

Report on	<p>Economic Development – OBFD</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020 2. Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) Funding Request (2020/21) 3. Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses 4. Economic Development Support to Businesses During Covid-19
Date of Meeting	11 June 2020
Reporting Officer	Fiona McKeown, Head of Economic Development

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020</p> <p>To seek approval for Mid Ulster District Council's participation in the TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020, funded by DAERA.</p>
1.2	<p>ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21)</p> <p>To consider funding request from ICBAN for up to £15,000 from Council's Economic Development Budget (2020/21).</p>
1.3	<p>Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses</p> <p>To seek approval for funding to develop and rollout a Covid-19 Grant Scheme to assist town centre businesses put in place social distancing measures to comply with Government guidance.</p>
1.4	<p>Economic Development Support to Businesses During Covid-19</p> <p>To provide an update on the activities carried out by the Economic Development team to assist businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020</p> <p>TRPSI (Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation) is a DAERA funded initiative aimed at reducing poverty in rural areas across NI. In 2019 a pilot micro business development scheme was rolled out across NI administered by Local Authorities offering up to £4,999 in grant aid for rural micro businesses. DAERA has indicated that this scheme will be repeated in 2020.</p>
2.2	

<div data-bbox="132 181 215 448">2.3</div> <div data-bbox="132 448 215 784">2.4</div> <div data-bbox="132 784 215 2040"></div>	<div data-bbox="228 181 1394 403"> <p>ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21) Over the past number of years, a group of 8 Councils from north and south (as listed below) have provided a financial contribution towards ICBAN to support their work; these are Mid Ulster District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Monaghan, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="228 403 1394 582"> <p>Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses As part of Council's Town Centre Recovery Programme, officers are developing a grant scheme to assist town centre businesses put in place internal/external measures to address Government's two metre social distancing procedures.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="228 582 1394 1702"> <p>Economic Development Support to Businesses During Covid-19 The economic development team have been engaging with businesses and working proactively across many projects to assist our business community through the pandemic. These include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan • Town Recovery Plan being worked up • Preparations to Launch Council's £1million Suite of Business Programmes • Updating Covid-19 Business Section on Council's Website • Responding to Business Enquiries for Covid-19 Grants • Issuing E-Shots to Businesses to Keep Them Up to Date • Carrying Out Validation Checks for Department for the Economy for Covid-19 £25,000 Business Support Grants for Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure sectors • Resilience Messages from Mid Ulster's Business Leaders • Sourcing PPE Supplies for Local Businesses • Supporting the MEGA Network • Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme • Seamus Heaney Trails • Village Renewal Scheme • Rural Development Programme • Coalisland Public Realm • Full Fibre NI Project </div> <div data-bbox="228 1702 1394 2040"> <p>An economic development budget review has taken place and any funding originally earmarked for activities which can no longer take place due to reasons associated with Covid-19, is proposed to be redirected towards Council's Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan to assist companies across Mid Ulster who are in urgent need of support at this time. Additionally, a proportion of the economic development budget has been allocated to Community Grants to help those most vulnerable and in need.</p> </div>
3.0	Main Report

3.1	<p>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020</p> <p>The aim of this scheme is to assist rural micro businesses to become more sustainable by providing a small grant of up to £4999 for business improvement activities. The first call for applications opened in November 2019. In MUDC 73 funding applications were received seeking grant aid of £260,000 against an available budget of £50,000 leaving the scheme considerably oversubscribed. Following the completion of eligibility checks and assessment, 46 projects were approved for grant aid of £172,862.32. Additional funding was provided by DAERA which allowed all approved projects to receive a letter of offer. All letters of offer were due to complete by 31st March 2020 however extensions until 30th June 2020 have been facilitated due to the current COVID pandemic.</p> <p>Due to the popularity of the first phase of the scheme, DAERA has indicated that a second call for applications will open for 2020 again administered by local Councils across NI. A business case is currently in preparation for submission to DAERA. The indicative budget for the scheme is to be in the region of £500,000 - £600,000 across all participating Councils. The allocation per individual Council has yet to be agreed but is envisaged to be in the region of £40-50,000 for Mid Ulster District Council targeting at least 10 rural micro businesses.</p>
3.2	<p>ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21)</p> <p>ICBAN submitted a request to Mid Ulster District Council for a contribution of £15,000 for the financial year 2020/21. This is the first increased contribution which the organisation has requested since 2001 and the request outlines work streams to be undertaken. The delivery focus continues to be on areas to benefit member Councils.</p> <p>A key project will be the development of a new '<i>Strategic Action Plan for the Central Border Region</i>', currently being prepared to advocate for recognition of the potential and significance of the Central Border area to both governments, and to promote regional priorities into the Peace Plus Consultation. Please refer to Appendices 1a & 1b.</p>
3.3	<p>Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses</p> <p>Officers are devising a grant scheme to assist town centre businesses make adaptations to their premises for the purposes of implementing the two metre social distancing procedures to protect staff and customers as and when our high streets reopen in line with government guidance. The scheme will focus on both internal and external Covid-19 adjustments. Internal adjustments could include for example customer signage, flexi-plastic screens around tills, hand sanitiser stations, etc and external adjustments could include provision of awnings, shopper collection points, covered outdoor seating/tables for hospitality businesses who cannot accommodate clientele numbers indoors due to social distancing restrictions, etc.</p> <p>Council officers are actively speaking to a range of funders to determine if Council can attract match funding to deliver the scheme. If successful in attracting funding, it is proposed these monies will be used to match fund existing Council funds from within the Business & Communities section to deliver the scheme.</p>

3.4	<p>It is proposed the initial scheme is made available to town centre businesses in each of the 5 main towns (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera). It would be desirable to roll out the scheme into rural areas also, however, this will be entirely dependent on attracting additional funding from other sources.</p> <p>Timing is critical on this project and there is an urgent need to progress the scheme to have it ready as quickly as possible to allow businesses to apply for funding. Permission is sought to work up the scheme, make any necessary funding applications, and if required, procure any goods/services to help deliver the scheme. When the scheme is ready, officers seek permission to open the scheme to applications from town centre businesses in the 5 main towns. If further funding becomes available, the scheme could be extended to include rural areas.</p> <p>Economic Development Support to Businesses During Covid-19</p> <p>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan The economic development team have directly engaged with over 100 local businesses including micro, small and medium sized enterprises across our district to identify the unprecedented challenges and issues they face as a result of the economic shock caused by Covid-19. This evidence has identified the need for a robust economic response aimed at shoring up our economy in Mid Ulster and protecting our business and employment base. The purpose of the Business Recovery Plan is to inform government and key stakeholders of the precarious situation facing Mid Ulster and the interventions and support needed to help our industry recover from the ongoing pandemic. This report was presented to Council on 28 May 2020.</p> <p>Town Centre Recovery Plan In addition to preparing the Mid Ulster Covid-19 Business Recovery Plan, the economic development team have been in liaison with the Town Centre Forums/Traders Associations in each of our five main towns and have had in-depth discussions with Traders from across our district. A further Town Centre Recovery Plan is being worked up and will be presented to the Development Committee shortly.</p> <p>Launch of Council's £1million Suite of Business Programmes Plans are afoot to formally launch Council's four large business programmes (detailed below) valued at £1million, specifically designed to support 690 micro and small businesses (employing less than 50 employees) across Mid Ulster with bespoke mentoring support up to December 2022. These programmes are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital First Programme • Tender Ready Programme • Transform Programme • Gearing for Growth Programme (contractor to be appointed in July 2020) <p>These programmes are very timely. They were initially designed to stimulate growth and job creation, however, given we are now in the midst of a pandemic, officers have worked with Invest NI to ensure the suite of programmes have</p>
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sufficient in-built flexibility to support businesses that require urgent support to help them recover and sustain existing jobs. We are only too aware that job creation and growth targets will be longer term aims and may only be achievable beyond the lifespan of the programmes, given the impact the global pandemic has had on the world economy.

Covid-19 Business Section on Council's Website

Providing regular updates to Comms Team to keep the new Covid-19 business section of Council's website up to date with new grants and business support measures as they become available.

Responding to Business Enquiries for Covid-19 Grants

Economic staff continue to deal with a high volume of enquiries from businesses on a daily basis. This involves staff providing information and guidance as appropriate, as well as following up with updates to previous enquiries when new grants become available.

Issuing E-shots to Businesses to Keep Them Up to Date

Over 1,800 businesses registered on Council's online business directory are kept informed every week of new grants/supports as they become available.

Department for the Economy: Covid-19 Grants

The economic development team provide weekly assistance to the Department for the Economy (DfE) to validate the existence of companies in our district seeking support under the Government's Covid-19 £25,000 Business Support Grant Scheme for the Retail, Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure sectors. This is only required where DfE cannot verify an applicant's eligibility using LPS data or information available on the Companies House database. To date, Council officers have carried out 22 checks and responded to DfE within the 5 working days turnaround period.

Resilience Messages from Mid Ulster's Business Leaders

The economic development team have worked alongside our business leaders in Mid Ulster to garner short video messages from them to inspire resilience and boost morale during the pandemic.

Seven videos to date have been received and shared on Council's social media platforms from the following businesses, tagged with the strapline

#ResilientMidUlster;

- Ireland Coach Tours
- Rafferty HR
- McCloskey International
- Caroline O'Neill
- KE Plumbing Supplies
- Glenshane Country Farm
- Horace McMullan Clothing

More business videos are in the pipeline and will be shared upon receipt.

Sourcing PPE Suppliers for Local Businesses

The economic development team continue to assist local businesses source PPE supplies.

Mid Ulster Business Webinars

Six digital webinars have been organised from March – May 2020 to provide a range of support to businesses to help them adapt to new ways of working during the pandemic. These are;

- i) 'Effective Remote Working' (27 March 2020) - 69 participants.
- ii) 'Building a Digital Business' (21 April 2020) - 54 participants.
- iii) 'Connecting with Customers' (12 May 2020) - 33 participants.
- iv) 'Communicating through Uncertainty' (13 May 2020) - 17 participants.
- v) 'Communicating through Uncertainty' (18 May 2020) - 29 participants.
- vi) 'Building psychological resilience' (21 May 2020) - 34 participants.

MEGA Network

The MEGA (Manufacturing and Engineering Growth & Advancement) Network, funded by Mid Ulster Council and Invest NI, has been supporting and facilitating the local manufacturing and engineering sector during the pandemic through a number of initiatives as detailed below:-

- Sharing good practice and working with training providers to co-ordinate upskilling opportunities for employees and management;
- Providing information and updates on webinars and government support measures to all network members;
- Preparing and issuing a MEGA Apprenticeship Model to all schools providing details of apprenticeships that will be available in MEGA companies in 2020/21;
- Hosting a virtual Q&A Apprenticeship session which was attended by students, parents, careers teachers, advisors and training providers;
- Lobbying on the importance of apprenticeships and the need for government support to help industry employ apprentices in the year ahead;
- Creating videos showcasing 'work experience' in the sector; local schools have been sharing the videos with parents and pupils;
- Working with Invest NI to deliver 4 workshops to support businesses with Industry 4.0.

Mid Ulster Town & Village Spruce Up Scheme

- Phase 1 - Businesses are being supported through the claims process and reimbursed promptly.

- Phase 2 – A further 69 projects on the ranked reserve list, up to a budget value of £250,000, are being issued with Letters of Offer week commencing 1 June 2020, signalling they can commence improvement works on their properties as soon as they accept and return their funding offer.

Seamus Heaney Trails

- Work is ongoing with Planners re permissions for interpretation.
- Microsoft Teams meeting continuing with Interpretation designers re latest designs and coordinating responses internally.
- Reviewed proposals/budget for interpretation works.
- Ongoing liaison with stakeholders re legal issues.
- Landowners have been engaged re land purchase.
- Regular progress updates with project team.
- Seamus Heaney Trails claim 2 has been prepared.

Village Renewal Scheme

- Villages awaiting appointment of Contractor;
 - Group 6 - Eglish, Clonoe, Stewartstown and Tamnamore
 - Group 7 - Kildress, Culnady, Curran, Ballymaguigan/Creagh, Washingbay, Tullyhogue and Cappagh
- Villages at quotation stage; Galbally and Broughderg.
- Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (the LAG) was awarded an additional £1m in funding from DAERA under the Village Renewal Scheme in 2019 which along with slippage from other schemes within the LAG strategy led to the development of three strategic scale village renewal projects at Maghera Leisure Centre, Fivemiletown Round Lake and Ballyronan Marina. These projects were approved for funding by the LAG in March 2020 and are now awaiting the appointment of contractors.

This additional funding from the LAG brings the overall allocation of grant aid for village renewal to £3.15m.

Rural Development Programme

- Grant claims processing procedures have been modified to allow project promoters to submit claims electronically during the Covid-19 crisis.
- Project assessments have continued and three strategic scale village renewal projects were approved by the LAG for funding of £1.4m.
- Monitoring and evaluation of completed projects under the Rural Business Investment Scheme and Rural Services Schemes has also continued through business continuity arrangements.

	<p>Coalisland Public Realm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contractors are currently off-site due to Covid-19. All claims are up to date - Claim 3 was submitted to DfC for £518,299.10. All supporting documentation was prepared and scanned for vouching with remittance already received by Council. Claim 4 prepared and forwarded to DfC for processing. <p>FFNI (Full Fibre NI) Project</p> <p>Procurement phases 1 & 2 for infrastructure supplier(s) for 10 Councils across NI is now live, total value £15m. Contract is worth up to £1.5m to Mid Ulster District Council area. It is expected to conclude towards the end of May 2020. An update report will be brought to the P&R Committee in June 2020 in readiness for contract with Mid Ulster Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 92 Council owned sites have been submitted as part of the proposal to be fully fibred. An Officer Implementation Team has been established and held its first meeting on 21 May 2020. Draft contracts and draft wayleaves documents are being reviewed by Council's solicitor.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>TRPSI Micro Business Scheme – A funding allocation from DAERA is expected to be made available to Council to provide small capital grants to rural micro-businesses. A modest administration budget to offset Council staff costs will also be included.</p> <p>ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21) – Tentative provision has been made in the 2020/21 economic development budget for £15,000.</p> <p>Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses - Use existing budgets from within the Business & Communities Department to fund the scheme, whilst actively seeking match funding from Government Dept's to boost scheme funds.</p> <p>Human: Officer Time</p> <p>Risk Management: N/A</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A</p>

	Rural Needs Implications: Phase 2 of the TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme will be available to all rural micro businesses.
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members:-
5.1	<p>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020 Approve the participation of Mid Ulster District Council in the second call for applications in the TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme 2020, funded by DAERA.</p>
5.2	<p>ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21) (i) Consider funding request from ICBAN for up to £15,000 from Council's Economic Development Budget (2020/21), to be paid in two equal instalments, subject to Council being provided with the requisite documentation (application form, confirmation of match funding, copies of accounts, insurances financial report and Progress Updates).</p> <p>(ii) Consider the release of funding to ICBAN twice yearly in two equal instalments, once Council is in receipt of all documentation requested for each stage (as outlined above). ICBAN Progress updates will be furnished to future Development Committee meetings.</p>
5.3	<p>Covid-19 Grant Scheme to Assist Town Centre Businesses Approve Council funding be made available from existing Business & Communities budgets for a Covid-19 Grant Scheme to assist town centre businesses make internal/external adaptations to their premises to comply with Government's two metre social distancing procedures. Permission is sought to work up the scheme, make any necessary funding applications and procure any required goods/services. Furthermore when the scheme is ready, approval is sought to open the scheme to applications from eligible applicant businesses in Mid Ulster's 5 main towns (ie, Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera). If further funding becomes available, the scheme could be extended to include rural towns and villages.</p>
5.4	<p>Economic Development Support to Businesses During Covid-19 Note progress update.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1a – ICBAN Funding Request (2020/21)</p> <p>Appendix 1b – ICBAN Update Report (2019/20)</p>