

Report on	1) Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 22.3.21 2) Economic Development Achievements 2020/2021 3) Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group 4) Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report (May 2021)
Date of Meeting	17 June 2021
Reporting Officer	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	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 22.3.21 Coalisland Town Centre Forum was established in March 2019. It is a partnership of public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations working together to deliver a range of strategic economic actions to develop Coalisland town.</p>
2.2	<p>Economic Development Achievements 2020/2021 It has been a challenging year for us all, not least the business sector. Council, through its economic development service, has spearheaded and funded a significant volume of support to assist businesses and communities. A summary of the headline achievements can be found in Section 3.2 and the full report is contained in Appendix 2.</p>
2.3	<p>Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group The Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group was established in September 2018. Within Mid Ulster, there are a significant number of prevailing broadband deficiencies across our district. Recently Council have had major concerns that whilst the Department for the Economy (DfE) and their delivery partner, Fibrus, are focusing their efforts on rolling out Project Stratum, there remains many parts of our district that will be left behind. As such, these premises will not benefit from any upgrade works, nor be in line to receive a 30mbps broadband service.</p>

2.4	<p>Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report (May 2021)</p> <p>The findings of the latest Tughans Manufacturing NI survey was published in May 2021. The aim of this research is to assess the needs, experiences and issues affecting businesses in the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland. Perceptive Insight, a market research company, collected information from 190 businesses in April 2021 on performance, activity and experiences within the manufacturing industry.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 22.3.21</p> <p>Minutes of the meeting of Coalisland Town Centre Forum held on the 22nd March 2021 are attached at Appendix 1.</p>
3.2	<p>Economic Development Achievements 2020/2021</p> <p>There has been a significant volume of economic development initiatives delivered during the 2020/2021 financial year, much of which has included a range of new interventions, and repurposing existing programmes, to support Mid Ulster businesses during the pandemic. Table 1 below summarises the headline achievements. The full report can be read on Appendix 2.</p> <p><i>Table 1 – Headline Economic Development Achievements (Apr 2020 – Mar 21)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Creation of 126 new jobs through the Business Start Programme ✓ ESF Funded Programmes supported 304 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helped 134 people gain employment - Assisted participants to achieve 768 new qualifications - Helped 64 participants progress to Further Education/Training ✓ 18 business events delivered to 797 attendees, including 12 webinars run as part of Mid Ulster Enterprise Week in 2020 ✓ Suite of 4 business development programmes have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - supported 287 businesses - created 39 jobs (equating to a value of £767,974) - helped 11 businesses win 16 tenders (total value of £3,343,400) - referred 4 businesses to Invest NI for further support. ✓ £1,339,067.81 of Covid-19 Business Grants delivered to 587 businesses across the district ✓ 22 villages being supported to develop projects with a total cost of £731,089 ✓ £5.9m of Public Realm Schemes being progressed in Maghera and Coalisland ✓ 57 business properties enhanced, with a total investment of £318,513 under Town & Village Business Spruce Up Scheme (Apr 20-Mar 21).

(Council Grant Aid of £195,159.02 has leveraged a further £123,354.02 of private sector investment).

3.3

Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group

Mid Ulster District Council area has the second worst broadband in NI, therefore, the intervention of Project Stratum from Department of the Economy (DfE) is welcomed as it is expected to deliver superfast broadband to over 12,000 rural premises in Mid Ulster. It will bring full fibre to these premises, who cannot currently receive a 30Mbps broadband service and will futureproof their telecoms needs for a generation. However, shortly after the commencement of Project Stratum in January 2021, Council's initial indications showed that there are many properties in Mid Ulster being excluded from these broadband upgrades, being rolled out by Fibrus and funded by DfE.

Mid Ulster District Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband Survey from 15th February to 8th March 2021 to get a snapshot and understanding of the issues, following which a report was prepared to highlight the gaps in provision and this was shared with our elected members, MLA's, MP's, DfE and Fibrus Networks. Clarity was sought from DfE and Fibrus on solutions to how they will address the issues raised in the report in order to ensure no property was left behind that couldn't receive a 30Mbps connection.

On Monday 10 May 2021, Mid Ulster Council's Broadband Working Group Members held a meeting with the district's MLA's and MP's to brief them on the findings of the Mid Ulster Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report. Following this, on Monday 17 May 2021, a comprehensive meeting was held involving Mid Ulster Council's elected members, and the MLA's, MP's for Mid Ulster and Fermanagh South Tyrone together with representatives from DfE and Fibrus. The discussions revolved around five areas of concern where clarity was sought from DfE:-

1. 354 premises have been de-scoped by DfE/Fibrus from within the Mid Ulster area and it is essential these premises are included, and not left behind.
2. 105 Premises in Mid Ulster currently served by wireless broadband. If these premises are getting 30Mbps then they will be outside the scope of Project Stratum. Clarity sought from DfE that these premises are actually receiving a satisfactory service within minimum speeds of 30Mbps.
3. The information on the LPS Pointer system which DfE used to determine the number of eligible properties to be included in Mid Ulster for the Project Stratum project was not up to date. As a result many premises were excluded and it is imperative DfE find a solution and funding to bring these back on board.
4. In January 2019, DfE undertook an Open Market Review across NI asking Telecoms Companies (Telco's) to clarify if any were upgrading their broadband services to NI postcodes before January 2022. As a result, new

build premises after January 2019 are now outside the scope of Project Stratum. It is estimated there are approx 900 new builds in Mid Ulster during this period which DfE must address and provide funding to bring them on board.

5. Council has evidence that a significant number of premises in Mid Ulster have checked their eligibility to receive a 30mbps service from Project Stratum on Fibrus Networks www.hyperfastni.com website. On entering their postcode these property owners are advised that they either currently receive a 30mbps broadband service, or can avail of one from a Telecoms Company before January 2022. Anyone falling into this category will be unable to get support from Stratum. This situation has arisen due to Telecoms Companies providing an indicative indication to DfE in Jan 2019, that they would upgrade services to specific postcodes between Jan 2019 – Jan 2022. In many instances this has not occurred, and therefore DfE must reaffirm with Telecoms Companies these premises will be afforded the opportunity to receive an upgraded broadband service with minimum speeds of 30mbps by January 2022, or else these premises must be included under Project Stratum and funded accordingly.

Further information is enclosed in the appendices section;

- **Appendix 3a** contains a Report summarising the key issues / findings arising from Mid Ulster Council's Project Stratum Broadband Survey, dated March 2021.
- **Appendix 3b** – contains DfE Telecoms Branch response (May 2021) to the issues raised in Council's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report.

3.4 **Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report (May 2021)**

The findings of the latest Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey has found that the majority of Northern Ireland manufacturers have been negatively impacted by the end of the Brexit transition period but many are continuing to see growth. The survey, conducted by Perceptive Insight in April 2021, shows that some 77% of companies have "experienced a negative impact on their business since the Brexit transition period ended". However, around 59% of those surveyed said they are in growth-mode.

Other key findings from the report:-

- Increased expenditure on raw materials has been experienced by 93% of manufacturers and 37% said disrupted supply chains are the biggest obstacle to their firms' recovery.
- 86% of firms have increased input costs on transportation.
- 66% want the government to cut employment related costs to support the sector.
- 45% of businesses expect that the sector will see growth in the next 12 months, compared to 15% that expect continued weakness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% of firms expect their profit margins to deteriorate in 2021 relative to the previous 12 months, although 35% expect to see improvement. • Although Covid-19 continues to affect manufacturing businesses, the sector is showing signs of recovery compared to July 2020. <p>A full copy of the report is attached (Appendix 4).</p>
	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: N/A
	Human: Officers time
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 22.3.21 Note minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum meeting held on 22 March 2021 on Appendix 1.</p>
5.2	<p>Economic Development Achievements 2020/2021 Note update outlining Economic Development Achievements for the year April 2020-March 2021, including Summary Report on Appendix 2.</p>
5.3	<p>Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group Note update provided, including copies of Mid Ulster District Council's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report (March 2021) on Appendix 3a, and DfE Telecoms Branch Response (May 2021) to the issues raised in Council's Broadband Survey Report on Appendix 3b.</p>

5.4	Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report (May 2021) Note Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report, dated May 2021 (Appendix 4).
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1 – Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 22.3.21</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Summary of Achievements – Economic Development - 2020/2021</p> <p>Appendix 3a – Mid Ulster Council's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report - March 2021</p> <p>Appendix 3b - DfE Response to Council's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report - May 2021</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Tughans Manufacturing NI Survey Report (May 2021)</p>