

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ICBAN – Peace Plus - DS3 Smart Towns and Villages Area 2.4 2. Cookstown Town Centre Forum – AGM Minutes 15.09.21 & Meeting Minutes 18.5.22 3. Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 09.10.2023 4. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF): Mid Ulster Successful Businesses Letters of Offer
Date of Meeting	14 March 2024
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
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>ICBAN – Peace Plus - DS3 Smart Towns and Villages (Investment Area 2.4)</p> <p>Under the Peace Plus Programme, SEUPB have opened a call under measure 2.4 Smart Towns and Villages. As a member of ICBAN (Irish Central Border Area Network), MUDC are developing a funding applicant with the other partner Councils that will be submitted under this investment call. The closing date for applicants under this call is 5pm on the 14th March 2024.</p>
2.2	<p>Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes – AGM Minutes 15.09.21 & Meeting Minutes 18.5.22</p> <p>Cookstown Town Centre Forum was established in 2002 to develop a partnership approach for the development and delivery of key town centre initiatives. The Forum meets at regular intervals throughout the year.</p>

<p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p>	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 09.10.23</p> <p>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> <p>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)</p> <p>In September 2022, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council’s participation in the DTFF. To date, this has been the only cross-deal bid to be awarded funding (£6 million) under the first tranche. The Fund is managed on a cross council basis utilising governance structures created through the existing Full Fibre NI Consortium, led by Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, and its operation will be managed through cross council governance structures. Local Council Economic Development Teams have a key supporting role to animate and promote the DTFF, assess funding applications etc. The DTFF aims to address the financial barrier that micro and small businesses face when seeking to digitally transform by providing a capital grant to support investment in the types of capital equipment considered critical to their strategic digital transformation ambitions (e.g. hardware, software, bespoke system development).</p> <p>The value of the fund is £7.5m (£6m from the Complementary Fund; £1.1m DAERA and £450,000 from Derry City and Strabane District Council (they had secured funding from NI Executive for an Inclusive Futures Fund, so were excluded from applying to the Complementary Fund. Given their interest in participating, the Council secured an additional £450,000 to contribute to DTFF.</p> <p>It offers a unique intervention rate of 70% (or up to £20,000) of total eligible project costs towards the purchase of capital equipment aligned to advanced digital technologies (to include: smart technologies (Internet of Things), process automation, big data and analytics, immersive technologies, artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies).</p> <p>There will be up to 7 funding calls across the 2-year delivery period. Pre-Application workshops are held in each council area to help stimulate demand. There are places for 600 businesses to be funded (depending on level of demand available) with 60 of these allocated to Mid Ulster.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>ICBAN – Peace Plus - DS3 Smart Towns and Villages Investment Area 2.4</p> <p>ICBAN officers are currently preparing a funding bid in association with partner Councils, Southern Regional College, Western Development Commission, University of Ulster and International Centre for Local & Regional Development, under Investment Area 2.4: Smart Towns and Villages. Lorraine McCourt has been appointed by ICBAN to assist with the development and submission of the application.</p>

The three work packages which are currently being worked up for inclusion in the application are:-

- WP1 – Learning Skills & Mentoring Programme for SMEs and community/voluntary sector.
- WP2 – Interventions Two Mobile Digital Hubs.
- WP3 – Smart Strategies

Workshops and regular meetings are taking place between all partners to finalise the application before submission by the closing date of Thursday 14 March 2024.

Following a meeting held between ICBAN and council members represented on the ICBAN board, MUDC Council Officers have requested that consideration is given for the inclusion to conduct a feasibility study on community banking as part of the application being submitted.

In addition, a consultation response on behalf of Council was submitted to the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to their *Access to Cash* consultation. Councils' consultation response was contained within the Council papers for February 2024.

3.2 Cookstown Town Centre Forum - AGM Minutes 15.09.21 & Meeting Minutes 18.05.22

To note minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum AGM held on 15 September 2021 (**Appendix 1**).

To note the minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum meeting held on 18 May 2022 (**Appendix 2**).

3.3 Coalisland Town Centre Forum – Meeting Minutes 09.10.23

To present the minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum meeting held on 9 October 2023 (**Appendix 3**).

3.4 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)

The DTFF was formally launched with Call 1 opening in November 2023, with a Business Workshop being held in the Burnavon Theatre on 29 November 2023.

- 135 Expressions of Interest were received from the 11 Council areas.
- 108 applicants were deemed eligible to submit a full application.
- 63 applications were submitted along with relevant supporting documentation and a fully completed application form by 12 Jan 2024.
- Assessment of the 63 applications took place 22-31 January with all Councils and Queen's University through individual scoring, a consensus panel and overview review by DTFF/Invest NI.

Call 1 - Applications Outcome: -

Council area	Total	Fail	Pass
Ards & North Down	5	2	3
Antrim and N'abbey	5	2	3
Armagh, B'bridge, C'avon	2	0	2
Belfast	14	2	12
Causeway Coast & Glens	3	1	2
Derry City and Strabane	3	3	0
Fermanagh and Omagh	5	1	4
Lisburn and Castlereagh	3	1	1
Mid and East Antrim	1	0	1
Mid Ulster	14	2	12
Newry Mourne and Down	8	3	5
Total	63	18	45

The next call for Applications is anticipated to open in April 2024. Council officers are continuing to promote DTFF and engage with interested local businesses to progress applications to maximise uptake from the region.

4.0 Other Considerations**4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**

Financial:

ICBAN – Peace Plus - DS3 Smart Towns and Villages - Funding contribution of up to £1,500 (sterling) towards costs associated with employment of a consultant to coordinate a major funding bid (circ. €3.3 million) on behalf of the ICBAN region.

Each Council will be requested by NM&D Council to release payments to each of the businesses following which they will then be reimbursed by NM&D.

Human:

Officer time in checking grant documentation and managing payments.

Risk Management:

NM&D are responsible for claims monitoring and verification. Once they have confirmed payment approval, they advise each Council to release the relevant amount.

4.2 Screening & Impact Assessments

Equality & Good Relations Implications:

	<p>An EQIA was undertaken by NMDDC and Invest NI. The DTFF is a competitive process whereby eligible businesses are invited to apply through open calls.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was undertaken by NMDDC and Invest NI. The nature of the proposed fund is that it will attract all eligible businesses from across NI on a competitive basis. There is no adverse impact anticipated on any community/urban or rural section of the community.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	<p>It is recommended that Members;</p>
5.1	<p>ICBAN – Peace Plus - DS3 Smart Towns and Villages</p> <p>Note update.</p>
5.2	<p>Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes – AGM Minutes 15.09.21 & Meeting Minutes 18.05.22</p> <p>Note minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum AGM held 15.09.21 and meeting 18.05.22.</p>
5.3	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes – 09.10.23</p> <p>Note Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum meeting held 09.10.23.</p>
5.4	<p>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)</p> <p>Note the outcome of the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund Call 1.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1 - Minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum AGM – 15.09.21</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum Meeting – 18.05.22</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum Meeting – 09.10.23</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF): Letters of Offer issued to Successful Businesses in Mid Ulster</p>