

Report on	DAERA Rural Micro Business Small Grant Pilot Scheme
Date of Meeting	Wednesday 4th December 2019
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	To provide Members with an update on the DAERA Rural Micro Business Small Grant Pilot Scheme.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>The Rural Micro Business Small Grant Pilot Scheme is a pilot project funded by DAERA through the TRPSI (Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation) Programme. It will focus on existing rural micro businesses employing less than 10 employees, offering 50% in grant aid against eligible costs up to £4,999 to support actions aimed at improving business sustainability and growth.</p> <p>The Scheme will operate across all rural areas of Northern Ireland and will be administered by local Councils. Council will be responsible for issuing letters of offer to successful applicants under this scheme but DAERA will be responsible for the payment of all grant aid approved. There is no match fund requirement from Council.</p> <p>The overall budget available for this pilot is relatively small at £500,000 in total across all Councils participating. This equates to a project budget of approximately £50,000 for Mid Ulster to support a target of 10 rural micro businesses.</p> <p>An administration budget of up to £7,847 will be paid to Council for associated administrative duties (or 15% of the grant allocation committed and spent)</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Delivery timescales</p> <p>Indicative timescales for the roll out of this Scheme have been agreed with DAERA which necessitates the assessment of applications and completion of individual projects by successful applicants by 31st March 2020.</p> <p>To meet this timescale all of the participating Councils are working simultaneously to the following timetable:</p>

	<p>18th November 2019 – call opens for application 18th December 2019 (12noon) – close of call 19th Dec – 13th Feb 2020 – assessment of applications and preparation of letters of offer 14th Feb 2020 – issue of letters of offer 31st March 2020 – completion of projects by letter of offer recipients</p> <p>The timescales shown for letter of offer issue (by 14th Feb 2020) and project completion by successful applicant's (by 31st March 2020) form part of the contract for delivery now agreed with DAERA and must therefore be met.</p>
3.2	<p>Assessment arrangements Council staff will be responsible for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening the call for applications • Initial eligibility checks • Liaison with DAERA / Invest NI on applications received • Assessment and scoring of eligible applications • Preparation of letters of offer • Collation of grant claims from successful project promoters for submission to DAERA for payment • Post project evaluation on individual funded projects
3.3	<p>Projects achieving a score of 65% and over will be awarded funding. In the event that the number of projects approved exceeds the budget available, funding will be awarded to the highest ranking scores until the budget is exhausted.</p>
3.4	<p>An overall Post Project Evaluation at scheme level will be carried out to ascertain the achievement of scheme objectives and identify lessons learnt for future similar initiatives.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial: No Council funding required – all grant aid approved to project promoters will be paid by DAERA.</p>
	<p>Human: Staff time. An administrative budget of £7,874 will be paid to Council by DAERA for associated administrative duties on completion of the scheme.</p>
	Risk Management: None
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: None</p>

	<p>Rural Needs Implications: This scheme is specifically targeted at rural areas (defined as all areas outside of settlements with over 5000 residents).</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	<p>It is recommended;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members note update on the Rural Micro Business Small Grant Pilot Scheme and pressure on delivery timescales. • Once the project applications are assessed, scored and ranked, that Members approve authority be granted to the Director of Business & Communities to approve the issue of letters of offer, up to the maximum grant funding available of £50,000, in order to allow the Rural Micro Business Small Grant Pilot Scheme to progress and be delivered within the timeframe available ie, 31st March 2020. A report will be brought to the Development Committee immediately afterwards to update Members on the outcome of assessment and scoring.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	None