

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Town Centre Business Spruce Up Scheme 2. ATCM Membership 3. NABMA Membership 4. Lough Neagh Rescue - Service Level Agreement (2024/2025) 5. Labour Market Partnership (LMPs): Multiply Funding Programme Bid 6. Sperrins Partnership Funding (October 2023 – March 2024)
Date of Meeting	14 March 2024
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	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>Town Business Spruce Up Scheme</p> <p>Council approval was granted in November 2023, to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress Spruce Up Scheme focusing on the four largest towns with a population over 5,000 in Mid Ulster (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland) and more specifically focusing upon the <i>'town centre boundaries'</i> in each town as defined within the respective Area Plans, in order to comply with Department for Communities requirements. • Chief Executive granted delegated authority to sign and return a Letter of Offer to the Department for Communities. • Undertake a procurement process to appoint an Independent Chartered Architect, at a cost of up to £30,000 to score, verify the applicants and oversee management of the scheme.

2.2 Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal

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.

2.3 National Association of British Market Authorities – Membership

The National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) is a leading retail and wholesome markets organisation in the UK. For 100 years it has promoted markets on a national stage and provides a wide portfolio of services for its members.

2.4 Lough Neagh Rescue – Service Level Agreement (2024-2025)

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.

2.5 Labour Market Partnership (LMPs): NI Multiply Programme Bid

In October 2021, the UK Government announced ‘Multiply’, a new programme to improve the functional numeracy skills of adults. ‘Multiply’ is a ringfenced element of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is part of government’s Levelling Up agenda which supports high quality skills training and employment.

It is recognised that people who improve their numeracy skills are more likely to be in employment, have higher wages and better wellbeing. Following the announcement, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), undertook a brief scoping exercise locally, but no allocation was made from the UKSPF to Northern Ireland based providers.

During the summer of 2023, DLUHC approached the Department for the Economy (DfE) with a request to lead on developing and managing a portfolio of interventions, as part of the “Multiply” programme, with the following conditions:

- all provision to be completed by March 2025;
- must be numeracy, or numeracy related training;
- only open to adults, over 18 years old; and
- up to level 2 or equivalent, with no qualification outcome required.
- funding for the numeracy element of larger co-funded schemes; and
- funding utilised for existing provision, with an element of re-badging.

To progress the Multiply programme, DfE engaged with the Department of Education and Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, along with exploring what could be put in place with our FE colleges and universities.

Given the tight timescales to design and deliver any interventions, DfE welcomed any opportunities to work in partnership with local government and, as such, have identified LMPs as an ideal vehicle through which we may be able to deliver Multiply in Northern Ireland.

DfE joined an LMP Co-Design meeting on 28th June 2023 to give a brief overview and to request that LMPs deliver approximately £4m of the £11.8m funding allocated to the project over a 18 month period, with Universities and Colleges delivering the remaining £7.8m. A Letter of Offer to be issued by DfE, however this will be administered via DfC (mechanisms to be agreed).

DLUHC specifically mentioned the following as areas they would be interested in supporting:

- additional relevant maths modules embedded into other vocational courses;
- innovative programmes delivered together with employers – including courses designed to cover specific numeracy skills required in the workplace;
- new intensive and flexible courses targeted at people without Level 2 maths in Northern Ireland, leading to an equivalent qualification; and
- courses aimed at people who can't apply for certain jobs because of lack of numeracy skills or to encourage people to upskill in order to access a certain job.

Following a consultation on the types of initiatives which LMPs could potentially deliver, a collective approach was submitted in principle from all 11 Councils with the caveat that it will be dependent on each LMP Board and Council approval, as well as budget allocation for each Council area.

In November 2023, the UK government paused the Multiply funding bid for Northern Ireland. However, on 3 March 2024, DfE advised LMPs that DLUHC have now approved the NI bid, which is £5.9m for delivery between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025 through colleges, universities and LMPs.

2.6 Sperrins Partnership Funding (October 2023 – March 2024)

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. 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).

The Sperrins Partnership Project is a joint collaboration between 4 councils; Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District

	<p>Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council, who back in 2018 committed to equal financial contribution towards its delivery and have also funded the Sperrins Future Search initiative.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Town Business Spruce Up Scheme</p> <p>An application was submitted to Department of Communities (DfC), up to the value of £200,000, as detailed at the November 2023 Development Committee. The Scheme focuses on the four largest towns in Mid Ulster (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland) each with a population of 5,000+ people. A condition of Department for Communities funding is that the eligible area within each of the four towns must be focused specifically within the <i>'town centre boundaries'</i> as defined within the respective Area Plans. The application was successful, and a Letter of Offer has been duly signed and returned to DfC.</p> <p>The procurement process has been completed to appoint a Chartered Architect to oversee the management of the scheme, with the appointment of Knox Clayton Ltd.</p> <p>The Town Business Spruce Up Scheme, opened for applications Monday 19 February 2024 and closed for applications Friday 8 March 2024 @ 4pm. Guidance Notes and Application Forms were available to download from Mid Ulster District Council website and also upon request from Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Programmes Department.</p> <p>Details of the scheme were displayed on Mid Ulster District Council website and social media channels; local press and letter drop in each of the four town centres to eligible businesses. The Town Business Spruce Up Scheme offers discretionary grants of up to 80% eligible costs, capped at £4,000 per property for external and/or internal improvements.</p> <p>Four Drop-In Business Clinics were delivered during the month of February 2024. These included one half day workshop in each of the four towns across the district.</p> <p>The Drop-In Business Clinics provided the opportunity for potential applicants to gain advice and guidance from the Architect (Knox & Clayton Chartered Architects) and deal with queries regarding the completion of the application form.</p> <p>Knox & Clayton Chartered Architects have been appointed to assist in the delivery of the Town Business Spruce Up Scheme, including assessment of Applications, management and monitoring of the successful projects.</p> <p>Following the Scheme's closing date (Friday 8 March 2024 at 4pm), applications will be eligibility checked. Applications which meet the requirements of the eligibility check will proceed to assessment.</p> <p>Applications which proceed to assessment must achieve a minimum threshold</p>

of 40% to be eligible for grant aid. On completion of the assessment of applications, scores will be ranked highest to lowest, with grant aid awarded until £200,000 is exhausted. Those who score above 40% and do not get funded under this Letter of Offer will be held on a reserve list. It is proposed an application will be made to Department for Communities to seek further funding in the financial year 2024-2025 to meet demand.

Successful applicants will receive a Letter of Offer by 29 March 2024 aligning to Department for Communities funding deadline.

3.2

Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal

ATCM Membership is now due for renewal for the period January 2024 – January 2025 at a fee of £620 (excluding Vat). Invoice attached on **Appendix 1**.

Membership provides a range of benefits to Council such as;

- 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

3.3

National Association of British Market Authorities – Membership

The membership cost of the National Association of British Market Authorities for a 12 month period (April 2024 – March 2025) is £768 (excluding VAT) as per quotation enclosed on **Appendix 2**).

Membership to NABMA would provide a range of benefits including:

- Exclusive website content with template documents, research and access to the NABMA library
- Virtual networking on Basecamp with over 250 markets professionals across the UK
- Social media benefits with dedicated channels promoting markets
- Access to market mentors to give you help and support
- National representation to government and high street leaders
- Professional development opportunities and training
- Legal advice on your market issues
- Online support sessions to help with your market issues
- Conferences and events
- Regular newsletters and updates
- Benchmarking and survey information
- Being part of NABMA campaigns such as Love Your Local Market and Great British Market Awards
- Subsidised Professional Training for the Level 4 Markets Diploma (DMA)

Membership of NABMA, will provide an opportunity to engage with the professional body and avail of expertise advice.

3.4 Lough Neagh Rescue – Service Level Agreement (2024-2025)

Lough Neagh Rescue has submitted a request (**Appendix 3**) 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 2024/2025 financial year.

By way of update, they have also provided a copy of their Progress Report for the 2023/2024 financial year (**Appendix 4**).

Lough Neagh Rescue's 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 the annual financial request of £12,000, it is recommended that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) on **Appendix 5** is issued to Lough Neagh Rescue to cover the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

3.5 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP): Multiply Funding

The 'Multiply' Programme is a government-funded programme to help adults to improve their numeracy skills and boost their number confidence. The government wants to help people unlock new job opportunities or progress in work, get higher wages, improve their wellbeing, and take the next step to higher levels of training. It is also recognised that boosting numeracy abilities can also help with everyday tasks like bills and budgeting or helping children with homework. Improved numeracy also matters to businesses by helping boost productivity and improve employee retention.

In November 2023, the UK government paused the Multiply funding bid for Northern Ireland. However, on 3 March 2024, DfE advised all LMPs that DLUHC have now approved the NI bid, which is £5.9m for delivery between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025 through colleges, universities and LMPs.

The NI bid has 6 focused delivery areas, with the aim to provide a mixture of qualifications and interventions:-

- Maths for speakers of other languages
- Numeracy for Mature learners
- Industry led numeracy interventions
- Numeracy bootcamps
- Adult/child numeracy collaboration
- Previous offenders/those in prison system

The Multiply Programme is considered to hold great promise in advancing critical maths skills and knowledge across various sectors of our society and a collaborative approach is essential to maximise the impact of these interventions and to avoid any unnecessary overlap or duplication of efforts.

Indicative Multiply Budget Allocation (Revenue) 2024-25

As part of the overall funding bid, it is anticipated that each Council will be allocated between £175k and £200k which covers the cost of a Multiply Officer/Numeracy Champion over this one-year period. A separate report on this matter will be brought to the Council's Policy & Resources Committee.

Following a workshop on 21 March 2023, decisions will be made as to the optimum provision for each of the 6 key delivery areas, and the role required from each of the partners. An Action Plan will be created for Northern Ireland and maintained by DfE, with local delivery agreed with each LMP. DfE have noted the tight timescales and recognise a simplified delivery approach is required to prioritise delivery. The types of initiatives/activity that Council/LMP will be expected to deliver are included in **Appendix 6**.

Mid Ulster LMP agreed at a board meeting on 14 September 2023 to participate in the delivery of the NI Multiply programme (subject to funding and Council approval) to ensure residents of the district benefit from the support and opportunities that would be available.

3.6 Sperrins Partnership Funding (October 2023 – March 2024)

As Members will be aware, Sperrins Partnership is funded by the four Councils at a total annual cost of c.£88,000 (£22,000 per Council, per annum). This contribution includes salary and programming costs.

Previous annual invoicing arrangements for Partner Council contributions to support the work of Sperrins Partnership related to the period October to October each year, to fall in line with staff employment dates.

However, upon receipt of a request from Sperrins Partnership, in October 2023, Council's Development Committee agreed to realign invoicing arrangements to tie in with financial years moving forward (ie, 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025).

Prior to the above arrangements commencing, on 7 March 2024, Sperrins Partnership issued correspondence to Partner Councils, stating that the last contributions sought from Councils was for the period October 2022 – October 2023 and respectively requested that Partner Councils contribute funding for the six month gap period, ie, October 2023 – March 2024, at a reduced rate of £2,500 (instead of £11,000).

4.0 Other Considerations

4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

Financial:

4.1.1 Town Business Spruce Up Scheme

Provision made within economic development budget for a Chartered Architect - £23,481, as councils' contribution to the scheme as per letter of offer. Department of Communities capital funding secured to value of £200,000 (project grant aid).

4.1.2 Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal

Provision is made within the economic development budget to renew membership with the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) for a fee of £620 (excl. Vat) for the period January 2024 to January 2025.

4.1.3 National Association of British Market Authorities – Membership

Provision is made within the economic development budget for membership to the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) for a fee of £768 (excl. Vat) for 2024/25 financial year.

4.1.4 Lough Neagh Rescue – Service Level Agreement (2024-2025)

Provision has been made for an annual financial contribution towards Lough Neagh Rescue of £12,000 from Council's Tourism budget.

4.1.5 Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs): NI Multiply Programme Bid

The new 'Multiply' project is fully funded by DLUHC and administered via DfC and DfE. DfE have also confirmed that for each delivery partner, there would be dedicated costs to support the salary of a Multiply Officer over this one year period.

4.1.6 Sperrins Partnership Funding (October 2023 – March 2024)

This funding is vital to ensure that Sperrins Partnership Project can deliver on its vision as outlined at the Sperrins Future Search Conference, subject to matching agreement from all partner councils. Recommended financial contribution of £2,500 ringfenced within the Council's Tourism Budget.

Human:

Officer time

Risk Management:

4.1.1 Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs): Multiply Funding

The risk level is mitigated as Multiply programme activity will be 100% externally funded and includes the employment of a Multiply Officer via a contract post.

4.2 Screening & Impact Assessments

Town Business Spruce Up Scheme
Equality Screening & Rural Needs Completed

	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	<p>Town Business Spruce Up Scheme</p> <p>Approve that Council’s Chief Executive be granted delegated authority to approve and issue Letters of Offers to successful applicants from the Town Business Spruce Up Scheme to meet Department for Communities funding timelines.</p>
5.2	<p>Association of Town Centre Management - Membership Renewal</p> <p>Approve Council renew its annual ATCM membership (January 2024 – January 2025) at a cost of £620 (excluding Vat).</p>
5.3	<p>National Association of British Market Authorities – Membership</p> <p>Approve Council to become a member of the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) for the financial year 2024/2025 at a cost of £768 (excluding Vat).</p>
5.4	<p>Lough Neagh Rescue – Service Level Agreement (2024-2025)</p> <p>(i) Note Lough Neagh Rescue’s 2023/2024 Progress Report outlining actions completed against their SLA Targets.</p> <p>(ii) Approve Mid Ulster District Council’s Service Level Agreement with Lough Neagh Rescue for the year 2024/2025</p> <p>(iii) Approve the release of £12,000 to Lough Neagh Rescue from Council’s Tourism budget (2024/2025) subject to Council being provided with the requisite documentation as detailed in the Service Level Agreement.</p>
5.5	<p>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMPs): NI Multiply Programme Bid</p> <p>5.5.1 Subject to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) formally confirming the successful bid;</p> <p>(i) Approve Council’s participation in the NI Multiply Programme.</p>

<p>5.6</p>	<p>(ii) Approve Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) as the delivery vehicle for the Multiply Programme in Mid Ulster.</p> <p>(iii) Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive to;</p> <p>a) Sign and return the letter of offer from the Department for the Economy when it is received. It is expected that the letter of offer will provide funding in the region of £350-£400k to cover the period 1 April 2024 to March 2025. The types of initiatives/activity that Council are expected to deliver are included in Appendix 6. A copy of the letter of offer and programme of activity will be submitted to the Committee when available.</p> <p>b) Procure suitable organisations to deliver the agreed Programme of activity in adherence with Council policy and procedures to enable the Multiply Programme to commence as swiftly as possible.</p> <p>Sperrins Partnership Funding (October 2023 – March 2024)</p> <p>Approve financial contribution of £2,500 to Sperrins Partnership, for the period 1 October 2023 until 31 March 2024.</p>
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - ATCM Membership Renewal Invoice 2024/2025</p> <p>Appendix 2 - NABMA Quotation for membership to the National Association of British Market Authorities.</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Lough Neagh Rescue - Request for Funding 2024/2025</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Lough Neagh Rescue Progress Report 2023/2024</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Lough Neagh Rescue - Service Level Agreement (April 2024 - March 2025)</p> <p>Appendix 6 – Outline of LMP ‘Multiply Programme Initiatives’</p>