

**Ask Mentor Programme – Guidance Notes (2025/26)**

**CATEGORY: Business Support**

**Information for Applicants**

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1.1	Economic Development	Guidance Document	10 Sep 2025

## SECTION 1 – APPLICATION GUIDANCE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to businesses wishing to apply for mentoring under the Ask Mentoring Programme ('the programme').

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has developed the 'Ask Mentor Programme' which is designed to support our local businesses and social enterprises develop their capability, improve efficiency, and accelerate growth through tailored, one-to-one mentoring.

### 2. SUPPORT OFFERED

Eligible businesses may receive up to 10 hours of free one-to-one mentoring with a specialist selected to match the applicant's needs.

Mentoring can include (but is not limited to):

- Reviewing systems, processes or workflows
- Identifying digital or operational improvements
- Exploring innovation or new product development
- Identifying skills gaps and capability needs
- Supporting funding readiness (e.g. DTF applications, where appropriate)
- Strengthening marketing, sales, or procurement approaches
- Providing independent expert advice to address specific business challenges

Following completion of mentoring, the mentor may recommend an applicant for the Ask Capital Grant (up to £1,500, 80% funded).

*Please see Ask Capital Grant Guidance.*

### 3. WHO CAN APPLY

The Ask Mentor Programme is open to:

- Sole traders
- Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- Social enterprises / CICs
- Businesses actively trading within Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough

To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be registered and actively trading, and
- Have a clear business need that mentoring can support.

Sole traders are fully eligible but must be able to demonstrate proof of active self-employment (see Section 5).

The programme is open to businesses across all sectors, including manufacturing, retail, creative industries, construction, hospitality, logistics, professional services and more.

Applicants who have previously received Ask mentoring may apply again, provided the support requested relates to a new challenge or development.

#### 4. WHO CANNOT APPLY

The following are not eligible for Ask mentoring:

- Individuals or organisations not actively trading
- Businesses outside the Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough boundary
- Companies whose activity is primarily political or religious in nature
- Businesses currently in insolvency, liquidation, or subject to enforcement action
- Organisations unable or unwilling to provide appropriate evidence of trading status
- Charities or groups seeking support unrelated to business operations (e.g. community activity without a trading element)

If the Digital Innovation Team cannot verify eligibility using publicly available information, evidence will be requested before support can be approved.

#### 5. EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS (INC. SOLE TRADERS)

To confirm eligibility, the Council may request evidence of trading status. This applies particularly to sole traders and businesses where trading activity cannot be independently verified.

##### **Acceptable Evidence for Sole Traders**

You may be asked to provide one or more of the following:

- HMRC Self-Assessment Tax Return
- HMRC Notice of Registration for Self-Assessment
- Evidence of active trading such as business invoices, receipts or bank statements showing business activity (with sensitive data redacted)
- Confirmation of your Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR)

### Acceptable Evidence for Limited Companies / Partnerships / CICs

- Companies House registration (automatically verified)
- Confirmation of active trading (e.g. website, marketing materials, invoices, etc.)
- CIC or Charity registration number where applicable

This evidence is only requested when necessary and is handled in line with GDPR and Council data-protection policies.

## 6. SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

Applications must be submitted via the online form on the Council website:  
**[antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/ask](http://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/ask)**

When completing your form, please ensure:

- All fields are completed in full
- You clearly describe your business challenge or need
- You select the most relevant mentoring category

Once your application is submitted:

1. You will receive an automated acknowledgement email.
2. The Digital Innovation Team will review your request.
3. If eligible, your business will be matched to a suitable mentor.
4. The mentor will contact you directly to arrange your first meeting.

Typical turnaround for assessment and matching is **5–10 working days**, depending on current demand.

## 7. ASSIGNMENT OF MENTORS

Mentors are allocated based on:

- Business needs
- Mentor expertise and specialism
- Availability
- Rotation and fairness across the appointed framework

Applicants may request a specific mentor, but assignment cannot be guaranteed.

## 8. DURATION OF SUPPORT

Successful applicants are entitled to up to 10 hours of mentoring. If deemed appropriate by council officers, mentoring can be split (50/50) across two specialisms.

Work should be completed within 6–8 weeks of assignment where possible.

Mentors will submit a Contact Report at the end of the engagement. Participating businesses are required to support the completion of this report.

## 9. DATA USAGE AND FRAUD

All information submitted is used solely for:

- Assessing eligibility
- Matching a mentor
- Programme monitoring and improvement

The Council operates in accordance with GDPR and the Privacy Notice available on our website.

The Council is committed to the prevention and detection of fraud and the promotion of an anti-fraud culture.

The Council operates a zero-tolerance attitude to fraud and corruption, whether from internal or external sources. The Council requires staff and individuals/organisations that it deals with, to act with honesty and integrity, to safeguard the public resources and to report all suspicions of fraud and corruption.

Every case of alleged or suspected fraud will be thoroughly investigated in accordance with the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, and where appropriate, referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The Council will also seek to recover any loss suffered as a result of fraud and if appropriate, will take civil, and/or disciplinary action.

## 10. PRIVACY NOTICE

The Ask Mentor Programme collects personal and business data to process applications and evaluate programme impact. This is done under the legal basis of performance of a public task. Data will be handled in line with council retention policy and may be subject to audit. Information will not be shared externally unless legally required or part of audit/funding reporting.

You have rights to access, correct, erase, or object to your data. For more information or to raise a query, please contact the Council's Data Protection Officer:  
T: 028 94 463113 | E: [DPO@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:DPO@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk)

For further detail, view the full Ask Programme Privacy Notice [through this link](#)