



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL
ON 13 JANUARY 2026 AT 6.30 PM**

In the Chair : Alderman M Cosgrove

Committee Members (In person) : Councillors – M Cooper, N Kelly and B Webb

Committee Members (Remote) : Councillors – E McLaughlin, M Ní Chonghaile and M Stewart

In Attendance : Maria Doyle, Office Senior Partner, Deloitte in Northern Ireland/ Chair of the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership
Robert Ditty, Executive Director, Investment Properties CBRE NI

Officers Present : Director of Economic Development & Planning – M McAlister
Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development – M McKenna
Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure – S Norris
Head of Finance – R Murray
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
ICT Support Assistant – D Graham
Member Services Officer – L Irwin

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the January Meeting of the Economic Development Committee and reminded all present of recording requirements. He extended condolences to Councillor Mallon on his recent bereavement.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor B Mallon

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 7.3 – Alderman M Cosgrove

AOB item – Economic Development Strategy – Cllr Billy Webb

The Chair advised that the presentation on the rates estimate process would be taken as the first item on the agenda.

3 PRESENTATIONS

3.2 FI/FIN/11 ESTIMATES UPDATE PRESENTATION

1. Purpose

An update on the 2026/27 Estimates for Economic Development was presented at the meeting by the Head of Finance.

A summary of the financial position for the 2025/26 financial year and the current financial estimates for 2026/27 was circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed that

the presentation be noted.

NO ACTION

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

1. Purpose

A short presentation was given by Marie Doyle, Chair of the Belfast City Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) and Robert Ditty, Executive Director of Investment Properties CBRE to provide an update on the work of BCRPP.

Members sought clarification in relation to the benefits for the Council of being involved in the partnership to date.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

the presentation be noted.

NO ACTION

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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, was a joint public-private initiative that was delivering a programme of work aimed at ensuring the wider City Region was 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 comprised public, private and key anchor institution partners within the Belfast City Region. Partners included 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, presented at the January Committee meeting. Following the presentation, Members were requested to agree a way forward regarding the Council's future participation in the Partnership.

As part of this decision, Members could 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 had been £15,000 per annum which had been met through the Economic Development budget and was included in the 2026/27 budget

allocation. This fee included the delegate passes for both UKREiF and MIPIIM, although travel expenses and accommodation etc. were an additional cost.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the Council remained in the Belfast and City Region Place Partnership for 2026/27 but would seek a reduced contribution based on value for money, and that the position be reviewed in one year.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

4.2 ED/REG/072 SMALL SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 could 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 included:

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 included 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 included 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 had undertaken a further detailed financial analysis of the programme. This had refined the programme's financial position and confirmed that the level of underspend was lower than previously estimated.

The table, circulated, illustrated 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 had now obtained a programme of works with a cost of £87,000. The associated costs for this scheme had been included in the forecasted expenditure under the Environmental Improvement Scheme and Programme Delivery project lines. The table illustrated a funding gap of £20,878.12.

6. Financial Implication

The total value of the COVID Recovery Small Settlements Programme was £1,006,878.12. The agreed programme budget was £986,000, which included 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 was a funding gap of £20,878.12.

Members were asked to note that the Letter of Offer was only valid until 31 March 2026, and works had to be completed by this date.

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

Council's total contribution to the programme would be £132,878.12, representing 13.1% of the overall programme value. This remained 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 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.

8. Summary

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

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

the financial position of the Small Settlements Programme be noted and an additional £20,878.12 be approved to complete the Templepatrick Environmental Improvement Scheme, which could be accommodated within the Economic Development 2025/26 departmental budget.

ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

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

1. Purpose

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

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 help connect employers with employees.

Members were advised that an amended letter of offer (circulated) had 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 Action Plan of £503,957.40.

3. Key Issues

The budget for the Partnership for the financial year had 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 was 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 met bi-monthly (6 times per year) and was chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings were reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

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

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

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 sought approval for the Council's financial contribution to the Action Plan delivery.

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 help connect employers with employees.

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

Officers had 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 believed a number of minor changes were required to the plan to make the expected Outcomes Based Accountability targeted more realistic and achievable. An updated Action Plan extract was circulated.

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 would 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

Members were asked to note that the budget had been developed based on guidance supplied by DfC. Administration costs were capped at 20% of the overall programme costs.

There were currently 3 Council Officers (2.7 FTE equivalent) working on the Labour Market Partnership programme. Funding of £103,079 from DfC would cover 69.5% of the salary costs involved with £45,100 met by the Council, provision for which had been made in the 2026/27 economic development budget. Administration costs had 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 met bi-monthly (6 times per year) and was chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings were reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Cllr Webb paid tribute to the members of the LMP and the staff for their contribution.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed 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.

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

4.5 **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 five further business applicants under Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme, at a value of circa £20,709.00

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.

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 encompassed an open call approach and prioritised the PSNI's suggested areas at the application scoring stage, via a scoring matrix.

The 9 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 had 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 were continuing with the assessment of these applications, the initial grant assistance requested was in the region of £20,709. This figure could reduce as assessment of the applications progressed against the eligibility criteria.

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

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

Following completion of Phase 2 of the Business CCTV scheme, Officers intended to undertake a post-project evaluation of both phases of the scheme. The evaluation would consider 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.

5. Financial Position/Implication

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

6. Governance

The project would be delivered by the Economic Development section.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

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.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer

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

1. Purpose

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

2. Introduction/Background

As Members would 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 meant there had been limited time for the Council, as a whole, to fully avail of the benefits of the membership.

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

An Economic Development Officer would 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 remained at £2,000 + VAT as the Council was a large employer with more than 500 employees – all employees were welcome to enjoy the benefits; membership was not exclusive to women.

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

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

the Corporate Membership of Women in Business NI be approved at a cost of £2,000 (excluding VAT), to be met from the Economic Development budget.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

4.7 ED/ED/284 NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 was a Westminster Committee which examined expenditure, administration and policy of the Northern Ireland Office and its associated bodies.

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

The current membership of the Committee was:

- 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 sought to gather evidence on

- What were the main sectoral opportunities for economic growth in NI?
- How did these align with the eight priority sectors for growth identified in the UK Government's new industrial strategy?
- What were the main barriers to economic growth in Northern Ireland, in particular among new and emerging sectors?
- To what extent would 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 did their respective strategies and priorities align or diverge?
 - How should they work together to enhance Northern Ireland's skills base?
- What steps were needed to ensure economic growth benefit all parts of NI?
- What steps should the UK Government, NI Executive and businesses take to better exploit UK-EU dual market access and the all-island economy?

A response was submitted to the inquiry on behalf of the Council and was circulated. Additionally, Belfast City Region Deal submitted a response via their Project Management Office. A copy was circulated 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 was the second such panel undertaken by the Committee to date and allowed 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 had been invited to participate in the second oral evidence session on 7 January at Westminster. The session was attended by Michael McKenna and Steven Norris.

In addition to this, the NI Affairs Committee was planning a three-day visit to Northern Ireland at the end of January 2026, specifically 26 – 28 January. On the 27th the Council had 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 was under development it was 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 would 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 7 January and the Council had been asked to host the Committee at the end of the month as part of its three-day visit to Northern Ireland.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

- a) attendance of officers from the Economic Development Team at the evidence session on 7 January 2026 be retrospectively approved.**
- b) The Council agrees to host the upcoming visit of the members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in January 2026.**

ACTION BY: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Economic Development and Michael McKenna, Deputy Director Economic Development

4.8 ED/ED/315 RURAL INVESTMENT AND GROWTH FUND

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 were 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 faced recognised and persistent disadvantage, acknowledged in law through the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which required public bodies to address the shortcomings of “one-size-fits-all” policy approaches.

In practice, rural SMEs were 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 were heightened by weaker digital and transport connectivity, including unreliable broadband and limited mobile coverage, which restricted market access and reduced competitiveness.

Following the cessation of the European funded Rural Development Programme (RDP) in 2020, Rural organisations had 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) had continued to administer the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) programme, this focused more on sustainability than growth and, for 2025/26, was capped at a relatively low grant level of £7,500 with a 50% intervention rate. It was anticipated that within the Council area, £135,000 would 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 had sought guidance from key stakeholders including DAERA and SOLACE regarding the development of any future rural development programme funded by the Department. It was understood that there had been ongoing discussions around the development of a dedicated rural fund, however, to date there was no firm proposal, business case or budget allocation. As a result, any future programmes were not envisaged to be live in the next 12-24 months.

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

To address this gap in support for local businesses it was 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 would 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 aimed to provide substantial capital support to micro and SME businesses operating in rural areas across the Borough.

The Programme would 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 would focus primarily on capital purchases and capital works that contributed directly to business productivity and growth.

The programme was expected to provide financial support to micro and SME businesses in rural areas. It was envisaged that grants would be in the region of £10,000 - £20,000 at a 50% grant rate, ensuring a minimum project value of £20,000 which emphasized 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 was defined as all areas outside the statutory development limits of towns with a population less than 5,000. This meant that the below settlements were not eligible for funding under the programme:

- Antrim
- Metropolitan Newtownabbey
- Ballyclare
- Crumlin
- Randalstown

Eligible project spend was 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 were not exhaustive, and each application would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

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

A draft version of the application guidance document was circulated.

5. Strategic Alignment

This fund aligned 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 complemented 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 was proposed that up to £150,000 be ringfenced in the 2026/27 economic development budget.

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

a budget of up to £150,000 from the 2026/27 Economic Development Budget be approved for the delivery of a pilot Rural Investment & Growth Fund.

ACTION BY: Stewart McCormack, Investment Officer

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 was a 5G Innovation Region initiative by Helix8 Ltd, a Larne-based technology company. Helix8 had 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 would 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 was outlined in the circulated information.

The project would 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 was 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 remained the project lead and data controller, while regulatory oversight continued to rest with DAERA/NIEA.

This distinction ensured 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 was referred to as a "facilitating partner and site host within the 5G Innovation Region ecosystem".

The specific ask from the Council was:

- Site and Location
- To install a drone docking station on the roof of the Council-owned Gateway Centre. The exact location would be confirmed in consultation with the Council's Estates Services Team, however the area required would be 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 had 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, made the Gateway Centre the desired location for the equipment. There was 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 were responsible for design, procurement and contractor supervision however all plans and works must be agreed in advance with the Council.

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

A full checklist was circulated 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) maintained oversight of regional reporting to DSIT. The Council's participation ensured representation of rural and tourism-based use cases within the region's wider 5G ecosystem.

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

5. Financial Position/Implication

There would be no cost to the Council in relation to this project. All costs would 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 would be co-ordinated by the Economic Development Team, supported by Estate Services and IT.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed that

the Council's role as a facilitating partner and site host for the Gateway Project be approved.

ACTION BY: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer

4.10 ED/ED/306 LONDON INVESTMENT EVENT UPDATE

1. Purpose

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

2. Update

As Members were aware, following the award of Council of the Year, an Investment Showcase event was held on 10 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 had to offer: [Borough Showcase Video](#)

Feedback since the event had been overwhelmingly positive in relation to venue, content and 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 were circulated.

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 had 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 was essential that momentum was maintained regarding the messaging and conversations which took place in London.

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

Attendees had 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 would be developed and delivered by Officers to ensure that the momentum generated by the event was capitalised on and maintained. The ambition would be to convert the high levels of interest into firm commitments, partnerships and a pipeline of activity.

A proposed action plan was circulated.

To support the follow up activities in the short-term, it was 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.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the update regarding the showcase investment event which took place in London on Wednesday 10th December 2025 be noted and the associated action plan be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

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

1. Purpose

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

2. Background

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

Specifically, the duties in the Act related to Section 84(1), 85(2) and 85(9) whereby the Council had 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 were 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 played a vital role in the Council's performance management and delivery processes. It offered a more efficient and cohesive approach to monitoring and evaluating performance while improving overall visibility.

The purpose of the Directorate Business Plans were to:

- Demonstrate how each of the Directorates supported the achievement of Council's priorities.
- Provided a clear sense of purpose of the Directorate and the challenges faced.
- Illustrate how it aligned its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measured performance and held the Council to account to ensure delivery for the Council and its residents.

Business Plans Quarter 2 Performance Reporting Templates for; Economic Development Directorate 2025/26 were circulated for approval.

5. Financial Position / Implications

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

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

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

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

4.12 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 meeting held on 22 October 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 help 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 was chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings were reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meeting held on 22 October be approved.

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

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 ED/ED/277 TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONT PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 was 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 had 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 was therefore £494,000.

The programme had been managed by the Economic Development section and delivered in three separate phases since June 2024. The programme would 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 had 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 had processed almost 90 claims, and five applicants had withdrawn the acceptance of their LoO due to reasons including the proposed timing, costs or planning requirements.

Detailed Guidance Notes agreed with the Department had outlined the terms and conditions that governed the programme in relation to commercial and retail properties located within defined town centre boundaries. Applicants could 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 had 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 sought to reduce physical decline across the town centres.

The Application Process

Building upon the experience of similar schemes, the Town Centre Shopfront Programme featured 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 had been received in accordance with the separate calls outlined above,

and assessed by Council officers, ensuring that applications were eligible and quotations were verified. Each application was 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, could be issued.

Following completion of works, applicants were required to submit photographic evidence and subject to site inspections before claims were paid.

Final claims had to be submitted by 31 March 2026, and Officers continued 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 showed how the grant award allocations had been distributed across the Borough, highlighting that 139 Letters of Offer had allocated almost £470k of grant awards to local businesses to date.

Following the issue of Letters of Offer to approved applications, Officers were 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 indicated £467,500 had been allocated to local businesses and property owners in terms of grant award, subject to acceptance.

4. Financial Position/Implication

Under this programme, Officers had processed payment of grant claims to 80 local businesses to date, amounting to £234,286.99 in grant award. Officers

continued to process the claims on a rolling basis as the works being funded were completed.

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

5. Governance

The Economic Development team had responsibility for managing the programme.

6. Business Feedback

Initial comments received by Officers and Members alike had been very positive across all five Borough towns, and this was highlighted by photographs (circulated) featuring before and after examples of works undertaken by local businesses with support from the programme.

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

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

7. Summary

This report provided 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.

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

the update to the scheme be noted.

NO ACTION

5.2 **ED/ED/305 BALMORAL SHOW 2026**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 had 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 was 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 had also enquired with FoodNI about the availability of a smaller stand, similar to Mid and East Antrim, at 3mx3m and there were 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 had concluded that a shared stand arrangement was not achievable for the 2026 Balmoral Show.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed that

the outcome of the exploration with Mid and East Antrim Council be noted and that the Council would seek to pursue this option in 2027 including a full detailed costing of staff expenses as well as cost of the stand.

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

5.3 ED/ED/298 NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMIC CONFERENCE 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 would 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 was Northern Ireland's premier economic analysis event and was unique in being the only forum which took 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, which included 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 would be uploaded to Flux for Member's 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.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was 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 had received correspondence from DfE dated 3 December 2025 outlining performance against statutory targets for the NI Business Start-Up Programme.

The Council had 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 was circulated.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the correspondence from Department for Economy (DfE) in relation to the Council's NI Business Start-Up Programme Performance (NIBSUP) 2024/25 be noted.

NO ACTION

6 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

- 6.1 In response to a Member's query, the Director of Economic Development and Planning advised that she had not seen the detail of the Water Quality Improvement Scheme issued by DAERA and it may fall in the remit of Operations, however she agreed to liaise with the Director of Environment and Sustainability Services on this issue.

ACTION BY: M McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

- 6.2 In relation to a query raised by a Member in relation to a review of international relationships, the Director of Economic Development and Planning outlined that a piece of work had been carried out by Declan Barry that is now being reviewed by Officers with a report to be presented to members in due course.

ACTION BY: M McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

- 6.3 A Member sought and received clarification from the Director of Economic Development and Planning on the progress of the Economic Strategy. She confirmed that she was reviewing the draft specification which would be shared on a confidential basis, in the coming weeks with Members for feedback .

ACTION BY: M McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

- 6.4 In response to Members, the Director of Economic Development and Planning advised that dates were being considered for the upcoming trip to Gilbert and she would update and circulate details to Members when these were confirmed in the coming week.

ACTION BY: M McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

- 6.5 The Director of Economic Development and Planning advised that she would respond to a Member's question in relation to the Glengormley office space 'in confidence' due to legal matters.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

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

ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS CONTINUED

- 6.5 The Director of Economic Development and Planning updated Members on the progress of the Glengormley office space with an update report to be presented in due course outlining the way forward.

ACTION BY: M McAlister, Director of Economic Development and Planning

7 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

7.1 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/313 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (LEP) UPDATE & ACTION PLAN

1. Purpose

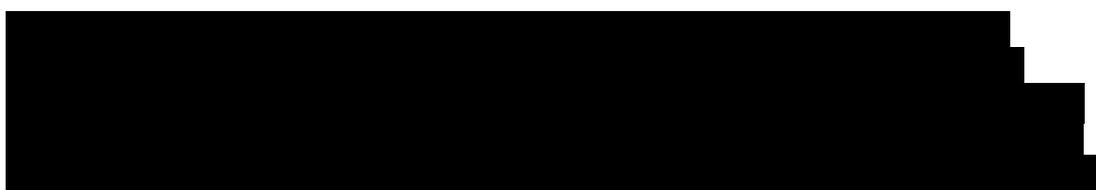
The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the progress of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP) activities and progress up to 18th December 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be 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 sought to address regional imbalance. Each Council area in Northern Ireland would be granted an allocation to support their individual action plan.



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.

In August 2025 it was agreed by Committee that the update was noted and approval was made for the preparation of Year 1 projects to proceed at risk, in anticipation of the LoO and MoU from the Department for Economy. Confirmation was also made of the 3-year funding provision.

Total project costs: £ [REDACTED] Capital: [REDACTED] Revenue: [REDACTED]

Overall total cost including staff costs: £ [REDACTED]

Total staff costs had been taken from date of Business Case approval – 23rd May 25.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the above report be noted, and that the next meeting be scheduled for Thursday, 5 February 2026 at 17:30 (Mossley Mill) to outline the agreed Final Action Plan, confirm Year 1 delivery and inform Year 2 priorities.

ACTION BY: Conor Steele, Local Economic Partnership Officer

7.2 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/279 GO SUCCEED PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the current position and options for future funding for the Go Succeed Programme (Entrepreneurship Support Service) and outline the potential implications for future delivery and the Council's contribution.

2. Introduction/Background

At Economic Development Committee in November 2025 Members were updated on the delivery of the Go Succeed programme and progress to date. Members would recall that the Go Succeed Project Management Office (PMO) in Belfast City Council was actively exploring and engaging with key stakeholders regarding the future funding of the programme.

The current primary funder for the service was the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), managed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with financial contributions also made from by each local council based on a proportionate share. An initial £17 million was secured from SPF for this regional programme delivery from November 2023 – March 2025 with a further £9.2 million made available for the 2025/26 delivery period. This funding would end in March 2026.

The UK Government's 'Local Growth Fund' was the successor to the Shared Prosperity Fund and in mid-December 2025, members of the NI SPF Partnership Group were advised as follows:

- The revenue element of the Local Growth Fund would be £11.8 million in financial year 2026/27
- This would be split between Go Succeed and economic inactivity projects in the same proportion to funding received in 2025/26 under UKSPF

- This means that there would be an allocation of £2.53m to Go Succeed and £9.276m to economic inactivity projects
- The funding would be for one year only. Further engagement would take place with projects (and wider partners) to consider approach for financial years 2027/28 and 2028/29

[Redacted text block]

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council previously agreed to participate in Go Succeed in October 2023. Council committed to contributing £77,347 towards participation in the 2025/26 programme.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The Council had previously agreed to match-fund the Programme to the value of £77,347 in 2023-24, £77,347 in 2024-25 and £77,347 in 25/26.

The Transferred Functions Grant relevant to Economic Development activity was £225,302 in the 2024/25 year and was expected to be £236,490 in 2026/27. This financial support was primarily focussed on job creation and aligns with the Go Succeed programme activity.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed that

provision of £154,694 be made in the 2026/27 estimates, which represents a doubling of the current contribution from Council. Should the required level of remaining funding not be met by the Department for Economy or other sources a further report would be provided to the Committee.

ACTION BY: Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer

7.3 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/285 SPACE ANTRIM SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the performance in Years 1 and 2 of the Pilot Service Level Agreement and to seek Members' approval to implement new targets for Year 3.

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 led to the development of "Space Antrim", a flexible workspace which officially opened in November 2024.

A pilot arrangement was approved by the Council in July 2023 for Antrim Enterprise Agency to undertake the operation of Space Antrim. This pilot operational agreement commenced on 01 November 2023 for a period of three years, with the potential for an additional two-year extension to 31 October 2028.

Year 1: 1 November 2023 – 31 October 2024

Year 2: 1 November 2024 – 31 October 2025

Year 3: 1 November 2025 – 31 October 2026

3. Previous Decision of Council

In July 2023, the Council approved the pilot Operational Agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency for a period of three years.

4. Key Issues

The Pilot Operational Agreement provided for Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited to act as the building operator performing all duties and responsibilities to ensure that a high standard of service was achieved at all times for businesses and customers using SPACE Antrim.

In addition, the terms of the agreement set out that Antrim Enterprise Agency would work collaboratively with the Council in relation to:

- Staff recruitment to support the operation of SPACE
- Recruitment of new business users and licensee holders
- Setting rates for rents, hot desks, meeting rooms and events
- Supporting and co-ordinating the communications and marketing of SPACE
- Signposting businesses to extra support
- Hosting relevant professional events

To provide this service and to cover the staff costs an initial service cost would be paid to Antrim Enterprise of £60,000, which would increase by 5% each year, subject to satisfactory performance.

To support the on-going monitoring of the agreement a series of Key Performance Indicators were set out in the original agreement. It was important to note that these KPIs were based upon the original business case developed to support the project.

KPI	Proposed Target	Monitoring Frequency
Core KPIs (on which the performance of the contract is based)		
Number of enquiries received	█	Quarterly
Number of events hosted	█	Quarterly
Building Occupancy (Office Space)	█	Quarterly
Building Occupancy (Meeting Rooms)	█	Quarterly
Building Occupancy (Hot Desks)	█	Quarterly
Additional KPIs		
Number of Referrals to Support	█	Annually
Satisfaction rating from Users	█	Annually

In addition to these core KPIs, research conducted in relation to operating agreements of this nature indicated that several performance related metrics should also be included in the Pilot Service Level Agreement. These included:

Performance Aspect	Description	Total Payment	Payment Period
Customer Satisfaction	Customer satisfaction survey for areas that the service provider manages and above the agreed KPI Level shall trigger the payment.	██████	Quarterly (i.e. £██████ per quarter)
Staff retention and cover	Consecutive employment from the same member of staff	██████	Bi-Annually (£██████ every six months)
Operating agreement performance	Following a review of overall performance and based on agreed KPIs	██████	Annually
Sales Commission	Above the agreed letting targets, Antrim Enterprise will be paid commission based on rent/license fee.	n/a	Annually

Year 1

Year 1 of the pilot agreement commenced in November 2023, however due to delays in the construction of the building, the new workspace didn't open until August 2024 and didn't open officially until November 2024. Despite this, Antrim Enterprise did allocate a significant amount of time to support the design and development of the building and contributed to the development of the new branding and marketing materials. This allowed Antrim Enterprise to build up a portfolio of clients who were already signed up to move into SPACE before it had officially opened. Antrim Enterprise also employed the first member of staff to support the operation of SPACE in July 2024 in anticipation of the building opening.

The performance in Year 1 was recorded as follows:

KPI	Proposed Target	Year 1 Achieved*
Core KPIs (on which the performance of the contract is based)		
Number of enquiries received	██████	██████
Number of events hosted	██████	██████
Building Occupancy (Office Space)	██████	██████
Building Occupancy (Meeting Rooms)	██████	██████
Building Occupancy (Hot Desks)	██████	██████
Additional KPIs		
Number of Referrals to Support	██████	██████
Satisfaction rating from Users	██████	██████

*Taking account of the August 2024 opening date.

Despite a limited operating window, Antrim Enterprise managed to meet or exceed most of the KPIs associated with the contract.

In Year 1 this performance alongside the reduced operating window resulted in Antrim Enterprise being paid £ [REDACTED] out of a total contract value of up to £ [REDACTED].

Year 2

Year 2 commenced on 1st November 2024 and ended on 31st October 2025. This was the first full year of operation and as a result the KPIs included in the Pilot Operational Agreement remained unchanged.

Year 2 saw the development of SPACE Antrim with dedicated marketing and promotional campaigns, increased events and increased overall presence in both the town and across NI.

At the end of Year 2, the output of the KPIs was as follows:

KPI	Proposed Target	Year 2 Achieved
Core KPIs (on which the performance of the contract is based)		
Number of enquires received	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Number of events hosted	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Building Occupancy (Office Space)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Building Occupancy (Meeting Rooms)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Building Occupancy (Hot Desks)	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Additional KPIs		
Number of Referrals to Support	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Satisfaction rating from Users	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

The performance in Year 2 continued to build on the success of year 1 and at the end of the period there were only 2 offices remaining available to let out of the original 15.

In Year 2 this performance resulted in Antrim Enterprise being paid £ [REDACTED] out of a total contract value of up to £ [REDACTED].

Year 3

As we enter Year 3 it was timely now to review the KPIs to ensure that they continued to provide a robust mechanism to monitor progress and performance of this important contract.

In the table below were suggested KPIs for Year 3 with a rationale to support the changes.

KPI	Proposed Target	Rationale
Core KPIs (on which the performance of the contract is based)		
Number of enquiries received	[REDACTED]	It is proposed to keep this target at [REDACTED] given that the office space is almost 100% occupied, the

		number of enquiries is likely to drop off as a waiting list is developed.
Number of attendees at events	■	It is proposed to change this KPI from number of events to number of attendees which will better capture the scale of the events.
Building Occupancy (Office Space)	■	Currently the office space is 85% occupied this new target ensures a continued focus to let the remaining offices and maintain the current licensees.
Building Occupancy (Meeting Rooms)	■	This better reflects the nature and type of bookings received for meeting rooms but also represents a stretch target for the operator.
Building Occupancy (Hot Desks)	■	Currently the hot desk and dedicated desk use is 60% this new target ensures a continued focus to grow this aspect of the workspace.
Additional KPIs		
Number of Referrals to Business Support	■	This target better reflects the anticipated performance.
Satisfaction Rating from users	■	This target is reduced slightly as the building is more highly occupied 95% is very difficult to achieve across all user groups.

If agreed these metrics would be included in an updated version of the Pilot SLA which would be signed by both the Council and Antrim Enterprise Agency.

A further review would be conducted at the end of Year 3 and a further report would be brought to Members in due course regarding the future operation of SPACE Antrim and the operation of SPACE Glengormley.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The Council had entered into a Pilot Operational Agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency for an initial period of three years until 31 October 2026. The costs of this agreement and the other running cost of the facility were included within the current Economic Development budget and the estimates for 2026/2027.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the proposed KPIs for the Pilot Operational Agreement Year 3 for SPACE Antrim with Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited be approved.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer

7.4 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/284 INVESTMENT VISITS FOLLOW-UP

Members were provided with a verbal update on potential investment opportunities and advised that further developments would be reported to a future Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the update be noted.

NO ACTION

7.5 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 (circulated) and for Members to note current Planning Application Notices.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that
the Major Strategic Planning Applications Overview be noted.

NO ACTION

7.6 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/195 Vol.3 MINUTES - LEVELLING UP FUND PROJECT BOARD ANTRIM & 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 meeting held on 23 October 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

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 23 October 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

7.7 **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 16 September 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.

Proposed by Councillor Webb

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 16 September 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

7.8 **IN CONFIDENCE** FI/ED/ED/18 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM) SYSTEM

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the procurement and implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to support the work of the Economic Development Team within Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.

2. Introduction

The Economic Development Team played a pivotal role in supporting local businesses, attracting investment, and delivering strategic initiatives that enhanced the borough's economic competitiveness and prosperity. As the scope and scale of the team's programmes, partnerships, and stakeholder engagements continued to expand, the need for a more structured, efficient, and data-driven approach to relationship management had become increasingly evident.

At present, stakeholder information and engagement activity were managed through a combination of spreadsheets, email correspondence, and disparate databases. This fragmented approach presented a number of operational challenges, including duplication of data, limited visibility of engagement history, inconsistent communication with key stakeholders, and

difficulties in measuring impact and reporting outcomes to internal and external partners.

These limitations constrained the team's ability to work efficiently, collaborated effectively, and demonstrated the value and outcomes of economic development activity. They also presented a barrier to delivering a consistent and proactive service to businesses, investors, community organisations, and government partners.

To address these challenges and support the Council's wider digital transformation agenda, the Economic Development Team proposed the implementation of a dedicated CRM system. The CRM would provide a single, secure, and centralised platform for managing stakeholder information, recording interactions, automating workflows, and generating meaningful insights to inform strategic decision-making.

The introduction of a CRM system would enhance internal efficiency, improve data quality and reporting, and support more effective engagement with stakeholders across the borough. It would enable a more proactive, responsive, and evidence-based approach to economic development activity, ensuring the Council was well positioned to support sustainable economic growth now and in the future.

The full business case was circulated for Members' consideration.

Three options were considered,

- CRM (Lite)
- Full CRM
- Outsourced CRM

The preferred option arising from the business case was Option 2 CRM (Lite) as it met the immediate objectives and needs of the section whilst maintaining the flexibility for further development and expansion to other Council sections as required

3. Procurement

In order to identify the available backup solutions and costs for the business case, Officers investigated the market via the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) G-Cloud Framework. This framework offered access to the latest technology and innovation from over 4000 suppliers and provided a compliant route to market which reduced the timescales and the procurement risk.

Stage 1 – Capability Assessment

The software solutions were evaluated for:

- compliance with specification
- cyber security, data protection and infrastructure resilience

- management and pro-active support provision

Stage 2 – Pricing

Following the capability assessment, the preferred solution price for Option 2 was below:

Supplier	Estimated Cost including Implementation and Installation (£) (excl. VAT)	Annual SAAS Licence (£) (excl. VAT)	Estimated additional Annual Support
Codec	██████████	██████████	██████████

In relation to use of digital technology including Artificial Intelligence in Council, the Director of Economic Development and Planning advised that a piece of work was currently being undertaken to review Council systems and that an update would be provided to members. A member requested that consideration be given to including Elected Members in any relevant training which may be rolled out.

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

- approval be given to proceed with Option 2 of the Business Case at an estimated cost of £██████████ over the project life.**
- approval be given for the implementation of the CRM solution supplied by Codec, through the G-Cloud Framework, at an estimated cost of £██████████ for 5 years.**

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

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile
 Seconded by Councillor Webb 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 8.00pm.

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.