



7 June 2024

Committee Chair: Councillor B Webb  
Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor M Goodman  
Committee Members: Aldermen – M Cosgrove, M Magill and S Ross  
Councillors – R Lynch, B Mallon and S Ward

Dear Member

**MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee will be held in the **Chamber, Mossley Mill** on **Thursday 13 June 2024** at **6.30 pm**.

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker", is positioned above the printed name.

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

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

**For any queries please contact Member Services:**  
Tel: 028 9448 1301

[memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk)

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING ON  
THURSDAY 13 JUNE 2024**

**3 PRESENTATION**

**3.1 ED/ED/284 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS PLAN 2024/25**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this presentation is to provide Members with an overview of the Economic Development Business Plan 2024/25.**

**2. Introduction/Background**

Majella McAlister, Director of Economic Development & Planning, will deliver a presentation on the Economic Development Business Plan 2024/25 which is enclosed).

**3. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that the presentation be noted.**

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development

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

## 4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

### 4.1 ED/ED/070 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE AND 5 YEAR ACTION PLAN

#### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to commission an update of the Economic Development Strategy and the development of a costed 5 Year action plan.**

#### 2. Introduction/Background

Members will recall that in 2018 the Council adopted its current Economic Strategy and Action Plan, which took account of the new super Council area post RPA and identified the key sectors and future opportunities for economic growth. The documents are **enclosed**.

In summary the strategy identified a number of interventions in particular sectors as summarised below:

- **Focus and Step Change:** These are "critical for growth" sectors which are considered likely to have the potential to support significant economic growth. These are sectors against which to prioritise resource and effort as a key economic development opportunity for Antrim and Newtownabbey including Advanced Manufacturing, Transport & Logistics and Health & Life Sciences.
- **Sustain and Grow:** These are important core sectors for Antrim and Newtownabbey's economic development, with potential to enable [potentially significant] incremental growth. These are sectors which should be cultivated and nurtured to support future economic growth including Professional Services, Tourism and Digital/ICT.
- **Monitor and Intervene:** These are sectors which, although they may be important to the current local economy, are not considered as one likely to generate material economic growth moving forward. These sectors should be monitored on an on-going basis for opportunities and trends which might create potential for future economic development, and interventions made accordingly. These sectors include Construction, Retail and Agri Food.

Since 2018 there has been significant change at an international, national and local level including the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, transformed trading arrangements with the European Union, increasing focus on sustainability targets and re-established NI governance structures, all set in the context of an ever challenging financial environment.

It is clear therefore that going forward the Council needs to reposition its growth strategy to take advantage of changing economic circumstances and to ensure that the Borough is in the best possible position to capture and realise economic growth, prosperity and productivity improvements over the course of the coming months and years.

Of particular relevance in this regard is the new Local Development Plan and the opportunities that can be created at the Council's Strategic Employment Locations as well as the realisation of jobs and related benefits emerging from the Belfast Region City Deal particularly the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre at Global Point.

From an alignment perspective it will be important for the Council to understand the future direction both policy and operational to be adopted by key stakeholders such as the Department for the Economy and Invest NI. In February the Department via Minister Murphy set out 4 key objectives namely;

- Good jobs
- Promote Regional Balance
- Raise Productivity
- Reduce carbon emissions

The Minister has appointed four Critical Friends who combine academic rigour and real-life practical application to provide advice at a strategic level as to how these objectives can be pursued.

Invest NI will have a key role to play in the delivery of the Department's objectives and as members will be aware is in the process of bringing forward action plans in response to the Lyon's Review. Of key relevance to the borough will be Invest NI's proposals in relation to land and property and its approach to sub-regional development across the region. The Minister has highlighted 3 aspects of reform which he expects to see within Invest as follows;

- Attaching stronger conditions and incentives to its support for business in line with the 4 objectives
- A new regional structure dedicated to home-grown SMEs and Start-Ups (similar to the service provided by LEDU)
- Invest must develop industries as well as individual firms

He also promotes working in partnership with industry and academia to develop sectors such as Advanced Manufacturing, Life and Health Sciences and Low Carbon.

In this context, the key requirements of the brief will include:

- Update and 'sense check' the current economic strategy and vision for the Borough;
- Identify a set of new interventions for the Council to clearly articulate and execute its strategy to grow the local economy and increase productivity;
- Set a costed five-year action plan against these interventions to support the vision;
- Consider local economic impacts and opportunities from the new trading arrangements in place, changes to the national and local growth agenda and the Local Development Plan/emerging policies; and
- Align policy development and actions with wider strategic growth opportunities at a sub-regional and national level.

### **3. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that an update of the Economic Development Strategy and the development of a costed 5 Year action plan be commissioned, provision for which exists in the 2024/25 budget.**

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

## 4.2 ED/REG/083 OUT OF TOWN CENTRE SHOP FRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME PHASE 2

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members the approval of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shop Front Improvement Programme for implementation in the 2024/2025 financial year.**

### 2. Introduction/Background

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

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

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council agreed in January 2023 to open the Expression of Interest Process and to procure the services of an independent QS art risk and subsequently in July 2023 to approve a budget of £250,000 to support the scheme and progress Phase 1 delivery in Abbots Cross, Monkstown and Carnmoney Village, at a maximum award of £5,000 per property, at a grant rate of 80%.

### 4. Key Issues

Members approved the delivery of Phase 1 of the Programme in July 2023 in;

- Abbots Cross
- Monkstown; and
- Carnmoney Village

These were the areas considered most in need of intervention and a scheme in these areas would have the greatest visual impact.

To date, Officers have worked with businesses and property owners in these areas and have recorded the following outputs:

- 41 Expressions of Interest received from Phase 1 areas.
- 29 applications submitted from Phase 1 areas.
- 29 Letters of Offer either issued or due to be issued.
- £111,450 committed to support the businesses.

Based on the Expression of Interest process in January 2023, there was interest in the programme from a further 16 properties at various locations. Given that most are single properties in different locations, the visual impact of any programme would be limited unlike Phase 1.



<b>Area</b>	<b>EOIs Received</b>
Richmond Gardens	1
Beverly Shopping Area	1
New Mossley	2
Mossley	1
Hillview Avenue	3
Rathcoole	4
Rushpark	2
Doagh Road	1
Shore Road	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

Therefore, given the length of time that has passed since the initial call for Expressions of Interest opened in January 2023, Members may wish a fresh Expression of Interest process, excluding those areas which have been supported under Phase 1.

An indicative timeline for delivery of Phase 2 would be:

- July 2024 - Refresh of the application pack and opening the scheme to new enquiries i.e. a new EOI process for additional applications.
- August /September 2024 – Phase 2 application process.
- October/November 2024 – Assessment Panel, Value for Money Assessments and Letter of Offer.
- December – March 2025 – Works to be completed.

#### 5. Financial Position/Implication

In July 2023, £250,000 was approved from the Economic Development budget to be utilised to support this scheme. Members are advised that the costs included in the scheme can be capitalised.

£35,000 of this budget was approved to appoint an independent quantity surveyor to support the value for money assessment on this programme. This leaves a usable budget of up to £215,000 for grants.

Given the level of spend to date, there is £103,550 remaining from the approved budget to support Phase 2. It is therefore proposed that Expression of Interest be invited for Phase 2 of the Programme, with a maximum award of £5,000, at a grant rate of 80%. Businesses will be required to demonstrate a minimum contribution of 20% of the overall project costs.

#### 6. Governance

The Economic Development team will lead the delivery of this scheme.

The project will be overseen by a Project Board with representation from internal Council departments and external agencies if and when relevant. Procurement and financial management will be progressed in line with the Council's own policies. The independent QS appointed by the Council will also

support the assessment of value for money and ensure that works are completed in line with the application.

The team has significant experience of managing and delivering schemes of this nature.

## **7. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that the Shopfront Improvement Programme Phase 2, as outlined be approved, with a budget of £103,550, which can be capitalised. A maximum award of £5,000 will be applied per property at a grant rate of 80%.**

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

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

## 4.3 ED/ED/264 WORKPLUS PROGRAMME PHASE 2

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members the approval of Phase 2 of the Work Experience Programme 2024-2025 up to a value of £29,250, with agreement for officers to proceed pending a full, detailed proposal being completed.**

### 2. Introduction/Background

Members will 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 quantitative outcomes of the pilot programme were as follows:

- 28 employers engaged with the programme and offered work placements to students.
- 67 placements offered by local employers.
- 67 placement opportunities taken by young people.
  - 37 placements for students from mainstream schools; and
  - 30 placements for students from SEN schools.
- 16 schools involved in the wider sub-group.
- 66 businesses attending the engagement sessions and webinars.

The schools involved in the programme included Abbey Community College, Glengormley Integrated College, Riverside Special School, Jordanstown Special School and Hillcroft Special School.

The Council itself was able to offer 9 placement opportunities across the organisation with 4 being taken up in sections including Leisure, Parks, Media etc.

A Celebration Event was hosted by the Mayor of Antrim and Newtownabbey on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

August 2023 – approval for Pilot Schools Work Placement Programme

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

Following on from the success of the pilot programme Members may wish to consider the further development of this programme for the next academic year continuing to work with post primary schools, special educational settings and the business community.

Work experience is 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 and Next Steps**

Officers are still collating the feedback from the pilot phase and will undertake one-to-one meetings with each post primary and SEN school in the Borough to understand:

- Why they did (or did not) engage with the pilot phase.
- The need for this type of on-going support.
- How the programme could be improved.
- Barriers to participation etc.

The out workings of these meetings will help to shape the future direction of the programme. However, sufficient feedback from participants, teachers and businesses has been garnered to confidently say that there is support for a further phase of the programme.

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

[antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/workpluscelebrationevent](https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/workpluscelebrationevent)

### **What will Phase 2 Deliver?**

It is envisaged that Phase 2 will closely follow the model of the pilot phase linking schools and employers to meaningful work placement opportunities for

young people across the Borough. This is the basis on which the procurement will be undertaken.

However, there are a number of variables to be considered in relation to phase 2, including:

- **SEN and Mainstream** – there was unprecedented demand from SEN schools, and this was a highlight from the pilot programme as it was not an anticipated outcome.
- **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. This has implications for insurances and releasing students.
- **Time of Year** – during the pilot programme the young people all had a set time in year to complete their work placement. Consideration is being given to offering a rolling list of placements that students can avail off throughout the year which means that schools don't have to change their plans in relation to the time of year they normally complete their placements.

The procurement exercise for this programme to be undertaken will follow the model of the pilot programme but with enough built in flexibility to adapt to any of the variable changes outlined above.

### **How will the programme be delivered?**

In order to be ready for roll-out of the programme at the beginning of the new academic year in September 2024 a new delivery partner is required. Workplus Limited was appointed via a Direct Award Contract for the pilot phase in 2023. However, a procurement process will be required as the programme moves into Year 2.

Officers are requesting Members approval to undertake this procurement exercise, over the summer in order to have a potential provider lined up for September 2024.

A further report will then be brought to the Economic Development Committee in September 2024 with a proposed delivery partner appointment and a full plan for the next phase of the programme based on the findings of the meetings with schools later this month.

### **5. Financial Position/Implication**

Below is the breakdown of the budget for the pilot phase. It is anticipated that the costs would remain at the same level. This budget has been accounted for in the economic development budget for 2024/25. There are no new financial implications for the Council.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Set up matching platform	£9,500
Marketing campaign to employers	£4,500
Support to employers	£12,000
Planning workshops	£1,750
Promotional webinars to schools	£1,500
Support to schools and pupils	Included
Matching employers and pupils	Included
<b>Total</b>	<b>£29,250</b>

## 6. Governance

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

## 7. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Members approve Phase 2 of the Work Experience Programme 2024-2025 up to a value of £29,250, the specification for which will be based on the outcome of the schools engagement.**

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development

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

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

## 4.4 ED/LMP/44 MULTIPLY PROGRAMME UPDATE

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of Multiply programme, administered by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and locally delivered by ANBC and seek approval to accept the associated Letter of Offer for £250,000 for project costs (**enclosed**). The Council has previously accepted the Letter of Offer of £50,000 relating to staff costs, which has subsequently been paid to the Council.

### 2. Introduction/Background

Members will recall that in 2023 the UK Government announced that "Multiply", a scheme to boost numeracy skills would be introduced in Northern Ireland via the Department for Economy locally. The Multiply programme is targeted at those individuals aged 19 and over who don't have maths GCSE at grade C (or equivalent). In November 2023 the funding was subsequently paused by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

In March 2024 the Council received confirmation that the Multiply funding bid for Northern Ireland had now been approved. This total bid is for £5.9m, for delivery between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025, through local colleges, universities, and Labour Market Partnerships.

The Department for the Economy (DfE) is the Departmental lead on the programme and will work with the Further Education Colleges and Higher Education Institutions on its delivery. DfE has asked the 11 Labour Market Partnerships if they would be willing to deliver the Multiply projects. To date, all eleven Councils have agreed to participate.

### 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

The **enclosed** Letter of Offer and additional appendix (**enclosed**) sets out the key interventions to be delivered by the Council in the Financial Year 2024/25 with an associated delivery budget of £251,007.20:

- Maths for speakers of other languages,
- Engaging mature learners,
- Counting on you – industry upskilling,
- Numeracy bootcamps,
- Bring your grown up - adult/child numeracy collaboration,

Included in Multiply is staff costs and resources for a Multiply Officer to support the delivery of the projects. A Letter of Offer for £50,000 was received for the officer post and the money has been paid to the Council by the Department.

The Multiply Officer is a fully funded post until 31 March 2025, and has been advertised internally within Council and via agencies on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024, with a closing date for applications of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The total budget for the programme is approximately £300k comprising of £250,000 for project costs and £50,000 for salary costs.

6. Governance

The initiative will be managed by the Economic Development Team with update reports brought to the Labour Market Partnership.

7. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Members:**

- a) note the overview of the proposed Multiply programme; and**
- b) accept the associated Letter of Offer for £250,000.**

Prepared by: Terry McNeill, Economic Development Manager

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

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



## 4.5 ED/DI/001 DIGITAL READINESS ASSESSMENT PILOT PROGRAMME

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members a pilot Digital Factory Accelerator Initiative in partnership with Leading Manufacturing Accelerating Change (LMAC) to support local manufacturing businesses in their digital transformation journeys.**

### 2. Background

The Digital Factory Accelerator for Manufacturers, launched by the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC) in partnership with the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) and Invest NI, offers comprehensive support to manufacturers seeking to enhance their digital manufacturing readiness using the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI). This pilot programme provides a thorough assessment and roadmap for integrating advanced digital technologies into traditional manufacturing operations. The Council's partnership with AMIC positions this pilot programme as a platform to further support and integrate with the initiatives of AMIC by offering extended benefits and opportunities for participating businesses. This further demonstrates the Council's proactive role in addressing barriers such as access, cost, and awareness, ensuring innovative solutions are available to local businesses.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

Previously, the Council has successfully supported various digital initiatives, including the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund and Digital Surge, which have stimulated digital innovation by addressing financial barriers for small and micro-businesses. The positive outcomes of these programmes demonstrate the requirement for further investment in digital transformation initiatives, particularly in manufacturing; a growth sector for the Council area that currently accounts for 12% of employment in the Borough.

### 4. Key Issues

#### **What will the programme deliver?**

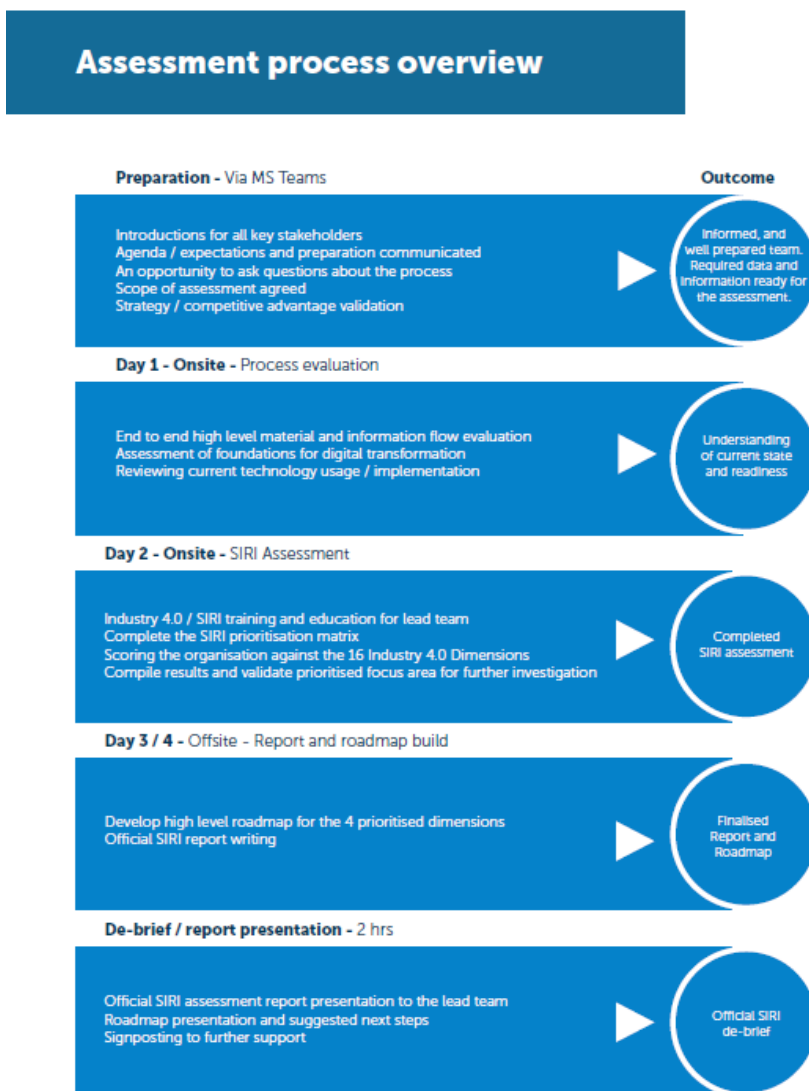
The pilot Digital Factory Accelerator for Manufacturers will assess an organisation's digital manufacturing readiness using SIRI – the Smart Industry Readiness Index. SIRI is a global standard assessment and prioritisation process for manufacturing organisations looking to adopt digital manufacturing technologies.

Participating businesses will receive:

- Five days of dedicated support from HVMC and LMAC representatives.
- Comprehensive digital manufacturing maturity assessment (Official SIRI - Smart Industry Readiness Index assessment).
- Benchmarking against a global pool of manufacturers and organisations in your sector.

- Technology scan against the prioritised areas for your business.
- Debrief presentation from HVMC & LMAC representatives.
- A bespoke, high-level roadmap for how to transform your business with digital manufacturing technologies.
- Signposting to any relevant funding or business support available in Northern Ireland.
- An Invitation to join the community of manufacturers in Northern Ireland growing the local sector and economy.

The process for each company is detailed in the diagram below.



## **How will it be delivered?**

The programme will be an open application for eligible businesses from across the Borough. In the pilot programme we anticipate supporting 7 businesses to complete the programme.

The programme will be delivered by the Economic Development section, working alongside LMAC, AMIC and QUB. These partners have committed to providing the necessary expertise and resources for the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI) assessments. Their involvement ensures that participating businesses receive high-quality, tailored assessments and roadmaps for their digital transformation journeys.

Officers in the Economic Development Team focused on Digital Innovation will play an essential role in the successful implementation and outcomes of the pilot programme. Specific roles have been identified as follows:

- **Team Involvement:** Officers will actively shadow the assessment process. This hands-on involvement ensures that the team gains valuable insights and practical experience.
- **Upskilling & Knowledge Exchange:** The Council's participation in all stages of the assessment, from company identification to ensuring completion and the satisfaction of the assessments facilitates continuous upskilling for the team and supports the wider business community with a knowledge exchange.
- **Project Management:** The team will oversee the entire project, ensuring adherence to timelines, governance, and maintaining high standards of execution.

## **Promotion Strategy –**

Given that 51% of businesses in the Borough have indicated the need for Digital Support (as per the Economic Development business engagement survey), the pilot offers significant added value to local businesses by addressing several key barriers:

- **Accessibility:** Many of the Borough's SMEs lack the access to high-quality digital assessments like SIRI. This programme makes resources available which will improve economic growth at a micro and macro level.
- **Cost:** Of the 32 companies in Northern Ireland which have received a SIRI assessment, one is from the Borough. The cost of comprehensive digital assessments is prohibitive. By subsidising 80% of the assessment cost, the Council removes this financial barrier, making it feasible for more businesses to participate.
- **Council's Role:** This pilot clearly demonstrates Council's commitment to promoting innovation and economic growth by supporting the manufacturing sector locally. This initiative helps create an attractive environment for employment and will entice new businesses to consider the Borough as an area for investment, in turn, this provides our citizens with a

committed investment with sustainable, long-term benefits for the local economy.

### **Business Engagement –**

The recruitment process for the pilot programme will be strategic, ensuring a representative selection of businesses from across the Borough:

- **Targeted Recruitment:** Officers' proposal to LMAC/QUB is that focus will be on a range of manufacturing businesses from across the borough, ensuring the programme covers a varied range of scale and sectors, where possible.
- **Wider Call for Interest:** To ensure inclusivity and performance a call for expressions interest will be issued. This will ensure the Council engages a diverse range of businesses and ensures distribution of the benefits of the programme across the Borough.
- **Member Engagement:** The selection process and the geographical distribution of participating companies will be communicated to local Members to them involved.

### 5. Financial Position/Implication

The proposed funding for the pilot initiative is £30,000 and is accounted for within the Economic Development 2024/25 budget.

<b>Cost Area</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Programme costs for the 7 businesses to complete	£28,000
Support costs e.g. marketing materials	£2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£30,000</b>

Participating businesses would be required to contribute £1,000, representing 20% of the total £5,000 cost for each SIRI assessment, the Council programme would meet the other 80% (i.e. £4,000 per business).

This funding model aims to subsidise the high cost of the assessments, making them more accessible to local manufacturing businesses.

### 6. Governance

The initiative will be managed by the Economic Development section. The procurement process will involve a direct award to LMAC, justified by their unique expertise and the specific requirements of the SIRI assessment. Compliance with council procurement policies and transparency in fund allocation will be ensured.

### 7. Summary

The Digital Factory Accelerator initiative aims to support local manufacturing businesses in their digital transformation. By providing comprehensive assessments and tailored roadmaps, the programme enhances the competitiveness and growth of the manufacturing sector in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough. The initiative aligns with the Council's broader economic development goals, supports the local economy's resilience and

digital innovation objectives. The programme's collaboration with AMIC not only enhances the credibility and quality of assessments but also provides a platform for businesses to access broader support and integration with AMIC's initiatives.

## **8. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that;**

- (a) a pilot Digital Factory Accelerator initiative be progressed at a cost of £30,000 for which provision has been made in the 2024/25 budget; and**
- (b) a Direct Award be made to LMAC to conduct the SIRI Assessment due to their unique expertise.**

Prepared by: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Regeneration and Infrastructure

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

## 4.6 ED/ED/281 BUSINESS MERCHANDISING SUPPORT PROGRAMME

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members the approval of a new Business Merchandising Support Programme for 2024/2025.**

### 2. Introduction/Background

Officers have been proactively engaging with local businesses over the last number of years to understand how the Council can support them to grow and maximise their sales potential. This has been successful with an almost 40% response rate from almost 1,500 businesses of all shapes and sizes.

Through this survey and on-going work on programmes such as the Town Chambers of Commerce, the shop front improvement programmes and our town centre marketing campaigns a need has been identified to support businesses with the visual merchandising elements of their businesses i.e. how they display and promote their products.

The development of the new programme is a natural follow-on from the Council's shop front improvement programmes which have focused on the external appearance of shops whilst the proposed programme aims to improve how retail businesses display products behind their shop window and in their stores internally.

### 3. Key Issues

Through the business engagement work and the existing shop front improvement programmes a need has been identified to provide support to retailers in relation to how they display their products to maximise the visual impact and increase footfall into their stores.

The new programme will now focus on those businesses with products to display or a 'shop window' to improve how they promote their products.

#### **What will the new programme provide?**

The proposed programme will work with up to 25 businesses, 5 businesses per town, and be delivered by an appointed visual merchandising expert.

The programme will deliver up to 5 hours of mentoring support to each business as well as a dedicated redesign of both their window display (if applicable) and the layout of products on their shop floor. The programme will also provide a small grant to each participating business, subject to approval from the visual merchandising expert, to purchase items to help with the visual improvements e.g. shelving units etc.

The support will be delivered in a number of steps:

- a) Initial meeting between business owner, key staff and the expert consultant to scope out the business, understand the key selling points, and the businesses view and understanding of visual merchandising.
- b) Expert to review and develop a plan for each business to be discussed and agreed with the owner.
- c) Expert will have a small budget to purchase items to help with the remodel of the shop window and floor e.g. window dressings, themed items.
- d) Expert will work with the business owner to undertake the remodel of the store and provide any additional training, input to the business owner in relation to other activities that might be useful particularly with regards to themed campaigns e.g. Christmas.

The cost for each business will be approximately £1,000.

- £500 will be used to cover the mentoring support for each business; and
- £500 will be used for a grant for each business.

This will be 100% funded and no financial contribution will be sought from the business owners. However, their commitment to the programme will be provided 'in kind' through their time given over to the mentoring elements. At the discretion of individual business owners, they can provide financial support to help implement the changes if they are in a position to do so. The expert will discuss this with the business owner at the initial meeting.

To be eligible for the programme it is envisaged that a business must:

- a) Be a rate paying business.
- b) Be located in a town centre.
- c) Be a retail focused business with products to sell to the general public.
- d) Have a customer facing shop presence (i.e. a commercial unit); and
- e) Have a 12-month trading history.

Additional criterion may be added as the scheme develops. The programme will not be open to online businesses.

### **How will the new programme be delivered?**

The programme will be managed by the Economic Development Team, however at least one independent visual merchandising consultant will be procured to support the programme delivery. The number of experts will depend on the business types to be involved and the availability of each expert.

The Council team will work closely with the Chambers and Business Networks in each town during the delivery of this programme.

### **Where will the programme be delivered?**

The Economic Development Team will work collaboratively with the Chambers of Commerce or Business Networks in each town to deliver this programme. This will be the first collaborative venture between the Council and our refreshed Chambers of Commerce.

Specifically, the Chambers will support the identification of businesses who could benefit from this support in each town.

#### 4. Financial Position/Implication

£25,000 for this programme has been accounted for in the current economic development budget for 2024/2025 and there are no further financial implications for the Council.

Officers are continuing to discuss this project with the Department for Communities to understand any support, financial or otherwise, that they would be willing to contribute.

#### 5. Governance

This programme will be procured in line with the Council's Procurement guidance.

Economic Development will be the lead section for the scheme.

#### 6. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Members approve £25,000 from the existing Economic Development budget for the Business Visual Merchandising Programme 2024/2025 for up to 25 businesses across the five towns in the Borough.**

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

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



**5 ITEMS FOR NOTING**

**5.1 ED/ED/284 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN**

**1. Purpose**

**The purpose of this report is to update Members on the delivery of the Economic Development Action Plan.**

**2. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that Members note the Economic Development Action Plan (**enclosed**) as outlined.**

Prepared by: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development

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

## 5.2 ED/ED/280 GILBERT STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME UPDATE

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Student Ambassador Programme with Gilbert.**

### 2. Introduction/Background

The Sister Cities Student Exchange Programme is a programme that typically provides eight students, four from Antrim and Newtownabbey and four from Gilbert, Arizona with an opportunity to develop an understanding of a different country, its culture, and its people through a family living experience. The programme lasts approximately six weeks during the summer with half the time spent in Gilbert and half in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

It was approved at Full Council on 29 JAN 2024 that four students from the Borough will take part in the 2024 Student Exchange Programme.

### 4. Key Issues

The Student Exchange is now on its 21<sup>st</sup> year, and forms a key component of the Councils ongoing Sister City Relationship with Gilbert, Arizona.

This year's exchange will take place from 13<sup>th</sup> June until 21<sup>st</sup> July, commencing in Gilbert and concluding in Antrim and Newtownabbey with a BBQ planned for 18<sup>th</sup> July at Antrim Castle Gardens (confirmation to follow), to which all members are invited. Students and their partners will be partaking in volunteering with groups across the Borough including the Parkrun.

The Council and its lead Officers have engaged directly with the lead contacts in Gilbert regarding the future of the Exchange Programme- both during last year's inward delegation from Gilbert and during the most recently outward visit by representation of the Council in May 2024.

A future report will be brought to Members regarding the exchange and how it operates including;

- Associated Governance
- Marketing and Promotion
- Eligibility and Duration

### 5. Financial Position/Implication

The costs for this programme of up to £10,000 will be met through the existing Economic Development budget.

### 6. Governance

Update reports will be brought to Committee in due course.

## **7. Recommendation**

**It is recommended that Members note the update for this year's student ambassador programme and the scheduled BBQ on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2024 at Antrim Castle Gardens.**

Prepared by: Matthew Mulligan, Business Development Project Officer,  
Economic Development

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

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

## 5.3 ED/LMP/061 LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP 2024/2025 DELIVERY

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the delivery of the Labour Market Partnership Action Plan for 2024/25 including the key events scheduled. The report also outlines to Members that a letter of offer for £25,197.87 to cover administration costs from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024 has been accepted, however, no Letter of Offer for programme delivery has yet been received.**

### 2. Introduction/Background

Members will be aware of the Labour Market Partnership (LMP), the aim of which is to improve labour market conditions by working on a collaborative basis with a range of partners.

The Labour Market Partnership is comprised of representatives from:

- Department for Communities
- Antrim Jobs & Benefits Office
- Newtownabbey Jobs & Benefits Office
- Department for Economy Careers Service
- Health Trust
- Education Authority
- Northern Regional College
- Invest Northern Ireland
- 1 representative from each Enterprise Agency – Antrim, LEDCOM and Mallusk
- 1 representative from each political party of Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council & the Mayor (2 DUP, 1 UUP, 1 Alliance, 1 SDLP and 1 Sinn Fein).

### **2024/25 Action Plan**

The 2024/25 Action Plan a copy of which is **enclosed** will focus on similar strategic priorities as the 23/24 Action Plan, including activities such as **employment academies** and support programmes, **upskilling academies**, **employment events** such as job fairs, as well as continuing to maintain and **form partnerships** with external support organisations, training providers and businesses.

The 2024/25 Action Plan implements a new strategic priority around support and **employability programmes for employers** and **people with disabilities** to increase awareness of supports and opportunities available to both employers and residents.

Subject to receipt of the full budget, the LMP will seek to appoint a Schools and Business Engagement and Outreach Officer to act as a point of contact for businesses and residents, develop an online information hub and work in partnership with Disability programme providers in the area to provide workshops and information sessions.

The Action Plan will focus on the following themes:

- **Economic Inactivity** - People not in employment who have not been seeking employment within the last four weeks and/ or are unable to start work in the next two weeks;
- **Unemployment** - People who are without a job, currently available to work, and have been actively looking for work within the previous four weeks;
- **Disability** – People who report a physical or mental health condition(s) or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more where this reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities; and
- **Skilled Labour Supply** – DfE’s 2021 Skills Barometer utilises the National Qualification Framework (NQF) Skills Classification.

Key events scheduled to date include:

Date	Event
29 June 2024	Wellbeing & Employability, The Junction
17 October 2024	Health & Wellbeing Fair, Abbey Centre
25 October 2024	Large Job Fair, Valley Leisure Centre
4 February 2025	Careers Fair, Theatre at the Mill
22 February 2025	Wellbeing & Employability, The Junction
TBC March 2025	Industry Youth Event, Theatre at the Mill

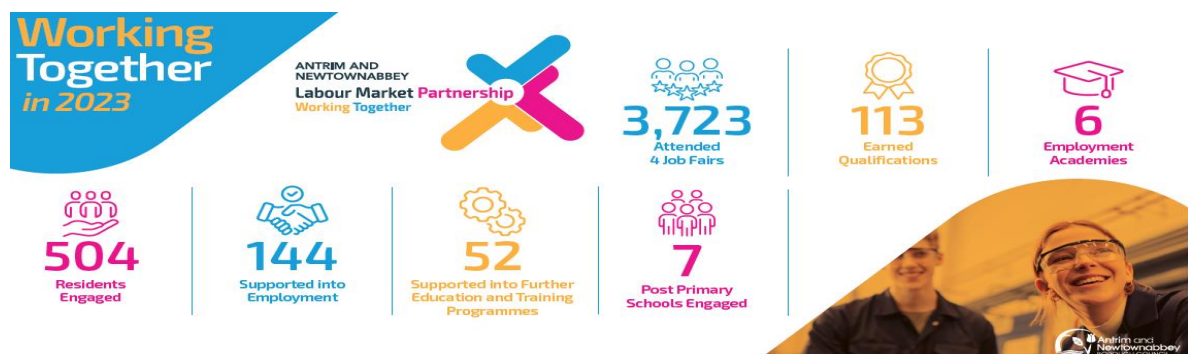
The review of the 2023/24 Action Plan is underway and will be reported in due course.

The LMP is currently awaiting a formal Letter of Offer of funding from the Department for the Community (DfC), estimated to be received in June to enable delivery of the 24/25 Action Plan.

### LMP Schools Sub-Group

The LMP has established a sub-group comprising all 16 local post primary schools. The subgroup provides an excellent opportunity for the Council to promote current and future careers and career routes within the Borough, as well as gaining input from schools on their student's needs. This in turn directs and informs the design of the support provided by the Partnership.

A number of projects have taken place as a result of the Sub-Group including the Careers Fair, which took place in February 2024 and attracted over 860 attendees.



### 3. Previous Decision of Council

At full Council on 29 April 2024, the LMP Action Plan 2024/25 was approved along with agreement for Officers to proceed at risk with project delivery preparation, without entering into any contract until a formal letter of offer is issued by Department for Communities, and accepted by the Council.

### 4. Key Issues

The delayed receipt of a letter of offer from the DfC poses a significant risk to the LMP achieving the targets set out within the Action Plan. The Council has agreed that Officers commence preparation for the delivery of the action plan at risk without entering into any contract. Members will be updated in due course regarding the receipt of a Letter of Offer.

In the interim a Letter of Offer was issued and accepted for £25,197.87 to cover administration costs from 1 April 2024 to 30 June 2024.

### 5. Financial Position/Implication

The total budget for the programme is:

Overall Total (Administration & Operational) £528,263.40.

This is made up of £503,957.40 from DfC and £24,306 ANBC contribution.

The below table breaks down the funding allocation:

<b>Strategic Priority 1</b> (LMP Delivery and Development; LMP Subgroups; Strategic Planning)	£8,500
<b>Strategic Priority 2</b> (Programme delivery, including: Upskilling, Academy and Employability Programmes)	£349,666.40
<b>Strategic Priority 3</b> (PR and marketing; employability events and initiatives including career and job fairs)	£45,000
<b>Total Operational</b>	<b>£403,166.40</b>
<b>DfC Admin Costs</b>	£100,791.00
<b>ANBC Admin Costs</b>	£24,306.00
<b>Total Administration</b>	<b>£125,097.00</b>
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>£528,263.40</b>

## 6. Governance

The Partnership meets bi-monthly (6 times per year) and is chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings will be reported to the Economic Development Committee.

## 7. Recommendation

**It is recommended that Members note the report.**

Prepared by: Terry McNeill, Economic Development Manager

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

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

## 5.4 PT/CI/049 PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2023/24 PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) QUARTER 4

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 Performance Progress Report (Economic Development) Quarter 4 be noted.**

### 2. Background

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

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 was approved in June 2023. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with six identified improvement objectives and a number of Statutory Performance Targets.

### 3. Previous Decision of Council

As agreed at the August 2023 Council meeting, quarterly performance reports will be presented to the relevant committee or Working Group.

### 4. Key Points

Fourth Quarter performance progress reports for Economic Development are **enclosed** for Members information.

### 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2023/24 Performance Progress Report (Economic Development) Quarter 4 be noted.**

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Agreed by: Katherine Young, Organisation Development and Employee Engagement Manager.

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Corporate Strategy



## 5.5 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – QUARTER 4 APRIL 2023 to MARCH 2024

### 1. Purpose

**The purpose of this report is to provide financial performance information at Quarter four (April 2023 – March 2024) for Economic Development.**

### 2. Introduction

As agreed at the August Council meeting, quarterly budget reports will be presented to the relevant Committee or Working Group. All financial reports will be available to all Members.

### 3. Summary

The budget report for Period 12 does not include adjustments required to arrive at the final financial position of the Council for the 2023/24 financial year. These adjustments include final accruals of expenditure incurred and grants and debts invoiced after 31 March 2024, contributions to or from reserves, and prepayments of expenditure and income.

Budget report for Economic Development for Quarter 4 – April 2023 to March 2024 is **enclosed** for Members' information.

### 4. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the report be noted.**

Prepared by: Richard Murray, Head of Finance

Agreed by: John Balmer, Deputy Director of Finance

Approved by: Sandra Cole, Director of Finance and Governance

## 5.6 ED/ED/171 MINUTES – BELFAST REGIONAL CITY DEAL COUNCIL PANEL

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to share with Members the minutes of recent BRCD Council Panel meetings held on 27 September 2023 and 31 January 2024; copies are **enclosed** for Members information.

### 2. Introduction/Background

The BRCD Council Panel has been established to fulfil an oversight role, ensuring that the BRCD continues to be aligned with the vision for inclusive economic growth with the Panel meeting regularly during the development of the BRCD.

### 5. Recommendation

**It is recommended that the minutes of the 27 September 2023 and 31 January 2024 meetings be noted.**

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