

# **NI Executive Department Engagement**

## **Strategic Issues**

## **The Executive Office**

**Responsibilities** : *strategic investment and regeneration, Brexit, civil contingencies, programme for government, east/west and north/south co-operation, promoting NI overseas, good relations and social change*

**First Minister** : Arlene Foster (DUP)

Deputy First Minister : Michelle O'Neill (SF)

Junior Ministers : Gordon Lyons (DUP) / Declan Kearney (SF)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Colin McGrath (SDLP) / Mike Nesbitt (UUP)

## **Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**

**Responsibilities :** *to assist the competitive development of the agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors of the Northern Ireland economy, also carries out environmental functions and has policy responsibility for Northern Ireland's Sustainability Strategy).*

**Minister :** Edwin Poots (DUP)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair :** Declan McAleer (SF) / Philip McGuigan (SF)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- Exit from EU:
  - Rural Policy Post Brexit, this needs to be co-designed with Council and the local community
  - Replacement of Rural Development Programme funding and opportunities to address the resulting deficit in support for rural communities and businesses. RDP has been critical to enhancing facilities in small rural settlements.
  - Impact on agricultural industry and farming communities generally, especially small farms.
- Mid Ulster has benefited greatly from DAERA funding (e.g. Rural Tourism Scheme funding) for significant investment projects, including the £1.2M Davagh Dark Sky Observatory opening in April, and funding has been very welcome.
- Opportunity for enhanced collaborative working around sustainable development of parks, open spaces, forests, natural assets for recreation purposes and associated well-being benefits.
- Waste Strategy: Mid Ulster is the top performing council for recycling and sends the second lowest amount of waste to landfill. We operate a three bin system which greatly facilitates our performance, imposed changes to this system would increase costs and negatively impact on our excellent performance.

## **Department for Communities**

**Responsibilities** : *urban regeneration, community and voluntary sector development, historic environment, social legislation, housing, social security benefits, pensions and child support, debt advice, public records, Employment Service, promoting equality, and development of arts and culture).*

**Minister** : Deidre Hargey (SF)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Paula Bradley (DUP) / Kellie Armstrong (AP)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- Transfer of Regeneration / Community Development powers and appropriate budget to develop new and sustainable models of support for our town centres is vital for their regeneration and enhancement as economic and social hubs.
- Rates Support Grant: Restoration of Rates Support Grant at 15/16 levels (£20m) with statutory protection is required if less wealthy councils are to have any chance of providing equity in service delivery compared to wealthy councils.
- Housing: Urgent measures need to be taken to address homelessness and the shortage of social and affordable housing. NIHE should start building houses once again and implement rent controls for the private sector to ensure affordability.
- Deprivation in Rural Areas: Currently there is no core central government funding to address deprivation in rural areas, and no department appears to have responsibility for this area. At present, EU funding is crucial to filling the gap. In a post Brexit era, funding needs to be mainstreamed.
- Public realm schemes: Mid Ulster have incurred significant design fees in the preparation of a public realm scheme in Maghera, DfC funding of £2.5m needs confirmed.
- Seamus Heaney HomePlace: Homeplace is the most culturally significant project on the Island of Ireland in recent times. It is an arts and literary centre of national and international significance, as such it should not be left to the local council to provide 100% of the funding needed to run it. Central government needs to step up and co-fund.
- Local Government Division: Growing burden on local government in relation to external audit, particularly in terms of the performance management regime which is becoming burdensome from a resource perspective (time and cost).
- Community Planning: issues around achieving meaningful collaboration at senior level with partners to achieve shared objectives.

- Community funding: where community and voluntary sector lose traditional sources of government funding, the sector turns to councils to plug the funding gaps. This is not sustainable.
- Domestic abuse, victims to have access to the same “intimidation points” as victims of racial/sectarian abuse when assessing housing allocations.
- Welfare Reform: current mitigations need to continue beyond March 2020

## **Department for the Economy**

**Responsibilities :** *economic policy development, enterprise, innovation, energy, telecoms, tourism, health and safety at work, Insolvency Service, consumer affairs, and labour market and economic statistics services, learning and research, skills training and promoting good employment practice*

**Minister :** Diane Dodds (DUP)

**Committee Chair/Vice Chair :** Caoimhe Archibald (SF)/Sinead McLaughlin (SDLP)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- Mid Ulster is the most entrepreneurial region in NI, with the highest concentration of businesses outside of Belfast and the centre of manufacturing here, yet level of central government support and investment is not reflective of the district's status as a significant sub-economic region.
- Exit from the EU, specifically:
  - Need for a future trade deal that is co-designed by and benefits business in Mid Ulster with unfettered access east/west and north/south.
  - Future Migration policy needs to work for local business, many rely on EU workforce in particular sectors (e.g. agri-food) and potential impact is a major concern.
  - Wider consideration of Mid Ulster as a border corridor local authority and the associated challenges that brings in terms of economic activity, notably the movement of goods and people.
- Growth Deal: Mid Ulster are working with ABC and Fermanagh Omagh Councils and our business community in the preparation of a Regional Economic Strategy. The UK Government have announced a package of £163m by way of a Growth Deal for our area and the CC&G Council area. Executive support to deliver the economic interventions within the deal is essential (to include Manufacturing & Innovation Centre in Dungannon, an Agri-food Innovation Centre at CAFRE). Flexibility in the composition of the deal may be required given the regionals infrastructure deficit.
- Skills Agenda: Mid Ulster has been leading the drive to tackle the skills gaps and address the relevant issues to ensure economic stability and growth. Work recognised and supported by DfE and wish to assure Mid Ulster's significant role in the area is to the fore in future skills development programme.
- Connectivity: broadband connectivity needs addressed urgently, (Mid Ulster is in bottom 1% of UK Local Authorities), the worst areas need to be address first in

Project Stratum. In addition, deficiencies in the electricity network continue to be critical and the North South Interconnector needs delivered as a priority.

- Mid Ulster suffers from a shortage of industrial land which is restricting economic growth, eg Granville. Invest NI need to take forward new sites to address business need without further delay.
- Apprenticeship Levy: Mid Ulster businesses who are contributing to the levy should have the same access to this skills investment money as their competitors in GB.
- Tourism funding: in Mid Ulster has been identified as a key growth area and the Council is continuing to invest (SHHP, Davagh Dark Skies). However, no funding streams available to local government which continues to invest directly in tourism and stimulate economic growth.
- Natural tourism assets:
  - The new approach document notes the need for the completion of the Ulster Canal to Upper Lough Erne. This is welcome however the real prize for tourism is to restore the Ulster Canal all the way to Lough Neagh.
  - The Sperrins AONB is the largest in NI yet receives no funding to help realise its potential in a sustainable way. Match funding is required to deliver the Sperrins Future Search Action Plan.
  - Lough Neagh should be brought into public ownership to ensure its sustainable development and to progress its greatly untapped tourism potential.

## **Department of Education**

**Responsibilities** : *pre-school, primary, post-primary and special education; the youth service; the promotion of community relations within and between schools; and teacher education and salaries*

**Minister** : Peter Weir (DUP)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Chris Lyttle (AP) / Karen Mullan (SF)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- Levels of educational under achievement (no to low qualifications) and link to areas of deprivation as much a factor in Mid Ulster as elsewhere.
- Cross-over with DfE in terms of skills development, with priorities in schools for programmes around STEM, entrepreneurial and creative skills.
- Pre-school places and early years interventions with 30 hours free childcare to be provided for working parents
- Sustainability of schools within Mid Ulster: Council urges the Department to work with local communities and the Council in designing solutions to situations where the sustainability of a school has been brought into question.
- Investment in the school estate is long overdue with some schools waiting decades for investment, eg Holy Trinity Cookstown.



## **Department of Finance**

**Responsibilities** : *to prioritise the use of resources available to Northern Ireland, make sure that these are used efficiently and secure the reform and modernisation of public services; and to deliver efficient and cost effective services to the public in the Department's areas of executive responsibility*

**Minister** : Connor Murphy (SF)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Steve Aiken (UUP) / Paul Frew (DUP)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- The historical uncertainty around local government funding, specifically:
  - Restoration of Rates Support Grant at 15/16 levels (£20m) with statutory protection.
  - the percentage split among qualifying councils which in the 2020-21 financial year is projected to be 3.48% less than anticipated for Mid Ulster (expected drop from 24.93% to 21.45%).
  - the disconnect between the Department's budget-setting cycle and the Council's striking of the rate.
- Business rates system review: '*strategic importance for government to ensure that the business rating system is fit for purpose in order to fund Northern Ireland's key services, both at regional and district level*'. Strategically important for local government equally. Critical to involve local government at early stages of potential new policy development.
- Public sector jobs: Need to address the public sector jobs deficit in Mid Ulster. Decentralisation of public sector jobs is a Community Plan priority.
- Dormant Account fund, need for co-design with Council on how this funding is spent

## **Department of Health**

**Responsibilities** : *to improve the health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland and Public Safety, which covers policy and legislation for fire and rescue services*

**Minister** : Robin Swann (UUP)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Colm Gildernew (SF) / Gary Middleton (DUP)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

- Access to acute care: Mid Ulster is already adversely impacted by geographic distance to acute hospitals
- Investment in emergency ambulance services, Mid Ulster has the worst response times in NI. (The Council recognises the very clear link between roads infrastructure investment and the ability to move acute patients at speed).
- Primary Care Services
  - interventions to address chronic GP shortages (critically in Dungannon),
  - Mid Ulster has no acute hospital, our communities have had to cope with a continual withdrawal of services from the Mid Ulster and South Tyrone sites while very significant investment has gone into Community Care & Treatment Centres in areas that have acute hospitals. Preparatory work on the establishment of CC&TCs in Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt has been either stopped or significantly delayed. This is unacceptable, the health of Mid Ulster's population is as important as any other area and it is about time this is recognised, and action taken to redress the regional disparity in health care provision.
- Measures to address Mental Health and suicide prevention in Mid Ulster need accelerated
- Opportunity for Regional Services to be brought to Mid Ulster and South Tyrone Hospital sites, eg imagining, drug dispensary
- Welcome the partial resolution to the Nurses pay dispute and encourage the Executive to work to ensure safe staffing levels as soon as possible.

## **Department for Infrastructure**

**Responsibilities :** *to develop infrastructure and services including water and sewerage networks, roads and footpaths, public transport services, vehicle regulation, road safety, driver licensing, and rivers and inland waterways*

**Minister :** Nicola Mallon (SDLP)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair :** Michelle McIlveen (DUP) / David Hilditch (DUP)

### Strategic Issues for MUDC

**Department for Infrastructure**  
(*Main responsibilities are*).

- Key strategic issues centre on the historical underinvestment in infrastructure 'West of the Bann', specifically:
  - the strategic road network. Key roads identified in the Community Plan are A29/A31, A4, A5. Welcome the ongoing work on the delivery of the A6.
  - the A29/A31 need to be re-designated as a Key Transport Corridor and prioritised for investment.
  - lack of progress over the past 2 decades in delivering bypasses for Dungannon and Cookstown which have now reached a critical point if Mid Ulster is to optimise growth potential, retain indigenous business and attract investment.
  - issues with waste-water/sewerage infrastructure are already beginning to impact on development and are as critical for Mid Ulster's towns as it is for major urban areas.
- Public Transport: While roads investment is critical, there is also the need to address issues of rural access to services (public transport) and to develop an integrated transport scheme, as well as an intra-town transit scheme which includes bus, cycling and walking links.
- Rail Network: A feasibility study to be carried out on the possible extension of the rail network to Mid Ulster, ie Antrim to Castledawson, Portadown to Dungannon and onwards to Cookstown
- Local Development Plans: We are told our LDP is the spatial manifestation of our Community Plan, if this is truly to be the case and if the transfer of planning is to achieve its objectives then local councils must be allowed to tailor policy to meet local need.

## **Department of Justice**

**Responsibilities** : *justice and the law, legal aid, prisons, youth justice, forensic science, policing and community safety, courts and tribunals*

**Minister** : Naomi Long (AP)

**Committee Chair / Vice Chair** : Paul Givan (DUP) / Linda Dillon (SF)