

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal 2. Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes 3. Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement 4. Sperrins Partnership Agreement 5. Tourism Spring Campaign 2023
Date of Meeting	16 February 2023
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & Strategic Programmes

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>Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal</p> <p>The Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) is a respected voice for town and city management at both a European and wider global level. They are a not-for-profit organisation with members that come from the public, private and third sectors. They include key stakeholders and thought leaders who develop and implement shared visions, strategies and action plans for town and city centres throughout the UK and Ireland.</p>
2.2	<p>Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes</p> <p>In 2018/19, following the submission of four successful applications from the Council to the ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme for the provision of 4 business support programmes (2018-22), Council accepted four Letters of Offer from Invest NI for the delivery to the value of up to £1.1m of: 'Gearing for Growth', 'Tender Ready', 'Transform' and Digital First'.</p>

	<p>These were part funded by Invest Northern Ireland (20%) and the European Regional Development Fund under the Investment for Growth and Jobs Northern Ireland (2014-2020) Programme (60%) and Mid Ulster District Council (20%).</p> <p>Included within each Letter of Offer's 'Project Key Actions' is a requirement for Council 'To produce a final Evaluation Report' to assess each programme's performance and impact in terms of achieving their targets. All four programmes complete their delivery of support to business participants by February 2023.</p>
2.3	<p>Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement</p> <p>Over the past number of years, the 3 Councils from around the shoreline of Lough Neagh (as listed below) have provided a financial contribution towards Lough Neagh Rescue to support their work; these are Mid Ulster District Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council.</p>
2.4	<p>Sperrins Partnership Agreement</p> <p>The Sperrins Future Search Conference entitled 'The Sperrins – Reaching New Heights, Realising Our Potential' was held in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 27th – 29th September 2017.</p> <p>The event brought together a group of key stakeholders to draft and agree an action plan for the future development of the Sperrins and in particular the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).</p>
2.5	<p>Tourism Spring Campaign 2023</p> <p>As well as kick starting the tourism season in Mid Ulster (typically March through to October), the proposed Spring 2023 campaign will be the opportunity to promote the 'Visit Mid Ulster' website, through the associated social media channels and in so doing further consolidate the Unwinding Time brand.</p> <p>At its core, the campaign's visual and verbal identity will reflect the brand essence (Unwinding Time), as well as drawing on the narrative and tone of voice created at brand launch, reinforcing the brand values and using the 'brand anatomy' as set out in the brand guidelines.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal</p> <p>ATCM Membership is now due for renewal for the period January 2023 – January 2024 at a fee of £595 (excluding Vat). Invoice attached on Appendix 1. Membership provides a range of benefits to Council such as;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Platform for knowledge exchange in Town and City Centre Management - Access to written resources in Town and City Centre Management - Access to town centre events information and a variety of webinars

3.2	<p>Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes</p> <p>It is proposed to procure the services of a suitably qualified organisation(s) /consultant(s) to undertake an Independent Evaluation of all four business support programmes, to analyse their performance, validate data in terms of the achievement of targets and assess their overall performance at a cost in the region of £15,000 (inclusion expenses and excluding vat).</p>
3.3	<p>Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement</p> <p>Lough Neagh Rescue submitted a request (Appendix 2) to Mid Ulster District Council for an annual financial contribution of £12,000 towards Search and Rescue and Flood/Swift water activities at Lough Neagh and its tributaries for the 2022/23 financial year. The base at Ardboe continues to benefit all of the western and south western shores contiguous with Mid Ulster District Council area. If Members are minded to approve this annual financial request, it is recommended that the draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) on Appendix 3 (which is subject to final review by Council's legal team) is issued to Lough Neagh Rescue to cover the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.</p>
3.4	<p>Sperrins Partnership Agreement</p> <p>During the 2022/2023 financial year, Officers sought to better align the governance arrangements with regard to the financial contributions Council makes from its Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes budget and sought to do so by way of Service Legal Agreements (SLAs) with partner/delivery organisations.</p> <p>In terms of Sperrins Partnership, earlier this financial year, the Development Committee agreed that Officers issue Sperrins Partnership with an SLA to reflect the activities to be delivered within the 2022/2023 financial year, through Council's financial contribution of £22,000. This new SLA was issued with the view it would supercede the former Sperrins Partnership Agreement which Council entered into in 2020 (Appendix 4). After a series of discussions and meetings with the Lead Council for Sperrins Partnership (ie Derry & Strabane Council), they have asked Mid Ulster District Council to retract our SLA and continue with the original Partnership Agreement until it completes in 2023.</p> <p>In order to reach a consensus, it is recommended that Mid Ulster Council recalls its Sperrins Partnership SLA issued to Derry & Strabane Council and continues with the original Sperrins Partnership Agreement until it expires in 2023, after which there will be an opportunity to input into a fresh Agreement.</p>

3.5	<p>Tourism Spring Campaign</p> <p>Tourism NI opened a funding call to their Co-operative Partnership Marketing Fund, designed to support NI's Tourism Industry through recovery by amplifying and extending the reach of the NI "Embrace a Giant Spirit" Campaign.</p> <p>This funding call provided short notice for Council to make an application, however, Officers acted quickly to prepare and submit a marketing bid to the Fund requesting financial support of £20k from Tourism NI to assist in the financial delivery of a Mid Ulster Spring Tourism Marketing Campaign, with up to £7,000 match funding to be provided from Council's tourism budget.</p> <p>Council received notification on 24 January 2023 from Tourism NI that our funding bid was successful and received a Service Level Agreement to set out the terms and conditions of the contract which had to be signed and returned by 31 January 2023, to accept the offer of funding.</p> <p>The Tourism Spring Campaign will position Mid Ulster as an ideal staycation destination for NI domestic markets and a key gateway destination for ROI markets, focusing on Mid Ulster's unique offering of open spaces and outdoor recreation sites which provide a chance to escape and get away from it all.</p> <p>As well as profiling walking and other outdoor recreation experiences, the key focus of the campaign will be newly developed outdoor product which epitomises the Unwinding Time brand and which has not yet been profiled extensively.</p> <p>This product includes the OM Solar Walk, which has enhanced the attractiveness of OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory as a truly unique experience in the natural landscape, and the re-imagining of Ballyronan Marina with the unique accommodation option provided by the on-water glamping pods.</p> <p>Complementing these core visitor experiences will be the offerings from the local tourism industry as a whole, with the campaign featuring accommodation, food and drink which enhance and add value to any visit to Mid Ulster.</p> <p>Campaign content to run from mid-March until end March 2023 as detailed on Appendix 5.</p> <p>Retrospective approval is sought for the Chief Executive to sign and return Tourism NI's offer of funding totalling £20,000 from the Co-operative Partnership Marketing Fund (Appendix 6) in order to meet the timeframe to return the Service Level Agreement by 31 January 2023.</p> <p>Total project cost £27K (£20k from Tourism NI and up to £7K from Council's tourism budget).</p>
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4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial:
4.1.1	Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal Provision is made within the economic development budget to renew membership with ATCM for a fee of £595 (excl. Vat) for the period January 2023 to January 2024.
4.1.2	Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes It is estimated that the Independent Evaluation will cost in the region of £15,000 (including expenses and excluding vat) and this has been provided for within the Economic Development budget for 2023/24.
4.1.3	Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement Provision has been made in the 2022/23 Tourism Development budget for a financial contribution to Lough Neagh Rescue of £12,000.
4.1.4	Sperrins Partnership Agreement The Sperrins Partnership Project is presently funded by 4 Councils at a total annual cost of £88,000. This contribution includes salary and programming costs. Provision made within the tourism budget for £22,000 within 2022/2023.
4.1.5	Tourism Spring Campaign 2023 £20,000 from Tourism NI through an SLA and up to £7,000 from existing Tourism budget.
4.2	Human:
4.2.1	Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal Membership provides valuable resources for Town Centre Managers to use.
4.2.2	Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes Officers' time will be required to manage and work with the successful organisation.
4.2.3	Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Draft Service Level Agreement Officers' time.
4.2.4	Sperrins Partnership Agreement Officers' time.
4.2.5	Tourism Spring Campaign 2023 Officer time to manage the project.
4.3	Risk Management: Projects will be managed in line with current governance arrangements.

4.4	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	<p>Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal Approve Council renew its ATCM membership (January 2023 – January 2024) at a cost of £595 (excluding Vat).</p>
5.2	<p>Independent Evaluation of Council's Business Support Programmes</p> <p>5.2.1 Approve officers proceed to seek competitive quotations to appoint a suitably qualified organisation/consultant to undertake an Independent Evaluation of Council's suite of Business Support Programmes, with costs to be funded from the 2023/24 economic development budget in the region of £15,000 (excl Vat).</p> <p>5.2.2 Approve that the Chief Executive be awarded delegated authority to appoint the successful organisation/consultant following the quotation exercise to allow work to commence as soon as possible.</p>
5.3	<p>Lough Neagh Rescue (2022-2023) – Service Level Agreement</p> <p>5.3.1 Approve annual contribution of £12,000 to Lough Neagh Rescue from Council's 2022/2023 tourism budget;</p> <p>5.3.2 Approve Mid Ulster District Council's Service Level Agreement with Lough Neagh Rescue (LNR) on Appendix 3, for the 2022-2023 financial year (subject to final review of SLA by Legal Services) and release the full payment to LNR once the Agreement has been signed and returned and Council provided with all the requisite documentation.</p>
5.4	<p>Sperrins Partnership Agreement</p> <p>Approval to retract Mid Ulster Council's 2022/2023 Service Level Agreement for £22,000, issued earlier this year to Derry & Strabane Council (the Lead Council for Sperrins Partnership) and revert to make payments against the original Partnership Agreement dated 2020, until it expires in 2023, after which a new Agreement can be developed. This change has no material impact upon the</p>

	<p>delivery of the Sperrins Partnership Action Plan, but rather sought to align the governance arrangements with partners/organisations, funded from Council's economic development, tourism and strategic programmes service plan.</p>
5.5	<p>Tourism Spring Campaign 2023</p> <p>Retrospectively approve the Tourism Spring Marketing Campaign and for the Chief Executive to sign and return Tourism NI's offer of funding totalling £20,000 for the Co-operative Partnership Marketing Fund, in order to meet the timeframe to return the Service Level Agreement by 31 January 2023. Also retrospectively approve provision of up to £7,000 match funding from Council's Tourism budget.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – ATCM - Membership Renewal Invoice</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Annual Funding Request from Lough Neagh Rescue</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Lough Neagh Rescue Service Level Agreement (April 2022 – March 2023)</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Sperrins Partnership Agreement (Original Version 2020)</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Spring 2023 Tourism Marketing Campaign Content</p> <p>Appendix 6 – Tourism NI Service Level Agreement</p>