



**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL
ON TUESDAY 13 MAY 2025 AT 6.45PM**

- In the Chair** : Councillor B Webb
- Members Present (In person)** : Aldermen – M Magill and S Ross
Councillors – M Goodman, Lynch, Mallon and Ward
- 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
ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson
Member Services Officer – L Irwin

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the May Meeting of the Economic Development Committee, and reminded all present of recording requirements. He noted the later start time due to the Economic Development Workshop which had taken place prior to the Committee meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Alderman M Cosgrove

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 4.13 – Councillor M Goodman

3. PRESENTATION

3.1 LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

A presentation from the Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development was provided on the recent achievements, priorities and plans for the Labour Market Partnership.

The Chairperson thanked the Deputy Director of Investment and Business for his presentation.

It was agreed that the presentation be noted.

NO ACTION

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 PT/CI/068 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PLAN 2025/26

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members the approval of the Economic Development and Planning Business Plan 2025/26.

2. Background

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; and
- Exercise its functions so that any Departmental specified standards are met.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In January 2025 the Council approved a strategic performance framework as part of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2025/26 (draft for consultation).

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 Plan was to:

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

The Business Plan for the Economic Development and Planning Department was circulated for approval.

5. Financial Position/Implications

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

6. Governance

Progress reports on the Council's Directorate Business Plans 2025/26 would be reported quarterly to relevant Committees.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the Economic Development and Planning Business Plan 2025/26 be approved.

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

4.2 **ED/ED/264 WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME 2026**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the progress of the Work Experience Programme 2025 and to seek approval to undertake a procurement exercise for the Work Experience Programme 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be aware that in August 2023 approval was granted to launch a new pilot Work Placement Programme 2023-2024.

The Work Experience 2024 programme, led by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council alongside Workplus Ltd was Northern Ireland's pioneering work experience initiative. Working with employers, teachers, students and parents this innovative, first of its kind programme, delivered meaningful, structured work experience opportunities for students based on their actual career aspirations. This dynamic programme supported students to make informed education and career choices, demonstrated the breadth of opportunities available within our local area and streamlined the placement process for all participants.

The key aims of the pilot project were to:

- Co-ordinate meaningful work experience for pupils before they make their post GCSE decisions.
- Make opportunities easier to find for young people, thereby widening access.
- Make it easier for young people to rank multiple work experience opportunities.
- Offer placements in a variety of sectors.
- Offer a choice of placements to young people.
- Inspire career choices young people make, through encounters with employers and employees.
- Provide work-based learning and key employability skills.
- Equip young people with skills language and skills growth
- Build confidence in young people as they enter the world of work to help them become workplace ready.
- Help employers deliver work experience making it fun and meaningful.

The programme was shortlisted for Best Public/Private Partnership in the APSE awards 2024.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

August 2023 – approval for Pilot Schools Work Placement Programme

June 2024 – approval for Phase 2 Work Experience Programme

Sept 2024 – approval of tender for Phase 2 Work Experience Programme

4. Key Issues

Work experience was an identified policy response to addressing labour shortages in the Borough and the difficulties faced by schools and employers in this area remain prevalent.

Feedback from Pilot Phase

The video developed as part of the celebration event for the pilot phase can be viewed via the following link:

antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/workpluscelebrationevent

Delivery of Phase 2

An open procurement exercise was undertaken for delivery of Phase 2, with Workplus Ltd being appointed in August 2024. Phase 2 had followed the model of the pilot phase linking schools and employers to meaningful work placement opportunities for young people across the Borough with built in flexibility to allow the participating schools to make the programme fit with their individual school's needs.

There had been a number of key enhancements to the programme, as a direct result of the feedback from last year:

- **Enhanced SEN school involvement** – the uptake of SEN placements in the pilot programme was greater than anticipated, and this led to there being an enhanced focus on SEN schools and finding suitable placements in phase 2.
- **Year Group** – the pilot programme aimed to support pre-A-Level students i.e. those who are in the GCSE years before they make decisions on the next stage of the career or education. Some feedback indicated that the programme could be opened up to even younger year groups e.g. pre-GCSE to help with choices. As a result, phase 2 allowed schools to decide the most suitable year group to be involved, based on their careers model.
- **Time of Year** – the pilot programme had a date set in March for work placements to take place, which was not suitable for a large number of schools due to their predefined timetables. In phase 2, a date had been agreed after consultation with schools for the placements to take place over a three-day period in June.
- **Dedicated Platform Developed by Workplus** – during the pilot phase, the platform upon which placements were managed was outsourced to a third party. Feedback indicated this platform wasn't user-friendly at times and this also meant that the matching of pupils to work placement opportunities still relied on teachers finding time to complete. In Phase 2, Workplus had developed a dedicated in-house platform, allowing for seamless processing of opportunities from businesses, profiles from students and the matching of students to placements, by the Workplus team. This more integrated approach took away burden for teachers and allowed a more streamline administrative process.

Delivery of phase 2 was currently underway, with placements scheduled to take place from 17-19 June 2025. A full update on the programme outcomes would be presented to Members at the September Economic Development Committee. A celebration event was planned for Phase 2 on Wednesday 25 June 2025. All Members would receive an invitation in due course.

The table below shows figures for the pilot programme and Phase 2 which was currently underway:

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

The schools involved in the 2025 programme were:

- Abbey Community College
- Edmund Rice College
- Ballyclare High School
- Integrated College Glengormley
- Parkhall Integrated College
- Jordanstown Special School
- Rostulla Special School
- Riverside Special School
- Hillcroft Special School
- Thornfield Special School

Every SEN school in the Borough was taking part in the programme this year which given the recent reports on the challenges facing this cohort post school is very encouraging.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c86pvv6pza3o>

Some of the businesses involved in the scheme include:

- Abbey Centre
- CDE Global
- CITB
- Contact Marketing
- Education Authority
- H&J Martin
- Jans Group
- McKeever Hotels
- Rabbit Hotel
- SAM
- The Hilton
- Translink
- Lidl
- Wrightbus
- W&G Baird
- Lloyds Banking Group

Work Experience 2026

In order to maintain momentum for this pioneering programme and to be in a state of readiness for roll-out of the programme at the beginning of the new academic year in September 2025, a procurement process was required. Officers were requesting Members' approval to undertake this procurement exercise over the summer with a more detailed report on the outcomes of Phase 2, the costs of Phase 3, the potential contractor appointment, and the cocktail of funding to be presented in September 2025.

There were a number of funding mechanisms being explored including PEACEPLUS Funding which could co-fund the project and reduce the financial contribution from the Council going forward.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Below was the breakdown of the budget for the pilot programme and phase 2. It was anticipated that the costs would remain at the same level. This budget had been accounted for in the Economic Development budget for 2025/26. There were no new financial implications for the Council.

	Pilot (2024)	Phase 2 (2025)
Cost	£29,250	£29,950

6. Governance

The programme would be managed by the Economic Development Team and regular reports would be brought to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

- a) The update on the Phase 2 of the Work Experience Programme be noted; and**
- b) The undertaking of a procurement exercise for Phase 3 with a more detailed report and proposal around appointment and funding to be considered at the September Economic Development Committee be approved.**

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Office, Economic Development

4.3 ED/ED/311 PEACEPLUS PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members regarding the elements of the PEACEPLUS Action Plan that were due to be delivered by Economic Development over the next number of years and the steps in the process regarding the delivery of these interventions.

2. Introduction/Background

The PEACEPLUS programme was a €1.14bn investment in the social, economic and environmental development of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.

It comprised of six themes and 21 individual investment areas. The Council had secured over £4m to deliver schemes and projects in the Borough over the next few years and this implementation was being managed by the Community Development Department within the Council.

3. Previous Decisions of Council

Members were reminded that a Letter of Offer was received from SEUPB offering €5,103,757 (approx. £4.4) towards delivery of the Antrim and

Newtownabbey Co-designed PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan and reported to Council on 24 February 2025.

4. Key Issues

Within the Local Community Action Plan (circulated) Programme 6, 'Our Future Borough' was to be delivered by the Economic Development Section.

This programme had two main objectives:

- Firstly, to build the confidence and resilience of local people through personal education and learning, enabling them to grow in areas concerning their personal development and individual success.
- The second objective was to provide a community education and learning programme designed to support those deemed the hardest to reach, and/or who are economically inactive to enter the workplace through apprenticeships and other career path opportunities.

The outputs of this programme were anticipated to be as follows:

- Minimum of 350 (175 each objective) participants to take part in the programme.
- Deliver a programme that provides a minimum of 24 hours of meaningful contact on a cross-community basis.
- Creation and delivery of a personal development programme to support local people support themselves and their families.
- Creation and delivery of a community education and learning programme to enhance employment opportunities.

The budget for this element of the programme is €730,000 which included a proportion of costs for administration, management and staffing. To enable the Economic Development section to undertake this project additional temporary staff would be required. Further detail would be provided in due course.

The next steps in the process were:

- The development of a detailed action plan for the 'Our Future Borough' elements of the programme supported by the business case for the whole PEACEPLUS Programme.
- Establishment of a Service Level Agreement between the PEACEPLUS Partnership and the Economic Development section.
- Establishment of monthly departmental working groups; and
- Recruitment of temporary programme management staff.

The final action plan for the 'Our Future' element would be presented to Members at the September Economic Development Committee.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The budget for this element of the programme was €730,000 which included a proportion of costs for administration, management and staffing. There was no additional financial contribution required from the Council.

6. Governance

The 'Our Future' programme elements would be managed by the Economic Development Team via an SLA with the PEACEPLUS Partnership and regular reports would be brought to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Alderman Magill and agreed that

the update on the 'Our Future' element of the PEACEPLUS Programme be noted and delegate authority to officers to:

- a) Enter into the SLA with the PEACEPLUS Partnership once this had been finalised with SEUPB; and**
- b) Recruit temporary staff as required to support the implementation of the programme.**

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

The Vice Chair wished to be recorded as not being in agreement with this decision.

4.4 ED/ED/299 GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK 2025: YOUNG ENTERPRISE SCHOOLS MASTERCLASSES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval to deliver Global Entrepreneurship Week Activities and appoint Young Enterprise Northern Ireland as a delivery partner at a cost of £5,600. Approval was also sought for £9,400 expenditure for Global Entrepreneurship Week Activities from the Economic Development Budget

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that Young Enterprise NI (YENI) is a charity that delivers a range of enterprise and financial education programmes to children and young people from all backgrounds from one day masterclasses to year-long activities.

A proposal had been received from YENI to deliver a primary and secondary schools programme in November 2025 during Global Entrepreneurship Week in partnership with the Council (circulated).

Global Entrepreneurship Week was a worldwide initiative which took place each year and was used as a medium to enable organisations to raise the profile of entrepreneurship. As part of the week, YENI and Council's Economic Development Team would work in collaboration to deliver a series of workshops to primary, post primary and SEN schools across the Borough. The workshops would introduce the concept of entrepreneurship and using enterprise skills to realise entrepreneurial potential.

The masterclasses would link with Go Succeed, promoting entrepreneurship via community outreach demonstrating the support and opportunities available for entrepreneurs through the service.

In 2024, the programme took place from 11-14 November and delivered 6 masterclasses to 819 school pupils from 21 local primary and post primary schools in the Borough.

Anticipated Outputs

- A minimum of 16 schools took part in the Programme to include: A minimum of 5 post primary schools
- A minimum of 11 primary schools

Primary Schools

- Delivery of a minimum of 4 supply chain workshops
- A minimum of 350 pupils participating
- Each student would design new branding for their juice carton through the supply chain workshops

Post Primary Schools

- Delivery of 1 digital industry masterclass
- A minimum of 60 pupils participating
- A minimum of 8 new app designs generated through the workshop

Reporting

- A final report detailing the programme results against anticipated outputs and if appropriate recommendations for future programmes

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council approved the delivery of Global Entrepreneurship Week activity and associated budget for the programme last year.

4. Financial Position/Implication

Financial provision for Global Entrepreneurship Week Events had been made in the Economic Development Budget and was based on the previous year cost.

Cost Breakdown:

- **Young Enterprise Delivery Costs- £5,600**

Delivery of 4x Supply Chain Workshops (Primary Session) - £3,600

Delivery of 1x Industry Masterclass (Post Primary Session) - £2,000

Should there be high demand for these workshops, YENI could facilitate additional workshops at a fee of £800 per day.

YENI would provide the following within the above delivery cost;

- Management of recruitment of the schools
- Management of the schools' attendance at the event
- Designing of workshop content and materials
- Provide staff resources to provide and deliver the workshops
- Provide a final report detailing the programme results against anticipated outputs and if appropriate recommendations for future programmes

Remaining indicative costs to be met from existing Economic Development Budget:

- Catering – £2,400
- Bus Hire- £5,000
- AV equipment hire - £1,000
- Prizes- £300
- Trophies - £250
- Photographer - £100
- Ad-hoc spend (translator, additional prizes, etc) - £350

At the request of a Member, the Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development undertook to consider options for monitoring of the scheme for long term outcomes.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor Ward and agreed that

- a) The delivery of Global Entrepreneurship Week Activities be approved;**
- b) The appointment of YENI as a delivery partner at a cost of £5,600 be approved; and**
- c) £9,400 expenditure for Global Entrepreneurship Week Activities from the Economic Development Budget be approved.**

ACTION BY: Michael McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer

4.5 ED/ED/198 WORKSPACE DEVELOPMENT FUND - LEDCOM

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a Letter of Variation for a 12-month extension to LEDCOM's letter of offer for its project to refurbish and repurpose Foundry House Ballyclare.

2. Introduction/Background

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

In November 2021 the Council agreed to provide LEDCOM (Local Economic Development Company), one of the Borough's three Local Enterprise Agencies that provided services from their Ballyclare location, with up to £200,200 to deliver a 7,800sq/ft. refurbishment and create 200 business start-ups with c.300 jobs to be created at Foundry House in Ballyclare. The project would also promote the Space branding, currently being adopted for the Antrim and Glengormley hubs.

3. Key Issues

Since receiving their Letter of Offer on 11 October 2022, having completed their acquisition of Foundry House, LEDCOM finalised their detailed workspace design and secured the necessary planning permission for the works. However, due to a range of factors including rising costs, LEDCOM had not yet commenced the delivery of the workspace project.

As a result of this delay LEDCOM requested a 12-month extension to the original letter of offer in order to enable delivery of their capital works programme, which was approved by the Economic Development Committee on 12 November 2024 culminating in an extension of their letter of offer until 30th September 2025.

The original project costs were estimated to be £265,000. To date LEDCOM had spent £65,000 to acquire the Foundry House site, which included expenditure on general maintenance and repair costs. Through the Workspace Development Fund, the Council was originally committed to support 75% of the original project costs.

LEDCOM had appointed a Quantity Surveyor who had provided updated projected costs at an estimated £450,000 with the cost increase due primarily to the increases in construction and material costs since the original business case. The Council's contribution as it currently stood therefore would be 45% towards total project costs.

As a result of ongoing difficulties to respond to the increase in costs and subsequent funding shortfall LEDCOM was exploring other avenues for financial support. There could be an opportunity for additional workspace funding to become available to LEDCOM through the Local Economic Partnership (LEP). This would be a separate application and assessment process and subject to an approved business case.

Members were therefore requested to consider, subject to the submission of an updated business case, an additional 12-month extension to the original

letter of offer which would extend it until 30 September 2026, to enable the pursuit of additional funding and subsequent project delivery.

4. Financial Position/Implication

There were no new financial implications at this time.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed that

the letter of variation for a 12-month extension to LEDCOM's funding offer for the refurbishment and repurposing of Foundry House, Ballyclare subject to an updated business case from LEDCOM be approved.

ACTION BY: Chris Doyle, Investment Officer

4.6 **ED/ED/195 VOL 3 LEVELLING UP FUND: LOCAL GROWTH CAPACITY SUPPORT PAYMENT 2024-25**

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the expenditure of the Capacity and Capability grant payment of £60,000 received from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in support of the Council's Levelling Up Funded projects in Antrim and Glengormley.

2. Key Issues

Earlier this year the Council received correspondence from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (circulated) outlining that as a grant recipient of the Levelling Up Fund, the Council was eligible to receive a Capacity and Capability grant payment of £60,000. This payment was for the sole purpose of accelerating and unblocking the delivery of your LUF projects and help mitigate any issues impacting our LUF-funded projects.

It was proposed that this funding was utilised to procure external advice and support to update the financial models in the business case for Glengormley and Antrim as well as on marketing and promotion, website development, market assessment and benchmarking, and wider promotional opportunities.

3. Financial Position/Implication

This grant payment was additional to the main Levelling Up grant received by Council and would reduce expenditure from Council budgets on the aforementioned promotional, marketing and market assessment activities.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Ward and agreed that

that the expenditure of the Capacity and Capability grant payment of £60,000 as outlined be approved.

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

4.7 ED/REG/085 AWARDS UNDER TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONTS (TRANCHE 5)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to:

- Update Members on the Urban Shop Frontage Scheme and seek approval for the latest grant awards (Tranche 5),
- To clarify the ongoing funding arrangements with the Department for Communities, and
- To seek Members' approval to move to a Phase 3 call.

2. Programme Update - Tranche 5 Recommended Awards

Members had been regularly updated with details of the shopfront improvement programme. This report covered Tranche 5, with an additional 6 applications presented for review and approval. Following a Project Board meeting on 15 April 2025, further grant awards of £14,299 were now brought before Committee for approval (Table 1, below).

TABLE 1: Tranche 5 Awards			
Ref No	DEA	Name of Business	LoO Amount
B010	Ballyclare	Abode	£ 1,200.00
		(Ballyclare) Total:	<u>£ 1,200.00</u>
R030	Dunsilly	Posh Closet	£ 1,680.00
		(Randalstown) Total:	<u>£ 1,680.00</u>
A024	Antrim	Maxine Tipping	£ 1,657.60
A025	Antrim	Antrim Therapy Centre	£ 3,552.80
		(Antrim) Total:	<u>£ 5,210.40</u>
G017	Glengormley	Jordan Hairdressing	£1,209.60
G018	Glengormley	Bean & Grape	£4,999.00
		(Glengormley) Total:	<u>£ 6,208.60</u>

		<u>Tranche 5 Total:</u>	<u>£ 14,299.00</u>
Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 1):			<u>£ 47,096.94</u>
Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 2):			<u>£ 99,003.16</u>
Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 3):			<u>£ 153,937.62</u>
Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 4):			<u>£ 58,544.25</u>
Total Grant Assistance (Tranche 5):			<u>£ 14,299.00</u>
Rolling Programme Total, as at 15/4/2025:			<u>£ 372,880.97</u>

In addition to the grants awarded to date, Members were advised that officers had begun to process claims from local businesses whose works had been completed.

3. Programme Funding and DfC Letter of Variance

Members would recall that the Department for Communities extended a Letter of Offer to Council in July 2024 with a total project value of £434,000 (£390,600 DfC, £43,400 Council contribution) for the 2024/25 financial year.

Due to the tight programme timeframe, officers wrote to the Department to request an extension to the programme into the 2025/26 financial year in order to enable the full drawdown of funding to take place.

This Letter of Variance had been received and approval was sought to accept this offer and continue the roll-out of this programme into 2025/2026.

4. Phase 3

To date, over £372,000 had been committed by the programme to businesses across the town centres. All town centres had been invited to apply in two separate phases. Phase 1: Ballyclare and Randalstown, Phase 2: Antrim, Crumlin and Glengormley.

Given that there was approximately £61,000 remaining in the programme budget, Officers were seeking permission to open a third and final phase of the programme. There were a number of considerations as follows:

- **Additional Funding** - £61,000 would enable the programme to support around 18 further businesses. The Department had indicated that additional funding could be secured to boost the Phase 3 budget but that this would need to be matched by an additional contribution from the Council. The total value of the programme could exceed £500,000 and therefore the department was indicating that up to an additional £30,000 could be made available if the Council were also willing to add an additional £30,000. This would take the programme budget to £494,000 and the Phase 3 budget to £121,000 which could support

around 35 additional businesses. Members' approval was therefore requested to ring-fence up to a maximum of £30,000 from the Economic Development Budget for 2025/2026 to support any additional allocation that can be made toward the programme from the Department. This would mean the total programme budget would be £494,000 with £420,600 coming from DfC and £73,400 coming from the Council.

- **Scope of Phase 3** – each town had been engaged in the programme to date and approval was now sought to launch phase 3 of the programme as an open call to all eligible businesses and property owners across the five towns. However, given that this was the last round of funding available if the programme was oversubscribed, applications would be prioritised based on a number of criteria to ensure that the objectives of the programme were maximised. The proposed criteria would include (additional criteria could be added if required):
 - Applicants who did not proceed under Phase 1 or Phase 2, either through incomplete submissions, those that did not provide requested information in a timely manner, or had not previously applied to the programme;
 - Business properties which had not come forward but are in a street or area with multiple applications, to maximise the local impact of the programme;
 - Areas that were deemed to have been under-represented across the programme;
 - Previously successful applicants under Phases 1 and 2 of the programme would not be eligible to re-apply.

Pending Members' approval, it was proposed to open a Phase 3 call in June 2025, with receipt of applications and processing over the summer.

5. Summary

Programme Summary Position – Tranches 1-4 (as at 15 April 2025):

<u>Towns</u>	<u>Grant Approvals</u>	<u>Ground Floor Units (Total)</u>	<u>% Ground Floor Approvals</u>	<u>Value (£)</u>	<u>Ave. Award Level (£)</u>
Ballyclare	39	131	29.8	124,445.18	3,190.90
Randalstown	22	86	25.6	73,772.12	3,353.28
Antrim	26	148	17.6	87,196.14	3,353.70
Crumlin	5	75	6.7	18,648.78	3,729.76
Glengormley	<u>20</u>	<u>129</u>	<u>15.5</u>	<u>68,818.75</u>	<u>3,440.94</u>
<u>Totals:</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>569</u>	<u>19.7</u>	<u>372,880.97</u>	<u>3,329.29</u>

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Alderman Magill and agreed that

- a) **The fifth tranche of awards with a value of £ 14,299.00 to a further 6 local businesses be approved;**
- b) **Receipt and signing of the Letter of Variance, dated 27 March 2025, extending the programme into the 2025/26 financial year be approved; and**
- c) **The extension of the programme to Phase 3 be approved – to commence in June 2025 - and, in doing so, commit up to an additional £30,000 from the Economic Development budget to match any additional funds identified by the Department for Communities.**

ACTION BY: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer

Councillors Mallon and Ward left and returned to the Chamber during Item 4.8.

4.8 ED/REG/088 TOWN CENTRE VACANCY AND DERELICTION UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on current town centre vacancy levels, to provide an overview of the process used to collect and monitor this data and to seek approval for the commissioning of a scoping study to inform future funded programmes.

2. Introduction/Background

The vitality of town centres was crucial for the economic and social well-being of communities. However, many town centres were facing increasing challenges related to vacancy and dereliction. These issues not only impacted the aesthetic appeal of urban areas but also had significant implications for local economies.

Vacancy referred to the presence of unoccupied commercial properties, which could result from various factors such as economic downturns, shifts in consumer behaviour, and changes in the retail landscape. Dereliction, on the other hand, involves properties that have fallen into disrepair and neglect, often due to prolonged vacancy or lack of investment.

3. Key Issues

Town centre vacancy data was currently collected manually by the Regeneration Team on a quarterly basis, and only records ground floor commercial units, independent and chain stores. The process involves:

- Conducting on-the-ground site visits to manually record vacant commercial properties;
- Cross-referencing findings with commercial property listings and the Department for Communities vacancy data.

Monitoring vacancy levels in our town centres was essential to understanding the economic vitality of our towns; identifying emerging trends and informing strategic interventions to support regeneration and economic growth.

Current Vacancy Levels

The average commercial ground floor town centre vacancy rate across the Borough (January 2025, Q4) was 12%.

Town	Total No. of Ground Floor Units	Total No. Independent Businesses	Total No. Chain Businesses	Total No. of Vacant Units	Vacancy %
Antrim (exc. Castle Mall)	148	115	18	15	10%
Ballyclare	131	97	19	15	11%
Crumlin	75	54	9	12	16%
Glengormley	129	84	33	12	9%
Randalstown	86	68	4	14	16%
Total	569	418	83	68	12%

Overall, our towns perform well against other benchmarks. The UK average was around 14%, however the Northern Ireland average is 22.4% (Source: DfC Town Centre Database 2024 (<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/town-centre-database>)). All the towns in the Borough were well below the NI average.

Future Data Collection & Technology

Regeneration Officers were currently working with the Council's GIS Officer to improve how vacancy data would be collected and monitored. Going forward, Esri's GIS platform would be used to streamline the process and improve the quality and accessibility of the data.

The new approach would offer several key benefits:

- Real-time field data collection using mobile devices, to facilitate more timely and accurate updates;
- Accurate spatial mapping of vacant units to visualise concentrations and identify emerging patterns;
- Trend tracking across specific areas and sectors;
- Interactive dashboards and visual reports for clearer insights;
- Potential to integrate with other key information, such as Land & Property Services (LPS)/Ordnance Survey NI (OSNI) data and internal Council datasets

This approach would help provide a more accurate and holistic view of town centre health and significantly strengthen Council's ability to monitor vacancy levels, identify emerging issues early, and plan targeted interventions that support the regeneration of our town centres.

In order to utilise the existing system additional Mobile Worker licences required for the Regeneration Officers. Approval was sought to purchase up to three additional licences to be used by the Economic Development Team. The current annual fee is £600 (excluding VAT), which could be covered within the 2025/26 Economic Development budget.

In addition to this Officers were working closely with Belfast City Council to explore the benefits of a new pilot programme being used to monitor vacancy using Artificial Intelligence (AI). This technology pulls information from multiple sources to provide a view on whether a property was being used for commercial purposes.

LPS and Rates Income

Land and Property Services (LPS) was responsible for the monitoring of vacant property. A vacant non-domestic property was rates exempt for three months and then pays only 50% of the normal occupied amount. However, given the ever-changing nature of property and businesses opening and closing on a daily basis, it was challenging to keep this information accessible and up to date.

Consequences could include many businesses continuing to pay a reduced rates bill as they had not been re-rated as an occupied premise. More accurate reporting on vacancy and the ability to share this between organisations should support additional rates raising activities.

Scoping Study and Market Research

Members would be aware that the Department for Communities continued to hold the regeneration powers in Northern Ireland and that Councils deliver a large proportion of schemes on their behalf.

After many programmes based upon urban regeneration there was a renewed policy focus on vacant and derelict property in town centres and the mechanism that could be used to restore these properties into commercial use.

Given this, it would be the intention of Officers to explore the development of a funding programme aimed at addressing vacancy and dereliction in our town centres.

To that end, Officers were seeking Member approval to commission an innovative scoping study to build on the information we currently collect and to provide a framework to support a new vacancy and dereliction programme in the Borough. Whilst there was already a strong understanding of the extent and location of vacant properties, commissioning a scoping study would provide a valuable evidence base to inform this initiative. The study would include:

- Previous use, planning history and condition of the vacant property;
- An audit of the existing services and retail offer in the town and the gaps in provision;

- Consultation with businesses and residents to understand how the offer in the town could be improved;
- Market analysis to better understand what types of business activity e.g. retail, leisure, services, hospitality are attractive to the market given the population growth and demands in each town.

This scoping study would inform the design of a new grant programme for property owners, providing essential data to support future funding bids, should such opportunities become available. The findings would also help identify the most suitable uses for vacant units, guiding property owners on how best to refurbish and repurpose their spaces to align with market trends and community needs.

The scoping study was anticipated to cost around £25,000 and this would be met from the existing economic development budget in 2025/2026.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The purchase of the Esri licences would cost up to £1,800 for three additional users and the scoping study would cost up to £25,000. These costs could both be met from the Economic Development budget for 2025/26.

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

- a) **The update on the vacancy levels across the Borough towns be noted;**
- b) **The purchase of up to three additional mobile worker licences for the Esri platform at a maximum cost of £1,800 be approved and met through the Economic Development budget; and**
- c) **The commissioning of a scoping study and market research on the potential use of vacant property in town centres at a cost of £25,000 be approved and met through the Economic Development budget.**

ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

4.9 **ED/LMP/064 TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS WORKSHOPS 2025/2026**

1. Purpose

The purpose of the report was to update members on the recent Transport and Logistics Workshops and seek approval to appoint Young Enterprise NI (YENI) to deliver Transport and Logistics Workshops for local primary and secondary schools in partnership with the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) in 2025/26.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that YENI was a charity that delivered a range of enterprise and financial education programmes to children and young

people from all backgrounds, from one day masterclasses to year-long activities.

The Council and the LMP worked in partnership with YENI to deliver Transport and Logistics Masterclasses for school age residents in March 2025 to raise awareness of the wide variety of career opportunities and routes into the sector.

The highly successful and interactive workshops involved local industry speakers, demonstrations, a driving simulator and various vehicles used in the sector and was supported by 5 local businesses: Woodside Haulage, Diamond Trucks, Montgomery Transport Group, Henderson Group and Transport Training Services.

In total, 3 Transport and Logistics industry workshops took place with 263 primary 7 pupils from 12 primary schools and 68 secondary pupils from 4 secondary schools attending over the three days.

All teachers and students were surveyed following the event and feedback from both was very positive regarding the format and content of the event. Teachers agreed that the following workshop objectives were met:

- To have a better awareness of local career options and pathways
- To learn about the variety of careers and apprenticeships available in the industry
- To experience some of the skills required to work in the industry
- To develop team working skills
- To identify the importance of the industry to the community

Tuesday 11th and Wednesday 12th March 2025

School	Town	Number of Children
Gaelscoil Eanna	Glengormley	20
Greystone Primary School	Antrim	23
Groggan Primary School	Randalstown	18
Loanends Primary School	Crumlin	25
Maine Integrated Primary School	Randalstown	16
Mossley Primary School	Newtownabbey	31
Parkhall Primary School	Antrim	30
Round Tower Integrated Primary School,	Antrim	25
Rathcoole Primary School	Newtownabbey	11
St Comgall's Primary School	Antrim	24
St Joseph's Primary School	Crumlin	28
Tildarg Primary School	Ballyclare	10
Totals 12 Schools	Total	261

Thursday 13th March 2025

School	Town	Student numbers
Parkhall Integrated College	Randalstown	13
Edmund Rice College	Glengormley	11
SEN School		
Thornfield House School	Newtownabbey	12
Jordanstown School	Newtownabbey	14
Rostulla School	Newtownabbey	5

A copy of the final report, prepared by YENI was (circulated)

3. Previous Decision of Council

In September 2024, the Economic Development Committee agreed to work in partnership with YENI for the delivery of Transport & Logistics workshop, to include financial commitment from LMP and the Council.

4. Proposal

A proposal had been received from YENI (circulated) to deliver the workshops again in March 2026. It was proposed that for £6,600 YENI would deliver the 2026 programme to include two workshops targeted at primary school students and one to post primary pupils. The workshops would be open to all primary, post primary and special educational needs schools across the Borough, and the recommendations following this year's event would be implemented for the 2026 workshop.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The overall cost for the 3 days was estimated to be a maximum of £14,000, including YENI fee (£6,600), schools transport, hospitality and prizes.

The Labour Market Partnership was able to fund up to £6,000 and Council was asked to approve funding for the remaining cost up to £8,000. Allocation of this funding was provided for in the Economic Development budget for 2025/26

6. Governance

Delivery of the workshops would be managed by the LMP in partnership with YENI. The LMP met bi-monthly (six times per year) and was chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings were reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

a) The 2025 final report from YENI be noted; and

- b) **The YENI proposal as outlined at a cost of £6,600 and contribute up to £8,000 towards the total programme cost be approved.**

ACTION BY: Carrie Beck – Economic Development Officer

4.10 ED/ED/284 CITY NATION PLACE UK CONFERENCE 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for Members of the Economic Development Committee and appropriate Officers to attend the City Nation Place UK Conference 2025 in Glasgow.

2. Key Issues

The 7th Annual City Nation Place UK Conference is taking place in Glasgow on Wednesday 24th & Thursday 25th September 2025.

This two-day Placemaking Conference would bring together expertise and experience of place development and marketing from across the UK whilst providing an opportunity to learn from the activities that have taken place in Glasgow, which had seen four decades of growth through regeneration and inward investment.

The agenda included:

- An afternoon of placemaking presentations in key locations across the city;
- A Civic Reception hosted in the Glasgow City Chambers;
- A day of presentations, panel discussions, and round table collaboration towards shaping collaborative, place-led approaches to building and managing place reputation and growth

The Conference was of specific interest to the Council's Regeneration team due to its focus on place-led strategy, policy and branding. It was hoped that attendance at the conference would provide some examples of best practice that could help shape funding applications for urban regeneration money for our towns and urban spaces.

Attendees would benefit from expertise on making places more attractive for citizens, visitors and businesses, developing and leveraging tools to build civic pride, and developing more sustainable tourism and place economies.

Officers were therefore proposing attendance from interested Members of the Economic Development Committee, along with two appropriate Economic Development Officers.

3. Financial Position/Implication

Until 31 May 2025, the Council could avail of a "Super Early bird" rate of £295 per person. Any further bookings after this date, until 18 July 2025, would cost

£345 per person. The cost of the tickets would be met from within the 2025/2026 Economic Development budget.

Flights and other expenses would also be met through the existing budgets.

Proposed by Alderman Ross
Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed that

Council's attendance at the City Nation Place UK Conference in Glasgow on 24 and 25th September 2025 for Members of the Economic Development Committee and up to two officers from the Councils Economic Development Team be approved, the costs of which would be met through the 2025/26 Economic Development Budget.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development

4.11 PBS/BC/003 VOL 2 STREET NAMING SUBMISSION – BALLYBENTRAGH ROAD, ANTRIM

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members a new street name for a development at Ballybentragh Road, Antrim.

2. Introduction/Background

A development naming application was received from Britt Megahey on behalf of Ballybentragh Developments Ltd. regarding the naming of a residential development at Ballybentragh Road, Antrim. The development consisted of 5 detached dwellings. The development names and developer's rationale had been submitted as outlined below, with the developer's application, location map and site plan circulated.

1 – Bentragh Hall – Ballybentragh was the townland, and it would be desirable to keep the townland in the name.

2 – Bentragh Manor – Ballybentragh was the townland, and it would be desirable to keep the townland in the name.

3 – Ballybentragh Hall – Ballybentragh was the townland, and it would be desirable to keep the townland in the name.

Should the Council not wish to select one of the above names; the matter would be referred back to the developer via the Building Control section for further consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed that

the name Bentragh Hall be approved.

ACTION BY: Liam McFadden, Principal Building Control Surveyor

4.12 PBS/BC/003 VOL 2 STREET NAMING SUBMISSION – ANTRIM ROAD, GLENGORMLEY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members a new street name for a development at Antrim Road, Glengormley.

2. Introduction/Background

A development naming application was received from Barry O'Donnell on behalf of McGirr Architects regarding the naming of a residential development at Antrim Road, Glengormley. The development consisted of 63 apartments and 1 commercial unit. The development names and developer's rationale had been submitted as outlined below, with the developer's application, location map and site plan circulated.

1 - The Ferbro Buildings – The new development proudly stood on the historic site of the original Ferbro Buildings – a well-known commercial landmark at the heart of Glengormley. Since the 1960s, the area played a key role in the town's growth and identity. By reviving the Ferbro name, the development celebrates its rich heritage while creating an exciting new chapter for local businesses and the wider community. This connection to the past ensured a strong sense of place, making it instantly recognisable and meaningful to residents and visitors alike.

2 - Ferbro Court – As above

3 - Ferbro Mews – As above

Should the Council not wish to select one of the above names; the matter would be referred back to the developer via the Building Control section for further consideration.

Proposed by Alderman Ross

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the name Ferbro Building as opposed to Ferbro Buildings be approved.

ACTION BY: Liam McFadden, Principal Building Control Surveyor

Councillor Goodman declared an interest in Item 4.13 at this point of the meeting.

4.13 ED/ED/284 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING SUMMIT 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for attendance of an Elected Member, alongside a suitable Economic Development Officer, at the CWB Summit in Manchester on 3 July 2025, with an estimated cost of £105 per ticket along with flight costs and other expenses, to be met through the Economic Development budget.

2. Introduction/Background

On 3 July 2025, Manchester City Council would host the CWB Summit, a flagship event by CLES, the national organisation for local economies, for considering progressive economic approaches at local levels across the UK. This year, the summit would bring together local economic changemakers, place leaders, grassroots innovators and policymakers to explore how both community wealth building and changes in local democracy could open up opportunities for communities to own the future of their local economies.

3. Previous Decision of Council

At OPODG in October 2023, Members approved attendance of one Elected Member and one officer to the 2023 CWB summit in Manchester.

4. Key Issues

The event would present opportunities to hear from a range of speakers who would inspire and promote fresh ideas as to how the economies of places work and to reflect upon where the private and charity sectors fit when building economic justice in places and communities. Topics would include:

- **Wellbeing economies:** how local governance can prioritise future generations and sustainable economic strategies.
- **People-powered policymaking:** Strengthening relationships between grassroots organisations, local and combined authorities and other anchor institutions.
- **Community wealth building in action:** Exploring new ways to drive inclusive and fair economic change.

5. Summary

The CWB summit would be held on 3 July 2025 at Manchester Metropolitan University following the success of the 2023 CWB Summit, which was also in Manchester. The theme of the event would be 'Fairer Economies, Stronger Communities'. The event would run from 9am-430pm, with an individual ticket costing £105.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed that

attendance of an Elected Member, alongside a suitable Economic Development Officer, at the CWB Summit in Manchester on 3 July 2025 be approved, with an estimated cost of £105 per ticket along with flight costs and other expenses, to be met through the Economic Development budget.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

4.14 ED/ED/293 GREEN FOR BUSINESS PROGRAMME EVALUATION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide members with an overview of the evaluation of the 2024/25 Green for Business Pilot Programme and seek approval for the continued delivery of a redesigned Green for Business Programme in 2025/26.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that the delivery of a pilot net zero business support, the Green for Business Programme was approved by the Economic Committee and ratified by Full Council in September 2024.

Officers developed the pilot programme to support local businesses to combat the growing pressures in relation to sustainability commitments alongside the need to remain competitive and commercially successful in the face of growing energy, sustainability and net zero challenges.

Members would be aware that the UK Government signed up to the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Targeted Amendment) Order 2019, that aimed to ensure the UK reduces its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 100% from 1990 levels by 2050; and that the Northern Ireland Assembly declared a climate change emergency in February 2020.

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (Act) set a target of at least 100% reduction in net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050. This act included an interim target of at least a 48% reduction in net emissions by 2030.

In June 2024 DfE published 'Low Carbon/Net Zero Sectoral Action Plan' which recognised the positive components to be realised for the Northern Ireland industry as businesses sought to decarbonise across the commercial landscape. The report recognised the opportunities for business to grow as they work toward net zero targets. Following on from this, in March 2025, the Department launched the Energy Strategy Action Plan that set out four strategic priorities for progressing the Strategy for 2025.

3. Green for Business Pilot Programme Evaluation 2024/25

The Council partnered with Carbonfit, local qualified chartered low carbon consultants, to deliver a programme of work to support businesses providing a range of interventions including:

- Access to their online intelligence carbon reporting software
- Development of a carbon reduction plan
- Attainment of a carbon reduction certificate
- Development of a carbon Assessment
- Support with managing utility costs vs kwh tracking
- Development of a decarbonisation roadmap

Carbonfit specialised in carbon calculations using data analysis calculations that were DESNZ approved in line with ISO14064 methodologies, carbon legislation and risk management as well as energy modelling that enabled them to frame company specific data against globally recognised standards

to give a meaningful benchmark for their base year. The CarbonFit Programme evaluation was circulated.

Council received 27 Expression of interests from businesses throughout the borough, resulting in 23 progressing to receive technical assistance:

Company Name	Sector
Randalstown Arches	Charity
W S Dennison	Transport & Logistics
Golden Popcorn	Manufacturing
4-11 Afterschool Club	Training & Education
Greenview Group	Construction
Ping Group	Transport & Logistics
Secret Stash Yarn Shop	Retail
ESF	Manufacturing
Mallusk Enterprise Park	Charity
Ecopart NI	Retail
FB Smyth & Co	Construction
Gordon Estates Management	Professional Services
CD Group	Transport & Logistics
Railway Fryer	Food & Drink
Sustainable Blooms	Agriculture
RTU	Construction
GES	Manufacturing
Safeguarding	Services
Specsavers	Retail
Training services NI	Training & Education
TTS	Training & Education

Carbonfit provided bespoke guidance including a carbon reduction plan for each business and a roadmap to attain net zero credentials to a broad spectrum of businesses ranging from advanced manufacturing, corporate services, transport & logistics and food & drinks industries.

At its inception, the Pilot Programme had a target to enlist 150 businesses to access essential tools and expert guidance. However, despite rigorous

promotion, a targeted social media campaign and two business breakfast events the programme was unable to recruit as many businesses as anticipated, with 23 successfully on-boarded by the end of the pilot.

It was however important to note that the Green for Business Programme compares favourably to other Net Zero programmes being delivered by local government. For example, the Mid South West Economic Engine's "MSW Net Zero Support" programme, delivered in collaboration with three Northern Ireland councils, has had 40 participants over the past 12 months, averaging 13 per council area.

Feedback from those business that participated in the programme had been very positive, however, it had been a challenge to convert initial interest from other businesses to full programme participation. It was considered that one factor in this lack of conversion to programme participation was the absence of any capital grant scheme to support delivery of interventions recommended in the Sustainability Action Plans.

Learnings & Next Steps

Following delivery of the Green for Business Pilot Programme, the evaluation recommendations and officers' learnings, it was proposed that an enhanced Green for Business Programme be developed and procured for delivery in 2025/26 that would include:

- Continued and enhanced technical assistance
- An additional Green Transition Fund to support delivery of capital interventions
- Refined messaging and promotion to appeal to potential participants

4. Green for Business 2025/26

It was proposed that the Green for Business 2025/26 programme comprised of two core components:

Component 1 - Technical assistance

Businesses who received technical assistance would receive:

- Enhanced bespoke carbon reduction action plan (scope 1 & 2)
- Carbon Footprint Certificate
- Carbon Assessment
- Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) Compliant Net Zero Pledge
- Access to carbon accounting software

Businesses which had availed of technical assistance through the Pilot Programme received an initial action plan outlining key recommendations. However, to effectively guide future capital investments a more extensive analysis was required to help inform how grant funding could support their decarbonisation journey. It was proposed that this new output was incorporated into the 2025/26 programme.

Component 2 - Green Transition Fund

It was proposed to include financial assistance in the form of grant funding to help businesses deliver the recommendations outlined in their carbon reduction action plan. Upon completion of Component 1, businesses would become eligible to access Component 2. It was anticipated that a grant element to the programme would also increase the overall participation on the Programme.

This transition fund would seek to provide up to 70% of capital costs and range from £5,000 up to £20,000. It was proposed that applicants would submit an Expression of Interest and if deemed eligible they would then be invited to make a full application with details and justification for their project.

5. Finance

The Pilot Programme was delivered at a rate of £150 per business, excluding costs for the delivery of engagement events and promotion activities. As currently drafted in the LEP Action Plan (Agenda Item 4.8) Component 1 and 2 of the Green for Business Programme 2025/26 was proposed to be funded through the Local Enterprise Partnership at a rate of £250 per business, with the increase to account for enhanced advice regarding future capital interventions.

There remained a gap for some participants of the Pilot Programme that wish to obtain additional guidance on capital spend as part of their Net Zero Journey. It was proposed that this need was met via the Council's Ask Programme with associated costs met from the existing Economic Development Budget. The Ask Programme had a number of sustainability specialists listed as mentors, however, a further exercise could be undertaken to appoint additional sustainability / Net Zero expertise to the Ask Mentor list.

Proposed by Councillor Goodman
Seconded by Alderman Ross and agreed that

- a) the evaluation of the 2024/25 Pilot Programme be noted;**
- b) delivery of the Green for Business Programme in 2025/26 be approved;
and**
- c) the addition of Sustainability / Net Zero expertise to Council's Ask Programme be approved.**

ACTION BY: Chris Doyle & Stewart McCormack, Investment Officers

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 ED/ED/279 GO SUCCEED UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on Go Succeed programme delivery for Financial Year 2024/25 and planned delivery for 2025/26.

2. Introduction/Background

As Members would be aware, Go Succeed launched in November 2023 and was a new go-to source for expert business advice delivered by all 11 local councils across Northern Ireland. The programme offered a flexible service to both entrepreneurs and already established businesses within the Borough through its 4 primary pillars; Engage, Foundation, Growth and Scaling via one-to-one mentoring, specialist masterclasses, peer support networks and access to grant aid.

Belfast City Council (BCC), the Council leading the service on behalf of all Councils, established a Project Management Office (PMO) to support the delivery of the programme, contract management and the administering of funding.

2024/25 Delivery Mentoring

Mentoring support through the service was delivered via 4 primary pillars. When an applicant applied to the programme, Economic Development Officers would select the most appropriate support pillar based on their application.

Engage – Volume Starts/Entrepreneurs (up to 5.5 hours mentoring)

Foundation – Higher Value Starts/Newly Established (up to 11 hours mentoring)

Growth – Existing Businesses (up to 21 hours mentoring)

Scaling – Those who can go on and generate at least £1m in revenue after 3 years (up to 30 hours mentoring)

From the beginning of the programme (November 2023), up to the 31 March 2025 recruitment for each pillar was as below.

Pillar	18 Month Target	Actual Recruited
Engage	397	455
Foundation	57	107
Growth	240	248
Scaling	20 (regional target)	3

Grants

The Go Succeed Grant was open to those receiving support through the Foundation, Growth or Scaling pillars of the service. Applicants had to be actively trading and have completed at least 50% of their allocated

mentoring hours to be eligible for an application pack. Grants were awarded on a competitive basis and were subject to budget availability.

During the 24/25 Financial Year, **90 businesses** from across the Borough were supported with up to £4,000 in grant aid to support their business growth and development. The total value of Letter of Offer awarded to these businesses was **£294,070.26** which greatly exceeded the target of awarding 72 businesses with £252,721 in grant aid. Due to high demand, the Council was able to access further funds to support an additional 18 businesses.

It was anticipated that a further grant call would open at the beginning of May, with an initial budget of £113,846. Further calls could be announced subject to the availability of additional funds.

Peer Support Networks

Go Succeed Peer Support Networks (PSN) were spaces for like-minded entrepreneurs and established businesses to provide mutual support, encouragement and assistance. These networks were designed to be vital platforms for businesses to connect and gain insights from similar sector and role models within their industry. ANBC established two growth PSNs for local businesses during 24/25.

1. ANBC Social Enterprise Peer Support Network

Launched in September 2024, the network was created to support Social Enterprises within the Borough. The network had 11 members, all of which were social enterprises.

A key feature of this network was that it was shaped by the needs and requirements of its members. At the end of each session, feedback was taken from attendees, which was used to determine the theme of the next session.

Sessions:

- 1- Launch Event – Social Enterprise Support Organisations and Networking
- 2- Social Enterprise Governance
- 3- Unlock the Power of AI for your Social Enterprise
- 4- A Practical Guide to Using AI in your Social Enterprise

Officers were currently exploring opportunities for continuing to engage with this group, providing further support beyond the Peer Support Network

2. ANBC & MEA DTFF Peer Support Network

Open to both ANBC and Mid and East Antrim (MEA) businesses, the purpose of this Peer Support Network was to build awareness and provide a pathway for Go Succeed clients to access support through the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund.

Sessions:

- 1- What is Digital Transformation
- 2- Identifying Support for Small Businesses Wishing to Digitise
- 3- Site Visit (NRC)
- 4- Integrating AI into Your Business

2025/26 Delivery

Members would recall that BCC had been engaging with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) on behalf of all the Councils, to seek a 12-month extension to the programme. In February, PMO received confirmation from UKSPF of continued funding into the 2025/26 Financial Period. The total value of the award was to be £7 million revenue and £2.2 capital (£9.2 million).

With a slightly reduced budget, PMO developed a funding application which sought to minimise any impact on the client experience and benefitted from the input of all 11 councils on the best approach to delivery over the extension period.

The Go Succeed Programme for 2025/26 would have some key adjustments as a result of the reduced budget, including.

- A more coordinated approach to Community Outreach with a mixture of both regional and local delivery
- Targeted support for Economically Inactive (EI) Groups is included this year
- Engage Targets maintained, Foundation Targets Reduced
- Growth and Scaling Targets maintained
- Masterclasses and Peer Support Networks reduced and streamlined
- Grant Programme amendments – open/close calls, 50% grant rate, 100 retrospective spend, capital funding only

	24/25 Delivery	25/26 Delivery
Community Outreach	£30,000 allocation for local delivery	£16,364 allocation for local delivery / £13,636 allocation for regional delivery
Economically Inactive Support	No targeted support	£18,419 allocation to support Economically Inactive Groups
Engage and Foundation Target	264 participants engaged across all Engage Activities 60 participants engaged across all 'Foundation' activities	265 participants engaged across all Engage Activities 41 participants engaged across all Foundation activities
Growth and Scaling Target	120 participants engaged across all Growth Activities	120 participants engaged across all Growth activities

	20 enterprises engaged across all Scaling Activities (Regional Target)	20 enterprises engaged across all Scaling Activities (Regional Target)
Grant Programme	<p>£252,271 budget allocation, supporting 72 businesses</p> <p>Rolling Grant</p> <p>70% Grant Rate / 30% business match funding</p> <p>80% upfront payment, 20% payment upon submission of claim (proof of payment/monitoring form)</p>	<p>£113,846.15 budget allocation, supporting 38 businesses (potential for additional fund allocation)</p> <p>Open/Closed calls</p> <p>50% Grant Rate / 50% business match funding</p> <p>100% retrospective payment, paid upon submission of claim (proof of payment/monitoring form)</p>

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council previously agreed to participate in Go Succeed in October 2023. Council committed up to £80,000 to participate in the 2025/26 programme.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The Council had previously agreed to match-fund the Programme estimated at up to £80,000, provision for which had been made in the Economic Development budget.

Proposed by Alderman Magill
Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

the update on Go Succeed programme delivery for the Financial Year 2024/25 and planned delivery for 2025/26 be noted.

NO ACTION

5.2 ED/ED/308 MULTIPLY PROGRAMME SUMMARY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an overview of the Multiply Programme, following its finalisation in March 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's (ANBC) Multiply Programme, funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE), successfully concluded on 31st March 2025. This initiative fully utilised its allocated funding of £274K and met its participation target by engaging over 500 residents across the Borough. The programme was designed to enhance numeracy skills among adults through a range of non-accredited, community-based education initiatives.

The programme was delivered in collaboration with two delivery partners, Workforce Training Services and Sentinus, leveraging various venues throughout the borough to facilitate learning. A total of eight tailored initiatives were implemented, each designed to address specific needs within the community. These initiatives provided accessible, flexible, and dynamic numeracy training opportunities, ensuring that participants could improve their skills in a manner that best suited their individual circumstances.

3. Previous Decision of Council

It was approved at Full Council in April 2024 that the Council would participate in the Multiply programme.

4. Key Issues (or the relevant titles for the main body of the report)

Numeracy proficiency was vital for both personal and professional success. Research conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores the direct correlation between improved numeracy skills and reductions in unemployment and low wages, contributing to overall economic growth. The Multiply Programme recognised the urgent need for a flexible, community-centred approach to addressing the numeracy gap among adults, ultimately fostering a numerate society capable of adapting to the demands of the modern world.

Intervention	Initiative	Target number of participants	Achieved number of participants
Bring Your Grown Up	Numeracy Workshops	120	120
Counting on You – Industry Upskilling	Retail & Hospitality	70	70
Engaging Mature Learners	Lifelong Learning	60	60
MSOL	Numeracy Workshops	20	20
Numeracy Boot Camps	Community Organisations	40	40
Numeracy Boot Camps	Entrepreneurs & Businesses	40	40

Numeracy Boot Camps	Accounting for You	120	120
Numeracy Boot Camps	Disability	12	12
Total		482	482

The Multiply Programme comprised the following eight initiatives, each targeting specific community groups and skills gaps:

Eligibility criteria for participation in the programme was open to adults aged 19 and above residing in the Borough of Antrim and Newtownabbey who had not attained a GCSE grade C or above in mathematics.

Programme Benefits Participants of the ANBC Multiply Programme benefitted from:

- Flexible Learning Options: Courses designed to fit around participants' busy schedules.
- Supportive Environment: A welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere.
- Skilled Instructors: Experienced tutors delivering engaging and practical numeracy education.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Note programme finished 31.03.2025 and associated LoO's fully utilised.

6. Governance

Programme funded and governed by DfE, through Letters of Offer, with programme updates provided to the Labour Market Partnership (LMP).

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the overview of the Multiply Programme and end date of 31 March 2025 be noted.

NO ACTION

5.3 ED/ED/284 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT KPI REPORT 2024/25

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on Economic Development's performance against the agreed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) at the end of financial year 2024/25.

2. Update

The Economic Development section provided quarterly progress reports against KPIs. This report summarised the performance against these KPIs for financial year 2024/25.

The Economic Development service had performed well throughout financial year 2024/25, exceeding targets for all 8 KPIs.

Some key performance highlights included:

- The breadth of Economic Development's commitment to working with local businesses was demonstrated by the number of businesses engaging with Council's suite of programmes and events. The Economic Development team surpassed this target by 64%, with 784 businesses engaging with its wide range of programmes and events.
- The Go Succeed Programme and Labour Market Partnership assisted 362 businesses to develop/ expand their operations, exceeding this target by 45%.
- The Regeneration Team surpassed the target of securing £0.5m in regeneration grant funding by 63%, securing £798,600 this financial year alone. This grant funding sat across various schemes which would aid local businesses, including Town Centre Marketing (£50k), Town Centre Shop Front Improvement Programme (£390.6k) and Small Areas Revitalisation Programme (£358k). Furthermore, an application for regeneration grant funding of £240k towards a Town Centre Street Furniture Scheme was currently being progressed.
- The Labour Market Partnership activity had outperformed the KPI by 55%, assisting 271 unemployed people into work through Partnership activity.

In addition to the activities outlined above, the Economic Development section had provided other interventions across a range of programmes not explicitly measured by the KPIs. This included, but was not limited to, over £290k of Go Succeed business grants awarded, Living Over the Shops Scheme, Digital Transformation Flexible Fund, Rural Business Development Grant Scheme, Green for Business programme and the Multiply programme.

A detailed update on KPI performance had been circulated for Members consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed that

the Economic Development service performance during the financial year 2024/25 be noted.

NO ACTION

5.4 ED/ED/292 RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT (TRPSI)

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update and overview of the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2024-25, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would recall that during financial years 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 and 2022-23, the Council administered a Rural Business Development Grant on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI).

The key aim of the Scheme was to provide small capital grants of up to £4,999 to support micro-businesses located in rural areas with under 5,000 population to invest in new equipment or capital items. The objective of the fund was to enable the businesses to remain sustainable or to grow. The maximum grant-funding rate, as determined by the Department, was 50%, with 50% match-funding provided by participating businesses.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Members approved the delivery of the RBDGS 2024-25 at the Council meeting on 29 July 2024.

Members approved the RBDGS awards subject to satisfactory eligibility checks, successful application and DAERA budget allocation at the Council meeting on 16 December 2024.

4. Key Issues (or the relevant titles for the main body of the report)

As determined by DAERA, the scheme was open for applications from 16 October until 8 November 2024, with a programme completion date of 14 March 2025. All claims were to be submitted via the DAERA portal by 31 March 2025. By the submission deadline, 24 applications were submitted, 3 of which were ineligible, 1 withdrew and 4 failed at assessment stage. This resulted in the issuing of 16 Letters of Offer. A detailed breakdown of grant awards was circulated.

5. Financial Position/Implication

There was no direct financial contribution made by the Council to this programme.

The administration budget allocated to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council based on 24 submitted applications; to administer, promote and deliver the programme was a total value of £8,131.44. This was calculated at a cost of £338.81 per application received by the Council. 90% of this payment had been received by the Council, and the remaining 10% would be paid in April 2026, upon the submission of data collected from each successful business. This survey would be commissioned by each Council for

their respective Council area. The survey and budget would be managed by the Economic Development Team.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
Seconded by Councillor Ward and agreed that

the grant awards administered to rural businesses as listed in the enclosure by the Economic Development Team on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme be noted.

NO ACTION

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Goodman
Seconded by Councillor Mallon and agreed

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

6 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

- 6.1 Members thanked the Chair for his guidance and demeanour throughout his time as Chair of the Economic Development Committee.

NO ACTION

7 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

7.1 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/302 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the progress of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and changes to its Terms of Reference. Approval was also sought for the Year 1 Action Plan which was due for formal submission to the Department for the Economy in June 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 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 aligned with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Council Economic Development Strategies and Invest NI Business Strategy.

These would be developed with advice from the Department for Economy (DfE) and Invest NI, and they should be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology.

To support the delivery of these plans the Minister had proposed a £15m Regional Fund which would sought to address regional imbalance.

Funding

In the announcement made on the 1 October the Minister outlined a £15m fund spread across three financial years commencing on 1 April 2025. Each Council area in Northern Ireland would be granted an allocation to support their individual action plan.

Since the last update to Committee, the Department had indicated that up to £956,000 per year would be allocated to the Council, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years. This was higher than the figure previously reported to Committee (£865,000 p/a), however, it remained the joint lowest allocation across Northern Ireland. It was expected that 30% (£259,500) of this would be made available in Year 1 i.e. 2025/26.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

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

4. Key Issues

Terms of Reference

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

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

Departmental Guidance

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

- The business case for the Regional Balance Fund had moved through the internal approval process and now would go to economists in the Department of Finance for final approval.
- Project business cases would not need to come to the Department for approval, instead Councils could approve these internally.
- The focus of the Regional Balance Fund and therefore the LEPs would be on productivity and tradeable services. This was to make a clear distinction between the work of LEP and the work of the Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs).
- The objectives of the overall Regional Balance Fund were
 - 5% increase in tradeable businesses
 - 10% increase in Invest NI client companies
 - Growth in median wages.
- Potential Interventions included:
 - Commercial property/land
 - Entrepreneurship support
 - Sectoral entrepreneurship support
 - Scaling support
 - Sectoral scaling support
 - R&D investment
 - Energy efficiency
 - Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills
 - Sectoral cluster development
- Activities outside the scope of support included:
 - Primary Agricultural Production
 - Fisheries and Aquaculture Sectors
 - Steel
 - Coal Sector
 - Shipbuilding
 - Synthetic fibres
 - Transport sectors and related infrastructure
 - Energy generation, distribution and infrastructure

Year 1 – allocation of 30% rather than 100% to allow for Council/LEP ramp-up of activity. Years 2 & 3 – likely allocations of 120% and 150% respectively.

The presentation and guidance documents discussed at the information session were circulated.

MOU/Letter of Offer

The Department indicated that once the business case was approved by the Department of Finance, Councils would be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department for Economy in order to deliver the programme. A template for the MOU had not yet been shared, however it would be subject to review by the Council's legal team.

As the Economic Development Committee would not meet again until September, approval is sought to grant officers delegated authority to sign the MOU and any subsequent Letter of Offer for the programme, subject to all necessary due diligence being carried out. Economic Development

Committee Members would be briefed on developments in relation to this as required.

Action Plan

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

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

Approval was now sought to finalise the action plan and to submit it to the department for review before June 2025.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Since the last update to Committee the Department had indicated that up to £956,000 per year would be allocated to the Council, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years.

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

Proposed by Alderman Ross

Seconded by Councillor Lynch and agreed that

- a) the update on the Local Economic Partnership be noted;**
- b) delegated authority be granted to Officers to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and subsequent Letter of Offer (LoO), subject to due diligence on both documents; and**
- c) submission of the Year 1 action plan be approved.**

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

7.2 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/230 ENHANCED INVESTMENT ZONES

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the recent call for Expressions of Interest to the Northern Ireland Enhanced Investment Zone (EIZ) Call for Evidence and the subsequent correspondence with the Department for the Economy.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would recall that a number of years ago there was significant discussion around the development of Investment Zones in Northern Ireland as part of a programme to establish new Investment Zones across the UK and specifically in the regions.

The last event that Antrim and Newtownabbey was invited to attend was facilitated by Sue Gray and hosted at Queen's University. Since then, there had been no direct engagement with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in relation to Investment Zones.

3. Key Issues

Invest Northern Ireland issued an invite to Local Government stakeholders to attend an information session at their headquarters in Belfast on Monday 31st March.

At this session, it was revealed that information was now being sought on Enhanced Investment Zone for Northern Ireland – a £150 million support package to boost productivity, provide high value jobs, grow strengths in priority sectors and help address economic disparities. Proposals for the development of an Enhanced Investment Zone were being co-developed by the Department for the Economy and Invest NI in partnership with the UK Government. The presentation shared at this session was circulated.

Following this meeting a template Call for Evidence was issued by the Department and Invest NI with a 9-day turnaround required. The deadline was Friday 11th April 2025. The Call for Evidence (circulated) invited submissions to identify projects that could benefit from EIZ funding and interventions.

Given the time permitted, only high-level submissions could be developed by Officers and given the information provided, a submission was drafted based on the Advanced Manufacturing sector at Global Point and the future opportunity to develop Global Point 2. The funding would support both capital and revenue projects that address economic barriers to enable private sector investment and align with strategic regional and national priorities. A minimum 60% match funding was expected from the private sector, with 40% provided from the EIZ fund.

The outline submission for this is Call for Evidence was (circulated). The bid focused on a number of key elements:

- Infrastructure Development
 - The enhancement of the existing global point site with the latest technologies and innovations; and
 - The financing and preparation of new advanced manufacturing investment land, Global Point 2, to expand land availability for advanced manufacturing projects.
- Research, Development and Innovation (RDI)

- Support built around the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) to underpin “best in class” solutions on the existing Global Point Site.
- Promotion of R&D Initiatives – Partnerships with academic institutions and industry leaders to foster the co-creation of innovative technologies and enhance competitive advantages.
- Skills Development
 - Implementation of Employability and Skills Interventions – the EIZ would support the local labour market by providing training opportunities, apprenticeships and employment to support the needs of the growing advanced manufacturing sector.
 - Collaboration with Educational Institutions – partnerships with Queen's University, Ulster University and FE Colleges to develop future-focused skills and drive innovation within the workforce.

The indicative cost of the project was estimated to be around £10m with £6m being provided by private and other sources, including perhaps the Council and the remaining £4m being provided by the EIZ Programme.

4. Follow On Correspondence

Given the short window to respond to a very significant investment opportunity for this Borough and Northern Ireland, A letter was submitted to the Department for the Economy outlining the Council's dissatisfaction with the process and the lack of engagement.

5. Summary of Timeline

Indicative timescales outlined at the information session on the 31 March were set out below.

Milestones	Date
Council approval to submit EOI	Q1 25/26
Submission of Expression of Interest	Q1 25/26
Initial assessment and feedback from Invest NI	Q2 25/26
Potential co-development of full EIZ proposal with UKG/NI Executive	Q3 25/26
Final proposal agreement and announcement	Q4 25/26
Project initiation	Q1 26/27 onwards

Proposed by Councillor Lynch
 Seconded by Alderman Magill and agreed that

the submission of the expression of interest to the NI Enhanced Investment Zone (EIZ) Call for Evidence be retrospectively approved.

ACTION BY: Stewart McCormack, Investment Officer

7.3 IN CONFIDENCE ED/REG/082 LIVING OVER THE SHOPS (LOTS) SCHEME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the progress of the Living over the Shops Scheme, to seek approval for the issue of Heads of Terms for the latest batch of applicants and to seek approval for the extension of the programme to Phase 3.

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 demonstrate 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 include 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 are 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 Member to open Phase 2 of the pilot programme for properties in Ballyclare and Randalstown.

4. Key Issues

Programme Update

Phase 1 – Antrim

Under Phase 1 of the LOTS initiative, two applications continued to progress through planning and building control.

At the January 2025 meeting of the Economic Development Committee the £385,000 required was ring-fenced from the overall programme budget.

TABLE 1: PHASE 1 APPLICATIONS					
Ref No.	Town	Applicant	Property Address 1	Proposed Works	Indicative Allocation (£k)
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	■
			<u>Totals:</u>	8 x 1-bed; 6 x 2-bed	■

Phase 2 – Ballyclare and Randalstown

A Phase 2 call for properties in Ballyclare and Randalstown closed in January 2025, with 5 applications in Ballyclare and 2 in Randalstown being received.

The table below outlined the indicative grant allocation from Council by property.

TABLE 2: PHASE 2 APPLICATIONS					
Ref No.	Town	Applicant	Property Address 1	Proposed Works	Indicative Allocation (£k)
BAL001	Ballyclare	Ryszard Spiewak	65 Main Street	1 x 2-bed	■
BAL002	Ballyclare	John Moore	44 The Square	1 x 1-bed; 1 x 2-bed	■
BAL003	Ballyclare	Paul Alderdice	3a Rashee Road	1 x 1-bed	■
BAL004	Ballyclare	Stephen McNeill	71 Main Street	1 x 3-bed	■
BAL005	Ballyclare	Ken Montgomery	1-11 Granges Street	4 x 1-bed; 2 x 2-bed	■
RAN001	Randalstown	Christine Doherty	17 Main Street	1 x 1-bed; 1 x 2-bed	■
RAN002	Randalstown	Peter Hurrell	14-20 Main Street	2 x 2-bed	■
			<u>Totals:</u>	7 x 1-bed; 7 x 2-bed; 1 x 3-bed	■

Heads of Terms

Following on from the internal project board meeting on the 2 April, the applications from Phase 2 were assessed by officers from Economic Development, Environmental Health, Planning, Building Control, Legal and Finance. The outcome of the Project Board was that all the applications were eligible for the programme.

It was now incumbent upon the property owners to:

- Engage the services of an architect and design team
- Develop detailed plans for the proposed project

- Undertake all required surveys e.g. noise surveys as would be required to support a planning application
- Submit a planning application and cover the associated costs

In the interim, to support applicants and to affirm the Council's commitment to the project approval was now sought to issue a Heads of Terms to each applicant indicating the level of Council support that would be available if the project commences, subject to all statutory requirements being met. This would involve issuing Heads of Terms for the seven new applicants from Phase 2 and one application from Phase 1 and ring-fencing this money from the programme budget.

Letter of Offer

Following the issue of Heads of Terms applicants wishing to progress works to the next stage were required to submit the following:

- Proof of all relevant statutory consents (Planning Permission, Building Control Approval, Environmental Health consent, as well as Listed Building and Conservation Area consent where appropriate;
- Written/email quotations from contractors, obtained in line with Council's procurement guidelines;
- Proof of financial viability; and,
- Any existing and proposed plans, if not previously submitted.

One of the applicants in Phase 2 – BAL005 - 1-11 Granges Street, had been granted full planning permission for the development of 4 x 1-bed and 2 x 2-bed apartment units.

This was the first application to reach this stage of the process, and officers would now seek to obtain all of the above listed information. Once all of this had been received Officers would be in a position to issue a Letter of Offer. Therefore, Members' approval was sought to issue a Letter of Offer to the applicant, subject to the receipt of all the additional information.

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.

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 be submitted within three months of the date of the Letter of Offer. Applicants must not commence works until they receive 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.

Phase 3 – Crumlin and Glengormley

Officers had received some interest in the LOTS initiative from property owners in Crumlin and Glengormley, and given the timeframes involved in the process, wished to seek Members' approval to open a Phase 3 call for the two remaining Borough towns. This would potentially open in June 2025 and remain open over the summer period.

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, £385,000 had been ring-fenced for the two projects under Phase 1 and £547,500 had been ring-fenced for the seven projects under Phase 2. This leaves approximately £500,000 to support Phase 3.

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 Ross

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

- a) the programme update on Phase 1 and Phase 2 be noted;**
- b) the Heads of Terms to the seven applicants under Phase 2 and one additional applicant from Phase 1 be issued;**
- c) the proposed allocations from the programme budget be approved;**
- d) the issue of a Letter of Offer to BAL005 (1-11 Granges Street) at a value of £[REDACTED], subject to the receipt of all required information be approved; and**
- e) the opening of Phase 3 of the programme for Crumlin and Glengormley be approved.**

ACTION BY: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer

7.4 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/211 SUPPORTING DIRECT INVESTMENT FUND-ASHERS BAKERY

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a Letter of Variation for a 14-month extension to Ashers Baking Co to build their new production facility on Doagh Road.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that on 29 August 2023 of Council's approval of Ashers Baking Company for the development of the former CSD site on the Doagh Road, to establish a food production facility, with grant funding of £56,381.25. The new facility on the brownfield site was an addition to their existing premises also on the Doagh Road. Along with the initial purchase, the £5million investment in the area demonstrated a commitment from the company of their desire to enhance their Newtownabbey Headquarters to achieve cross border market ambitions.

3. Key Issues

Since receiving their Letter of Offer and having completed their acquisition of the Doagh Road site Ashers Baking Co had developed their plans to build the new facility. However, due to a range of factors including access to the grid, Ashers Baking Co had not yet commenced the delivery project.

As a result of this delay Ashers Baking Co required a 14-month extension to the original letter of offer in order to enable delivery of their capital works programme. The proposed letter of variation provided an extension until 31st August 2026.

4. Financial Position/Implication

There were no new financial implications at this time.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Alderman Magill and agreed that

the letter of variation for a 14-month extension to Ashers Baking Co. be approved.

ACTION BY: Chris Doyle, Investment Officer

7.5 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/261 SUPPORTING DIRECT INVESTMENT FUND – PING HANDLING LTD

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for a Letter of Variation for a 6-month extension to PING Handling Ltd project at Belfast International Airport.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that the policy to Support Direct Investment, approved through Full Council on 29 March 2021, allowed selective grant assistance to be provided to businesses seeking to invest in the borough culminating in job creation, investment, business expansion and a focus on priority sectors.

On 29 August 2023, the Council agreed to provide PING Handling Ltd with up to £55,000 to deliver a 6032ft² modern facility refurbishment and create 30 jobs at their Belfast International Airport site.

3. Key Issues

In line with the Supporting Direct Investment Policy, £41,250 of the total £55,000 grant had been paid to date. This was paid upon provision of evidence that the building project had been completed and the additional 13 staff had been recruited. This left £13,750 outstanding. The outstanding balance would only be paid on completion of the remaining agreed KPIs.

Since receiving their Letter of Offer, Ping Handling Ltd had completed a large percentage of the project and had invested heavily in new ground handling equipment and the employment of the 13 new staff, as above. They had recently launched a recruitment drive for 30 additional drivers and operators for the Belfast International Operation however, delays in launching this campaign had impacted on their ability to meet the KPIs in the agreed timescales.

The business was confident of filling these positions and meeting the KPIs therefore PING Handling had requested a 6-month extension to the original Letter of Offer in order to enable delivery of their KPIs in relation to job creation. The Letter of Variation provided an extension until 31st December 2025 and payment would only be made upon appointment of the contractor.

4. Financial Position/Implication

There were no new financial implications at this time.

Proposed by Councillor Lynch

Seconded by Alderman Ross and agreed that

the Letter of Variation for a 6-month extension to PING Handling Ltd to complete the investment project at Belfast International Airport be approved.

ACTION BY: Chris Doyle, Investment Officer

7.6 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/284 STRATEGIC PLANNING APPLICATIONS OVERVIEW

1. Purpose

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

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the Major Strategic Planning Overview be noted.

NO ACTION

7.7 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 meetings held on 30 January 2025 and 18 March 2025, and the Antrim Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 5 December 2024.

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 Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Levelling Up Fund Project Board meetings held on 30 January 2025 and 18 March 2025, and the Antrim Levelling Up Fund Project Board meeting held on 5 December 2024 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

7.8 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 18 February 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 Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

that the minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 18 February 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

7.9 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/LMP/001 MINUTES - LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership meetings held on 7 November 2024 and 22 January 2025.

A copy of the minutes from the meetings were circulated for Members' consideration.

2. Introduction/Background

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

3. Governance

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

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the minutes of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Labour Market Partnership Meetings on 7 November 2024 and 22 January 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

7.10 **IN CONFIDENCE** ED/ED/273 MINUTES – LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP BOARD

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members' approval of the circulated minutes of the Local Economic Partnership Board meeting held on 9 February 2025.

2. Governance

The Board as required by the Department for the Economy (funder) was established to provide assurance and a formal governance structure for the successful delivery of Antrim and Newtownabbey Council's Local Economic Partnership Action Plan.

Proposed by Alderman Magill

Seconded by Councillor Goodman and agreed that

the minutes of the Local Economic Partnership Board meeting held on 9 February 2025 be approved.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Goodman
Seconded by Alderman Magill and agreed

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

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

The Chairperson thanked Members and staff for their support and contribution over his term as Chair of the Economic Development Committee.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8.27pm.

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.