

In consolidating this funding, the department had assured that they would continue to honour the funding awarded via the constituent funds. This new fund would be called the Local Regeneration Fund.

A copy of the letter was circulated.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that this report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

#### **4.5 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 4 APRIL 2025 TO JULY 2025**

##### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Economic Development Committee for Period 4 April 2025 to July 2025.**

##### **2. Introduction/Background**

As agreed, quarterly budget reports would be presented to the relevant Committee. All financial reports would be available to all Members.

##### **3. Summary**

As at period 4:

The Economic Development and Planning Directorate had a favourable variance of £51k, or 9.6%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

A report on the financial performance, employee costs, highest areas of expenditure and income, and the financial performance by Head of Service was circulated for Members' information.

The overall financial position of the Council would be presented to the Policy and Governance Committee.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove

Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that the report be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

## **5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

There was no any other relevant business to be taken.

### **PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed

**that the following Committee business be taken In Confidence and the livestream and audio recording would cease.**

*Councillor Magill left the meeting at this point.*

## **6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE**

### **6.1 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/285 OPERATOR ARRANGEMENTS – SPACE GLENGORMLEY AND ANTRIM**

#### **1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to update Members on the future operation of the SPACE facilities in Antrim and Glengormley.**

#### **2. Introduction/Background**

Members would be aware of the Council's success in securing £5.1m from the UK Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to support two major regeneration schemes in Antrim and Glengormley. This had led to the development of 'Space Antrim', a flexible workspace facility which had been operational since mid-2024 and the ongoing development of the purpose built 3 storey flexible workspace 'Space Glengormley', situated on the old PSNI station site on Antrim/Glenwell Road.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

At Council in November 2023, Members approved the total construction works budget for the Glengormley workspace of £8,244,732 with a Council contribution of £4,777,889 and £3,466,843 from Levelling Up Fund.

At Council in July 2023, Members approved the pilot LUF operational agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency for a period of 3 years.

### 4. Key Issues

#### SPACE Antrim Operation

Space Antrim officially opened in November 2024, utilising £1.2m of the Levelling Up Fund budget.

Operated by Antrim Enterprise Agency on behalf of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in an innovative Pilot Service Level Agreement, Space Antrim features modern facilities including 14 offices, 2 collaboration zone with hot desks and dedicated desks, 1 event hosting space and three state-of-the-art meeting rooms.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses could avail of a range of flexible packages across the working and meeting spaces, private pods and hot desks and utilise all of the amenity space including the two fully equipped kitchenettes.

The website and booking system were live for online booking and could be found here: <https://space-ni.co.uk/>

13 businesses now operate solely from Space through offices of dedicated desks. This represents 70% occupancy of all the available office space in Antrim with only three offices remaining unlet.

Resident Business Name	Services Provided
[REDACTED]	Business consultancy, support and training
[REDACTED]	Digital forensics and technical training
[REDACTED]	Buy and sell connection platform
[REDACTED]	Bespoke competition platforms
[REDACTED]	Architects
[REDACTED]	Video production
[REDACTED]	Industrial Internet of Things technology business
[REDACTED]	Aesthetic and skincare solutions
[REDACTED]	Colour management software and proofing
[REDACTED]	Employment placement agency
[REDACTED]	Company management
[REDACTED]	Sales, marketing and distribution

[REDACTED]	Education consultants
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Space Antrim was also home to a growing number of regular hot desk users who rent a desk space frequently. This flexibility of space meant that many people could be accommodated including those working from home or entrepreneurs who don't require a large office presence.

Hot Desk User Name	Services Provided
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	Business Coaching
[REDACTED]	Copywriting
[REDACTED]	Private training provider
[REDACTED]	English Irish translation services
[REDACTED]	BBQ and grill manufacture
[REDACTED]	Web design and development
[REDACTED]	Mail order retail
[REDACTED]	Safeguarding children and young people
[REDACTED]	Golf Club Management
[REDACTED]	Conflict management
[REDACTED]	Dementia healthcare design

Space Antrim had also hosted several external events with around 450 attendees and logged 238 enquiries.

The booking and payment system was live and accessible from Space and the Council's websites and social media channels. The current focus, through a variety of marketing campaigns, social media posts and incentives, was on increasing usage of the event hosting space, meeting rooms and pods. Officers were also looking into the potential return on radio and billboard advertising.

Operationally, Antrim Enterprise Agency had achieved the year one performance related KPIs outlined in the Service Level Agreement. Quarterly customer satisfaction surveys report a consistently positive return.

### Operation of the SPACE Hubs

The construction of 'Space Glengormley' was underway, with the contractor Connolly & Fee on-site since April 2024. [REDACTED]

A pilot arrangement was approved at Council in July 2023 for Antrim Enterprise Agency to undertake the operation of Space Antrim which had been operational since late -2024. This agreement commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 for a period of 3 years, until 31<sup>st</sup> October 2026, with the potential for extension for an additional 2 years.

In anticipation of the end of the pilot arrangement for Space Antrim, and in preparation for the opening of Space Glengormley, it was proposed that a

procurement exercise be undertaken to appoint suitably qualified operator(s) for both Space Antrim and Space Glengormley, to commence from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2026.

This process would be informed by premarket engagement, however it was anticipated that procurement would be on a lots basis, to allow potential operators to tender for one or both workspaces. This would allow for operator contracts to remain aligned going forward. Should an appropriate operator be identified, it would be envisaged that they would be appointed on a three-year basis, with an option for Council to extend this appointment subject to performance. A further update would be provided to Members in this regard in due course.

The above procurement strategy seeks to provide a coherent solution from November 2026 onwards, however, there remains an interim period between completion of the Glengormley project and November 2026. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The work to be undertaken would include:

- Promotional marketing and communication activity.
- Following up expressions of interest for space in Glengormley
- Developing licensee guidance and operating rules for space Glengormley
- Having the asset registered on the Council's Building Management System
- Supporting Estate Services in the development of cleaning and maintenance contracts.
- Supporting finance department with insurance, rates calculations and the payment systems for Space Glengormley
- Supporting the IT Department with the installation of Wi-Fi and cabled internet provision, TVs and meeting room screens etc.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed

**that Members:**

- a) note the update on the Space Antrim and Space Glengormley projects.**
- b) approve the procurement exercise to appoint the future operator(s) for Space Antrim and Space Glengormley.**

- c) **approve the interim management by Council staff for an ongoing period for Space Glengormley.**

*ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development*

**6.2 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/306 LONDON INVESTMENT EVENT**

The Director of Economic Development and Planning provided Members with a verbal update on the London Investment Event, noting that the date had been rescheduled to 10th December 2025. Members will now travel on 9th December 2025. The event is set to take place at the Terrace in Westminster with anticipated sponsorship from our three MPs.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper  
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed that

**the update be noted.**

*NO ACTION*

**6.3. IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/232 YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the 2025/26 Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme at a cost of up to £10,000 for up to 4 young people from the Borough aged 16/17 (year 13 or equivalent); seek approval of financial assistance for participants families, and to seek approval that the Mayor and Chair of Economic Development Committee or their nominees sit on the interview panel to recruit the programme participants.**

**2. Introduction/Background**

Members would be aware that the Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme provided young adults from Antrim and Newtownabbey and Gilbert, Arizona with an opportunity to develop an understanding of a different country, its culture, and its people through a family living experience. The programme lasts approximately six weeks during the summer with half the time spent in Gilbert and half in Antrim and Newtownabbey. This year celebrated 22 years of the exchange.

**3. Previous Decision of Council**

This long running programme was part of our ongoing Sister City relationship with Gilbert, Arizona. Most recently, in September 2024 Economic Development Committee, Members approved;

- a) The programme title be changed from Sister Cities Student Exchange Programme to Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme
- b) Delivery of the Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme 2024/25 at a cost of up to £10,000 for up to 4 young people from the Borough aged 16/17 (year 13 or equivalent) be approved.

- c) Financial assistance of up to £500 per participant family be agreed (total £2000) The Mayor and Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee or their nominees sit on the interview panel to recruit the young people, alongside a member of the Economic Development team

#### 4. Key Issues

This year, 3 ANBC young adults were selected to take part in the exchange. Gilbert participants travelled to Antrim and Newtownabbey first where they were home hosted by their matched ANBC partner for approximately 3 weeks. Participants then travelled as a group to Gilbert, where the exchange was reciprocated. Direction of travel and length of visit vary from year to year and are selected based on exam timetables and availability of all participants.

Building on an extensive programme review last year as well as feedback over the past number of years from Council Officers, Gilbert Counterparts and past exchange participants, several amendments were made to this year's programme. These changes were implemented to enhance the programme and provide a high-quality experience for participants and their families. These amendments included.

- **Pre-Application Information Session** hosted both in Mossley Mill and Antrim Civic Centre. These sessions gave potential applicants the opportunity to engage with Council Officers, former participants and their families about the exchange and raise any questions they may have.
- **Child Safeguarding Session delivered by external Child Safeguarding Expert** incorporated into Pre-Departure Session. This session discussed key child protection themes within the context on international travel/exchange.
- **Amendment of exchange name to 'Youth Exchange Programme'** to ensure programme accessible to young people aged 16 or 17 – not just school students as previous name implied.
- **Implementation of Financial Support** in the form of vouchers for local restaurants and activities to ease the financial burden for host families.

The programme had undergone several adjustments over the last 24-month period to help ensure the best experience for all participants alongside appropriate safeguarding measures. It was proposed that the programme progresses in 2025/26 whilst in parallel a review of the programme be undertaken to maximise the potential benefits and delivery challenges. As part of the review the following items would be considered:

- Ensuring appropriate safeguarding measures are integrated into the programme with participants and the host families
- Code of conduct, responsibility agreement and consent forms
- Closer working with Gilbert Sister City Board regarding participation, matching of young people, and timing of the exchange
- Council resources utilised to deliver the programme

## 5. Financial Position/Implication

Financial provision of £10,000 for the 2025/26 Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme exists within the Economic Development budget.

## 6. Governance

The Youth Exchange programme will be managed by the Economic Development Team

Members' comments in relation to the review included consideration of how greater inclusion of a wider range of socially economic groups could be achieved and consideration of the structure and governance arrangements.

Proposed by Councillor Webb  
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

**that:**

- a) **Delivery of the Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme 2025/26 at a cost of up to £10,000 for up to 4 young people from the Borough aged 16/17 (year 13 or equivalent) be approved.**
- b) **Financial assistance of up to £500 per participant family be agreed (total £2,000)**
- c) **The Mayor and Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee or their nominees sit on the interview panel to recruit the young people, alongside a member of the Economic Development team.**

*ACTION BY: Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer.*

### 6.4 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/PRO/TEN/609 FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROVISION OF MENTOR AND ADVISORY SERVICES FOR BUSINESSES IN THE BOROUGH

**CONTRACT PERIOD 6 OCTOBER 2025 – 30 SEPTEMBER 2027 WITH AN OPTION TO EXTEND FOR UP TO A FURTHER 24 MONTHS, SUBJECT TO PERFORMANCE, REVIEW AND AVAILABLE FUNDING**

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to obtain approval for the appointment of suitably qualified and experienced organisations to provide mentor and advisory services for businesses in the Borough through the ASK Mentoring programme.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

Through its Ask Mentor Programme, the Council provided local businesses with up to 10 hours of free, expert mentoring. In order to support the programme, Officers have undertaken the procurement of this framework which would

include experienced mentors from a wide range of backgrounds and areas of expertise. Mentoring assignments would be demand led in accordance with the individual business needs and mentors appointed to the framework would be paid a fixed hourly rate of £■■■ (excl. VAT).

Businesses may submit applications for one or more mentors and each applicant could tender for up to 2 specialisms. Each mentor and specialism would be evaluated individually. It was the intention of the Council to appoint the five highest ranking applicants for each specialism. Where there was a tie, all the applicants in the relevant rank would be appointed to the framework, so there may be specialisms with more than 5 appointed mentors. Where there were specialisms with no responses, the Council would review the market and may undertake a further procurement exercise.

### 3. Procurement Process

This tender was procured in line with good practice laid out in the Procurement Act 2023. The opportunity was made available on eSourcingNI on 28 July 2025.

Thirty-three tender responses were opened via the eSourcingNI Portal on 15 August 2025 and referred to the evaluation panel for assessment. The tenders were evaluated on a two-stage basis as follows:

#### STAGE 1 – SELECTION STAGE

The tender was evaluated on a pass/fail basis for:

- tenderer's professional conduct
- economic and financial standing
- management systems and practices
- General Data Protection Regulations
- declarations and form of tender

All tenders met the requirements of Stage 1 of the evaluation process and proceeded to Stage 2.

#### STAGE 2 – AWARD STAGE

##### Quality Assessment

The tender was evaluated on the basis of:

- relevant qualifications/expertise for the specialism (50%),
- relevant experience for the specialism (50%)

One tenderer in specialism 14 and two tenderers in specialism 22 failed to meet the quality threshold and did not proceed further in the evaluation. The remaining tenderers' quality scores exceeded the threshold for the qualitative criteria and officers were content that the tenderers could deliver a high-quality contract in accordance with all aspects of the specification. Full details of the evaluation methodology was circulated.

The recommendation was as follows:

No.	Specialism	No. of Applicants	Mentor	Quality Score (out of 100%)
1	Smart Technologies & IoT	1	Marquee Electronics	
2	Process Automation and Robotics	No tenders received.		
3	Big Data and Analytics	1	Denis O'Hara Consultancy Services	
4	Immersive Tech (AR/VR)	No tenders received.		
5	AI/Machine Learning	2	Flax & Teal Limited	
			Profile Tree Digital Agency	
6	Digital Transformation Strategy	6	Excalibur Press – Adam McBride	
			Infoforte Ltd – Jim McWilliams	
			Flax & Teal Ltd	
			Denis O'Hara Consultancy Services	
			Salar IT	
7	Cybersecurity and Data Protection	No tenders received.		
8	IT	2	Excalibur Press – Adam McBride	
			Marlborough Marketing	
9	Process/Systems	1	Adapt 365	
10	Innovation	2	Mallusk Enterprise – Colleen McAreavey	
			Marquee Electronics	
11	Project Management for Digital Innovation	1	Infoforte Ltd – Jim McWilliams	
12	Business Planning	10	Admoor Business Solutions Ltd	
			Infoforte Ltd – Ciara McWilliams	
			Mallusk Enterprise – Julie Lynch	
			Karen Maguire	
			Mallusk Enterprise – Peter Weir	
			Core Consulting – Rebecca Taylor	
13	Workforce Development/Training Needs Analysis	3	Mallusk Enterprise – Emma Garrett	
			Excalibur Press – Tina Calder	
			Utopian Learning	
14	Change Management	4	Karen Maguire	

			Catherine Kane Associates	
			Mallusk Enterprise – Eugene Reid	
15	Investment Readiness	No tenders received.		
16	Finance	2	Mallusk Enterprise – Peter Weir	
			Ardmor Business Solutions Ltd	
17	Growth Readiness	1	Mallusk Enterprise – Colleen McAreavey	
18	Technical Assistance	No tenders received.		
19	Market Research	2	Core Consulting – Rebecca Taylor	
			Excalibur Press – Alexandra Feher	
20	Public Procurement	8	Core Consulting – Emily McCann	
			Doherty Consulting Ltd t/a Inspired Business Consultancy	
			JCR Network Services	
			KU Consultancy	
			Nadean Lowe Consulting	
21	Sustainability & ESG	3	AD Sustainability Consultancy Ltd – Adam Patton	
			AD Sustainability Consultancy Ltd – Andrew Wood	
			Close Focus Ltd	
22	Social Enterprise	4	Mallusk Enterprise – Emma Garrett	
			S Young Management Consultancy	
23	Legal	2	Catherine Kane Associates	
			S Young Management Consultancy	
24	Marketing & Sales	17	Core Consulting	
			Counter Digital	
			Doherty Consulting Ltd t/a Inspired Business Consultancy	
			Excalibur Press – Alexandra Feher	
			Excalibur Press – Tina Calder	
			KU Consultancy	
			North City Business Centre	

#### 4. Social Value

Social Value in procurement was implemented by the Executive in June 2022 and incorporates all aspects of sustainable procurement including ethical and sustainable supply chains, community benefits and wealth building, job and skills creation and efforts to decarbonise. It was a mandatory requirement for the above threshold contracts. This procurement exercise did not meet the threshold for social value criteria to be applied.

Moved by Councillor Ní Chonghaile

Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

**that, having achieved scores detailed above, the mentors listed be appointed to the framework in their respective specialisms for the period of 6 October 2025 – 30 September 2027 with an option to extend for up to 24 months, subject to performance, review and funding availability.**

*ACTION BY: Melissa Kenning, Procurement Manager*

#### 6.5 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/284 STRATEGIC PLANNING APPLICATIONS OVERVIEW

##### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to update Members regarding Major Strategic Planning Applications and for Members to note current Planning Application Notices. A summary was circulated for Members' information.**

Moved by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed

**that Members note the Major Strategic Planning Overview.**

*NO ACTION*

#### 6.6 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/195 Vol.3 MINUTES - LEVELLING UP FUND PROJECT BOARD ANTRIM AND GLENGORMLEY

##### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members approval of the circulated minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meetings held on 16 April 2025 and 23 June 2025, and the Antrim Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 27 March 2025.**

##### 2. Governance

The Levelling Up Fund award required that a governance structure be put in place to oversee the management and implementation of the approved schemes:

LUF0037 Glengormley Integrated Economic and Physical Regeneration Scheme

LUF0080 Antrim Integrated Economic and Physical Regeneration Scheme

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed

**that the minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meetings held on 16 April 2025 and 23 June 2025 and the Antrim Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 27 March 2025, be approved.**

*ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development*

**6.7 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/273 MINUTES - GLENGORMLEY PUBLIC REALM PROJECT BOARD**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members approval of the circulated minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 15 April 2025.**

**2. Governance**

The Board as required by the Department for Communities (funder) was established to provide assurance and a formal governance structure for the successful delivery of the improvement works, as defined in the Glengormley Town Centre Environmental Improvement scheme business case.

Moved by Alderman Cosgrove  
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed

**that the minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 15 April 2025 be approved.**

*ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development*

**6.8 IN CONFIDENCE ED/LMP/001 ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members approval of the circulated minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meetings held on 27 March 2025 and 19 May 2025.**

**2. Introduction/Background**

Members would be aware of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), the aim of which was to improve labour market conditions by working through coordinated, collaborative, multi-agency partnerships, achieving regional objectives whilst being flexible to meet the needs presented by localised conditions and helping to connect employers with employees.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

At the Economic Development Committee on 8 May 2025, the LMP the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership Meetings of 7 November 2024 and 22 January 2025 were approved.

### 4. Governance

The Partnership meets bi-monthly (6 times per year) and is chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings are reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Moved by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed

**that the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meetings held on 27 March 2025 and 19 May 2025 are approved.**

*ACTION BY: Michelle Pearson, Business Development Officer (Skills)*

### **PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'**

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed

**that the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.**

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence at this point.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8.38pm.

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**MAYOR**

***Council Minutes have been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation, and legal advice.***