MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HELD IN THE CHAMBER, MOSSLEY MILL ON TUESDAY 12 MAY 2026 AT 6.30 PM

In the Chair	:	Councillor B Mallon
Committee Members (In person)	:	Alderman – M Cosgrove Councillors – M Cooper, E McLaughlin, M Ní Chonghaile and B Webb
Non Committee Members (Remote)	:	Councillors – R Foster and R Lynch
In Attendance	:	Professor Sam Turner, Chief Executive, Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (AMIC) Factory of the Future
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 – S Fisher

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

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

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors – N Kelly and M Stewart

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 4.1 – Councillor M Ní Chonghaile
Item 7.1 – Alderman M Cosgrove

Alderman Cosgrove joined the meeting during Item 3.1

3 PRESENTATION

3.1 ED/ED/165 ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND INNOVATION CENTRE (AMIC) FACTORY OF THE FUTURE - UPDATE

1. <u>Purpose</u>

Professor Sam Turner, Chief Executive, Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (AMIC) Factory of the Future, presented an update on the progress of the AMIC project to date.

As several Members raised questions which were deemed commercially sensitive, the Chair indicated that the meeting would proceed In-Confidence.

<u>PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'</u>

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

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

Professor Turner responded to Members' questions, following which the Chair thanked him for his presentation and he left the meeting.

<u>PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'</u>

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed

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

The Chair advised that audio-recording and livestream would recommence at this point.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the presentation be noted and that a site visit open to all Members be facilitated.

ACTION BY: M McKenna, Deputy Director of Investment and Business Development and S Norris, Deputy Director of Regeneration and Infrastructure

4 ITEMS FOR DECISION

4.1 ED/LMP/064 TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS WORKSHOPS 2026/2027

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 2026/27.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that YENI is 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 2026 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 3 local businesses; Woodside Logistics, Henderson Group and Transport Training Services.

In total, 3 Transport and Logistics industry workshops took place with 248 primary 11 pupils from 12 primary schools and 55 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 10th and Wednesday 11th March 2026

School	Town
Ashgrove Primary School	Newtownabbey
Antrim Primary School	Antrim
Ballycraigy Primary School	Antrim
Ballyhenry Primary School	Newtownabbey
Crumlin Integrated Primary School	Crumlin
Gaelscoil Eanna	Glengormley
Kilbride Primary School	Ballyclare
Loanends Primary School	Crumlin
Parkhall Primary School	Antrim
Round Tower Integrated Primary School,	Antrim
The Thompson Primary	Ballyrobert Ballyclare
Totals	11 Schools

Thursday 12th March 2026

School	Town	Student numbers
Edmund Rice College	Glengormley	17
Ballyclare Secondary School	Ballyclare	15
SEN School		
Jordanstown School	Newtownabbey	16
Rostulla School	Newtownabbey	7

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

3. Previous Decision of Council

In May 2026, 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 2027. It was proposed that for £6,600 YENI would deliver the 2027 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 2027 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 2026/27.

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 the meetings were chaired by the Mayor. Minutes from LMP meetings were reported to the Economic Development Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

a) the 2026 final report from YENI be noted.
b) the YENI proposal as outlined at a cost of £6,600 and contribution of up to £8,000 towards the total programme cost be approved

ACTION BY: Carrie Beck, Economic Development Officer

4.2 ED/ED/320 GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP WEEK 2026: 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, including all associated expenditure

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that Young Enterprise NI (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.

YENI had submitted proposals (circulated) to deliver a primary and secondary schools programme in November 2026 during Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) in partnership with the Council.

GEW 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 use enterprise skills to realise entrepreneurial potential, as well as signpost to various elements of the NI entrepreneurship ecosystem to support business start-up including Go Succeed.

Extremely high demand each year for council GEW activities demonstrated the need for these types of interactive programmes in addressing entrepreneurial gaps within the education system and the necessity for embedding entrepreneurial skillsets within the Borough's youth populations to ensure future economic growth.

Members would be aware that all previous GEW activities had taken place in person, hosted in the Linen Suite in Mossley Mill. Typically, Council provided transportation to/from the event as well as light catering for staff and post-primary students. Feedback indicated that without Council contribution towards the travel, school attendance would have been lower due to budget constraints within schools.

Last year, Council welcomed 892 primary and post-primary students from 28 schools across the Borough over a 4-day period, with very positive feedback received from all those attending. The total cost for the delivery of the programme was £20,032, £15,086.85 of which was from approved Council budget with the remainder covered via the Go Succeed Community Outreach budget pot.

This year's proposal for delivery was detailed below.

Option 1, full proposal included within appendix 1 –
Full in-person delivery, as had been the case in previous years.

4 x Primary Sessions, in-person focusing on supply chains, using the journey of apple juice from orchard to supermarket shelf as a central theme

1) Supply chain story, branding and packaging, role of various businesses within the supply chain, co-hosted with a local business
2) Students challenged to design branding and packaging for a new juice carton, focused on sustainability
3) Students would take a juice carton template back to school, where they would complete their design as part of homework/art class activity
4) Schools would be invited to submit photographs of their completed designs, with a number of winning entries selected and prizes awarded.
5) Mayor would visit the winning school

1x Post Primary Session, in-person event, where students would be challenged to design a new app linked to the Internet of Things within the Digital and Technology industry

Students would work collaboratively to -
1) Develop an innovative digital idea
2) Create a business concept
3) Consider marketing and financial elements

4) Hear from local businesses and business advisors around the entrepreneurial journey
5) Prepare a short presentation to pitch to the Mayor, local businesses and ED Officers

Associated budget –
Overall request - £20,000
YENI delivery - £5,200
Remaining indicative costs would be met from existing Economic Development Budget (estimate based on previous years):

Catering - £2,200
Transportation to/from Mossley Mill - £8,000
Prizes - £300
AV Equipment - £1,400
Ad Hoc (resources, interpreters) - £2,900

To mitigate against a number of external factors including increasing costs associated with bus hire, global fuel price hikes and high demand limiting a number of schools from attending, YENI had submitted an additional potential delivery model for 2026.

Option 2, full proposal included within appendix 2 –
Hybrid delivery approach, whereby primary sessions would be delivered online and post-primary sessions in-person

1) 1x Primary Session – online event focusing on supply chains, using the journey Live Webinar – supply chain story, branding and packaging, role of various businesses within the supply chain, co-hosted with a local business
2) In-School Activity – students be provided with resource pack and design their own juice carton packaging
3) Competition Entry – schools submit designs for judging by the Mayor and ED Officers
4) Celebration Event – hosted at Mossley Mill during GEW, winners announced (1x representative from each class attending) and participating schools celebrated of apple juice from orchard to supermarket shelf as central theme –

1x Post Primary Session – in-person event, where students would be challenged to design a new app linked to the Internet of Things within the Digital and Technology industry

Students would work collaboratively to -
1) Group work to develop an innovative digital idea
2) Create a business concept
3) Consider marketing and financial elements
4) Hear from local businesses around their entrepreneurial journey
5) Prepare a short presentation to pitch to the Mayor, local businesses and ED Officers

Associated budget –
Overall request - £14,000
YENI delivery - £5,800
Remaining indicative costs to be met from existing Economic Development Budget (estimate based on previous years):

Catering - £2,000
Transportation (Post-Primary only) - £1,500
Prizes – £300
Cartons – £1,000
AV Equipment - £800
Ad Hoc (resources, interpreters) - £2,600

Based on the options discussed above, Officers recommended proceeding with option 1, 'business as usual' approach. This was based on consistently positive feedback each year surrounding the value and importance of these events in plugging the entrepreneurial knowledge gaps within the education ecosystem. Feedback and reflection across other programmes also indicated that in-person sessions were more impactful than virtual sessions and drove positive outcomes.

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 within the Economic Development Budget and were based on previous year costs.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

Members approve:

a) the delivery of Global Entrepreneurship Week Activities be approved
b) the appointment of YENI as a delivery partner be approved
c) the Proceed with option 1, 'business as usual' approach for delivery be approved.

ACTION BY: Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer

4.3 ED/ED/306 INVEST ANTRIM AND NEWTOWNABBEY – UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on investment performance and opportunities arising following the London Investment Showcase and sought approval for Officers to explore future activities.

2. Background

Members would recall the Council hosted an Investment Showcase Event in the House of Commons, London, 10 December 2025, to build on the success of securing the Overall Council of the Year 2024 and 2025 finalist for Service Delivery by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and to launch a new investment proposition branch "Invest Antrim Newtownabbey: AN Investment that Delivers"

The event was attended by more than 120 people, including host MPs Robin Swann, John Finucane and Sammy Wilson as well as a number of other elected officials and high profile guests including local business leaders, investors and developers, alongside officers from key UK government departments.

The showcase highlighted the Borough's strengths in connectivity, innovation, skills, and investment-ready sites, the Council's 'Call for Sites', alongside the scale of opportunity emerging through projects such as Belfast International Airport and the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC).

The Council recognised the importance of building on the momentum gained through the event and to continued to build brand awareness to enhance the Borough's reputation as an attractive place to invest.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In January 2026 the Council noted the update regarding the event and approved the associated action plan.

4. Post Event Investment Engagements & Updates

Following the Investment Showcase, the Council had maintained strong momentum through a series of high-level political and strategic engagement. This had included hosting the NI Affairs Committee to highlight the Borough's contribution to regional economic growth, discussions with the Department for Transport (DfT) in relation to airports and air freight, positioning the Borough within wider UK connectivity and infrastructure priorities.

The Council had also welcomed direct discussions with Deputy First Minister, Emma Little-Pengelly MLA, ensuring alignment with Executive priorities and continued political support and opportunities had strengthened the Borough's positioning within key growth sectors, while collaboration with Invest NI regarding the opportunity for an MRO was ongoing.
In parallel, engagement had been progressing with aerospace and related sectoral opportunities locally.

Since the event in Westminster a number of major planning applications had been submitted to the Council:

- DHL have had a c£30m 140,000 sq ft distribution centre approved in March 2026 and had since submitted a full application for another

100,000 sq ft storage and distribution warehouse costing c£18m. Should a full application be approved, it would result in a total investment of c£48m and create c430 new jobs in the Borough.

- A full application had been submitted from James Latham Timber PLC for the erection of a warehouse building with ancillary office space that would, if approved, lead to a c£10m investment and bring 35 FTE jobs to the Borough.

5. Next Steps

Farnborough International Airshow

The Farnborough International Airshow (FIA) is hosted in Farnborough, Hampshire, a long-established centre for aerospace research, development and innovation. The FIA had been hosted in the Town from 1948. Officers suggested attendance at the event offered a real opportunity to advance economic development objectives. From an investment attraction perspective, the event provided a platform to promote "Invest AN: An Investment that Delivers", previously launched in the House of Commons late last year and therefore promoting the Borough as a competitive location for key sectors with ample land availability and world class connectivity, showcasing regional strengths.

It was envisaged that the attending party would consist of the Chair and Vice of ED Committee or their nominees along with 3 appropriate Officers.

Whilst the event ran for five days, the advice was that the first three days (20 Jul – 22 Jul) would be more constructive for a local authority. With this considered ticket costs were:

Trade Visitor Pass (3 days) - £189 per attendee (£945)

Return Flights - estimated £200 per attendee (£1,000)

Accommodation – estimated £800 per attendee (£4,000)

Total estimated costs for 5 attendees - £5,945

Officers were also undertaking ongoing engagement with the UK Government's Department for Transport particularly regarding airports and air freight, reflecting the strategic importance of these sectors within the Borough and supporting wider connectivity and economic growth objectives.

Follow-up Event to Westminster Showcase

Officers were exploring the opportunity to host a follow-up event to the Westminster Showcase event. Hosted locally and with a target of being held approximately 6 months since Westminster Showcase, the event would provide a platform to update stakeholders on progress arising from the Investment Showcase whilst creating further opportunities for engagement and ensuring continued visibility of the new Invest Antrim Newtownabbey brand. It was anticipated that, much like the Westminster event, target invitees would include representatives from the investment and development industry, major local investors and businesses as well as commercial agents and relevant representative bodies.

The programme would be further developed subject to Committee approval, however, it was currently anticipated that the event would comprise updates on the key areas discussed at Westminster, including:

- An update from the Council on the Local Development Plan Call for sites process
- An update on major planning application decisions and submissions since the initial event
- An opportunity for confirmed recent investors / developers to the Borough with a dedicated speaking slot or panel discussion
- An update from AMIC
- A look ahead to future investment opportunities in the Borough and key milestones regarding the LDP process

Subject to final plans and venue it was anticipated that the total cost for this event would be up to £12,000.

Invest Antrim Newtownabbey - Brand Promotion in BIA

Since the development of the new brand and refreshment of the Council's investment proposition, Officers had been exploring opportunities to further promote the brand as an investment destination.

Following discussions with Belfast International Airport an opportunity had emerged to secure prominent advertisement space. The proposed activity involved a three-month advertising presence at Belfast International Airport at a total cost of £3,500. This included prominent advertising space within both international and domestic arrivals areas, alongside a 10-second video displayed in the baggage reclaim area (circulated).

The campaign would ensure brand visibility within the airport and provide a Council presence at a key Borough gateway. Production and installation of all advertising materials would be managed by the airport.

6. Financial Implications

All costs would be met from the existing economic development budgets.

The Chair of Economic Development and Planning responded to Members' questions regarding return on investment, investor interactions and feedback from the new branding exercise since the London Showcase and agreed to circulate further details to the Committee.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

Members approve:

a) The delivery of a follow up event to the 2025 Investment Showcase at a cost of up to £12,000
b) Attendance at the Farnborough International Airshow at a cost of £5495 for the Chair, Vice Chair of Economic Development Committee or their nominees from the Economic Development Committee, along with three appropriate Officers.
c) Promotion of the Invest Antrim Newtownabbey Brand at Belfast International airport as outlined, at a cost of £3,500

ACTION BY: Stewart McCormack, Investment Officer

4.4 ED/ED/313 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP (LEP) UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to:

a) Update Members on the progress of the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and
b) Seek approval of 7 Business Digitisation Grants and 3 Technical Assistance Grants.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be aware that the former Department for the Economy Minister, Conor Murphy MLA, launched a Sub-Regional Economic Plan on the 1st October 2024. The Plan outlined how the Department would work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholders to establish Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) between Oct-Dec 2024 in each Council area.

The LEP was tasked with co-designing a plan which would identify actions and develop projects that aligned with the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, Council Economic Development Strategy and Invest NI Business Strategy. These would be developed with advice from the Department for Economy (DfE) and Invest NI, and they would be appraised and scored/ ranked (where relevant) using a consistent and transparent methodology.

To support the delivery of these plans the Minister launched a £45m Regional Fund which would seek to address regional imbalance. Each Council area in Northern Ireland would be granted an allocation to support their individual action plan.

The Department had indicated that, for Antrim and Newtownabbey, up to £956,000 per year would be allocated, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years with a Resource Grant not exceeding £956,000 and Capital Grant not exceeding £1,912,000. This remained the joint lowest allocation across Northern Ireland.

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

Spend for Year 1 consisted of salaries only (£54,080.97), given the reduced timeframe for delivery. DfE had approved the rollover of any underspend in Year 1 into the remaining programme allocation.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

In January 2025 Members agreed the Membership of the LEP including all eight members of the Economic Development Committee; and agreed the recruitment of temporary staff to service the LEP using associated funding. In May 2025, members formally approved the proposed action plan and delegated the necessary authority to progress the Letter of Offer (LoO) and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), enabling the next stages of implementation to proceed in line with agreed governance arrangements with the Department for the Economy.

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

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

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

An Action Plan for Years 2 and 3 was submitted on 20 March 2026 following approval from the stakeholder group.

4. Update

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

The projected Year 1 expenditure was £88,831.97. Actual expenditure of £54,080.97 reflected staffing with the remaining £34,751.00 carried forward into Year 2 in accordance with programme delivery profiling.

Action Plan – Update

The following programmes were now launched:

Business Digitisation Programme

- Launched on 19 January 2026.
- Call 1 – 19 January to 6 March 2026
- Call 2 – 24 March to 1 May 2026.
- Provided £1,000–£5,000 grants at an 80% intervention rate to support improvements in productivity and digital capability.
- 43 Expressions of Interest and 9 full applications had been assessed. Two Letters of Offer issued and a further seven were ready to be issued which had shown a strong demand given the short time this programme had been live.

Officers had assessed 7 further applications and were satisfied that all conditions for funding had been met. Therefore, approval was sought to issue Letters of Offer to the following businesses:

Applications for approval		
Business	**Description**	**Amount to be awarded**
Devine Design	Graphic design and merchandise printing agency	£5,000.00
Newtownabbey Eats	Food delivery business utilising local independent restaurants, cafés, and takeaways	£4,889.51
Rea Sawmills Ltd	Timber manufacturing business	£3,014.39
Kitchens Direct NI Ltd	Kitchens and Bedrooms manufacturer and installer	£3,624.59
NI Counselling	Private counselling and psychotherapy organisation for adults	£5,000.00
MH Motors	Automotive retailer specialising in used vehicles	£2,856.65
365 Security	Fire protection and electronic security systems	£4,699.00
Total:		**£29,084.14**

Approval of the above grants would result in expenditure of £38,143.42 against the Year 2 Digitisation Programme budget of £100,000, leaving £61,856.58 available for the remainder of the financial year.

Workspace Development – Technical Assistance

This Programme was currently open to Social Enterprises only. 3 full applications had been received and assessed to date, with Letters of Offer ready to be issued pending approval.

Applications for approval:

Business	Description	Amount Awarded
LEDCOM Ltd	External support to assess grow-on workspace demand and evaluate development sites such as: • Market Demand & Stakeholder Consultation Report. • Site Options Appraisal & High-Level Cost Plan.	£5,000.00
Mallusk Enterprise Park	Technical assistance needed to assess options and deliver a Strategic Outline Case, produce Architectural Capacity Layouts and provide an Independent Planning Feasibility report.	£10,000.00
Randalstown ARCHES Association	The grant will help fund Feasibility, Demand Validation, Financial Modelling and Technical/Compliance Review, needed to progress toward capital readiness.	£10,000.00
Total:		**£25,000.00**

Approval of the above grants would result in expenditure of £25,000 against the Year 2 Workspace Development Programme budget of £550,000. The Workspace Development Programme supported a broad and multi-stage programme of work, complementing the existing SPACE offering by enabling the creation and enhancement of workspace in areas with clear demand or limited existing provision.

<u>Projects and Programmes Prepared for Launch / Ongoing Development</u>

There were several other programmes and initiatives outlined in the Action Plan which officers were progressing and developing. These were outlined below:

Green for Business Programme
Final guidance and application documentation had been completed ahead of marketing and promotion.

Green Cluster Programme
Work had commenced with the Council and Invest NI to establish business clusters at Global Point, Nutts Corner, and Mallusk, focusing on energy related collaboration and efficiencies. A meeting with Invest NI had been scheduled for 23 April to discuss the progression of a Green Cluster at Global Point.

Go Global: Skills, Business and Connectivity
Engagement continued around AMIC-linked stakeholder activity, including skills and sectoral mapping across the Borough.

Officers were working to prepare procurement documentation for specialist consultancy support for:

- Global Point Masterplan
- Business Improvement Techniques Programme (Accredited)
- Export Capability Support Programme

5. <u>Financial Position/Implication</u>

As outlined, a Letter of Offer confirmed a total programme allocation of £2,868,000 to 31 March 2028. Budget allocation comprised of a Resource Grant not exceeding £956,000 and a Capital Grant not exceeding £1,912,000, to be delivered across the three-year period. DfE had approved that any underspend could be rolled over into the next financial year.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning responded to Members' questions regarding the application from Mallusk Enterprise Park and the action plan for year 2 and 3 of the grant scheme.

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

Members note the update on the Local Economic Partnership and approve the grants of £29,084.14, to seven businesses in the Business Digitisation Programme and grants of £25,000 to three Social Enterprises in the Technical Assistance Programme.

ACTION BY: Conor Steele, Local Economic Partnership Officer

4.5 ED/ED/282 CCTV PROGRAMME GRANT AWARDS

1. <u>Purpose</u>

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval for the issue of Letters of Offer to a further 3 business applicants under Phase 2 of the CCTV Scheme, to a maximum value of £4,001.75.

2. Introduction/Background

Members were reminded that, in August 2021, the Council approved a 'CCTV Grant Programme', providing town centre businesses with financial assistance to install external, public facing CCTV systems and associated equipment.

The programme focused on supporting local businesses, reducing anti-social behaviour and crime hot-spots, and improving the safety and well-being of the public within our town centres.

More than £49,000 in grant funding was awarded to help businesses install their required CCTV equipment under Phase 1 of the scheme, as follows.

Town Centre	Completed Projects	Spend
Ballyclare	4	£4,222.65
Crumlin	8	£16,335.25
Randalstown	4	£6,735.00
Antrim	6	£9,509.27
Glengormley	8	£12,833.26
TOTAL	**30**	**£49,635.43**

3. Previous Decision of Council

£49,635.43 was awarded in Phase 1 to 30 applicants.

At the 10 September 2024 meeting of the Economic Development Committee approval was granted for the launch of Phase 2 of the Business CCTV Scheme.

Phase 2 encompassed an open call approach and prioritised the PSNI's suggested areas at the application scoring stage, via a scoring matrix.

In subsequent meetings, Members of the Economic Development Committee had approved Letters of Offer for 26 businesses, totalling £46,315.17. This consisted of:

Location	Number of Businesses	Value of grant approved
Antrim	14	£26,356.51
Glengormley	3	£5,789.16
Randalstown	2	£4,727.50
Newtownabbey	4	£7,240.00
Ballyclare	3	£2,202.00
TOTALS	**26**	**£46,315.17**

4. Key Issues for Consideration by Members

Phase 2 of the Scheme had proven as popular as the Phase 1 pilot and was fully subscribed six months after its launch. Engagement with the PSNI and assessment of the applicants' reasons for engagement had focused on

CCTV's role as a deterrent of anti-social behaviour and in providing a sense of security for business staff and the wider community in the applicant's area.

Three further applications were received as follows, with grant assistance requested as below;

Town	Business	Grant requested
Antrim	Ace Group	£1,715.00
Ballyclare	ADA Tint	£1,800.00
Newtownabbey	Belfast Computer Repairs	£486.75
Total		**£4,001.75**

5. Financial Position/Implication

£49,000 was set aside for Phase 2 of the Business CCTV Programme and these three applications would take the total spend to £50,316.92. The additional £1.316.92 required could be made available from the current Economic Development budget.

Upon completion of Phase 2 a post-project evaluation of the scheme would be carried out working alongside the Council's Police Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) and the PSNI. The evaluation would consider outputs and outcomes against value for money and effectiveness. A further report would be provided for Members' information in due course.

A Member requested that Officers provide information on the locations where Economic Development had funded cameras for business use to feed into the current review being undertaken by Estate Services to allow Members to be presented with an overall picture on CCTV within the Borough.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed that

that Members approve the final three grants within Phase 2 of the Business CCTV Programme at a value of £4,001.75.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development

4.6 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 2026 and to seek approval to undertake a review of the first three years of the Work Experience Programme.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be aware that the Work Experience Programme launched with a pilot in 2023 and was now approaching the end of its third year of delivery.

The Work Experience programme, led by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council alongside Workplus Ltd had been Northern Ireland's pioneering work experience initiative. Working with employers, teachers, students and parents this innovative, first of its kind programme, had delivered meaningful, structured work experience opportunities for mainstream and SEN students based on their actual career aspirations. This dynamic programme had 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.

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
June 2025 – approval for 2025 Work Experience Programme
Sept 2025 – approval for appointment of delivery partner and revised format

4. Key Issues

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

The video developed as part of the 2025 programme could be viewed via the following link:
Link to 2025 Programme Video

Following the end of Work Experience 2025, an evaluation was undertaken together with the delivery partner, and some key learnings were identified:

- One of the biggest challenges of the programme had been finding an efficient way to align the programme with the work experience schedules of the mainstream schools, who all worked differently from one another. This had created issues with engagement and non-attendance of pupils to work placements, which had a knock-on effect on employers.
- Employers had found the programme invaluable to increase awareness of their business profile amongst young people and ignite interest in their business and industry.

- The engagement from SEN schools had demonstrated the need and value in driving work placements for SEN pupils. This had the dual advantage of providing valuable insights into the working world for the pupils and built confidence in their ability to seek employment in the future but had also encouraged employers to consider their organisation's inclusivity capabilities.

Update on Work Experience 2026

An open procurement exercise was undertaken for delivery of the 2025 programme, with Workplus Ltd being appointed in September 2025.

To build upon the learnings outlined above and the feedback received from the schools involved and those not involved, some enhancements to the programme were made. These enhancements were aimed at maximising the efficiency, outcomes and value gained from the programme and to make it as straight forward as possible for young people, schools, and businesses to be involved.

The 2025/2026 programme was split into two separate but related strands of activity. Part 1 focussed on the work with mainstream schools and Part 2 focussed on the SEN sector.

- Part 1: Empowerment of mainstream schools and employers to connect through showcasing of work placement opportunities - a programme had been developed and was being delivered that enabled mainstream schools and employers to connect effectively, with the purpose of increasing awareness and uptake of work placement opportunities. The process for both schools and employers had been designed to be as straightforward, accessible, and streamlined as possible, minimising administrative burden and maximising participation. Activities included the structured showcasing of placement offers and the facilitation of direct engagement between pupils and employers. Outcomes were anticipated to demonstrable increases in the number, diversity, and quality of work placement opportunities accessed by mainstream pupils.

- Part 2: Delivery of SEN-Focused Employment Pathways – A programme had been designed and was implementing a range of tailored, sector-based work experience opportunities for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN), ensuring alignment with individual abilities, aspirations, and progression plans. Provision included short, supported taster sessions, medium-term experiences, and extended, goal-driven placements, each underpinned by appropriate guidance and in-placement support. Outcomes would include measurable improvements in pupils' workplace skills, confidence, and progression into further education, training, or employment.

The table below shows figures for the pilot programme and Phase 2, as well as current figures for the 2026 programme, showing strong improvements because of the revised delivery format:

	Pilot (2024)	**Phase 2 (2025)**	**2026**	**Change from 2024-2025**
Mainstream schools participating	2	5	**7**	↑

SEN schools participating	4	5	**5**	No change*
Businesses signed up	28	38	**44**	↑
Mainstream opportunities placed	37	38	**33**	↓
Placement opportunities created (mainstream)	91	100+	**150**	↑
Placement opportunities created (SEN)	30	70+	**164**	↑

*There are only five SEN schools in the Borough – maximum uptake.

The table below outlined the schools which had participated in the programme, and how many pupils had, or were scheduled to, take part in placements:

Mainstream Schools

The table below showed each participating mainstream school and the number of approved placements (i.e. how many placements careers' teachers in each school had approved for their students from the overall pool available) and how many placements were taken up by students.

School	Number of Approved Placements	Number of Placed Students
Ballyclare High School	24	0
Integrated College Glengormley	22	19 (86%)
Parkhall Integrated College	20	14 (70%)
St Benedicts College	10	0
Ballyclare Secondary School	3*	0
Belfast High School	3	0
Abbey Community College	2*	0
Total	**80**	**33 (37.5%)**

* Some are still to be approved by teachers.

SEN Schools

All the SEN schools in the Borough participated fully in the programme in both the new student multi-day placements and the student insight days.

School	Students on Multi Day Placements	Students on Insight Days
Rosstulla	13	16
Riverside	3	8
Thornfield	4	3
Jordanstown	5	19
Hillcroft	9	19
Total	**34**	**65**

In summary, over 334 work placement opportunities had been created for young people through the programme in 2025/2026. The majority of these, 197 placements (59%), had been taken by students.

All placements offered to students from the SEN schools had been taken but 137 opportunities offered to mainstream students remained unfilled.

Whilst the number of work experience opportunities continued to grow for both mainstream and SEN, it was acknowledged that the number of those being taken by mainstream students continued to under-perform, 5 of the 7 mainstream schools that had chosen to participate in the programme had no pupils placed so far.

The participation of some large-scale business from within our Borough and beyond also indicated the credibility the programme had. Some of the businesses involved in the scheme included:

- Mivan
- Belfast International Airport
- Sensata Technologies
- Benchmark Bakery
- Lloyds Banking Group
- Education Authority
- Armstrongs Solicitors
- McKeever Hotels
- Movie House Cinemas
- Harland and Wolfe

The budget for the programme had been as follows:

	Pilot (2024)	Phase 2 (2025)	Phase 3 (2026)
Cost	£29,250	£29,950	£49,940

Looking Ahead to Work Experience 2027

Anecdotal and survey feedback across the programme, both from employers and schools was that the programme was positive and well received. This was particularly true of the SEN schools for whom the programme had provided an opportunity for their students to engage with the world of work in a safe and structured way.

However, having committed significant financial and staff resource to the implementation of the programme, it was the right time to conduct an independent review of the outputs and outcomes before planning of any future provision. Therefore, approval was sought for £4,500 from the Economic Development budget to commission a review of the programme with findings and recommendations to be brought back to the Economic Development Committee in September 2026.

The Director of Economic Development and Planning responded to Members' questions relating to the ongoing engagement with mainstream schools.

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

a) the update on the Work Experience Programme 2026 be noted
b) £4,500 from the Economic Development budget to undertake a review of the first three years of the Work Experience Programme be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer, Economic Development

4.7 ED/REG/083 OUT OF TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME GRANT AWARDS

1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this report was to seek Members' approval to award six grants under Call 5 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme.

2. Introduction / Background

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

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

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

3. Applications Received

Members were advised that for the period 31 January 2026 – 27 March 2026, six applications were received and assessed by a panel of officers. The total value of grants recommended for approval was £20,165.60. Grant awards were set out in the circulated table.

4. Financial Position

The overall programme budget for Phase 2 was £139,743.55. To date, £48,100.00 had been awarded. Should Members approve the six grant recommendations circulated, the remaining programme budget would be £71,477.95.

A further call for applications opened on 28 March 2026 and would close on 31 July 2026.

5. Summary

This report made six grant recommendations under Call 5 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor Cooper and agreed that

that Members approve the six grant awards totalling £20,165.60 to the successful applicants under Call 5 of Phase 2 of the Out of Town Centre Shopfront Improvement Programme.

ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

4.8 ED/REG/093 RETAIL AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the success of the 2025/26 pilot Visual Merchandising Programme and to seek approval for the delivery of an enhanced Retail and Customer Experience Programme, at a cost of £70,000, which had been accounted for within the Economic Development budget.

2. Background

Members would be aware that the Council had successfully operated a shopfront improvement scheme since 2024, which enhanced the external appearance of shopfronts across the Borough's five town centres. Feedback from participating businesses indicated a need for additional support in relation to window displays and the internal presentation of their stores.

Therefore, in 2025, Members approved the pilot Visual Merchandising Programme. The programme successfully supported businesses across the five town centres through the Christmas and Spring seasonal campaigns, which combined bespoke masterclasses, one-to-one mentoring and seasonal window display kits and installations. A total of 46 window displays were created, with some businesses contributing multiple displays. In total, 26 businesses participated across both campaigns, with 20 in the Christmas phase and 17 in the Spring/Summer phase. Several businesses participated in both campaigns, demonstrating strong engagement with the programme.

Masterclasses covered a range of topics designed to enhance store presentation, customer experience and digital presence, including:

- Visual Merchandising
- Customer Experience
- Commercial Interior Design & Layout
- Bespoke In-Store Event Design & Planning
- Creative Marketing Ideas to Increase Footfall (in-store and online)
- Bespoke Digital Marketing Planning

The programme also supported the use of Embrace Your Town branding within participating businesses, helping to strengthen the visual identity of our town centres and create a more co-ordinated seasonal offer.

Overall, the programme equipped businesses with practical skills to improve store presentation, deliver impactful seasonal displays and strengthen promotional activity both in-store and online.

3. Proposed 2026/27 Programme

Building on the success of the 2025/26 pilot programme, it was proposed that the programme be expanded and renamed the Retail and Customer Experience Programme to reflect its wider focus on customer experience, digital engagement and store presentation. The enhanced programme would continue to support seasonal window displays and one-to-one mentoring while expanding digital training, customer experience development and integration of the Embrace Your Town brand, creating a more cohesive and engaging town centre experience.

The proposed programme would aim to support 25 businesses and would include a grant element of up to £2,000 per business, with a maximum intervention rate of 75%. Grants would support investment in in-store equipment and display improvements that enhanced store layout, window displays and overall customer experience. Only businesses recommended by the programme consultant following mentoring sessions would be eligible, ensuring support was targeted to those ready to implement improvements.

These enhancements aimed to make the programme more impactful, providing tangible benefits to businesses, strengthening town centre cohesion, and supporting increased footfall, customer engagement and sales.

4. Financial Position/Implication

A total budget of £70,000 was proposed for this programme and had been included within the Economic Development budget.

5. Governance

All elements of the programme would be procured and administered in line with the Council's procurement and financial procedures.

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

a) the success of the 2025/26 pilot Visual Merchandising Programme be noted.

b) £70,000 from the Economic Development budget for the delivery of a Retail and Customer Experience Programme as outlined be approved.

ACTION BY: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

4.9 ED/ED/092 EVENING ECONOMY PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the delivery of an Evening Economy grant programme, with a budget of £60,000 which had been accounted for in the Economic Development budget.

2. Background

A vibrant and sustainable evening economy was a key component of a thriving local economy. It contributed significantly to employment, business turnover, and the overall vitality, safety and attractiveness of town centres outside of traditional daytime hours. A strong evening economy also supported wider regeneration objectives by increasing dwell time, encouraging repeat visits, and creating more active and animated urban environments.

The hospitality sector was central to the success of the evening economy. However, feedback from the Economic Development Business Survey and ongoing engagement with local businesses indicated that many operators face challenges in sustaining profitable evening trade. These challenges include changing consumer behaviour, increased operating costs (particularly energy and staffing), and growing competition from alternative leisure and at-home consumption options.

As a result, many businesses reported reduced evening footfall and shorter trading hours, which could have a negative impact on town centre vibrancy and perceptions of safety and activity after dark. There was therefore a clear need for targeted intervention to support businesses to enhance their evening offer, attracting new audiences, and encouraging people to remain in or return to town centres during evening hours.

While there was appetite among businesses to innovate, barriers such as financial risk, limited staffing capacity, and lack of specialist expertise could restrict their ability to develop and test new concepts. Without support, many businesses were unlikely to invest in new evening-focused initiatives.

In 2022, the Council delivered a programme in partnership with Tourism NI which supported the development of a series of events and experiences. While this initiative was successful in driving participation and business engagement, it also demonstrated the potential for structured programmes to stimulate activity beyond daytime hours. Several participating businesses continued to deliver evening-focused initiatives beyond the programme period, highlighting the longer-term benefits of targeted support. However, with the withdrawal of TNI funding and other priorities for the Economic Development Department a similar scheme had not been implemented since that time.

There was now an opportunity to deliver a more focused intervention that directly addressed evening economy challenges and supports sustainable change in trading patterns.

3. Programme Overview

The proposed Evening Economy Grant Programme would support hospitality businesses across the Borough to develop, extend and enhance their evening trading offer. The primary objective was to increase evening footfall, extend dwell time, and contribute to a more vibrant and active town centre environment after 5pm.

The programme would encourage businesses to introduce new or enhanced evening concepts that incentivise customers to visit and stay longer during evening hours. While activity may include themed nights or entertainment, the core focus would be on strengthening the commercial viability and attractiveness of evening trading.

Examples of eligible activity may include:

- Extended evening opening with enhanced offerings
- Food and beverage concepts designed specifically for evening audiences
- Collaborative initiatives between neighbouring businesses to create evening clusters
- Programming that encouraged midweek evening footfall
- Initiatives aimed at diversifying the evening customer base

A key feature of the programme would be structured support delivered by an appointed consultant. Each participating business would receive mandatory one-to-one technical assistance to develop, refine and implement their evening economy proposal. This would ensure that concepts were commercially viable, targeted, and aligned with broader town centre objectives.

Financial support would be provided through grants of up to £1,500 per business, at a 100% intervention rate, supporting up to 25 businesses. This approach reduced the financial risk associated with trialling new ideas and enabled businesses to test and refine their evening offer in a controlled and supported manner.

In addition to business support, the programme would include a coordinated marketing campaign aimed at:

- Promoting the Borough as an evening destination
- Increasing awareness of participating businesses
- Driving footfall and participation during evening hours
- Encouraging behaviour change among residents and visitors

The programme would align with existing Council initiatives, including the Retail and Customer Experience Programme, and Embrace Your Town branding. This alignment would ensure a cohesive approach to place development while strengthening the identity and appeal of town centres as evening destinations.

4. Financial Position

A total budget of £60,000 was proposed for this programme and had been included within the Economic Development budget.

5. Governance

All elements of the programme would be procured and administered in line with the Council's procurement and financial procedures.

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

Members approve the delivery of the Evening Economy grant programme with a budget of £60,000.

ACTION BY: Hannah McVeigh, Regeneration Officer

Councillor McLaughlin left the Chamber during Item 4.10

4.10 PT/CI/073 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to Members to approve the Economic Development Directorate Business Plan 2026/27.

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 2026 the Council approved a strategic performance framework as part of the Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2026/27 (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 Plans were 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 is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Measure performance and hold ourselves to account to ensure we deliver for the Council and its residents.

The business plan for Economic Development was circulated for approval.

5. Governance

Progress reports on the Council's Directorate Business Plans 2026/27 would be reported quarterly to CLT and biannually to relevant Committees.

Proposed by Councillor Cooper
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the Economic Development Directorate Business Plans 2026/27 be approved.

ACTION BY: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Councillor McLaughlin returned to the Chamber during Item 4.11 and Councillor Cooper left and returned to the Chamber during Item 4.11.

4.11 ED/DI/005 ASK MENTORING CAPITAL GRANT PROGRAMME EXTENSION

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on the delivery of the pilot ASK Capital Grant programme, seek approval for a 12-month extension and approval for the grant awards as outlined in this report.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would recall that in 2024 the Council relaunched the ASK Business Mentoring Programme and then subsequently, on the back of feedback from the businesses, launched a pilot ASK Capital Grant in September 2025. The purpose of the £1,500 grant was to enable businesses to implement mentor-led recommendations to improve/enhance their business operation.

3. Programme Performance (FY25/26)

The 2025 programme including the capital grant element was launched in November 2025 with an initial budget of £45,000.

To date:

- 72 businesses have applied for ASK Mentoring Support
  - o 36 requests for help with Sales and Marketing
  - o 27 requests for help with Digital Infrastructure and Strategy
  - o 9 requests for help with Innovation and Product Development

- 35 businesses have completed their 10 hours of free mentoring support with 37 in progress.

Of the 35 businesses that had completed their mentoring 33 had subsequently applied to the Council for the new ASK Capital Grant.

Seven of these applications had passed assessment and Letters of Offer were issued before the end of the financial year in order that the expenditure could be accrued. Retrospective approval was now sought from Members for these seven grant awards.

Business Name	**DEA**	**Grant Amount**
Define Media Company	ANTRIM	£1,076.80
Hyde Park Environmental	ANTRIM	£1,500.00
H2o Swimming Academy	ANTRIM	£1,500.00
Cyberprint LTD	MACEDON	£1,500.00
Richard Atkinson and Company Ltd	AIRPORT	£1,500.00
Hawthorne Fine Boxes Ltd	GLENGORMLEY URBAN	£1,114.21
Crafty Little Linguists	GLENGORMLEY URBAN	£1,461.44
Total		**£9,652.45**

Off the remaining applications, five had now passed assessment and approval was sought to issue Letters of Offer to these businesses from the 2026/27 budget.

Business Name	**DEA**	**Grant Amount**
Pretty Polished	GLENGORMLEY URBAN	£1,500.00
WJ Blair Accident Repairs Ltd	BALLYCLARE	£1,344.00
Crumlin Travel	AIRPORT	£1,500.00
SO Aesthetics NI	AIRPORT	£1,500.00
Devine Design	ANTRIM	£1,500.00
Total		**£7,344.00**

The remaining 21 grant applications were currently being reviewed by Officers, a list of those businesses were included below.

Subject to final checks being completed approval was sought to issue Letters of Offer to those who passed the assessment and complete the final paperwork up to the a maximum of £1,500 per business and a total commitment of £31,500.

Business Name	**DEA**
Sam Allen Art	AIRPORT
Logan Decorating	AIRPORT
Blue Ocean Developments Ltd	ANTRIM
Savvy & Shine Ltd	ANTRIM
Julie A Robinson Optometrists	ANTRIM
Tiyga Health	ANTRIM
Claire Badger Podiatry	ANTRIM
Eos Community Consulting CIC	ANTRIM
Gary Cobain Building contractors	BALLYCLARE
Karma Hair Design	BALLYCLARE
Sub Side	BALLYCLARE
The Mortgage Shop Ballyclare	BALLYCLARE
Blair and Boyd Estate Management	DUNSILLY
Moneyvart Ceramics	DUNSILLY
TDR Academy	DUNSILLY
JG Aesthetics	GLENGORMLEY URBAN
Crafty Little Linguists	GLENGORMLEY URBAN
Vine Haugh Ceramics	GLENGORMLEY URBAN
MM Cleaning	MACEDON
Joan Henderson Education Mentor	THREE MILE WATER
Newtownabbey Self Storage	THREE MILE WATER

4. Future Provision

Applications for mentoring continued to come through to the team. At the time of reporting:

- 37 businesses were currently undertaking mentoring support with an assigned ASK Mentor
- A further 10 requests for ASK mentoring support had been received by the team since the beginning of April 2026.

Whilst Member approval for the Mentoring Element of the programme had been granted on a 3-year basis, the pilot capital grant element required further approval.

Approval was now sought to extend the ASK Capital Grant Programme for a further 12 months until March 2027 with an enhanced budget of £75,000. This request had been accounted for in the Economic Development Budget for 2026/2027.

5. Equality and/or Rural Screening Requirements

The programme had been screened and did not require a full EQIA or Rural Proofing assessment at this time.

6. Summary

The ASK Mentoring and Capital Grant Programme continued to perform well and as a result Member approval was sought for the continuation of the capital grant element for 2026/2027.

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

Members

a) Note the update on the ASK Programme
b) Approve a further 12-month extension of the Capital Grant element with a budget of £75,000
c) Approve the seven retrospective grant awards to be accrued into 2025/26 and the 26 grant awards for 2026/27 subject to final assessment by Officers

ACTION BY: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 FI/FIN/4 BUDGET REPORT – PERIOD 12 APRIL 2025 TO MARCH 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide an update on the financial performance for the Economic Development Committee for Period 12 April 2025 to March 2026.

2. Introduction/Background

As agreed, quarterly budget reports would be presented to the relevant Committee. All financial reports would be available to all Members.
The budget report for Period 12 did not include adjustments required to arrive at the final financial position of the Council for the 2025/26 financial year. These adjustments included final accruals of expenditure incurred and grants and debts invoiced after 31 March 2026, contributions to or from reserves, and prepayments of expenditure and income.

The final financial position for the year would be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee in June 2026.

3. Summary

As at period 12:

The Economic Development and Planning Directorate had a favourable variance of £455k, or 19.1%, against the budgeted financial performance for the period.

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

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

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.2 ED/ED/279 GO SUCCEED FY25/26 DELIVERY UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to update Members on key Go Succeed activities and progress for Financial Year 25/26

2. Introduction/Background

As members would be aware, Go Succeed was the go-to source of expert business advice provided through collaboration by all 11 local councils. The programme offered a flexible service to both entrepreneurs and already established businesses within the Borough through its 4 pillars; Engage, Foundation, Growth and Scaling via one-to-one mentoring, specialist masterclasses, peer support networks and access to grant aid.

Mentoring

When an applicant applied to the programme, Officers would select the most appropriate support pillar based on their application.

Once allocated to a pillar, delivery partners would organise a one hour 'diagnostic' session to determine the specific needs of the applicant which best supported business development and growth plans. Mentors were then allocated based on the outcome of diagnostic meeting.

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 April 25 – March 26, a total of 516 individuals and local businesses were supported with Go Succeed Mentoring (a breakdown of this was circulated).

Under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, Councils had a statutory duty to set objectives for improvement, which included job creation and business support targets. Replacing the former Go for It programme, Go Succeed contributed towards the statutory target of creating jobs through start-up activities.

During FY25/26, ANBC achieved 218% of its statutory target for job creation through start-up activities as detailed below. *Please note these figures were subject to final monitoring and verification checks by PMO and Council Officers*

Statutory Target

Statutory Target	**Annual Target**	**Delivery**	**% towards target**
Jobs created through start-up activity	80	175.2	218%

Recruitment for mentoring across all pillars performed over target. This was supported by on-going programme marketing campaigns (online and localised case study billboards) and outreach activities. Actual delivery of mentoring hours was generally in-line with targets with natural drop-offs due to inability to drawdown on hours within programme timeframe or for personal reasons. A full breakdown of targets and delivery was circulated.

Grants

In FY25/26, the Go Succeed Grant was open to those who completed at least 60% of their allocated mentoring hours through the Foundation, Growth or Scaling pillars of the service. Applications were invited through open calls and assessed via a competitive process.

The grant could fund up to 50% of eligible capital costs, to a maximum of £3,000. Grant payments were made retrospectively, upon submission of claim form, proof of payment and supporting documentation.

ANBC issued a total of 68 grant offers to local SMEs, at a total of £154,157.59. Total claimed value against offer was £128,843.57 supporting 63 businesses. See breakdown of grant delivery enclosed.

ANBC surpassed initial target for grant delivery of £113,845, supporting 38 businesses and were able to access additional budget to support a further 30 local businesses.

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.

During the financial year, ANBC delivered 2 successful PSNs, with sessions including networking opportunities, best practice visits and thematic sessions tackling skill gaps. Each network was shaped around the needs of the members.

1) ANBC Social Enterprise Peer Support Network – Growth

2) ANBC Health, Wellbeing and Beauty Professionals Peer Support Network – Engage and Foundation

Masterclasses

Delivered by industry experts, the Go Succeed Masterclasses acted as a supplementary support to the mentoring, working to address entrepreneurial and business skill gaps. ANBC delivered 11 workshops, both online and in-person, with high demand for social media marketing and AI focused sessions.

Community Outreach

Community Outreach was a mechanism which worked to build awareness of support available through the service. As part of Community Outreach works, Officers would typically attend events and promote the spectrum of support the service offers.

For FY 25/26, ANBC had an annual Community Outreach target of reaching 548 individuals along with an attributed budget of £16,394. Community Outreach delivery for the year surpassed this target, with 2002 individuals reached. The team engaged in a range of outreach activities which included roadshow events, attendance at job fairs, school's events, merchandise orders and online social media marketing.

Economically Inactive (Get Started in Business)

In addition to the core Go Succeed service, a targeted initiative was introduced this year to support Economically Inactive individuals to explore entrepreneurship. The aim of this support was to create a pathway for participants that increased the visibility and accessibility of early enterprise activity, to then progress to Go Succeed. Following a procurement exercise, Venture Folk were appointed to deliver this targeted support.

Support through Get Started in Business included-

- Outreach and Engagement
- Ideation and Exploration Sessions
- One-to-One Mentoring
- £750 funding to support start up

This support proved highly successful, with 32 economically inactive individuals engaged throughout the support. This included 7 through one-to-one mentoring support, resulting in the creation of 4 businesses. A full breakdown of targets and outcomes were circulated.

ANBC in collaboration with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, co-hosted a Business without Barriers Event at the Dunsilly Hotel in March 2025. The event was designed to support individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions to explore self-employment. A total of 34 individuals from both council areas attended this session, all of which provided extremely positive feedback.

If this type of support cannot be included in future Go Succeed delivery due to budget constraints, ED officers would explore other opportunities to deliver similar initiatives.

3 Previous Decision of Council

The Council previously agreed to participate in Go Succeed in October 2023. Council committed to contributing up to £154,694 towards participation in the 2025/26 programme.

4 Financial Position/Implication

The Council had previously agreed to match-fund the Programme estimated at £154,694 in 25/26, provision for which had been made in the Economic Development budget.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

5.3 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 (circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed that

the Major Strategic Planning Application Overview as outlined be noted.

NO ACTION

5 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

5.1 The Director of Economic Development and Planning and Members paid tribute to Jennifer McWilliams, Chief Executive Officer of Antrim Enterprise Agency. They thanked her for all her hard work in Antrim Enterprise Agency and Space Antrim and wished her well for the future. They also welcomed Nick Serb into the Chief Executive role and looked forward to working with him in the future.

NO ACTION

5.2 The Director of Economic Development and Planning responded to a question from a Member and advised that the Economic Development strategy would be going to public tender in the next couple of weeks.

NO ACTION

5.3 In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Economic Development and Planning advised that arrangements were being made for a meeting to discuss the future membership and meeting arrangements for the Economic Development Committee i.e. whether or not to meet monthly and increase the Committee Membership.

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

5.4 As this was the last meeting of the Economic Development Committee before the Annual Meeting, tribute was paid to the Chair and Vice-Chair and thanks extended to them for their stewardship across the year.

NO ACTION

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Alderman Cosgrove
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed

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

6 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

Having declared an interest in Item 7.1, Alderman Cosgrove left the Chamber.

7.1 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/285 SPACE ANTRIM PILOT OPERATIONAL AGREEMENT

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to recommend to members an extension to the pilot operational agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited for the

operation of SPACE Antrim and revised hire rates to be introduced from September 2026 with an annual uplift to be applied thereafter.

2. Introduction/Background

Members would be aware of the Council's success in securing £5.1m from the UK Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to support two major regeneration schemes in Antrim and Glengormley. This led to the development of "Space Antrim", a flexible workspace which officially opened in November 2024. The development of the Glengormley Workspace project is ongoing however the scheme had been delayed, and it was anticipated it will not now be completed until early 2028.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

Year 1: 01 November 2023 – 31 October 2024
Year 2: 01 November 2024 – 31 October 2025
Year 3: 01 November 2025 – 31 October 2026

4. Key Issues

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

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

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

To provide this service, including staff costs, a payment would be made to Antrim Enterprise Agency of £[redacted], which would increase by 5% each year, subject to satisfactory performance.

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

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

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

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

<u>Year 1</u>

Year 1 of the pilot agreement commenced in November 2023, and the new workspace officially opening in November 2024, later than originally anticipated.

Antrim Enterprise Agency through their Chief Executive allocated a significant amount of time to support the design and development of the building and contributed to the development of the new branding and marketing materials. This allowed Antrim Enterprise Agency to build up a portfolio of clients who were already signed up to move into SPACE before it had officially opened.

Antrim Enterprise Agency also employed the first member of staff to support the operation of SPACE in July 2024 in anticipation of the building opening.

The performance in Year 1 was recorded as follows:

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

*Taking account of the August 2024 opening date.

Despite a limited operating window, Antrim Enterprise Agency managed to meet or exceed most of the KPIs associated with the contract.
In Year 1 this performance alongside the reduced operating window resulted in Antrim Enterprise being paid £[redacted] out of a total potential contract value of up to £[redacted].

Year 2

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

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

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

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

The performance in Year 2 continued to build on the success of year 1 and at the end of the period there were only 2 offices remaining available to let out of the original 15. Meeting room hire was not performing as well as expected and the team agreed to focus on this moving forward.

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

Year 3

Enhanced metrics for Year 3 were agreed by Members in January 2026, and the new agreement is currently in operation.

KPI	Target	Current (end of Q2)
Core KPIs (on which the performance of the contract is based)		
Number of enquiries received	[redacted]	[redacted]
Number of attendees at events	[redacted]	[redacted]
Building Occupancy (Office Space)	[redacted]	[redacted]
Building Occupancy (Meeting Rooms)	[redacted]	[redacted]
Building Occupancy (Hot Desks)	[redacted]	[redacted]
Additional KPIs		
Number of Referrals to Business Support	[redacted]	[redacted]
Satisfaction Rating from users	[redacted]	[redacted]

Staffing Changes at Antrim Enterprise

Members would be aware that after almost 30 years, Jennifer McWilliams, the Chief Executive of Antrim Enterprise Agency Limited is leaving the organisation, with a new Chief Executive Officer, Nick Serb recently appointed. Officers fully anticipated that the collaborative and constructive relationship that existed between the Council and the Enterprise Agency would continue following this change in leadership. The change however would require careful management as Jennifer had dedicated significant time and energy to the operation of SPACE over the last number of years which had undoubtedly led to the success of the venture

The Pilot Operational Agreement with Antrim Enterprise had two relevant clauses:

i. A break clause after Year 3 (October 2026) which was included as it was anticipated that a full procurement exercise would be carried out to appoint operators for both the Antrim and Glengormley SPACE facilities. However, due to delays in the Glengormley project's construction it was not practical to commence this procurement process currently.

ii. Any discontinuation of the agreement must be communicated to the other party in writing no less than six months of the end of the agreement i.e. by the end of May 2026.

Officers had considered the options open to the Council and recommend that the current agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency be extended for 12 months until October 2027, subject to an acceptable transition arrangement. This would enable the positive working relationship between the two organisations to continue and indeed further develop to support the economic growth of the Borough. It would also facilitate engagement around the wider ambition to join up service provision and make the landscape more accessible for entrepreneurs and businesses.

Review of Charges and annual uplift
Members would be aware that, at the outset, the business case for SPACE Antrim was prepared by BMK Advisory Services Limited, with the initial pricing structure independently developed by CBRE Ltd.

With one full calendar year of operation now completed, and office occupancy having reached 100%, it was timely to review the charges being applied. This review aimed to provide a clearer understanding of income generation potential and to identify opportunities for revenue maximisation, particularly in relation to meeting rooms and hot desk provision.

In parallel, CBRE had been commissioned to undertake a revaluation of the current pricing structure for SPACE, as the prices originally set for 2023/2024 had remained unchanged. Whilst this was effective during the period to launch the workspace, pricing must reflect inflationary pressures and wider global factors impacting operational costs, most notably energy.

While CBRE's final report was not yet complete, initial recommendations indicated that prices should increase within a range of 8% to 15%.
An 8% increase would result in the following revised pricing:

- Gold office rates: [redacted]
- Silver office rates: [redacted]
- Daily hot desk passes: [redacted]
- Dedicated desks: [redacted]
- Pods: [redacted]
- Meeting rooms: [redacted], and full-day bookings from [redacted]

Officers wished to engage with Antrim Enterprise Agency to determine the most appropriate rates and any individual tenant considerations.

5. Financial Position/Implication

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

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Economic Development and Planning provided an update on the status of the building works in Glengormley and advised that Members' comments regarding the rate increase to be applied at Space, Antrim would be taken into consideration.

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

Members approve:

a) The operating agreement with Antrim Enterprise Agency be extended for 12 months from 31 October 2026 subject to an acceptable transition arrangement.

b) A revised pricing structure be approved with effect from 1 September 2026, within the range of an 8% to 15% increase, with the final percentage to be delegated to Officers following receipt of CBRE's final analysis and report; and

c) an annual uplift be applied thereafter to the pricing structure.

ACTION BY: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development

Alderman Cosgrove returned to the Chamber.

7.2 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/292 RURAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT SCHEME DELIVERY 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to seek approval for the Council's participation in the DAERA funded Rural Business Development Grant Scheme in 2026-27, subject to business case and Ministerial approval, as per correspondence received from DAERA (circulated).

2. Introduction/Background

Members would recall that since 2019, the Council had administered 6 iterations of the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDGS) on behalf of the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The key aim of the Scheme was to provide small capital grants of up to £7,500 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 them to remain sustainable or to grow. The maximum grant-funding rate is 50%, with 50% match-funding provided by participating businesses.

To maximise the departments' budget drawdown for the financial year, DAERA were proposing launching the programme in May 2026. This was earlier than in previous years and would work to ensure programme spend was incurred before the close of FY2627.

Feedback and outcomes from previous iterations of the scheme had shown that there was significant need for governmental interventions to support rural businesses growth, with this type of funding greatly supporting rural SMEs ability to grow, innovate and take on additional members of staff.

The funding allocation per Council would be as in previous scheme years, a straight percentage share based on the number of micro businesses in the Council area as a percentage of the overall number of micro businesses in

Northern Ireland. Each Council would have an administration budget relating to the Letter of Offer award amount issued by their respective area.

3. Previous Decision of Council

Approved for delivery of TRPSI programme in years 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-2022, 2022-23, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

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

The Department was awaiting final approval of the Scheme Business Case and Ministerial Approval. The Council would be unable to undertake formal work on the project until the Letter of Offer was received.

5. Financial Position/Implication

There was no direct financial contribution required from the Council. DAERA would provide an admin payment to Council (based on Letter of Offers issued) to promote and deliver the programme, which would be managed by the Economic Development Team.

Proposed by Councillor Ní Chonghaile
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed that

Members agree to participate in the Rural Business Development Grant Scheme in 2026-27, subject to business case and ministerial approval, and receipt of a satisfactory Letter of Offer

ACTION BY: Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer

7.3 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/199 SUPPORTING DIRECT INVESTMENT FUND UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the Supporting Direct Investment Fund and to seek approval for financial support to Raymart Development Ltd.

2. Introduction/Position

Since August 2021 the Council had introduced a number of funds to support investment across the Borough, primarily with a view to stimulating or securing further investment, jobs and associated business rates. One of the funds was the Supporting Direct Investment Fund and a summary of activities were included below.

Supporting Direct Investment Fund

The purpose of the Supporting Direct Investment Fund was to support the delivery of economic growth across the Borough with a view to enabling growth and creating jobs whilst safeguarding businesses that might have otherwise relocated elsewhere.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council had implemented the Strategic Direct Investment Policy to remove barriers and offer financial incentives to:

a) Businesses based in the Borough with strategic growth plans that may be considering relocating outside the area; and
b) Foreign & Indigenous businesses with mobile strategic growth plans who could add economic value by locating in the Borough, creating jobs & enhancing opportunities for both residents in gaining employment/skills and providing added value to the local supply chain.

Approved by Full Council in March 2021, the Policy to Support Direct Investment from its inception had committed over £400,000 to strategically selected businesses and had supported beneficiaries to create job opportunities, improve the supply chain and increase the Borough's business rates and enhancing skills.

Funding awards were assessed on a case-by-case basis however the priority sectors relating to the strategic direct investment policy, in line with the current Economic Development Strategy were:

a) Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering
b) Transport & Logistics
c) Construction & Materials Handling
d) Life & Health Sciences
e) Food & Drink
f) Aerospace & Defence
g) Creative, Digital & Technology
h) Professional & Financial Services

The Council's Investment team prepared casework for each application for consideration by the Economic Development Committee. Details included:

- Background to the business.
- Strategic Context – value of investment, jobs created included value of wages & impact on local supply chain.
- Company Viability including historic and projected financial performance.
- Additionality – does the business require financial intervention?
- Displacement – by locating in the Borough will it displace existing businesses?
- Mobility – is the business mobile?

The level of assistance would be proportionate to the size of investment, jobs created and strategic opportunities gained by the business locating, or investing, in the Borough. To date that the Fund has generated £31.2m worth of investment into the Borough creating approximately 178,000ft2 floor space creating 336 jobs within the Borough and generating an approximate increase of rates payable by £365,000.

A summary of the live SDI awards was set out in the following table

Strategic Direct Investment Fund - Live Projects:					
Business Name	**Amount Awarded**	**Paid to Date**	**Remaining**	**Anticipated Payment date**	**KPI's / Notes**
Ashers Baking Co	£56,381.25	£28,191.25	£28,190	Final Payment Q2 26/27	[redacted]
Contact Marketing NI Ltd	£32,494	£24,370.50	£8,123.50	Final Payment Q3 26/27	[redacted]
Ashdale Engineering	£25,000	£12,500	£12,500	Final Payment Q3 26/27	[redacted]
Total	**£113,875.25**	**£65,061.75**	**£48,813.50**		

3. Previous Decision

Members were updated on each individual project if there was a decision to be made. There had been multiple reports brought to Council regarding new projects and project variations.

The most recent project update report in Nov 2025 saw members note project progress.

4. Expression of interest

Following receipt of an Expression of Interest in April 2026, Officers had engaged directly with Raymart Developments Ltd regarding its expansion plans. Established over 15 years ago as a small family-run business with five employees and a turnover of approximately £100,000, the company had grown significantly into a multi-million-pound enterprise with an annual turnover of £12 million and a workforce of 110.

In the past year, Raymart relocated to Antrim from Ballymena, investing approximately £[redacted] in a new 26,000 ft2 facility at Killybegs Business Park.

[redacted]

Raymart operated across several key areas, including manufacturing, building and maintenance services and house building. The proposed addition of a spraying booth would further diversify its offering, enabling access to new markets.

Overall, the project represented a further £[redacted] investment, contributing to a total planned investment of £[redacted] over the next two years. This expansion was expected to increase total employment linked to the company's relocation to approximately 180 jobs and raise annual payroll from £[redacted].

It was proposed via the Casework (circulated) that the Council supported this development through a £50,000 grant from the SDI Fund. The grant was justified based on the scale of investment, job creation, and overall economic impact, and would be paid in two instalments, subject to project milestones and KPI achievement. The investment was projected to be recouped through rates income within two years, with ongoing annual returns thereafter.

Planning approval was expected to be approved upon reception of Historic Environment Division consultation response. The new sites would be fully operational by Autumn 2027.

Members' approval was sought to financially support the business with a grant of £50,000.

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Alderman Cosgrove and agreed that

a) the update on the Strategic Direct Investment Fund be noted
b) £50,000 financial support for Raymart Development Ltd be approved subject to the grant of planning permission.

ACTION BY: Stewart McCormack and Chris Doyle, Investment Officers

7.4 IN CONFIDENCE ED/ED/273 MINUTES - GLENGORMLEY PUBLIC REALM PROJECT BOARD

1. <u>Purpose</u>

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 22 January 2026.

2. <u>Governance</u>

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.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Economic Development and Planning confirmed that the public realm works were still on track to start in the Autumn.

Proposed by Councillor McLaughlin
Seconded by Councillor Webb and agreed that

the minutes of the Glengormley Public Realm Project Board meeting held on 22 January 2026 be approved.

ACTION BY: Jill Murray, Executive Officer

<u>PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'</u>

Proposed by Councillor Webb
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and agreed

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

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

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8.35 pm.

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MAYOR