



6 March 2025

Committee Chair: Councillor B Webb

Committee Vice-Chair: Councillor M Goodman

Committee Members: Aldermen – M Cosgrove, M Magill and S Ross
Councillors – R Lynch, B Mallon and S Ward

Dear Member

MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Economic Development Committee will be held in the **Chamber, Mossley Mill** on **Tuesday 11 March 2025** at **6.30 pm**.

You are requested to attend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Baker".

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

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

For any queries please contact Member Services:

Tel: 028 9448 1301

memberservices@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk

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**REPORT ON BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED AT THE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING ON
TUESDAY 11 MARCH 2025**

3 ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 ED/ED/ 284 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS PROPOSAL

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the appointment of an independent facilitator to lead a series of Workshops with the Economic Development Committee Members, the Chief Executive and the senior Economic Development Officers to explore the key economic factors impacting the local economy, opportunities for growth and identification of key gaps to be addressed at an estimated cost of £7,000.

2. Background

As Members will be aware the Council's Economic Development Strategy was completed in 2018 by Grant Thornton and sought to look out over the period to 2030. It has since been used to guide the strategic direction of the Council's Economic Development activities, however, was never formally published.

The economic landscape has changed significantly over the last seven years as a result of the pandemic, new trading arrangements, technological advancement etc and it is now timely that consideration is given to the strategic approach moving forward which will maximise the economic opportunities for the Borough.

Internally, the Council's Economic Development Committee is a new body and has been operational for just six months. The Committee were not all members of Council when the Strategy was agreed and therefore there is a need to develop a shared understanding of the local economic conditions and agree the main priorities for the future.

3. Proposal

It is proposed that in advance of any decision regarding the Economic Development Strategy for the Borough an independent facilitator is appointed to lead a series of workshops with the Economic Development Committee Members, the Chief Executive and the senior Economic Development Officers. These workshops will explore the key economic factors impacting the local economy, opportunities for growth and identification of key gaps to be addressed.

The estimated cost of this assignment is £7,000.

4. Outcome

The report produced following the workshops will provide informed recommendations regarding the way forward which include;

1. Commission new Economic Development Strategy
2. Commission bespoke piece of work to update and address gaps and/or key areas of change from the 2018 strategy position.
3. Other alternatives

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the appointment of an independent facilitator to deliver the assignment as outlined at an estimated cost of £7,000 be approved.

Prepared and Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

3.2 ED/ED/302 LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the Antrim and Newtownabbey Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and the anticipated timeframe for preparation and approval of the Action Plan and to seek Members' approval of the Terms of reference and minutes of the LEP meeting on 9th January 2025.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will be aware that the 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 will work with Invest NI, Councils and other key stakeholders to establish Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) between October to December 2024 in each Council area.

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

To support the delivery of these plans the Minister has proposed a £15m Regional Fund which will seek to address regional imbalance.

Funding

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

Since the last update to Committee, the Department has indicated that up to £956,000 per year will be allocated to the Council, meaning a total fund of £2,868,000 across the three years. This is higher than the figure previously reported to Committee (£865,000 p/a), however, it remains the joint lowest allocation across Northern Ireland.

Progress to Date

At the first formal meeting of the LEP on 29th January (minutes **enclosed**) the Terms of Reference (**enclosed**) were agreed for recommendation to Committee, and it was decided to set up a number of Task and Finish (T&F) Groups to consider key themes and propose potential projects.

Subsequently, Task and Finish groups comprising of LEP members and other thematic experts, have been established for the following broad thematic areas:

- Investment, Strategic Employment Locations
- Green Economy

- Business environment
- Productivity and Sectoral Development

The first sessions of the T&F groups were held in January and a summary of the discussion was provided to the LEP meeting on 5th February. The summary of each T&F group meeting is **enclosed** for Members to note.

Next Steps

The Department's original timeline proposed the submission of an Action Plan from each LEP by the end of March 2025. However, there is acceptance from DfE that this ambitious timeline will not be met by any LEP and the Department has now outlined that submission of Action Plans can occur later than March.

It is therefore proposed that the Council's LEP and T&F groups continue to meet to support the preparation of an Action Plan and a draft Plan is brought to the May meeting of the Economic Development Committee for Members' consideration.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

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

4. Financial Position/Implication

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

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

A further update will be brought to Members once further clarity is obtained from the Department regarding allocation of administration / management costs.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members

- a) Approve the enclosed minutes of the meeting of the LEP on 9 January 2025;**

- b) Approve the enclosed Terms of Reference; and**
- c) Note the progress to date of the LEP and the anticipated timeframe for preparation and approval of the Action Plan.**

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

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

3.3 ED/ED/240 CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the development and work of the Town Centre Chambers of Commerce and to seek approval for £25,000 from the 2025/26 Economic Development Budget to further support Chamber activity.

2. Background

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, business surveys carried out by the Council identified a desire to establish or reinvigorate town Chambers of Commerce.

In November 2022, Members will recall that approval was granted to appoint Lara Goodall Consulting to support the reinvigoration or development of these Chambers for the benefit of the business communities in the towns.

Overall, the programme of support has been successful. The consultant stepped back from operational support one year ago and a Council Officer has now been assigned as a link between the Chambers and the Council.

The Council Officer has established a good working relationship with the Chambers and developed formal and informal channels of communication and support, including signposting to Council and external initiatives, and notice of upcoming events and works.

A summary of the Chamber's current positions is **enclosed**.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In December 2023, Members approved the three-month extension of the consultant contract at a cost of £6,250, and provision of £25,000 from within the Economic Development Budget for 2024/25 to support the new Chambers.

4. Key Issues

Over the last two years, the Council has focused upon re-establishing business representative groups in each of the towns and providing them with a firm governance foundation to be able to build upon.

The Council's focus is now shifting towards development, capacity building and the future sustainability of the groups and as such any proposed financial support for the incoming financial year would be based on these activity areas.

In 2024/2025, £25,000 was approved to support the on-going work of the Chambers. In the main this support was used for a number of key areas:

- Marketing, brand development and social media
- Administrative support

- Publicity materials
- Events

To date around £22,500 of this has been utilised to support the work of the Chambers with a number of events and activities planned in March 2025 which should see the budget completely utilised.

In order to draw down Council funds, the Chambers have been required to complete a grant application form, which ensures adherence to the Council's procurement processes and is assessed by Officers as part of the standard due diligence.

The Chambers are operated, in the majority of cases, on a part time and voluntary basis around Members' full time business commitments. This includes Secretariat support of Committee meetings, website and social media updates, organising events and communicating with the business community.

Officers are now seeking Members' approval for £25,000 to be ring-fenced in the 2025/2026 financial year to continue to support the work of the Chambers, but with a key focus on:

- Awareness and Membership
- Administration
- Capacity Building
- Events

Officers will continue to work closely with the Chambers to consider their Action Plans and activities for the year ahead as well as the training and capacity building required.

In addition, financial sustainability is important and at present only one Chamber charges for membership therefore Officers will continue to liaise with the Chambers on the potential of introducing a membership scheme. This would begin to generate revenue for the group and make them less reliant on support from the Council or other funding bodies going forward.

5. Financial Position/Implication

Officers are seeking approval for £25,000 from the Economic Development Budget for 2025/2026 to be allocated to continued support for the Chambers of Commerce.

This has been accounted for within the budget.

6. **Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members

(a) Note the update on Chamber of Commerce activity and;

(b) Approve a funding support package of £25,000 towards the Chambers' ongoing needs and action plans from within the 2025/26 Economic Development budget

Prepared by: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development

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

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

3.4 ED/ED/279 GO SUCCEED/ENTERPRISE SUPPORT SERVICE UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for up to £80,000 in match funding for the extension period of the Go Succeed programme.

2. Introduction/Background

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

Members will recall that Engage and Foundation (Get Started) elements of the programme are delivered by Enterprise Northern Ireland. The Council is partnered with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council for the Growth and Scaling components, which is being delivered by Mallusk Enterprise Park and Deirdre Fitzpatrick & Associates.

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

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

PMO are currently developing an application for the new funding package, which is a slight reduction on the previous iteration. A more efficient delivery model will be developed based on Council and Delivery Partner feedback, which will streamline current services. This will likely see changes within certain sections of the programme, for examples regional approaches to Community Outreach, more focused workshop and reductions in Foundation mentoring delivery. Despite a lower budget allocation, it is anticipated that there will be minimal impact to current service operations.

Resources are to be matched with financial contributions from Councils; based on previous years costs for Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in 2024/25 financial years this is estimated to be in the region of £80,000 per annum (subject to variance). Provision has been made within the Economic Development budget.

3. Previous Decision of Council

The Council has previously agreed to match-fund the Programme estimated

at £77,347 in 2023-24 and £77,347 in 2024-25, provision for which has been made in the Economic Development budget.

4. Financial Position/Implication

Match-funding the service with the indicative amount of £80,000 (subject to change) for financial year 2025-26, provision for which is included within the Economic Development budget

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that match-funding of up to £80,000 for the extension period of the Northern Ireland wide Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed Programme) in 2025/26 be approved.

Prepared by: Matthew Mulligan, Economic Development Officer

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

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

3.5 ED/REG/085 AWARDS UNDER TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONTS PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Urban Shop Frontage Scheme and to seek Members' approval to issue Letters of Offer to the latest tranche of businesses following successful completion of the internal assessment process.

2. Introduction/Background

Members will recall that in September 2024 the Council was successful in securing £390,600 from DfC towards an Urban Shop Frontage Scheme which was launched in two phases:

- Phase 1 - Ballyclare and Randalstown (launched July 2024); and
- Phase 2 - Glengormley, Crumlin and Antrim (launched October 2024).

The scheme, which is co-funded by the Council, provides a combined budget of £434,000. Grants are provided to businesses at an 80% intervention level with 20% contributed by the business or property owner.

This grant provides up to £4,999 towards eligible businesses and property owners to make physical improvements to the exterior of their business premises.

Supported by regular social media alerts, a series of workshops to support potential applicants noted below and a link on the Council website, Phase 2 closed on the 13 December 2024.

- Tuesday 22 October & 19 November – Space, Antrim
- Wednesday 23 October & 20 November - Crumlin Leisure Centre
- Thursday 24 October & 21 November - Lillian Bland Pavilion, Glengormley

<https://antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk/business/support-for-businesses/proposed-town-centre-shopfront-improvement-scheme/>

3. Key Issues and Governance Process

Under Phase 1 of the Urban Shop Frontage Scheme, 81 applications were received, and a further 58 applications were received under Phase 2.

Applications are reviewed and verified by Council Officers and presented to a project Assessment Panel, comprised of Council Officers and representatives from the Department for Communities (DfC) Urban Regeneration Team, the principal funder of the programme. The Assessment Panel considers three main elements:

- Need for the project – is the current shop front in need of repair/upgrade?
- Impact on streetscape – will the project have a positive impact on the overall appearance of the area?
- Value for Money – does the project represent value for money?

Once recommended by the Assessment Panel, the proposed grant awards are presented to the Project Board, comprised of Council Officers, DfC, local DEA Members and representatives of the local Chambers.

The most recent Project Board took place on 14 February 2025, and this report seeks Members' approval to issue Letters of Offer to the applications (enclosed), following the completion of the internal approval process outlined above.

In addition, 5 applications were deemed unsuccessful due to ineligibility reasons, as detailed in the enclosure.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The Council has secured £390,600 from the Department for Communities towards the implementation of the Urban Shop Frontage Scheme. The Council must demonstrate a 10% match funding contribution, for which provision exists in the Economic Development 2024/25 budget.

5. Summary

To date £146,100 has been awarded to 44 businesses. This report seeks approval for awards to a further 48 businesses totalling £154,397.62.

Cumulatively, this represents a total of £300,497.72 across the first three tranches of Phase 1 and Phase 2, directly impacting 92 local businesses in total across the Borough. The third tranche of 48 applications recommended by the Project Board is noted in the attached Table 1. Table 2 depicts those applications deemed unsuccessful.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the third tranche of awards under the Urban Shop Frontage Scheme, with a value of £154,397.62 across 48 local businesses be approved.

Prepared by: Alastair Law, Regeneration Officer

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

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

3.6 ED/REG/083 OUT OF TOWN CENTRE SHOPFRONTS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME PHASE 2

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval to extend the eligible areas of the Shopfront Improvement Programme and to implement Phase 2 of the programme on a continuous application basis, subject to the availability of funds.

2. Introduction/Background

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

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

3. Previous Decision of Council

In January 2023, the Council agreed to open an Expression of Interest process for a Shopfront Improvement Programme in the Macedon and ThreemileWater DEAs. Following this process, in July 2023 the Council approved a programme budget of £250,000 for the Shopfront Improvement Programme. It was agreed that the programme would be implemented in stages over the Council term 2023-2027, and businesses in Abbots Cross, Hillview, Monkstown and Carnmoney Village would be invited to submit an application under Phase 1.

Under this Phase, each eligible property could apply for a grant of up to £5,000, at a grant rate of 80%.

In June 2024, Members agreed that Phase 2 of the programme should be launched to cover areas not eligible under Phase 1. A programme budget of £139,743.55 was also approved.

4. Key Issues

Extending Eligible Areas

The initial focus of this programme was to target commercial centres in ThreeMileWater and Macedon DEAs. Whilst this includes most of the local centres it does not cover them all, and Officers are therefore proposing to extend the eligible areas in Phase 2 to cover all Local Centres, as defined in the Draft Local Development Plan Strategy, with the exception of those which received support under Phase 1.

This means the inclusion of a number of new areas, namely: Mallusk,

Greystone and Parkhall. A full list of the proposed eligible areas under Phase 2 are detailed in the table below.

Ballyduff	Mayfield
Beverley Road	Merville Garden Village
Cloughfern	Mossley West
The Diamond (Rathcoole),	Richmond
Jennings Park	Greystone
Kings Park/Kings Crescent	Parkhall
Mallusk	

Application Approach

Officers are also proposing that Phase 2 be implemented on a “rolling” application basis, allowing applications to be submitted at any time, within the current Council term and dependent upon the availability of funds. It is proposed that the programme will open for applications in April 2025.

This approach offers several advantages, including greater accessibility and flexibility for applicants, as well as enabling faster response times, efficient resource allocation, and ongoing business engagement.

5. Financial Position/Implication

In July 2023, the Council approved a programme budget of £250,000, which included £35,000 for the services of a Quantity Surveyor. Under Phase 1, 28 businesses received funding offers totalling £75,256.45. At the time of writing, 24 businesses have completed their works, with a total of £56,189.77 of funding drawn down.

There is £139,743.55 remaining from the approved programme budget to support Phase 2.

6. Governance

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

Assessment of applications and allocation of funding will be scored, and based on individual merit and the criteria below on a Pass/Fail basis:

- i. Value for Money (demonstrated through provisional procurement);
- ii. Need for the project; and,
- iii. Impact on Streetscape.

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

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve:

- a) The inclusion of three additional ‘Local Centres’, Mallusk, Greystone and**

Newpark, as eligible areas in the Out-of-Town Shop Front Improvement Programme.

- b) That Phase 2 be implemented on a rolling application basis, subject to the availability of funds.**

Prepared by: Natasha Donald, Regeneration Officer

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

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

3.7 ED/DI/002 ASK MENTORING PROGRAMME 2025 UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the delivery of the ASK Mentoring Programme 2024/2025 and to seek approval for £45,000 from the Economic Development budget to extend the programme into the 2025/2026 financial year.

2. Introduction/Background

The ASK Mentoring programme was originally launched by the Council in 2013 with the aim of offering start-ups and SME businesses the opportunity to receive free one-to-one mentoring from an industry expert. It focused on addressing specific needs identified by businesses in the Borough and was designed to deliver quick and immediate support. Eligible business applicants are allocated a maximum of 10 hours mentoring from a range of 23 specialisms.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In December 2023 approval was granted for the relaunch of the ASK Programme with provision of £30,000 made in the 2024/2025 budget.

4. Key Issues

Programme to Date

Since the launch of the new programme in July 2024, 32 businesses have been supported through the ASK Mentoring support programme with 210 hours of mentoring support delivered to date and an additional 75 hours of support currently underway. Two local start-up businesses were also referred to Go Succeed for initial support.

A list of the businesses supported through ASK mentoring is **enclosed**.

Overview of specialisms:

The three most popular specialisms for businesses have been Marketing and Sales (39%), Digital Transformation Strategy (14%) and Legal (8%).

The programme is demand-led and shows the areas in which local businesses currently need quick and targeted bespoke support. Officers are continuously re-assessing the viability of the specialisms offered and also consider whether there is any opportunity for different specialisms within the initiative.

To date 5 local businesses have availed of ASK support to assist with their digital transformation through assistance with an application to the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) grant support scheme. These businesses were each successful in their applications and DTFF funding of almost £91,500 in total was awarded to these applicants.

Feedback

Feedback from businesses over the course of the programme has been overwhelmingly positive, with all twelve of those who have returned their feedback form rating their mentor's knowledge of the specialism, their ability to impart required knowledge, their assistance and the ASK Mentoring Programme in general was considered either good, very good or excellent.

Business testimonials

"This is a wonderful and valuable support service. As a new business owner, I found [the mentors'] expertise to be invaluable."

"The most beneficial mentoring support I have received since launching my new business."

"A practical scheme to assist small business with expertise outside our own capacity. We would welcome similar business support"

"We found it to be helpful to have someone from a business background ASK have us explain our reasoning behind various aspects of our business which assisted in us rethinking the way we do things"

Continuance of the Programme for 2025/2026

Demand for the programme continues to grow and given this, Member approval is now sought to extend the programme for 2025/2026 with a budget allocated of £45,000 which is accounted for within the Economic Development budget for 2025/2026.

5. Financial Position/Implication

£30,000 had been allocated in the 2024/2025 Economic Development budget for the programme and as of February 2025, £24,000 has been allocated. This leaves £6,000 remaining for the rest of the programme until March 2025.

6. Governance

The initiative is being managed by the Economic Development section.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that £45,000 for the continuation of the ASK Mentoring Support Programme for 2025/26 be approved.

Prepared by: Philip Doherty, Digital Project Implementation Officer

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

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

4. ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 ED/DI/003 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FLEXIBLE FUND (DTFF) PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update members on the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) programme, highlighting key achievements and businesses supported across the Borough. This report also provides an update on Call 4.

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded that The Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) aims to assist small and micro businesses to overcome the financial barriers in adopting digital technologies through a demand-led grant scheme. Grants cover up to 70% of capital costs, ranging from £5,000 to £20,000. The programme is expected to run until circa summer 2026 (with potential for extension if underspent) and is currently at Call 4.

The £7.5 million of funding is for businesses to invest in advanced digital technologies and capital equipment and is underpinned by funding from the City and Growth Deal Complementary Fund, DAERA and the Derry and Strabane Growth Deal. The programme is managed and delivered by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) through the existing Full Fibre Northern Ireland (FFNI) consortium.

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

4. Key Issues

Current Position:

To date, three funding calls have concluded, successfully supporting 13 businesses in the Borough.

Call 4 has now commenced and the Council have received 6 Expressions of Interest (EOI) from local businesses. The call for EOIs will remain open until the 14 March 2025 at 12 noon. EOIs will be assessed by NMDDC and Invest NI from 18th - 28th of March. Applications from successful EOI will be invited from March/April 2025.

Marketing:

Economic Development has secured approval from Invest NI to budget for advertising for the pre-brief session on Feb 26th. Billboards are on rotation across the borough at strategic locations.

Pre-application support is being provided through the ASK Mentoring Programme, which has specialist mentors in these areas. Of the Borough's 13 successful DTFF applicant businesses, five have received ASK Mentor support.

A number of video case studies have been deployed to support the ongoing promotion of the programme. One of these features Antrim based business, Savvy and Shine. A link to this case study is included below.

[Link to video](#)

Additional Support:

While the introduction of the ASK Mentor Programme has provided much needed support for businesses, Invest NI has taken into consideration the need for additional support, and has now introduced support (for all councils) in partnership with the Go Succeed programme.

Support is available through two mechanisms, Peer Support Networks (PSN) managed by Mallusk Enterprise Park, and a Wrap-Around service, delivered by Galvia Digital. The Economic Development team are managing and promoting both mechanisms.

5. Financial Position/Implication

To date £208,635.31 has been provided in grant funding to businesses in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

6. Governance

This initiative is managed by the Economic Development section.

7. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Roddy O'Flaherty, Digital Innovation Officer

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

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

4.2 ED/DI/001 DIGITAL FACTORY ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the ongoing Digital Factory Accelerator Initiative in partnership with Leading Manufacturing Accelerating Change (LMAC) and Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) supporting local manufacturing businesses with digital transformation.

2. Background

The Digital Factory Accelerator for Manufacturers was originally launched by the UK's High Value Manufacturing Catapult (HVMC) in partnership with the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) and Invest NI. It offered comprehensive support to manufacturers looking to enhance their digital manufacturing readiness using the Smart Industry Readiness Index (SIRI). 31 businesses participated in the Programme however, only one of these was located in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council area. Therefore, utilising the format of this programme approval was granted to extend this opportunity to more manufacturing businesses within the Borough.

3. Previous Decision of Council

In June 2024, Members approved the pilot programme at a cost of £30,000.

4. Key Issues

Award Contract

A direct award was made to LMAC, justified by their expertise and the specific accreditation and experience with the SIRI assessment. In October 2024 the Letter of Offer detailing the scope and expectations for the programme was signed. This included outlining the mandatory payment contribution for each business depending on size (Micro Business - £250, SME - £500, Large Enterprise - £1,500) and enabling on a maximum of five businesses to avail of the pilot programme. The contract additionally detailed project aims, deliverables and project costs.

Marketing and Outreach of Programme

A launch event information session was held in Mossley Mill on 2nd December 2024. Presenters from LMAC and AMIC each spoke about the programme and the support they can offer manufacturing businesses through the initiative. The Smart Manufacturing Data Hub (SMDH), in partnership with Ulster University, presented information relating to alternative support mechanisms, should the Digital Factory Accelerator not be suitable for all of the Borough's manufacturing businesses.

Following the event, the Expression of Interest portal opened and the marketing for the programme continued. The initiative was widely promoted on the Council, LMAC and AMIC social media channels and through the

Economic Development business e-Zine. An information flyer was produced to assist with recruitment.

The Economic Development team discussed the programme with over thirty manufacturing businesses across the Borough, highlighting its availability and the opportunity the initiative presents.

A video case study has been produced with Golden Popcorn following their completion of the programme which is currently being edited with the aim of promoting the programme on social media.

Expression of Interest

To date, seven businesses have expressed direct interest in the programme through submission of an Expression of Interest application or via on-boarding calls with the LMAC;

Business	Stage of Programme	Financial Contribution
Golden Popcorn	Completed	£500 - SME
JANS Group	Sent EOI	£1500 - Large
IBrand Everything	Contract Signed	£250 - Micro
W&G Baird	Awaiting Contract Signature	£1500 - Large
Ross Companies Limited	Considering programme	£500 - SME
RLC	Awaiting contract signature	£1500 - Large
MIVAN	Considering programme	£1500 - Large

Several businesses have been identified in collaboration with delivery partners and will continue to be approached regarding their interest in the programme.

Process

During Golden Popcorn's process, Officers observed the assessment being carried out.

The initial two days on-site were focused on interviewing members of staff and gaining an understanding of the business's current digital maturity. This overview covered many areas including but not limited to business history, business risks, KPIs, sales, I.T., finance, current technologies utilised, stock maintenance and a comprehensive run through of the factory in operation.

Once this was undertaken the SIRI debrief, an introduction to the cross-functional assessment designed to address challenges and opportunities for business growth was delivered. LMAC then prepared the final results for the SIRI assessment before providing the business with a clear roadmap for how to achieve future growth.

Key discoveries from the assessment comprised significant profit and loss opportunities (with the projected earnings of implementing £225k) and guidance to support the business's digital maturity gap and adoption of the

proposed digital transformation.

Sean McClinton, Managing Director of Golden Popcorn, provided this testimonial.

"We went through the SIRI assessment and straight away we looked at a programme we had been considering - an MRP System - and we just went for it and decided there was so much value in it after going through this programme. We were able to look through the digital transformation side of things in a totally different light."

"I think something like this as an entry level is fantastic because it really makes you understand the value in data and all of that will come back into a monetary value to your business in the long run. The council were fantastic, we've had support from them from day one and now we've dealt with them on numerous projects and they've been really good."

Future Activity

The programme is contracted to complete in May 2025, with the last assessments concluding in April.

5. Financial Position/Implication

The funding for the pilot initiative is £30,000.00 and is accounted for within the 2024/25 Economic Development budget.

Cost Area	Amount
Programme costs for the 7 businesses to complete	£29,000
Support costs e.g. marketing materials	£1,000
Total	£30,000

6. Governance

The initiative is being managed by the Economic Development section.

7. Summary

The Digital Factory Accelerator initiative aims to support local manufacturing businesses in their digital transformation. By providing comprehensive assessments and tailored roadmaps, the programme enhances the competitiveness and growth of the manufacturing sector in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough. The programme has strong interest from micro, SME and larger businesses and continues to provide a key service to local businesses as they consider the growth and development of their business.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Philip Doherty, Digital Innovation Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Regeneration and Infrastructure

Approved by: Majella McAllister, Director Economic Development and Planning

4.3 ED/ED/295 INVESTMENT READINESS PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the delivery of the “Investment Readiness Programme” designed to support micro, small and medium enterprises on their future growth journey.

2. Introduction/Background

Members are reminded that the delivery of a new “Investment Readiness Programme” to support micro, small and medium enterprises at no additional cost to Council was approved by the Economic Development Committee and ratified by Full Council in September 2024.

As part of the Council’s ongoing business engagement survey, local enterprises have highlighted a need for a range of support including future business planning, expansion and growth strategies.

The Investment Readiness Programme seeks to help address these needs by providing local micro, small and medium businesses with the necessary knowledge and support to better understand the world of business finance, procurement, and contract opportunities as part of their continued growth in the Borough.

3. Aims and Delivery of Programme

The primary aim of the programme is to support local businesses as they seek to become ready for future growth and investment opportunities.

The programme will primarily comprise a range of activities aimed at equipping local businesses with the knowledge and skills necessary for business development and growth on a one-to-one and one-to-many basis, including:

- Themed workshops and events featuring industry experts on key topics including:
 - Procurement and accessing work
 - Public sector procurement opportunities
 - Business Finance (accessing loans and overdrafts, Crowdfunding, pitch deck preparation)
 - Finding and applying for grants
 - Export
 - Work winning strategies
 - Growth opportunities in the Borough
- Access to specialist mentoring advice through Council's ASK programme (or other most relevant support programme)
- Direct connection to existing Council-led supports:
 - Digital Transformation Flexible Fund
 - Go Succeed

- ASK
- TRPSI
- Living over the Shops
- Supporting Direct Investment and Supporting Town Centre Investment funds
- Site search and pre-application engagement with other Council services
- Direct connection to existing external supports including Invest NI, Intertrade Ireland and Innovate UK

Members are reminded that the Economic Development team is currently delivering the ASK Programme that has procured mentors in over 20 specialisms. The Investment Readiness Programme will utilise existing business support programmes including Go Succeed and the ASK framework.

Events that have been delivered under the Investment Readiness Programme to date are:

Event	Key Focus	Event Detail	Partners
Oct 2024	Public Sector Procurement / Construction	35 business attended the event and were educated on how to access public sector funds as well as what monies are currently available through public sector works.	Housing Executive Education Authority Health Trust
Nov 2024 & Jan 2025	Sustainability	A combined total of 31 business attended the two sustainability workshops where green energy and sustainability were discussed. Participants prompted to register for Councils Green for Business Programme.	Carbonfit Sensata Power NI Danske Bank

It is anticipated that workshops will take place on a bi-monthly basis however, flexibility will be applied depending on business needs and operational requirements.

4. Financial Position/Implication

The programme will be facilitated through the existing Economic Development Budget.

5. Summary of Timeline

A summary of events is detailed within the table below. Officers are exploring partner's availability to assist the delivery of events therefore the scheduling has the potential to change.

Event	Key Focus	Business Benefit	Potential Partners
April 2025	Access to Funding	Helps businesses secure finance for growth	British Business Bank Whiterock Michelin Group INI Innovate UK
June 2025	Digital Transformation	Improves efficiency & security	ANBC Digital Transformation Team AMIC Sensatta LMAC Innovate UK
August 2025	Sustainability & Net Zero	Reduces costs & ensures compliance	Sustainability NI Carbonfit ANBC Sustainability Team NRC
October 2025	Procurement & Supply Chain	Opens new revenue streams	ANBC Procurement Team FSB Enterprise Agencies
Nov/Dec 2025	Workforce & Skills	Builds a future-ready workforce	NRC Queens University DfE
Feb 2026	Scaling & Innovation	Helps businesses expand into new markets	INI Enterprise Ireland NI Chamber of Commerce Enterprise Agencies

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Stewart McCormack, Investment Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Regeneration and Infrastructure

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

4.4 ED/ED/305 BALMORAL SHOW 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Council's involvement at the 2025 Balmoral Show.

2. Introduction

The 2025 Balmoral Show will take place from Wednesday 14th May to Saturday 17th May.

Following the Council's decision to use a smaller stand at the Show this year, Officers opened an expression of interest process on 15 January 2025 which closed on 24 February 2025.

3. Key Issues

Response to the EOI

This EOI was shared across Council's social media and website and officers communicated with a number of business organisations including Chambers of Commerce, Food NI and the Food to Go Association to promote the opportunity.

Six expressions of interest from local businesses were received by the deadline as listed below:

Company Name	Address/DEA	Products
Jozas	Airport	Handmade Japanese style gyozas
Minnie Dutch Pancakes	Glengormley Urban	Mini Dutch pancakes
En Plein Air Coffee	Dunsilly	Premium coffee bags
Cocobros	Three Mile Water	Artisan, hand painted chocolates
Get'er Brewed	Dunsilly	Brewery and supplier of ingredients for homebrew and microbreweries
Lock Keepers Cottage	Dunsilly	Artisan café in Toome

Officers will now begin to work with these businesses to understand their ambitions at the Balmoral Show, to explain to them what is involved and to determine which day(s) they wish to attend.

Additionally, this year, Officers will provide pre-and post-event support in the form of mentoring through the Go Succeed programme, specifically tailored to their exhibition at the show, facilitating engagement with the Council's Environmental Health team and other promotional activities.

The Mayor will attend the Show on one of the days to visit businesses on the Council stand and other Borough businesses showcasing.

If any Members of the Economic Development Committee would like to attend the show, please email the Regeneration Team at regeneration@antrimandnewtownabbey.gov.uk.

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Hannah McVeigh, Regeneration Project Officer

Agreed by: Steven Norris, Deputy Director Regeneration and Infrastructure

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

4.5 PT/CI/049 PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024/25 PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT) QUARTER 3

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to recommend to Members that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25 Performance Progress Report (Economic Development) Quarter 3 be noted.

2. Background

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

The Council's Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25 was approved at Council in June 2024. This set out a range of robust performance targets, along with six identified improvement objectives and a number of Statutory Performance Targets

3. Previous Decision of Council

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

4. Key Points

The third Quarter performance progress report for Economic Development is **enclosed** for Members' information.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Performance and Improvement Plan 2024/25 Performance Progress Report (Economic Development) Quarter 3 be noted.

Prepared by: Allen Templeton, Performance Improvement Officer

Agreed by: Lesley Millar, Head of Organisation Development

Approved by: Helen Hall, Director of Organisation Development (Interim)

4.6 ED/ED/284 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN UPDATE

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the delivery of the Economic Development Action Plan. A copy of the plan is **enclosed** with relevant updates since the last Committee meeting highlighted in red.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Tara McCormick, Executive Officer, Economic Development

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

4.7 ED/ED/232 GILBERT SISTER CITIES YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the interview and selection process undertaken as part of the Gilbert Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme 2025.

2. Background

Members are reminded that the 2025 Sister Cities Youth Exchange Programme was approved by Council in September 2024. It is a cross-community programme that typically provides a maximum of eight young people, up to four from Antrim and Newtownabbey and up to four from Gilbert, Arizona with an opportunity to develop an understanding of a different country, its culture, and its people through a family living experience. The programme lasts approximately six weeks during the summer with half the time spent in Gilbert and half in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

3. Key Issues

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

Thirteen applications were received in total, with eleven eligible applicants. All eleven eligible applicants progressed to interview stage. The interview panel consisted of The Mayor, Councillor Neil Kelly, Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee Councillor Billy Webb and a member of the Economic Development team.

The breakdown by gender and school of the top six scoring candidates following the interview process are as below.

Male - Ballyclare Secondary School	Successful
Male – St. Malachy's College Belfast	Successful
Female – Abbey Community College	First reserve
Male – Integrated College Glengormley	Second reserve
Male – St. Louis Grammar School	Third reserve
Female – Abbey Community College	Fourth reserve

Following confirmation from Gilbert regarding the completion of their selection process, Officers will undertake the matching process and organise travel arrangements. Should Gilbert wish to send up to four young people to Antrim and Newtownabbey, additional spaces will be offered to reserve applicants in the order of the scoring rank.

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

4. Recommendation

It is recommended that the report be noted.

Prepared by: Carly Long, Business Development Project Officer

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

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

5. ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Any Other Relevant Business (AORB) may be taken at this point.