



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL
ON 10 MARCH 2026 AT 6.30 PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor B Webb
- Members Present
(In person)** : Councillors – N Kelly, E McLaughlin, M Ní Chonghaile,
- Members Present:
(Remote)** : Alderman M Cosgrove
Councillors – M Stewart
- Non Committee
Members:
(In person)** : Councillors - V McWilliam and S Ross
- Non Committee
Members:
(Remote)** : Alderman M Magill
- Officers Present** : Director of Economic Development and Planning –
M McAlister
Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development –
M McKenna
Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure – S Norris
ICT Helpdesk Officer – Jonny Wilson
Member Services Officer – L McDonald

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning informed Members that the Chairperson was unable to attend the meeting due to work commitments and that whilst the Vice Chairperson was joining remotely, he would be unable to remain for the whole meeting. She invited members to nominate

from the floor indicating that Councillor Webb had previous experience of the Committee and was willing to Chair. It was agreed by members that Councillor Webb would chair the meeting.

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

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors – Cooper and Mallon

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 3.6 – Councillor Webb

3. ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 ED/ED/131 INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OVERVIEW UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was as follows:

- a) Updated Members on the independent study undertaken by Export Explore to consider the Council's current and future International Relations commitments and the associated resource requirements.**
- b) Sought Members' instructions on a recent invitation from the Chinese Consulate for a delegation of Council Members and Officers to take part in a fact finding tour to China in 2026.**
- c) Sought Members' instructions on a recent invitation from Rybnik for a two person delegation including the Mayor, to attend Rybnik Days 12-14 June 2026.**

2. Introduction/Background

International Relationships had been a feature of the work of many NI councils including Antrim and Newtownabbey Council for decades. They were important in positioning the Council as an outward and forward- looking region, that sought to learn from best practice elsewhere, shared what we do well with partners and ultimately attracted and created opportunities for our citizens.

As outlined in the circulated report, the Council's engagement in international relationships had evolved over time, reflecting a blend of civic diplomacy, cultural exchange, educational collaboration, and economic ambition.

The current relationships were summarised below:

- Gilbert, Arizona (Sister City),

- Dorsten, Germany (Twinning),
- Rybnik, Poland (Twinning), and
- Leshan, China (Friendship).

The Council had also been approached more recently by the Poppy Country, France to develop a formal relationship and some initial engagement had taken place.

The Economic Development section had delegated authority via the Council's Scheme of Delegation to support this activity as part of its overall programme delivery. There was no formal action linked to each relationship nor a dedicated resource within the team which focused on this area of work.

The Youth Exchange programme with Gilbert was the only activity which was undertaken and budgeted for on an annual basis. All other visits and associated programming etc were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. In addition, there was no framework through which requested to initiate such relationships were assessed and therefore they were brought through Committee for consideration.

The Export Explore report sought to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Borough's current international relationships. The report outlined a structured methodology for future international engagement and presents clear recommendations to ensure these relationships delivered meaningful and sustainable value.

A copy of the report and associated documents were circulated for Members' consideration.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members would recall that a report was presented to the Council on 29 July 2024 specifically in relation to the Gilbert and China relationships. The purpose of the report was as follows:

- Noted the success of the ongoing relationship with Gilbert and specifically the most recent visit in May 2024.
- Considered the correspondence with Leshan, China, regarding future relations with the Council.
- Invited the Director Designate of the NI Executive in China, to discuss the context and opportunities of establishing a sister city relationship with Leshan, China.

Following consideration, the decision of Council was that Members note the success of the ongoing relationship with Gilbert and specifically the most recent visit in May 2024.

4. Report Recommendations

The report proposed a series of recommendations which were summarised below:

- Deepened the Gilbert Sister City Partnership with a clear action plan for trade, skills, education, and civic collaboration.
- Repositioned Dorsten and Rybnik as low-cost, heritage-focused links or honorary relationships if active engagement could not be re-established.
- Maintained Leshan as a low-cost Friendship relationship, with strict criteria and risk assessment before any escalation.
- Progressed exploratory engagement with the Somme region of France on a pilot basis, focused on commemoration, education, and aligned economic opportunities.
- Introduced annual performance reviews and a structured evaluation framework for all relationships, linked to economic, civic, and community outcomes.
- Designated and resourced clear officer/partner responsibility for coordinated international relationship management.

Further detail on the proposed activities linked to each relationship was set out in the following table extracted from the main report.

Gilbert, Arizona	
Maintain and enhance the Sister City relationship with Gilbert, focusing on deepening economic and educational collaboration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand structured business engagement initiatives, particularly in advanced manufacturing, skills development, and innovation. • Broaden the educational offer beyond the existing Youth Exchange to include institutional partnerships and technical skills programmes. • Regularly review the Gilbert action plan to ensure continued alignment with the Borough's economic and civic priorities.
Rybnik, Poland	
Undertake a strategic reassessment of the twinning relationship with Rybnik to determine its future viability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate discussions with Rybnik counterparts to explore the potential for low-cost, community-led reactivation, particularly in education and culture. • If substantive engagement cannot be re-established within an agreed timeframe, consider repositioning the relationship to an honorary status without active programmes. • Communicate any changes transparently to stakeholders and communities.
Dorsten, Germany	

Reposition the relationship with Dorsten as a cultural and commemorative connection, recognising its historic value while managing resource commitments appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain the relationship for symbolic and heritage purposes, particularly in the context of post-war reconciliation. • Limit future engagement to civic representation during significant anniversaries or events, without requiring active programme management. • Explore light-touch community or school linkages if opportunities arise organically.
Leshan, China	
Maintain the current friendship status with Leshan and proceed cautiously regarding any progression towards a formal Sister City agreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with relevant stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Executive's Director in China, to better understand opportunities and risks. • Set clear criteria for any future escalation of the relationship, with an emphasis on tangible, low-cost, and strategic benefits. • Continue diplomatic and civic engagement without committing to expanded programme activity until a Council decision is taken

The report set out that international relationships should be reviewed annually against agreed performance indicators, and that new opportunities should be proactively assessed through the Borough's established methodology to ensure strategic fit, resource feasibility, and measurable community benefit. This approach would protect the Borough's reputation, optimise outcomes, and ensure international engagement remained a meaningful asset to local economic, civic, and cultural development.

In addition, the report provided a new methodology for assessing potential future relationships. An evaluation of the Poppy Country/Somme Region opportunity against the proposed Borough International Relationship Decision Model was undertaken in the report, and shown below;

1) Initial Approach or Interest from a Jurisdiction	Interest initiated informally through civic contacts linked to remembrance events.
2) Does the Opportunity Align with Strategic Goals (Economic, Civic, Cultural)?	Yes - Heritage tourism, educational engagement, and cultural diplomacy directly aligned with the Borough's priorities for community enrichment, international visibility, and tourism growth.
3) Can Meaningful Outcomes Be Realistically Achieved with Proportionate Resources?	Yes (Cautious) - Educational and cultural projects, such as joint school programmes or commemorative tourism initiatives, could be established at relatively low cost, focusing primarily on targeted events rather than permanent infrastructure or heavy staffing.

	<p>Educational and cultural projects, such as joint school programmes or commemorative tourism initiatives, could be established at relatively low cost, focusing primarily on targeted events rather than permanent infrastructure or heavy staffing.</p>
<p>4) Start with a Friendship Relationship (Low Cost, Diplomatic Engagement)</p>	<p>Recommended first step: <i>Formalise a Friendship Agreement focusing on low level economic development activity, shared heritage commemorations, student visits linked to history curriculum, and possible collaboration with local museums or cultural groups.</i></p>
<p>5) Evidence of Mutual Benefit, Capacity, and Community Interest?</p>	<p><i>Monitoring phase:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage local schools, heritage groups, and tourism officers to gauge interest and ability to participate. • Seek reciprocal commitment from Somme authorities in hosting and supporting joint activities. • Assess the appetite among the Borough's residents for participating in remembrance-related cultural programmes. • Potential impact of low level economic development activity.
<p>6) Upgrade to Twinning or Sister City Status?</p>	<p><i>Only if:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangible, multi-year educational and cultural programmes develop. • Economic benefits (e.g., increased tourism to the Borough) can be measured or forecast with confidence. <p>Otherwise, maintain the relationship at the Friendship level with periodic reviews.</p>

The Somme region represented a culturally significant and strategically aligned opportunity for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. However, it was recommended that engagement proceeds initially via a Friendship Relationship, focusing on specific, manageable projects around heritage, education, and tourism. Future escalation to a more formal Twinning

arrangement should be conditional on demonstrated mutual benefit and community value.

Chinese Consulate invitation for a fact-finding visit to China in 2026.

Members were advised that the Mayor had received correspondence from the Chinese Consulate, a copy of which was circulated inviting a delegation of Members and officers to take part in a fact finding visit in 2026 – potentially between April and June. It was proposed that the itinerary would include visits to leading enterprises, educational institutions and cultural sites both in Beijing and Leshan as well as meetings with Chinese counterparts – policymakers, municipal representatives, researchers, business leaders and educators involved in public governance and community development. The letter indicated that a delegation of 6 Members and 3-4 officers would be positively considered.

It was understood that the cost of the trip would be supported by the Chinese Consulate, therefore it was envisaged that the fact finding visit would align with the low-cost Friendship relationship as recommended by the International Relations report.

Invitation to Rybnik Days 12-14 June 2026

Members were further advised that the Mayor had received correspondence from the Mayor of the City of Rybnik, Piotr Kuczera, a copy of which was circulated. An invitation had been extended for a two person delegation to attend the Rybnik Days celebrations from June 12-14, in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship and the partnership between the cities.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed that

One Elected Member and an officer attend the Rybnik event, and that all remaining items be deferred to an Elected Member Workshop, with further consideration to be presented at Full Council meeting.

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

3.2 ED/REG/065 GLENGORMLEY PUBLIC REALM UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the Glengormley Public Realm Scheme, including planned procurement, project adjustments and seek approval for the final design of feature lighting.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would recall that a public realm project was proposed for the centre of Glengormley, with funding secured of up to £2.3m from Department for Communities and £696k from Department for Infrastructure.

3. Previous Decision of Council

At Council in August 2022, Members approved the scope of the public realm scheme with an anticipated cost of £5,230,414, with a further update to be provided to Members as the scheme progressed. A copy of the original scope of the scheme was circulated at appendix a.

4. Key Issues

The Glengormley Public Realm Improvement Scheme would deliver a significant contribution to both the physical enhancement and long-term economic regeneration of Glengormley Town Centre. Through a coordinated programme of environmental and infrastructure upgrades along the Antrim Road and Ballyclare Road corridors, the scheme would create a more welcoming, accessible, and commercially attractive destination for residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Key elements of the project included high-quality pavement improvements designed to promote accessibility and encourage increased pedestrian movement, the installation of modern street furniture and clear wayfinding signage to enhance the overall visitor experience, and upgraded LED street lighting to improve safety, visibility, and the evening economy. Together, these interventions would help create a vibrant town centre environment that supported increased footfall, longer dwell time, and greater confidence for investment in the locality.

The planned environmental improvement scheme would encompass the main town centre and would encompass parts of the Antrim Road and Ballyclare Road and would provide high quality natural stone paving and kerbing, landscaping, street lighting, high quality furniture and carriageway resurfacing.

The scheme was overseen by a Project Board with officers from the Council, DfC, DfI and other organisations including Central Procurement Directorate attending as was necessary. The procurement for the scheme was being finalised with the view to notifying for public tender in the next 6 weeks;

The anticipated project programme was as follows:

- Works tender Summer 2026
- Construction works
- Start on site November 2026
- Completion early 2028

Officers were working closely with the Council's Legal section to complete the land ownership exercise and establish ownership of land encompassed within the scheme. Officers had also held an engagement workshop with utilities and service providers with the view to alignment of any planned works over the course of the project in order to minimise disruption.

The project board had reviewed the extent of the public realm scheme primarily to consider the impact of private led developments in the area, and in anticipation of increased costs since the business case was passed and agreed. Since the original scheme was designed and planning approval obtained several private sector developments had commenced on site, including the Eurospar extension at Tramways, the residential developments at the Ferbro site, and the former Thunderdome site. In addition, the Council had completed a number of capital schemes within the town centre in the last 2-3 years which had highlighted the significant challenges and cost of encountering conditions below ground including utilities and services which were not in the expected locations and caused serious disruption and delay.

In anticipation of rising costs from the tender process, a number of adjustments had been recommended by the Project Board, which reduced the scope of the scheme, as shown on the map (circulated appendix b);

- Removal of privately owned areas considered non-essential for the scheme
- Reducing the extent of the footpaths included in the scheme along Ballyclare Road (which lie outside the commercial core)

Given those adjustments, the updated scope of the project was as follows: the total resurfacing area was approximately 12,500sqm with a paving area of 6,500sqm. This compared to a total scheme surfacing area of 13,500sqm and paving area of 9,800sqm in the original scheme).

Members would be aware of the recent workshop held on 4 March at which the scope of the scheme and feature lighting design was considered.

In addition to the new street lighting throughout the extent of the project, the scheme also proposed new feature lighting at a number of locations as shown on appendix b (circulated).

- Option 1; depicted full leaf cut-outs in a spiral formation around circumference of lighting column design to represent the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council logo.
- Option 2: which denoted each street/location on the feature column with illuminated text on opposite sides of the lighting column.

A further report outlining options in relation to the feature lighting would be provided to the Committee which considered number, location and 'fit' with the town centre environment.

5. Costs

It was proposed to bring an updated report to Economic Development Committee once updated costs from the pre-tender estimates process had been received.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the report and approval of the revised scope of the public realm scheme be approved.

ACTION BY: Chris Doyle, Investment Officer

3.3 ED/ED/313 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the progress of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP), outline programme activities, and sought approval for the Action Plan for Years 2 and 3 (circulated), along with approval of the Business Digitisation Grants.

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 1 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 align 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.

The Department had indicated that, for Antrim and Newtownabbey, up to £956,000 per year would be allocated, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years. This remained the joint lowest allocation across Northern Ireland.

The Council received a Letter of Offer from the Department of Economy (DfE) on 13 January 2026. This was reviewed, signed and returned on 29 January 2026.

Projected spend for Year 1 Action Plan activities had therefore been significantly reduced given the reduced timeframe for delivery and was now estimated to be £35,000. The Council was awaiting confirmation from DfE regarding the rollover of any underspend in Year 1 into the remaining programme allocation.

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.

In November 2025, following a Stakeholder meeting, the LEP Action Plan for Year 1 was formally agreed and finalised along with Terms of Reference and signed Memorandum of Understanding. These were submitted to DfE on 9 December.

4. Update

Since the last update provided to the Committee, the Council had now received a Letter of Offer from the Department for the Economy (DfE) on 13 January 2026. The LoO was reviewed, signed and returned on 29 January 2026.

The offer confirms a total programme allocation of £2,868,000 to 31 March 2028. Budget allocation comprised a Resource Grant not exceeding £956,000 and a Capital Grant not exceeding £1,912,000, to be delivered across the three-year period.

Year 1 activity had been further refined to reflect the significantly shortened delivery timeframe following receipt of the Letter of Offer. As a result, projected Year 1 spend had been reduced accordingly, and the Council was currently awaiting written confirmation from DfE regarding whether any underspend may be reprofiled into subsequent years of the programme.

Action Plan – Update

Year 1 Delivery:

Following receipt of the Letter of Offer, Year 1 activity had been refined to reflect the shortened delivery period, with priority given to projects that can be delivered at pace during the remainder of the financial year.

The following programmes were now launched or ready for immediate delivery:

Business Digitisation Programme

- Launched on 19 January 2026.
- Provided £1,000–£5,000 grants at an 80% intervention rate to support improvements in productivity and digital capability.
- 27 Expressions of Interest and 5 full applications had been received to date, indicating strong demand.

Assessed applications:

Business	Description	Proposed Award
Dynamic Fire and Security	Fire and Security Installation Company	£4,869.54
Training Solutions	Training Services	£5,000

Workspace Development – Technical Assistance

- Five applications had been sent to interested parties to date, and 2 full applications had been returned.

Green for Business Programme

- Final guidance and application documentation was being completed ahead of marketing and promotion.

Projects and Programmes Prepared for Launch / Ongoing Development

Green Cluster Programme

- Work had commenced with the Council and Invest NI to establish business clusters at Global Point, Nutts Corner, and Mallusk, focusing on energy related collaboration and efficiencies.
- An Invest NI led Workshop took place on 30 January 2026, with 12 companies registered and a further 4 requesting information. This programme would be delivered by Invest NI and a technical transfer of £25,000 would be made between the Department for Economy and Invest NI on behalf of the LEP.

Global Point Masterplan

- Officers were preparing procurement documentation for specialist consultancy support.

Go Global: Skills, Business and Connectivity

- Engagement continued around AMIC-linked stakeholder activity, including skills and sectoral mapping across the borough.

Action Plan – Years 2 and 3

Theme 1 – Investment and Strategic Employment locations	
Global Point Masterplan / Practical Delivery Plan Development	Development of a new Masterplan for Global Point, covering transport, infrastructure, sustainability and digital enhancements to support future investment.
SEL Masterplan / Practical Delivery Plan Development	New Masterplans for additional SELs focusing on infrastructure, transport, waste, energy and 5G readiness, alongside promotional collateral.
Masterplan Capital Delivery Scheme	Capital support to deliver priority actions from SEL Masterplans (e.g., energy, connectivity, shared infrastructure).
Go Global – Skills, Business and Connectivity	<p>Building a collaborative network of businesses and stakeholders with links to advanced manufacturing, enabling local businesses to leverage the opportunities presented by AMIC’s Factory of the Future and related City and Growth Deal initiatives.</p> <p>This programme includes stakeholder mapping, facilitated engagement events and allows businesses to acquire innovation support from AMICs resources, and support the ambitions of the LEP including referrals to Invest NI and support to tradeable services.</p>
Theme 2 – Green Economy	
Green for Business Programme	Mentoring, advisory support and capital grants enabling business adoption of low-carbon technologies and energy-efficient solutions.
Cluster Formation – Energy	Invest NI-led business clustering initiative focusing on energy/resource data, collaboration, and eco-efficiency at locations such as Mallusk, Nutts Corner or Global Point.
Theme 3 – Workspace Development	
Workspace Development – Technical Assistance and Capital Support	Support to progress new or enhanced workspace projects through feasibility, design, planning and capital development to strengthen entrepreneurial infrastructure.
Entrepreneurship/Start-up Support	Contribution to continuation of Go Succeed in Year 3, supporting early-stage entrepreneurs with mentoring and business development pathways.

Business Improvement Techniques Programme (Accredited)	NRC-delivered Lean and business improvement training (40 hours), enhancing workforce productivity and operational efficiency.
Theme 4 – Sector Development and Productivity	
Digital Transformation Mentoring Programme	NRC-delivered diagnostics and mentoring (20 hours per SME) supporting digital readiness, automation, AI and data-driven productivity planning.
Business Digitisation Programme	Grants and specialist support helping SMEs adopt digital tools, automation and operational improvements.
Export Capability Support Programme	Capability-building support for non-Invest NI client businesses seeking to enter or expand into export markets, with mentoring, readiness assessments and market analysis.
Productivity Improvement Programme	Expert business productivity assessments with implementation grants to deliver recommended improvements.
Advanced Manufacturing Cluster Programme	Supports development or participation in a regional manufacturing cluster to enhance collaboration, supply chain building and sector innovation.
Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (Follow-On)	Successor fund to maintain capital support for digital technology adoption once DTFF ends.

5. Financial Position/Implication

As outlined above, the Letter of Offer confirmed a total programme allocation of £2,868,000 to 31 March 2028. Budget allocation comprised of a Resource Grant not exceeding £956,000 and a Capital Grant not exceeding £1,912,000, to be delivered across the three-year period. Council was awaiting confirmation from DfE regarding allocation of any underspend from Year 1.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
 Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

- a) the grant awards to Dynamic Fire and Security and Training Solutions and
 b) the Action Plan for Years 2 and 3 be approved.**

ACTION BY: Conor Steele, Local Economic Partnership Officer

3.4 ED/REG/083 OUT OF TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONTS GRANT AWARDS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval to award seven grants under Call 4 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme.

2. Introduction / Background

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

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

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

3. Applications Received

Members were advised that for the period from 29 November 2025 – 30 January 2026, seven applications were received and assessed by a panel of officers. The total value of grants recommended for approval was £23,873.20, subject to the receipt of all supporting documentation. Grant awards were set out in the table (circulated).

4. Financial Position

The overall programme budget for Phase 2 was £139,743.55. To date, £24,226.80 had been awarded. Had Members approved the seven grant recommendations enclosed, the remaining programme budget would be £91,643.55.

A further call for applications opened on 31 January 2026 and closed on 28 March 2026.

5. Summary

This report made seven grant recommendations under Call 4 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme, subject to receipt of all relevant supporting documentation.

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

the seven grant awards totalling £23,873.20 to the successful applicants under Call 4 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme, subject to the receipt of all relevant supporting documentation be approved.

ACTION BY: *Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer*

3.5 ED/LMP/001 LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' permission to implement the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan projects for 2026/27 at risk, pending receipt of a Letter of Offer from the Department for Communities (DfC) and provided officers with the delegated authority to accept the Letter of Offer once received.

2. Introduction/Background

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

Members would also recall that the Regional LMP, at its meeting on 3 February 2025 approved the LMP Action Plan for 2026/27. Following learnings in the delivery of the Action Plan over the past two years Officers made a number of amendments to the plan for 2026/27 which were approved by Committee in January 2026.

3. Key Issues

As in previous years, programme delivery was due to commence on 1 April 2026 and be completed by 31 March 2027.

In previous years, letters of offer had been delayed until annual funding was confirmed for the Department for Communities. To date letters of offer had been received as follows:

2022/23 - November

2023/24 – July

2024/25 – August

2025/26 – May.

Delays related to late confirmation of external funding could've had a detrimental impact on programme delivery leaving significantly reduced timeframes to achieve the original outputs and levels of spend. Given the likelihood that the Letter of Offer would be delayed again this coming financial year, officers were seeking permission to commence delivery of the Action Plan projects at risk to maintain delivery momentum and minimise disruption to deliver the projects.

Delegated authority was also requested from Council to accept the Letter of Offer once received and reviewed by officers.

4. Previous Decision of Council

The updated Action Plan for 2026/27 was reviewed at the Economic Development Sub Committee meeting on 16 January 2026, and Council contribution of £45,100 approved as below:

Anticipated budget for the Partnership for 2026/27 was £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.

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 Ní Chonghaile
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

- a) **permission for the LMP to operate at risk pending receipt of a Letter of Offer from the Department for Communities be approved**
- b) **delegated authority be approved for officers to accept the Letter of Offer.**

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

3.6 **ED/ED/284 ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY BUSINESS AWARDS – REQUEST FOR SPONSORSHIP**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' instructions regarding the sponsorship of Antrim and Newtownabbey Business Awards being led by Mallusk Enterprise Park.

2. Introduction/Background

Members recalled that pre-COVID the Council had agreed to host Borough Business Awards, Community Awards and Sports Awards in a three yearly cycle i.e. one per year. The last Business awards were held in 2019.

3. Previous Decision of Council

N/A

4. Key issues

Mallusk Enterprise Park had submitted a proposal to the Council to lead on the delivery of Antrim and Newtownabbey Business Awards 2026.

The Business Awards would give local companies the opportunity to be recognised for their hard work and commitment to business excellence, the event would recognise all the great work that was going on a, especially as the businesses played such a key role in our local economy.

The aim of the awards was to highlight the achievements of some truly remarkable companies in our area, which boasted an incredibly diverse range of skills and industries from artisan producers and hospitality providers to leading manufacturing and technology businesses.

The following 14 individual awards categories had been chosen to reflect this prestigious event dedicated to the local business community:

- Antrim and Newtownabbey Business Person of the Year
- Rising Star – Young Business Person Award (Under 30)
- Excellence in Customer Service Award
- Excellence in Manufacturing Award
- Best Apprentice Employer Award
- Best Transport and Logistics Award
- Business Start Up of the Year Award
- Business Growth Award
- Best Eating Establishment
- Best Family Business Award
- Excellence in Contribution to the Community Award
- Greatest Sustainability and Environmental Impact Award
- Outstanding Independent Retailer Award
- Antrim and Newtownabbey Business of The Year

The awards ceremony would take place at the Dunadry Hotel, Antrim on Thursday 1 October and promised to be a night that celebrates the best of local business in the Antrim and Newtownabbey area. This prestigious black-tie event would give recognition to the hard work and dedication of local companies and would attract over 200 guests.

The Council had been offered the opportunity to be the only Title Sponsor for the event at a cost of £8,000. For this the Council would receive:

- The Council name and logo included in the awards title – Antrim and Newtownabbey Business Awards 2026 in association with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.
- Opportunity to speak at the awards event prior to awards presentation
- Company representative would make the presentation to the winner of the final award on the night
- Company name engraved on the award
- Inclusion in press releases and launch photo opportunity as title sponsor
- 10x complimentary tickets to the awards dinner
- Promotion as the title sponsor in the extensive publicity programme for the event

- Company logo on all print material such as brochures, flyers, tickets, menus, sponsors wall etc.
- Company logo would be prominently promoted on the night on stage throughout the evening as well as during the awards presentation itself
- Use of photographs taken at the event for your promotional and PR purposes

The full sponsorship pack was included and circulated.

Officers provided a further verbal update on the model for delivery of the Business Awards.

5. Financial Implications

The cost of the title sponsorship would be £8,000. This was accommodated within the 2026/2027 Economic Development budget.

Members asked Officers to engage with MEP to seek clarity and assurance regarding participation from businesses on a Borough-wide basis for this year's event and to ascertain if the other Enterprise Agencies are involved. Consideration is also to be given to Council Led Business Awards previously delivered pre-Covid with a report to be brought back to the Committee.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove

Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

Council take the Title sponsorship of £8,000 for the Antrim and Newtownabbey Business Awards.

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

3.7 **ED/REG/082 LIVING OVER THE SHOPS UPDATE**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the progress of the Living over the Shops Scheme and to seek approval for the issue of Letters of Offer.

2. Introduction/Background

The Living over the Shops (LOTS) scheme was a Council-led intervention aimed at improving the vitality and vibrancy of our towns by offering grant support to renovate or re-purpose vacant or under-utilised upper floor space within the town centres for the conversion to primary residential use.

The scheme aimed to:

- Help promote the re-population of town centres, contributing to increased footfall and custom

- Reduce the number of vacant or underutilised premises
- Increase housing stock and tenancy options for all budgets
- Reduce dependency on private transport, contributing to sustainability targets; and,
- Improve the animation of town centres to encourage people to visit, work and live in the town centres.

The total budget for the project was £1.45m, and the LOTS grant would cover up to 75% of the eligible costs for each individual property up to a predetermined maximum level, dependent upon the number of units being created, the number of bedrooms and the total eligible project costs. Applicants must have demonstrated a minimum contribution of 25% of the overall eligible project costs.

Only costs including the renovation and re-purposing of vacant or underutilised premises would be eligible for funding support. Eligible costs may have included construction works and non-recoverable VAT. Work already carried out, professional fees and any works representing poor value for money would not be eligible.

Given the level of financial assistance available, the LOTS scheme had been developed to ensure rigorous monitoring and scrutiny. As such, there was a number of levels to be navigated before financial commitments were made.

- Stage 1 – Application Form 1 – basic details and internal officer group assessment.
- Stage 2 – Application Form 2 – further detail and statutory consents required. If successful, Letter of Offer issued.
- Stage 3 – Permission to Start – pending above statutory approvals, initial grant payment (up to maximum of 50% total grant) and Permission to Start notice issued.
- Stage 4 – Construction and Monitoring – commencement of works and regular progress reports submitted.
- Stage 5 – Completion – complete all works – final quantity surveyor inspection completed – grant payment (up to maximum of 40% grant).
- Stage 6 – Securing a Tenant – submission of proof of tenancy and final balance payment (up to a maximum of 10% grant).

A 10-yr clawback mechanism to safeguard Council grant investment was in-built into the scheme.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Pilot Phase 1 Living over the Shops (LOTS) Scheme and the associated grant levels and conditions was approved by Members at the July 2023 Full Council Meeting. The report approved a budget of £1.45m for the four-year term of the Council and that these costs would be capitalised.

In September 2024, further approval was granted by Members to open Phase 2 of the pilot programme for properties in Ballyclare and Randalstown.

In May 2025, the first Letter of Offer was approved by Members for 1-11 Granges Street, Ballyclare at a value of £165,000.

4. Programme Update

Three further applicants to the LOTs programme, two in Antrim and one in Glengormley, had secured their planning permission and other statutory consents for their respective projects. They were detailed below.

Ref No.	Town	Applicant	Property Address 1	Proposed Works
ANT003	Antrim	JMCK Investments	12 Market Square	5 x 1 bed; 4 x 2-bed
ANT006	Antrim	Mr Brian McKenna	50-52 High Street	3 x 1-bed; 2 x 2-bed
GLEN001	Glengormley	Mr Brendan McGivern	2 Hightown Road	1 x 1-bed; 1 x 2-bed

Together these three projects would support the creation of 16 units of accommodation.

Approval was sought for the issue of the Letters of Offer for each of these applicants. The issue of a Letter of Offer would represent a legally binding, formal arrangement between Council and the applicant to deliver the works as proposed, and the onus would be on the applicant to share all details at the earliest opportunity. Officers had procured the services of independent quantity surveyors to help oversee this process.

The details of the three Letters of Offer were:

- ANT003 – up to a maximum of £240,000
- ANT006 – up to a maximum of £145,000
- GLEN001 - up to a maximum of £77,500

This represented a further investment of £462,500 and brought the total committed to projects through the programme to £627,500.

For applicants to commence works and claim the first 50% upfront payment, they would be required to complete a 'Permission to Start' form, providing evidence of contractor appointment. This must have been submitted within three months of the date of the Letter of Offer. Applicants must not have commenced works until they received a 'Permission to Start' notice from the Council. In addition, the independent quantity surveyor would assess the bill of quantities submitted by the appointed contractor for Value for Money and any issues would be reviewed with the applicant before any Permission to Start would be granted and any monies paid.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The total budget approved for the LOTS Programme was £1.45m and it was agreed that these costs would be capitalised. Of this, £165,000 had been committed through a Letter of Offer for a project in Ballyclare and a further

£462,500 could be committed for two projects in Antrim and a project in Glengormley.

6. Governance

This project was managed by the Council's Economic Development Team. An internal officers' group had been established involving relevant professional officers.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the issue of Letters of Offer to ANT003, ANT006 and GLEN001 at a value of £462,500, subject to the receipt of all required information be approved.

ACTION BY: Hannah McVeigh, Regeneration Project Officer

3.8 ED/DI/003 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FLEXIBLE FUND (DTFF) EXTENSION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update to Members on the £7.5m Digital Transformation Flexible Fund grant (DTFF). This was a key project within the City and Growth deals digital ecosystem and was managed and administrated by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council on behalf of all Councils within the FFNI Consortium.

2. Introduction/Background

DTFF was an important programme delivered right across the province. It had been designed to stimulate Digital Transformation and Innovation in small and micro businesses. These types of business generally did not have the capital reserves or resources to start to experiment, prototype and deliver new products or services using new and emerging technologies.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In August 2022, Members approved the council's participation in the programme and a funding commitment of £52,204.

4. Key issues

The programme had experienced substantial growth, with demand exceeding initial expectations, particularly across Calls 4–6. There had been a marked increase in Expressions of Interest (EOIs), full applications, Letters of Offer (LoOs), and subsequent claims. In later calls, claim values had risen significantly above the levels projected in the original business case which had resulted in funding available for the final Call 7 being substantially reduced.

To date, businesses in Antrim and Newtownabbey had benefitted from over £318,000 of funding support through the programme.

As the programme could not commit expenditure beyond the approved capital budget, the DTFF Steering Group had agreed a consensus decision to manage the remaining funds for Call 7. Council representatives on the DTFF Steering Group had endorsed proceeding immediately with Call 7 applications, on the basis that applicants clearly acknowledged the risk associated with limited remaining funding.

Adopting this approach avoided any interruption to programme delivery.

Should the programme have been extended beyond March 2027, each Council would have been required to contribute towards additional associated revenue costs based on the original business case calculation.

5. Financial Implications

A contingency was built into programme delivery to:

- Maintain the existing delivery team up to March 2027, with no additional cost unless the programme extends beyond that date.
- Allow for a potential three-month extension if required to complete any programme close-down activities.

If the programme extended beyond March 2027, an additional revenue contribution would be required from all Councils to support delivery and close-down. Antrim and Newtownabbey's contribution to revenue costs for this contingency was £3,600.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

- a) Members support the DTFF Steering Group's consensus position allowing Call 7 to proceed without delay.**
- b) The optional contingency revenue costs of £3,600 should the programme extend beyond March 2027 be approved.**

ACTION BY: Steven Norris Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

Alderman Cosgrove left the meeting.

3.9 ED/ED/284 KNOCKMORE RAIL LINK

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on a request received from Robin Swan MP seeking a letter of support from the Council in relation to the re-opening of the Antrim – Lisburn (Knockmore) Rail Line. A copy of the correspondence received was circulated for Members' information.

2. Background

Exploratory work had been taking place for some time now into the feasibility of reopening the Knockmore Line. It was understood that the formal feasibility study commissioned by the Department for Infrastructure had been completed but had not yet been published. Mr Swan's letter indicated that the study confirmed that the project was viable and in high demand – he highlighted the strategic benefits that would be delivered for the communities along the route, Belfast International Airport, the borough and NI as a whole.

In considering the opportunities that such an infrastructure development would deliver Officers had identified significant benefits to the borough as summarised below:

- Improving connectivity was integral to driving our economic growth and ensuring that Belfast International Airport as the gateway to Northern Ireland, was appropriately served through high quality, accessible and affordable public transport was essential.
- The reopening of the line would provide greater mobility options for those that live along the route as well as those who would be able to connect into it. Increased mobility would in turn make the employment and training options on offer in this immediate area and indeed the wider borough much more accessible and attractive to those seeking employment.
- Importantly, the Airport and Nutt's Corner areas were both designated as Strategic Employment Locations in the Council's new Local Development Plan which would formalise their status and provide clarity for future development. Both locations were already attracting significant investment in a wide variety of sectors from manufacturing, storage and distribution and logistics to training, retail and hospitality. The untapped potential of this unique location with the RAF Aldergrove lands lying in close proximity, presented a significant opportunity for the future success of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Council area and the wider region.
- Both domestic and international travellers would enjoy an improved experience from being able to connect to a wider range of destinations and having the choice between car, bus or rail transport.

Should Members have wished to provide a letter of support it was suggested that reference be made to the Vinci Group and their investment in a major improvement programme at the airport signalling their commitment to the region and that as a Council we would welcome their involvement as this campaign moves forward to ensure that the collective ambitions of all partners can be realised. The Council would have also welcomed the opportunity to be involved if the project was to be progressed given its importance to the economic future of the borough.

The Director introduced the report and reminded members that the Council had previously committed its support to the re-opening of the Knockmore Line in March 2023 through a Notice of Motion proposed by Alderman Magill, seconded by Cllr Dunlop and unanimously agreed by all members. The motion opened by stating:

“That this Council reaffirms its support for the further development of the public transport network in the Greater Belfast area and more specifically within the boundaries of Antrim and Newtownabbey. That the Council notes the strength of public opinion on the necessity of expansion of the rail network generally, and in particular the re-opening of the Knockmore Line and its connection to Belfast International Airport...’

In the context of this prior agreement, members welcomed the letter from Robin Swann MP and proposed that the response should provide this background.

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

a letter of support be provided from the Council which outlines the Council’s long standing commitment to the re-opening of the Knockmore Line and the Notice of Motion in 2023.

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

3.10 ED/LMP/001 MINUTES - 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 19 December 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Previous Decision of Council

At the Economic Development Committee on 11 November 2025, the LMP the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership Meeting of 5 August 2025 were approved.

4. 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 Webb

Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meetings held on 19 December 2025 be approved.

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

4. ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 ED/ED/317 GILBERT SISTER CITIES YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the interview and selection process undertaken as part of the Gilbert Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that the 2026 Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme was approved by Council in September 2025. The Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme was a longstanding initiative that provided an exchange opportunity for participants from Antrim and Newtownabbey and participants from Gilbert, Arizona the chance to develop an understanding of a different country, its culture, and its people through a family living experience. The programme lasted approximately six weeks during the summer with half the time spent in Gilbert and half in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

The application process involved the completion of a written application form, nomination from school teacher or youth leader, and an interview.

This year, fourteen applications were received in total, with twelve eligible applicants. Two withdrew from the process, therefore ten applicants proceeded to interview stage. The interview panel consisted of Deputy Mayor Julie Gilmour, Chair of Economic Development Committee Councillor Ben Mallon and a member of staff from the Economic Development team.

The breakdown by gender and school of the selected candidates following the interview process were as below. A reserve pool of four candidates had been established, in case Gilbert had additional suitable candidates and space on the programme become available.

Male - St Marys Grammar School	Successful
Female – Carrickfergus Grammar School	Successful

Following confirmation of Gilbert completing their selection process, officers undertook the matching process and organised travel arrangements. Should Gilbert had wished to send up to four young people to Antrim and

Newtownabbey, additional spaces would be offered utilising the reserve pool based on suitability.

Prior to the exchange commencing, officers would facilitate a pre-departure session with participants and their parents/guardians. This would provide information and guidance on the responsibilities of participating families, expected behaviour and conduct during the exchange, safeguarding and social media usage. The session also covered travel logistics and an insight into what to expect when visiting Gilbert, Arizona. Participants would be expected to complete a vlog diary and participate in a volunteering opportunity as part of the programme.

Members, the Mayor and past programme participants would be invited to meet the American participants and their host families at a reception during the summer.

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.2 ED/ED/249 SISTER CITY STAFF EXCHANGE PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Sister City Staff Exchange Pilot Programme.

2. Introduction/Background

In July 2024, the Council's Elected Members noted the success of the relationship and the actions resulting from the most recent outward visit to our sister city Gilbert in May 2024. Following this visit, it was agreed that a new staff exchange programme should be initiated involving a small number of officers from key departments in each Council taking part. These officers should work in key services which the Council wished to prioritise to enhance performance. This would also coincide with a short civic visit of the Mayor accompanied by an appropriate officer.

Members recalled that it was agreed at Economic Development Committee in September 2025 that four members of staff from the Council would participate in the pilot of the staff exchange programme as follows:

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

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

A budget of £30,000 was approved to support the arrangements for the staff exchange and the Civic visit to include the Mayor, Chair of ED Committee (or their nominees), accompanied by relevant officers. These costs would include flights, accommodation and subsistence. It was further agreed that any additional Members who wish to participate may do so through self-funding.

It was proposed that the staff travel to Gilbert in Q1 2026 spending approximately ten working days embedded in the Gilbert Team, with the Gilbert Team to then undertake their return visit during the new financial year (2026/27).

3. Update

Officers had been working alongside their counterparts in Gilbert to arrange mutually suitable dates for the exchange to take place. Due to significant operational challenges, it had not been possible to agree a viable date for the exchange to take place this financial year.

The staff exchange and civic visit was being proposed to take place in Autumn 2026 potentially during the period 2-13 November. Officers would continue to progress the arrangements and a further update would be provided to Members in due course.

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

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.3 **ED/ED/284 GROWTH OUTLOOK REPORT**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Growth Outlook 2026 report which named Antrim and Newtownabbey as one of the UK's most promising places for business growth for 2026.

2. Update

The Growth Outlook report was released on 21st January 2026 by Growth Flag, the UK data intelligence platform. The flagship Growth Flag report Growth Outlook 26 was one of the UK's most comprehensive data-led analysis of business growth potential at local authority level.

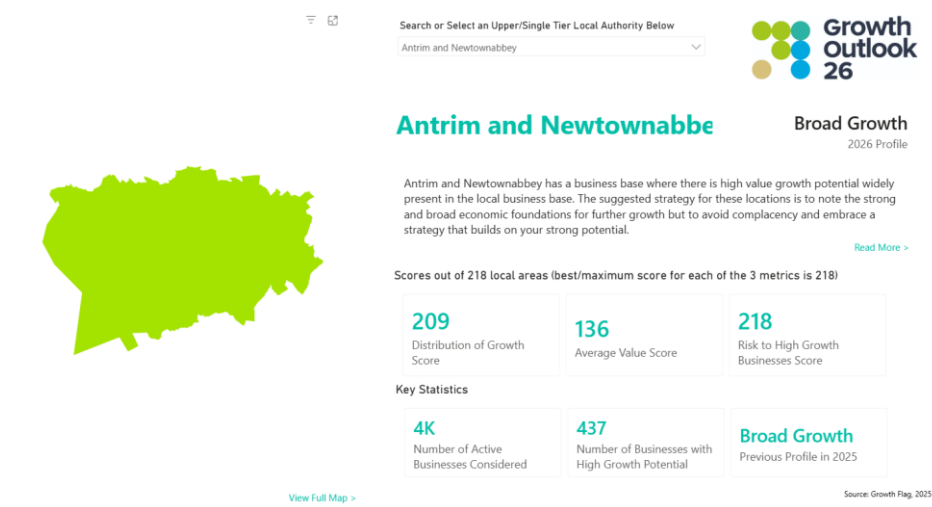
The report named Antrim and Newtownabbey as amongst the top ten growth hotspots in UK for 2026 with strong business resilience and low levels of

business risk in key sectors including health and life sciences, transport and logistics and advanced manufacturing. The ranking also identified Antrim and Newtownabbey as the strongest performing region in Northern Ireland, with 12% high growth potential.

Some media coverage could be found here:

<https://www.newsletter.co.uk/business/it-shows-what-can-be-achieved-northern-ireland-borough-named-one-of-the-uks-top-business-growth-hotspots-in-2026-5486165>

A copy of the report was circulated and the Antrim and Newtownabbey statistics could be seen in the image below.



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

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.4 ED/ED/315 RURAL INVESTMENT AND GROWTH FUND - SECTION 75 EQUALITY SCREENING AND RURAL NEEDS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the Section 75 Equality Screening and the Rural Needs Impact Assessment outcome for the Rural Investment and Growth Fund.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded of the approved Pilot Rural Investment and Growth Fund. The Pilot aimed 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
- Address this gap in support for local rural businesses it is proposed to develop a pilot

The Pilot would provide financial support to micro and SME businesses in rural areas. Grants were between £10,000 - £20,000 at a 50% grant rate.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Delivery of the Rural Investment and Growth Fund was approved by ED Committee on 13 January 2026 and ratified by Full Council on Monday 26 January 2026.

4. Key issues

As part of the Council's responsibilities to identify and address potential implications and promote equality of opportunity and good relations and to give due regard to the social and economic needs of rural communities, as required by the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 respectively.

The Rural Investment and Growth Fund had been subject to Section 75 Equality Screening and had been screened out for the need of an EQIA. A copy of the Section 75 Equality Screening Form was circulated.

The Fund had also been assessed via a Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA). The findings showed that there was no adverse impact which would disproportionately disadvantage people in rural areas. A copy of the RNIA was circulated.

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

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.5 **FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 9 APRIL 2025 TO DECEMBER 2025**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Economic Development Committee for Period 9 April 2025 to December 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Summary

As at period 9:

The Economic Development and Planning Directorate had a favourable variance of £295k, or 16.7%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

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

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

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

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.6 **ED/ED/203 BELFAST CITY AND REGION PLACE PARTNERSHIP**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update regarding the Council's involvement in the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership.

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 representatives of the Partnership delivered a presentation to Committee in January 2026.

It was agreed by the Committee 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 was reviewed in one year. Subsequently the Chair of the Economic Development Committee wrote to Marie Doyle in her role as Chair of the BCRPP seeking reduced financial contribution for this year. This correspondence was circulated alongside the response from Ms Doyle.

Members were asked to note that a reduced financial contribution was not possible this year for the reasons set out in the correspondence. Officers would continue to engage with the partnership for the remainder of this year, including; participating in UK REIF; engaging as part of the partnership's Taskforce; attending an Investment showcase in either London or Dublin (to be finalised) alongside a future dedicated Belfast Region City Deal showcase.

Officers would continue to participate in the Partnership alongside the continued promotion of the Council's new investment proposition, launched in December last year in Westminster.

4. Financial Position/Implication

In previous years the cost of participation in the wider Belfast City and 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.

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5. **ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

There was no Any Other Relevant Business raised.

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

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

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

6. **ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE**

6.1 **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 Kelly
Seconded by Councillor Ní Chonghaile and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

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

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members' approval of the circulated minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 27 November 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 McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 27 November 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

6.3 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 25 November 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 McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Kelly and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 25 November 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Kelly
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin 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 7.24pm.

MAYOR