



8 January 2026

Committee Chair: Councillor B Mallon
Committee Vice-Chair: Alderman M Cosgrove
Committee Members: Councillors – M Cooper, N Kelly, E McLaughlin,
M Ní Chonghaile, M Stewart and B Webb

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee will be held in the **Chamber, Mossley Mill** on **Tuesday 13 January 2026** at **6.30 pm**.

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker".

Richard Baker GM MSc
Chief Executive, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council

PLEASE NOTE: Refreshments will be available in the Café from 5.20

For any queries please contact Member Services:

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**REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING ON
TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2026**

3. PRESENTATION

3.1 ED/ED/203 BELFAST CITY REGION PLACE PARTNERSHIP PRESENTATION

1. Purpose

Marie Doyle, Chair of the Belfast City Region Place Partnership (BCRPP), will present to today's Committee meeting to provide an update on the work of BCRPP.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the presentation be noted.

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

Agreed and Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development & Planning

3.2 FI/FIN/11 ESTIMATES UPDATE PRESENTATION

1. Purpose

An update on the 2026/27 Estimates for Economic Development will be presented at the meeting.

A summary of the financial position for the 2025/26 financial year and the current financial estimates for 2026/27 is **enclosed.**

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the presentation be noted.

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 ED/ED/203 BELFAST CITY AND REGION PLACE PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPATION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update regarding the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership and seek direction on the Council's participation in 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

The Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP), formerly the Renewed Ambition Partnership, is a joint public-private initiative that is delivering a programme of work aimed at ensuring the wider City Region is positively positioned to continue to attract inclusive investment to unlock the development, regeneration and infrastructure required to deliver the City Region's ambitions.

The BCRPP comprises public, private and key anchor institution partners within the Belfast City Region. Partners include Belfast City Region Deal Partner Councils, Invest NI, Belfast Harbour, Translink, Housing Association representation, and representatives from the local development community bringing forward significant regeneration and development projects.

3. Key Issues

The Council's continued membership of the Partnership was considered by the November 2025 Committee and it was agreed to invite representatives of the partnership to present to January 2026 Committee.

Marie Doyle, as chair of the Partnership, is scheduled to present to today's Committee meeting. Following this presentation, Members are requested to agree a way forward regarding the Council's future participation in the Partnership.

As part of this decision, members may wish to consider various options:

- Continue to participate in the partnership on a 'business as usual' basis with the associated cost (c£15k)
- Engage with the Partnership and explore if membership could be continued at a reduced level of expenditure, reflecting a lower level of participation in certain event eg MIPIM.
- Pause membership for a year in order to consider fully the activities and programming undertaken by the Partnership in 2026, before reconsidering membership for future years.

4. Financial Position/Implication

In previous years the cost of participation in the wider Belfast City & Region Place Partnership has been £15,000 per annum which has been met through the Economic Development budget and is included in the 2026/27 budget

allocation. This fee includes the delegate passes for both UKREiF and MIPIM, although travel expenses and accommodation etc. are an additional cost.

5. Recommendation

Members direction is sought regarding future participation in the Belfast and City Region Place Partnership.

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

Agreed by: Michael, McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.2 ED/REG/072 SMALL SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Small Settlements Programme financial position and to seek approval for an additional £20,878.12 to complete the Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme, which can be accommodated within the Economic Development 2025/26 departmental budget.

2. Introduction/Background

In February 2022, the Council was awarded £874,000 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. In line with the funding agreement, the Council was required to provide a minimum match funding contribution of £86,000, resulting in a total programme budget of £960,000, 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

At the September 2025 Committee, Members were advised that there was a programme underspend of £103,000 and were provided with an overview of a proposed Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme to utilise the underspend.

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, which included £26,000 contribution from Council.
- March 2025 – approval to remove the Templepatrick element of the artwork scheme due to issues of cost and deliverability.
- September 2025 – approval to revise the 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.

4. Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme

In September 2025, Members approved revisions to the Small Settlements Scheme for Templepatrick, to deliver an Environmental Improvement Scheme comprising two elements at Paradise Walk Roundabout and Wallace Park. This approval was based on the programme underspend position reported at that time.

The approved scheme includes:

Paradise Walk Roundabout Improvements – Members approved the delivery of an enhanced environmental improvement scheme at Paradise Walk Roundabout. This replaced the originally proposed small-scale scheme that had been intended to complement the aircraft sculpture. With the sculpture not proceeding, the approved works include a more enhanced scheme with core elements around planting, boundary treatment and improved access for ongoing maintenance.

Wallace Park Improvements – Members also approved improvements at Wallace Park, the main public amenity space serving Templepatrick. The agreed works include resurfacing and lining of the existing car park, improvements to DDA access, installation of additional fencing and gates to enhance safety and security, and the provision of upgraded street furniture such as benches, picnic tables and bins.

5. Financial Review

Officers have undertaken a further detailed financial analysis of the programme. This has refined the programme's financial position and confirmed that the level of underspend is lower than previously estimated.

The table **enclosed** illustrates the financial position of the programme.

Following the approval at September's Committee to proceed with the proposed Templepatrick EIS scheme, the Capital Development Team has now obtained a programme of works with a cost of £87,000. The associated costs for this scheme have been included in the forecasted expenditure under the Environmental Improvement Scheme and Programme Delivery project lines. The table above illustrates a funding gap of £20,878.12.

6. Financial Implication

The total value of the COVID Recovery Small Settlements Programme is £1,006,878.12. The agreed programme budget is £986,000, which includes the additional £26,000 contribution approved in February 2024.

Following the detailed analysis of the programme budget and receipt of the final programme of works costings for the Templepatrick EIS scheme, there is a funding gap of £20,878.12.

It should be noted that the Letter of Offer is only valid until 31 March 2026, and works must be completed by this date.

Officers are therefore requesting approval of additional funding of £20,878.12. This additional cost can be accommodated within the current Economic Development 2025/26 departmental budget.

Council's total contribution to the programme will be £132,878.12, representing 13.1% of the overall programme value. This remains a highly favourable funding position, with the majority of investment secured from external funding sources delivering significant improvements for the Borough.

7. Governance

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

8. Summary

This report provides an updated financial position on the Small Settlements Programme and seeks approval for additional budget to complete the Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme.

9. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the financial position of the Small Settlements Programme and approve an additional £20,878.12 to complete the Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme, which can be accommodated within the Economic Development 2025/26 departmental budget.

Prepared by: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning.

4.3 ED/LMP/001 LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP LETTER OF OFFER 2025-26

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek retrospective approval for the acceptance of the revised Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Letter of Offer for 2025/26.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will be aware of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), the aim of which is 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.

Members are advised that an amended letter of offer **(enclosed)** has been received from the Department for Communities (DfC) for the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan 2025/26 increasing the budget by £107,990.87 to the maximum budget within the approved Acton Plan of £503,957.40.

3. Key Issues

The budget for the Partnership for this financial year has therefore increased and been confirmed as £503,957.40 as set out in the previously approved Action Plan.

Due to the Department's requirement to have the Letter of Offer signed and returned by 18 November, retrospective approval is sought from Members.

4. Previous Decision of Council

At Council on 30 June 2025, the previous letter of offer and Council contribution was approved.

5. 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.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that retrospective approval is granted for the acceptance of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Letter of Offer for 2025/26, for £503,957.40.

Prepared by: Michelle Pearson, Business Development Officer (Skills)

Agreed by: Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.4 ED/LMP/001 LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN 2026/27

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to note the agreement of the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan for 2026/27 by the Partnership at its meeting on 19 December 2025 and seek approval for the Council's financial contribution to the Action Plan delivery.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will be aware of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), the aim of which is 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.

Members will be aware that the Regional LMP, at its meeting on 3 February 2025 approved the LMP Action Plans for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Officers have sought to make a number of amendments to the approved plan for 2026/27, based on 'lessons learned' from the previous years.

3. Key Issues

Officers believe a number of minor changes are required to the plan to make the expected Outcomes Based Accountability targets more realistic and achievable. An updated Action Plan extract is **enclosed**.

The updated Action Plan was approved by the Labour Market Partnership at its meeting on 19 December 2025.

The anticipated budget for the Partnership for 2026/27 will be £549,057.40:

Department for Communities Contribution

- Administration Spend £103,079.00
- Operational Spend £400,878.40

The expected Council contribution

- Administration Spend £45,100.00

It should be noted that the budget has been developed based on guidance supplied by DfC. Administration costs are capped at 20% of the overall programme costs.

There are currently 3 Council Officers (2.7 FTE equivalent) working on the Labour Market Partnership programme. Funding of £103,079 from DfC will cover 69.5% of the salary costs involved with £45,100 met by the Council, provision for which has been made in the 2026/27 economic development budget. Administration costs have increased primarily due to salary cost increases across Council.

4. Previous Decision of Council

The Action Plan for 2025/26 was approved at the Economic Development Sub Committee meeting on 14 January 2025.

5. 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.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the agreement by the LMP Partnership on 19 December 2025 for the Action Plan for 2026/27 and approve the Council contribution of £45,100.

Prepared by: Michelle Pearson, Business Development Officer (Skills)

Agreed by: Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

4.5 ED/ED/282 CCTV PROGRAMME GRANT AWARDS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for the issue of Letters of Offer to five further business applicants under Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme, at a value of circa £20,709.00

2. Introduction/Background

Members are 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.

More than £49,000 in grant funding was awarded to help businesses install their required CCTV equipment under Phase 1 of the scheme, as follows;

Town Centre	Completed Projects	Spend
Ballyclare	4	£4,222.65
Crumlin	8	£16,335.25
Randalstown	4	£6,735.00
Antrim	6	£9,509.27
Glengormley	8	£12,833.26
TOTAL	30	£49,635.43

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.

The 09 September 2025 meeting of the Economic Development Committee approved grant funding of £19,829 to ten eligible applicants under Phase 2 of the CCTV scheme.

The 11 November 2025 meeting of the Economic Development Committee subsequently approved a further £8,115 of grant funding to five further eligible applicants.

4. Key Issues for Consideration by Members

11 further applications to Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme have now been received as follows;

Town	Business	Grant requested
Randalstown	Glenravel Properties	£2,500
Randalstown	Vintage Wine Merchants	£2,227.50
Antrim	The Vintage	£1,612.50
Ballyclare	The Advice Hub	£1,264.50
Newtownabbey	Petite Feet Day Nursery	£2,500.00
Antrim	Ace Taxis	£2,500.00
Antrim	Ace Properties	£1,827.00
Antrim	Maxine Tipping Massage Therapist	£1,570.50
Antrim	Nails By Brooke	£1,606.50
Antrim	R House	£1,525.50
Antrim	Ulster Scots/ Kneebreakers	£1,575.00
Total		£20,709.00

While Officers are continuing with the assessment of these applications, the initial grant assistance requested is in the region of £20,709. This figure may reduce as assessment of the applications progresses against the eligibility criteria.

Upon Committee approval, Officers will issue Letters of Offer and provide Members with an update in due course.

6 of the applicants are located in close proximity to the PSNI's identified priority areas.

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

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

5. Financial Position/Implication

Upon approval of the maximum grant assistance of £20,709.00, £648.00 will remain in the CCTV Phase 2 budget. The scheme will now close with an evaluation to be undertaken.

6. Governance

The project will be delivered by the Economic Development section.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that delegated authority be granted to Officers to issue Letters of Offer to the five listed businesses up to a maximum value of £20,709.00, subject to final assessment.

Prepared by: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.6 ED/ED/284 WOMEN IN BUSINESS NI CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to request Members' approval for renewal of Corporate Membership of Women in Business NI.

2. Introduction/Background

As members will recall, last year the Council became Corporate members of Women in Business NI as part of its wider approach to engaging with businesses across the Borough and maximising benefits of corporate networks locally.

Membership of the network provided the Council with the opportunity to avail of:

- Connections to businesses through the Member Directory
- Promotion of the Council and its programmes across the WIB network
- Discounted rates on Centre of Learning development programmes, available both online and in person
- Monthly free access to online industry events, topical webinars and in person networking opportunities
- Employee access to an individual dashboard, enabling them to view and register for upcoming events and member news
- Various employee perks and included within the employee benefits package
- Discounts to all conferences and Awards including the Voices of Leadership Conference, Women in Tech Conference, All-Island Female Entrepreneurs' Conference and the Chair's Lunch

Following approval of the Corporate Membership to Women in Business NI in January 2025, due to various operational reasons there was a delay in delivery of training on the benefits of the membership to the wider Council staff and to Elected Members. This training subsequently took place in August 2025. This has meant there has been limited time for the Council, as a whole, to fully avail of the benefits of the membership.

However, the Economic Development team has worked closely with Women in Business NI in relation to delivery, promotion and consideration of a number of events and programmes, including International Women's Day in March 2025, a Financial Wellness workshop in September 2025 and consideration of a programme related to female entrepreneurs.

This is a relationship that should be developed and nurtured further and which is anticipated to bring value to the Economic Development section and the wider Council throughout 2026. As such, it is suggested that renewal of the Corporate Membership is meaningful and worthwhile.

An Economic Development Officer will be given responsibility to lead on maximising the benefits of the membership in 2026, engaging with other

Council Departments and utilising the business connections and programme of events that come as a result of corporate membership.

3. Previous Decision of Council

2025 Membership of Women in Business NI, at a cost of £2,000 + VAT, was approved at Economic Development Committee in January 2025.

4. Cost

2026 Corporate Membership of Women in Business remains at £2,000 + VAT as the Council is a large employer with more than 500 employees – all employees are welcome to enjoy the benefits; membership is not exclusive to women.

This cost will be met from the existing Economic Development budget.

5. Recommendation

Members' approval is requested for renewal of the Corporate Membership of Women in Business NI at a cost of £2,000 (excluding VAT), to be met from the Economic Development budget.

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer Economic Development

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

4.7 ED/ED/284 NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on a recent evidence session and upcoming visit BY the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to the Borough.

2. Introduction/Background

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is a Westminster Committee which examines expenditure, administration and policy of the Northern Ireland Office and its associated bodies.

The Committee sits with up to 13 Members of Parliament and its work principally focusing on inquiries into various subjects seeking evidence from a wide range of groups and individuals with relevant interests and experience. The Committee then produces reports setting out key findings and making recommendations to the Government. The Government is mandated to respond to those recommendations within two months.

The current membership of the Committee is:

- a) Tonia Antoniazzi MP (Chair, Labour)
- b) Sorcha Eastwood MP (Alliance)
- c) Simon Hoare MP (Conservative)
- d) Mike Kane MP (Labour)
- e) Paul Kohler MP (Liberal Democrat)
- f) Rt Hon Gavin Robinson MP (Democratic Unionist Party)
- g) Chris Bloore MP (Labour)
- h) Claire Hanna MP (Social Democratic and Labour Party)
- i) Adam Jogee MP (Labour)
- j) Alicia Kearns MP (Conservative)
- k) Katrina Murray MP (Labour)
- l) David Smith MP (Labour)

Latest Inquiry

In June 2025, the committee launched a new call for evidence entitled "Economic growth in Northern Ireland: new and emerging sector."

The inquiry stated:

"Kickstarting economic growth is the number one mission for this Government's term in office. In this inquiry, the committee will examine plans to deliver economic growth in Northern Ireland, including the recent UK Industrial Strategy, with a particular reference to emerging sectors or 'industries of the future'."

Specifically, the inquiry seeks to gather evidence on

- What are the main sectoral opportunities for economic growth in NI?

- How do these align with the eight priority sectors for growth identified in the UK Government's new industrial strategy?
- What are the main barriers to economic growth in Northern Ireland, in particular among new and emerging sectors?
- To what extent will economic growth in Northern Ireland be enhanced by these new Government initiatives:
 - Enhanced Investment Zones;
 - Local Growth Plans; Local Growth Fund;
 - AI Growth Zones;
 - Defence Growth Deals; and
 - Support for industrial clusters?
- How should the Government and NI Executive work together to deliver economic growth in NI?
 - How do their respective strategies and priorities align or diverge?
 - How should they work together to enhance Northern Ireland's skills base?
- What steps are needed to ensure economic growth benefit all parts of NI?
- What steps should the UK Government, NI Executive and businesses take better to exploit UK-EU dual market access and the all-island economy?

A response was submitted to the inquiry on behalf of the Council **enclosed**. Additionally, Belfast City Region Deal submitted a response via their Project Management Office. A copy is **enclosed** for Members' information.

Following the submission of the Council evidence a request come through the NI Affairs committee for the Council to present at an oral evidence session to the Committee. This is the second such panel being undertaken by the Committee to date and allows members of the Committee to delve deeper into the issues raised and probe further with direct questions.

The first evidence session was held in November 2025 and heard evidence from:

- Queen's University, Belfast
- The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- The Matrix NI Panel; and
- University of Ulster

Antrim and Newtownabbey have been invited to participate in the second oral evidence session on the 7th January at Westminster. The session will be attended by Michael McKenna and Steven Norris.

In addition to this, the NI Affairs Committee is planning a three-day visit to Northern Ireland at the end of January 2026, specifically the 26th – 28th January. On the 27th the Council has been asked to host the delegation and provide a structured itinerary to show the Committee some of the assets and key economic drivers in our Borough.

Whilst a detailed itinerary is under development it is anticipated that it would include:

- A presentation at Mossley Mill
- A visit to AMIC/Sensata at Global Point
- A visit to BIA and Sysco Nutts Corner

3. Financial Position/Implication

The cost of travel to and from London and the hosting of the NI Affairs Committee Visit will be covered by the existing Economic Development budget.

4. Summary

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee launched an inquiry in relation to economic growth in Northern Ireland. Officers from Antrim and Newtownabbey were asked to attend an oral evidence session in London on the 7th January and the Council has been asked to host the Committee at the end of the month as part of its three-day visit to Northern Ireland.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:

- a) Retrospectively approve the attendance of officers from the Economic Development Team at the evidence session on the 7th January 2026**
- b) Agree to host the upcoming visit of the members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in January 2026.**

Prepared and Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Economic Development and Michael McKenna, Deputy Director Economic Development

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.8 ED/ED/315 RURAL INVESTMENT AND GROWTH FUND

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the delivery of a new Pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund to support micro and SME businesses in rural locations within the Borough

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded that the proposed development of a new Pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund was approved by the Economic Development Committee in November 2025.

Rural areas/communities face recognised and persistent disadvantage, acknowledged in law through the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which requires public bodies to address the shortcomings of “one-size-fits-all” policy approaches.

In practice, rural SMEs are less likely to access finance due to fewer local financial institutions, reduced visibility to lenders and geographic distance from decision makers, with the British Business Bank reporting higher barriers and lower awareness of finance options among rural firms. These challenges are heightened by weaker digital and transport connectivity, including unreliable broadband and limited mobile coverage, which restrict market access and reduce competitiveness.

Following the cessation of the European funded Rural Development Programme (RDP) in 2020, Rural organisations have faced a significant funding gap. Local Action Group, GROW South Antrim previously delivered £2.48m in support for rural development over the period 2014 to 2020, 60% of which focused upon co-funding rural business investment. While the Department for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has continued to administer the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) programme, this focuses more on sustainability than growth and, for 2025/26, is capped at a relatively low grant level of £7,500 with a 50% intervention rate. It is anticipated that within the Council area, £135,000 will be allocated to 30 local businesses this year.

In contrast, the European funded RDP provided up to £50,000 in capital grants at a 50% intervention rate. In this Council area this was used to support 39 businesses, creating 53 full-time and 13 part-time jobs over a 5 year programming period that ended in 2020.

Officers have sought guidance from key stakeholders including DAERA and SOLACE regarding the development of any future rural development programme funded by the Department. It is understood that there is currently ongoing discussions around the development of a dedicated rural fund, however, to date there is no firm proposal, business case or budget allocation. As a result, any future programme is not envisaged to be live in the forthcoming 12-24 months.

The absence of a targeted rural development programme has resulted in a gap in funding provision in rural areas across the Borough. There is now a strong rationale for introducing a new capital-focused programme that encourages investment and growth in rural businesses.

To address this gap in support for local businesses it is proposed to develop a pilot Rural Investment and Growth Fund. Should a fund similar to that proposed be instigated by Central Government during this pilot period, officers will adapt programme arrangements as required.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Economic Development Committee approved the development of a new Pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund in November 2025.

4. Programme Overview

The proposed pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund aims to provide substantial capital support to micro and SME businesses operating in rural areas across the Borough.

The Programme will aim to:

- Deliver funding to a minimum of 5 rural businesses
- Create a minimum of 10 new FTE jobs
- Generate £500,000 of private funding
- Stimulate rural economic growth

Eligible projects for funding will focus primarily on capital purchases and capital works that contribute directly to business productivity and growth.

The programme is expected to provide financial support to micro and SME businesses in rural areas. It is envisaged that grants will be in the region of £10,000 - £20,000 at a 50% grant rate, ensuring a minimum project value of £20,000 emphasising the fund's strategic intent to deliver meaningful and impactful investments while avoiding duplication with other business support programmes.

For the purposes of the fund, and in line with previous DAERA funded rural support schemes, rural Antrim and Newtownabbey is defined as all areas outside the statutory development limits of towns with a population less than 5,000. This means that the below settlements are not eligible for funding under the programme:

- Antrim
- Metropolitan Newtownabbey
- Ballyclare
- Crumlin
- Randalstown

Eligible project spend is proposed to include:

- Capital Builds
- Capital Purchases
- Capital Improvements
- Digital transformation Projects

Not eligible:

- Vehicles (cars / vans / farming vehicles)
- Business running costs (utilities, rates, rent, salaries etc.)
- Business Services
- Marketing / media expenditure (websites, social media etc.)
- Training

The above lists are not exhaustive, and each application will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Officer will continue to refine programme specifics prior to the anticipated launch in March 2026.

A draft version of the application guidance document is **enclosed**.

5. Strategic Alignment

This fund aligns with Council's strategic priorities to:

- Support sustainable economic development
- Promote rural growth and resilience
- Encourage investment in micro and SME businesses
- Address rural disparities in access to funding and infrastructure

The fund complements existing regional and national policies for rural development, while filling a critical funding gap not currently addressed by DAERA or any other funding body.

6. Financial Position

It is proposed that up to £150,000 ringfenced in the 2026/27 economic development budget.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that members approve a budget of up to £150,000 from the 2026/27 Economic Development Budget for the delivery of a pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund.

Prepared by: Stewart McCormack, Investment Officer

Agreed by: Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.9 ED/DI/006 SMART ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING AT LOUGH NEAGH

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for the Council's facilitative role in supporting delivery of smart environmental monitoring at Lough Neagh, entitled the Gateway Project, and to outline next steps in coordination with Estates Services, IT, and partner agencies.

2. Background

The Gateway Project is a 5G Innovation Region initiative by Helix8 Ltd, a Larne-based technology company. Helix8 has secured funding under the Belfast 5G Innovation Region (5GIR) programme, supported by the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

Their Gateway Project proposal will establish Northern Ireland's first 5G-enabled, automated environmental monitoring system at the Gateway Building / Antrim Marina, supporting early detection of blue-green algae blooms in Lough Neagh.

The proposed area to initially benefit from this initiative is outlined in Appendix 1, **enclosed**.

The project will use a drone-in-a-box system, IoT sensors, a private 5G-ready network and edge computing, and an interactive kiosk (pending agreement with DAERA/NIEA).

3. Council's Relationship to the Project

The Council's proposed involvement is as a facilitating partner, not as project owner or regulatory authority.

Specifically, the Council's role would be to:

- Provide site access and coordinate with Helix8 on the use of Council-owned land and assets at The Gateway building.
- Support digital connectivity through existing infrastructure (e.g., potentially LFFN) where feasible.
- Ensure appropriate governance, including NIEA/DAERA validation of public-facing environmental information.
- Champion local innovation by enabling a high-profile demonstration of advanced connectivity benefiting tourism, education, and public engagement.
- Helix8 Ltd remains the project lead and data controller, with regulatory oversight continuing to rest with DAERA/NIEA.

This distinction ensures that while the Council would be a key stakeholder, it would not be responsible for the environmental or statutory outputs of the project.

In the project documentation and DSIT reporting, the Council is referred to as a “facilitating partner and site host within the 5G Innovation Region ecosystem”.

The specific ask from the Council is:

- Site and Location
- To install a drone docking station on the roof of the Council-owned Gateway Centre. The exact location will be confirmed in consultation with the Council’s Estates Services Team, however the area required is very small.
- Dock Cover Opened: 1760×745×485 mm (L×W×H)
- To install a 55" LED Screen Kiosk on a site near or adjacent to the Gateway Centre in Antrim to display live information on the environmental condition of the water in Lough Neagh.
- 55" display; outdoor-rated unit requiring hardstand
- To install a small 5G cell on the Gateway Building in Antrim
- 5G small cell: Lopcomm LS5405-N77, roof/pole-mounted
- NIEA/DAERA have already provided permission for the installation of sensors in Lough Neagh. This, in addition to the Gateway Centre's location on a secure and unobstructed flight path and with appropriate elevation for the 5G mast, makes the Gateway Centre the desired location for the equipment. There is no feasible alternative venue.

- Power and Connectivity
 - Power connections required from the Gateway Centre
 - Drone Dock: 100–240V AC, up to 800W
 - Kiosk: Standard Outdoor Mains Supply
 - 5G Cell: AC supply (wattage unspecified)
 - Data
 - Access to fibre (Potentially LFFN) Approx. 10 GB/week
 - EMF/spectrum licensing considerations
 - Ofcom Shared Access Licence for 5G small cell & EMF compliance required.
 - Groundworks and Wayleaves
 - Hardstand for kiosk, roof fixings for dock and 5G small cell.
 - Helix8 are responsible for design, procurement and contractor supervision however all plans and works must be agreed in advance with the Council.

In each element, Helix8 will cover all costs associated with the installation and running of the systems. Helix8 will also indemnify the Council through their existing insurances.

A full checklist is **enclosed** for Members' information.

4. Strategic Context

The Gateway Project complements the Borough's Smart District and Digital Borough ambitions, aligning with initiatives such as the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) and Belfast Region City Deal's Digital Pillar.

Belfast City Council (Belfast City Innovation, as 5GIR lead authority) maintain oversight of regional reporting to DSIT. The Council's participation ensures representation of rural and tourism-based use cases within the region's wider 5G ecosystem.

Belfast City Council have confirmed that applications for 5GIR and BRCD funding have also been received from a logistics offering within the Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough, Newry, Mid & East Antrim, Lisburn & Castlereagh, and Belfast Councils.

5. Financial Position/Implication

There will be no cost to the Council in relation to this project. All costs will be recovered from Helix8 as part of the Council's role in facilitating the project.

6. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

Not applicable

7. Governance

The Council's facilitating role in the project will be co-ordinated by the Economic Development Team, supported by Estates Services and IT.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve the Council's role as a facilitating partner and site host for the Gateway Project.

Prepared by: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.10 ED/ED/306 LONDON INVESTMENT EVENT UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members regarding the showcase investment event which took place in London on Wednesday 10th December 2025 and seek approval for the associated action plan.

2. Update

As Members are aware, following the award of Council of the Year, an Investment Showcase event was held on 10th December 2025 in the Terrace Pavilion, House of Commons. The intention of the event was to:

- Showcase the Council's success and forward-thinking approach.
- Highlight key industries and investment opportunities within the borough.
- Engage directly with potential investors and stakeholders, including representatives from UK Government, leading businesses, and policymakers.

The event was attended by more than 120 people, including host MPs Robin Swann, John Finucane and Sammy Wilson as well as a number of other elected officials and high profile guests including local business leaders, investors and developers, alongside officers from key UK government departments.

The showcase highlighted the Borough's strengths in connectivity, innovation, skills, and investment-ready sites, the Council's live 'Call for Sites', alongside the scale of opportunity emerging through projects such as Belfast International Airport and the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC).

The event was hosted by Claire McCollum, and guests heard from the following speakers:

- Mayor, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council – Cllr Leah Kirkpatrick
- Junior Ministers Aisling Reilly MLA and Joanne Bunting MLA
- Richard Baker, ANBC

Guests also heard panel perspectives from:

- Mark Sterritt, British Business Bank
- Shorlagh McConville, Mivan
- Sam Turner, AMIC
- Dan Owens, Belfast International Airport
- Majella McAlister, ANBC

Guests were shown the following video, to showcase what the Borough has to offer: [Borough Showcase Video](#)

Feedback since the event has been overwhelmingly positive in relation to venue, content & messaging and execution of the event.

A highlights video of the event can be found at [London Showcase Highlights Video](#)

Press Coverage

The event garnered significant press coverage, highlights of which are **enclosed**.

Invest Antrim Newtownabbey brand

The event launched the Council's new approach to its investment proposition, entitled 'Invest Antrim Newtownabbey', with the key message of 'AN Investment that Delivers'.

Additionally, a new website was officially launched at the event, along with new and dedicated social media pages:

- Website: <https://investantrimnewtownabbey.com/>
- LinkedIn: InvestAntrimNewtownabbey
- X/Twitter: @InvestANBC

A gallery of event photos has been added to the website.

Next Steps

The event provided Elected Members and senior Council officers with an opportunity to engage with businesses and investors currently in the Borough, and importantly, with those with an interest in coming to the Borough. It is essential that momentum is maintained regarding the messaging and conversations which took place in London.

A follow up email has been issued to all attendees in the first instance, with some key, strategic connections to be contacted individually to discuss further action.

Attendees have been invited to:

- Share their feedback on the event to help shape future activity and continue the conversation by arranging a follow-up meeting with the team to explore opportunities in more detail
- Visit Antrim and Newtownabbey in a tailored follow-up visit to showcase key locations, projects, and partnerships across the Borough.
- Stay connected by following Invest Antrim Newtownabbey on social channels outlined above for updates on investment activity, announcements, and future events

By way of next steps, a range of activities will be developed and delivered by officers to ensure that the momentum generated by the event is capitalised

on and maintained. The ambition will be to convert the high levels of interest into firm commitments, partnerships and a pipeline of activity.

A proposed action plan is **enclosed**.

To support the follow up activities in the short-term, it is intended to pursue ongoing third-party support in order to drive key messaging and maintain momentum generated by the events.

3. Financial Position/Implication

A budget of up to £95,000 was approved by Committee in July 2025.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the update regarding the showcase investment event which took place in London on Wednesday 10th December 2025 and approve associated action plan.

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

Agreed by: Michael McKenna Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning.

4.11 PT/CI/066 QUARTER 2 BUSINESS PLANS PERFORMANCE REPORT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members that the Business Plan 2025/26, Performance Reporting Template for Economic Development be approved.

2. Background

Members are reminded that Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 puts in place a framework to support the continuous improvement of Council services.

Specifically, the duties in the Act relate to Section 84(1), 85(2) and 85(9) whereby the Council has a statutory duty to make arrangements to:

- Secure continuous improvement
- Secure achievement of its improvement objectives
- Exercise its functions so that any Departmental specified standards are met.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In June 2025 the Council approved a strategic performance framework as part of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26.

4. Business Planning

Business planning plays a vital role in the Council's performance management and delivery processes. It offers a more efficient and cohesive approach to monitoring and evaluating performance while improving overall visibility.

The purpose of the Directorate Business Plans are to:

- Demonstrate how each of the Directorates are supporting and achieving Council's priorities.
- Provide a clear sense of purpose of the Directorate and the challenges it faces.
- Illustrate how it is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measure performance and hold ourselves to account to ensure we deliver for the Council and its residents.

Business Plans Quarter 2 Performance Reporting Templates for; Economic Development Directorate 2025/26 is **enclosed** for approval.

5. Financial Position / Implications

As agreed as part of the Council's rate setting process

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Business Plan 2025/26 Quarter 2 Performance Reporting Template for Economic Development be approved.

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

4.12 ED/LMP/001 ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members approval of the enclosed minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meeting held on 22 October 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will be aware of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), the aim of which is 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 11 September 2025, the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership Meeting of 5 August 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.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meetings held on 22 August be approved.

Prepared by: Michelle Pearson, Business Development Officer (Skills)

Agreed by: Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 ED/ED/277 TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONT PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

- **Provide Members with an overview of the DfC Urban Shop Frontage Scheme; and,**
- **Update Members on the level of grant awards paid out to local businesses to date and the level of grant reclaimed from the funding Department.**

2. Introduction/Background

This programme is funded by the Department for Communities with 10% funding contribution from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, with a total of £434,000 having been initially secured. This has been supplemented further by a Letter of Variation to provide an additional £30k to the Department's initial contribution. The overall budget available to the programme is therefore £494,000.

The programme has been managed by the Economic Development section and delivered in three separate phases since June 2024. The programme will formally end on 31 March 2026, subject to final claims being processed.

Phase	Eligible Town Centres	Opening/Closing Dates
1	Ballyclare, Randalstown	24 June 2024 – 20 September 2024
2	Antrim, Crumlin, Glengormley	7 October 2024 – 13 December 2024
3	All town centres	20 June 2025 – 29 August 2025

In total, the programme received 174 applications – 139 LoOs have been issued, 34 applications were rejected due to their ineligibility for a range of reasons (e.g. outside the programme boundary, outstanding information not provided upon request), and 1 application was withdrawn. To date, officers have processed almost 90 claims, and five applicants have withdrawn the acceptance of their LoO due to reasons including the proposed timing, costs or planning requirements.

Detailed Guidance Notes agreed with the Department have outlined the terms and conditions that govern the programme in relation to commercial and retail properties located within defined town centre boundaries. Applicants can access a maximum grant of £4,999 per property for eligible works at a grant rate of 80%.

Among the key objectives of the programme, the most important have been to improve and enhance the visual streetscape of commercial areas within the town centres to improve the visitor experience and footfall, support local

businesses and to seek to reduce physical decline across the town centres.

The Application Process

Building upon the experience of similar schemes, the Town Centre Shopfront Programme features a rigorous assessment process endorsed by the Department for Communities, as chief funder.

Following an Expression of Interest exercise in 2023/24, funding was secured from the Department and an application process was designed, supported by detailed Guidance Notes. Applications for grant support for eligible works have been received in accordance with the separate calls outlined above, and assessed by Council officers, ensuring that applications are eligible and quotations are verified. Each application is then subjected to an officer site visit, an assessment panel, a programme Project Board, Council Committee (Economic Development) and Full Council, before any Letter of Offer, up to the maximum award of £4,999 per property, can be issued. Following completion of works, applicants are required to submit photographic evidence and subject to site inspections before claims are paid.

Final claims must be submitted by 31 March 2026, and officers continue to encourage successful applicants to complete their proposed works as quickly as possible, and to submit relevant claims in advance of this date.

TABLE 1: Grant Award Allocation by Town			
Town	No. of Approvals	Grant Award Value (£)	Ave. Award Level (£)
Ballyclare	49 (35%)	155,461.54	3,172.68
Randalstown	28 (20%)	95,719.88	3,418.57
Antrim	29 (21%)	99,383.74	3,427.03
Crumlin	9 (7%)	31,287.78	3,476.42
Glengormley	24 (17%)	85,686.92	3,570.29
Totals:	139 (100%)	£ 467,539.86	£ 3,363.60

Table 1 shows how the grant award allocations have been distributed across the Borough, highlighting that 139 Letters of Offer have allocated almost £470k of grant awards to local businesses to date.

Following the issue of Letters of Offer to approved applications, officers are continuing to process grant claims received in respect of works undertaken.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In December 2025, Full Council approved the previous update report endorsing the eighth and final tranche of grant awards (to a value of

£30,789.72) for 10 more local small businesses. With the inclusion of these awards, the rolling programme total indicates £467,500 has been allocated to local businesses and property owners in terms of grant award, subject to acceptance.

4. Financial Position/Implication

Under this programme, officers have processed payment of grant claims to 80 local businesses to date, amounting to £234,286.99 in grant award. Officers continue to process the claims on a rolling basis as the works being funded are completed.

To date, officers have submitted two separate claims to the Department for Communities for payments totalling £197,661.151.

5. Governance

The Economic Development team has responsibility for managing the programme.

6. Business Feedback

Initial comments received by officers and Members alike have been very positive across all five Borough towns, and this is highlighted by photographs in Annex A (**enclosed**) featuring before and after examples of works undertaken by local businesses with support from the programme.

The Department has also welcomed the positive effect of the programme on the ground, and this endorsement is reflected in the additional funding that has supplemented the original programme budget.

Officers will conduct a post-project evaluation at the conclusion of the programme in line with Department for Communities requirements.

7. Summary

This report provides 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, ahead of the programme's end date of 31 March 2026.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the update to the scheme.

Prepared by: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development, Planning

5.2 ED/ED/305 BALMORAL SHOW 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Council's potential participation in the 2026 Balmoral Show following meetings with other Council areas.

2. Introduction/Background

For the last number of years, the Council has purchased a stall at the Balmoral Show with the aim of providing a platform to promote local food, drink and hospitality businesses, as well as the tourism and hotel offering in the Borough.

The 2025 Show took place from Wednesday 14 – Saturday 17 May. As in previous years, the Council purchased a stand in the Food NI Pavilion to promote the Borough, and four local food/drink businesses benefited from free use of space on the stand.

The businesses showcasing at the Council stand included:

- Never Worry Coffee, Antrim DEA
- Get er Brewed, Dunsilly DEA
- Cocobros Chocolate, Three Mile Water DEA
- Tasty Grub Club, Ballyclare DEA

Each business availed of 2 days on the stand to showcase and sell their products, enabling them to promote themselves to the 120,000 attendees.

Exhibitors availed of pre- and post-event mentoring support through the Go Succeed programme which was specifically tailored to their exhibition at the show and how to maximise this opportunity. As well as this, officers provided support in the form of an online briefing session for participants, facilitating engagement with Council's Environmental Health team and event promotional opportunities. The Council's Tourism team also used the opportunity to promote the upcoming Garden Show Ireland 2025 by selling tickets and distributing promotional fliers.

In addition to the showcasing businesses, the Council stand was made available to local hotels including The Maldron, The Rabbit and McKeever Group who availed of the opportunity to promote themselves in conjunction with the Council's Tourism offer.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In November members considered the options for the Council's attendance at the Balmoral Show 2026 and approved option 3 – to explore the potential of sharing a space at the show with another council area or stakeholder to reduce overall costs and should no suitable partner be found, the Council revert to option 1 – to not attend the 2026 show, with a review thereafter.

4. Key Issues

Officers from Antrim and Newtownabbey issued correspondence to a number of other Council teams and subsequently met with officers from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council to discuss the option of sharing a stand. Whilst interested in the concept, Mid and East had already secured approval and committed financially to their own stand with a deposit paid to Food NI by the time of the meeting and therefore could not enter into a partnership agreement for the 2026 show. No other responses were received from other Councils or stakeholders.

However, Mid and East Antrim would be keen to revisit this option with Antrim and Newtownabbey for 2027.

Participation in the 2026 Show

Members agreed in November 2025 to not attend the 2026 show if a suitable partner could not be found.

For completeness, Officers have also enquired with FoodNI about the availability of a smaller stand, similar to Mid and East Antrim, at 3mx3m and there are a small number still available. The budget approved for the 2025 show was £17,500 and that provided the Council with a 6mx3m stand. The anticipated cost of the 3mx3m option would be £11,000 a saving of £6,500 on the 2025 stand. It would still enable the Council to support four businesses to attend the show in 2026, albeit on a smaller setting.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Based on the outcome, officers have concluded that a shared stand arrangement is not achievable for the 2026 Balmoral Show.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the outcome of the exploration with Mid & East Antrim Council and seek to pursue this option in 2027.

Prepared by: Hannah McVeigh, Regeneration Project Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

5.3 ED/ED/298 NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Northern Ireland Economic Conference, which took place in the Titanic Hotel Belfast on 19 November 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will recall that Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council was the principal sponsor for the 2022 and 2023 Agenda NI Northern Ireland Economic Conferences that took place at the Kingfisher Hotel. The Northern Ireland Economic Conference is Northern Ireland's premier economic analysis event and is unique in being the only forum which takes a high-level look at the performance of and prospects for the local economy

The 2024 Northern Ireland Economic Conference was hosted in the Titanic Hotel in Belfast with a theme of "Creating good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity and achieving net zero by 2050". At the meeting of the Economic Development Committee in September 2024, Members agreed the attendance of Members of the Committee and relevant Council Officers, with the cost met through existing Economic Development budgets

3. Previous Decision of Council

The 2025 Economic Conference was also hosted in the Titanic Hotel Belfast, with the theme of "Creating good jobs, promoting regional balance, raising productivity and reducing carbon emissions"

As in previous years, the 29 September 2025 Full Council meeting approved attendance at the Northern Ireland Economic Conference 2025 for Members of the Economic Development Committee and relevant Council Officers, with costs met through the Economic Development budget.

4. Overview

The Conference was attended by Economic Development Officers, who heard from a top line up of expert speakers, both local and visiting, including Caoimhe Archibald MLA, Minister for the Economy, Chris Giles, Economic Commentator, Financial Times and Mary O'Mahony, Professor of Applied Economics, King's Business School, King's College London.

Presentations and panel sessions focused on

- The global and UK economic outlook
- The medium-term economic outlook for Northern Ireland
- A comparative analysis of economies, North and South
- Narrowing the productivity gap
- Creating good jobs and tackling economic inactivity
- Addressing regional balance

- Achieving net zero by 2050
- Assessing the impact of trade tariffs
- Recalibrating the skills agenda
- Promoting innovation and R&D
- Analysing public expenditure
- Infrastructure investment as an economic driver

Copies of the presentations will be uploaded to Flux for Members information.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Tickets for the event were £195+VAT each on a special discounted rate for local government, with two Officers attending. The cost of attending the conference was provided for within the Economic Development budgets for 2025/26.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the report.

Prepared by: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

5.4 ED/ED/284 LETTER FROM DfE REGARDING NIBSUP PERFORMANCE 2024/25

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on correspondence received from Department for Economy (DfE) in relation to the Council's NI Business Start-Up Programme Performance (NIBSUP) 2024/25.

2. Update

The Council has received correspondence from DfE dated 3rd December 2025 outlining performance against statutory targets for the NI Business Start-Up Programme.

The Council has exceeded the statutory target, as outlined below:

Statutory Jobs Target	Total Jobs Created 2024/25	Target Variance
80	134	+54

A copy of the correspondence is **enclosed**.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the correspondence from Department for Economy (DfE) in relation to the Councils NI Business Start-Up Programme Performance (NIBSUP) 2024/25.

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

Agreed by: Michael, McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and Steven Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

6 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.