Report on	Community Development
Date of Meeting	13th May 2021
Reporting Officer	Claire Linney, Head of Community Development
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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	Peace Plus Response – to agree the response to Peace Plus.
1.2	Community Development – to note the community development update.
2.0	Background
2.1	Peace Plus Response – SEUPB has issued a consultation document on the future Peace Plus Programme and is seeking comments on this.
2.2	Community Development – to note the community development update. Community Development includes the following areas: Community Support, Good Relations, PCSP, Connecting Pomeroy and facilitation of Community Planning.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Peace Plus Response – Please see attached the Peace Plus consultation and proposed Council response at Appendix 1.
3.2	Community Development Community Support Community grants close now on the 12th May 2021 with recommendations still to June Committee. The grants were extended to allow groups to plan ahead for a range of projects taking account of direct delivery and social distancing. Emergency Support Funding Council is engaging with DFC regarding future emergency funding for Mid Ulster.

	Good Relations Good Relations is commencing the delivery of the new plan, pending final agreement by the NI Executive Office. Peace IV Local Action Plan – The request for the extension to the programme and the Towns Shared Space project (awnings and equipment to support outdoor events) is still with SEUPB for decision. An update on the STEP programme, with agreement from SEUPB is to deliver a communications project led by the partner, and a research project to support future peace delivery led by Council. The PCSP team has commenced delivery of their new plan under DOJ and NIPB.
4.0	**Other Considerations**
4.1	**Financial & Human Resources Implications** None **Professional Support** None
4.2	**Equality and Good Relations Implications** None
4.3	**Risk Management Implications** None
5.0	**Recommendation(s)**
5.1	To agree the response to Peace Plus.
5.2	To note the community development update.
6.0	**Documents Attached & References**
6.1	Appendix 1 Peace Plus delivery and Peace Plus response.

April 2021

INTRODUCTION
Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) welcomes this opportunity to respond to SEUPB's consultation exercise with respect to the plans for the new Peace Plus Programme.

The design and development of the new PEACE PLUS Programme provides what may be the last opportunity to learn from previous programmes and develop an improved programme that will produce real and sustained economic growth to underpin a peaceful society post Brexit.

Theme 1 – Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities

1.1 Co-designed local community Peace Action Plans

Welcome the local community Peace Action Plans looking at skills development, youth development, educational linkages, shared space, regeneration and health and wellbeing. However, it is important that poverty is also included within this as there would be a correlation between poverty and being able to fully participate in the opportunities of a peaceful society. Projects should co align with the Mid Ulster Community Plan.

The regional programmes need to support our Programme for Government priorities to grow and develop the region to allow for people to have opportunities from peace. These should be departmental priorities at a regional level that impact across all areas of Northern Ireland. At a sub regional level these need to be in line with major priorities such as the growth deal for the sub regions and key priorities within community planning. Similar to other programmes, regional delivery needs to link to local and ensure no duplication of target audiences to maximize the peace funding.

1.2 Empowering Communities

It is unclear as to how these elements are different from the opportunities which are intended/can be delivered via the Local Peace Action Plans (1.1) and Building Positive Relations (1.3) and how the funded activities will ensure complementarity and not duplication.

Community–based, localised solutions and bespoke interventions are required to respond to the current and emerging needs of vulnerable cohorts and communities. However, the provision of a small grants programme, due to the smaller scale and localised nature of the activity, is potentially best determined at local level based on identification of needs and opportunities.

Clarity is needed on the proposed implementation mechanism which will ensure ease and timely access to the proposed funds. Scrutiny of funding applications would be best undertaken by a more locally based implementation body, which understands the local environment best, than by a centralised authority.

In comparison the development of institutional capacity and anti-sectarian activities may best be achieved through regional level activity which involves collaborative action by a number of stakeholders. This may therefore sit outside the scope of an individual peace action plan and is appropriate to sit in a separate regionally based funding strand – perhaps within Building Positive Relations.

1.3 Building Positive Relations

There needs to be a greater flexible approach to outcome towards a shared society and peace rather than every action having to be specific to cross community engagement. For example, undertaking skills development of people will encourage greater opportunities for economic growth and then for engagement in mixed workplace environment, rather than the skills development being about counting numbers of cross community participants. These should be linked to the strategic priorities within community plans.

It is noted that the budget for this theme has increased from €16.4m in Peace IV to the proposed €30m. There is an increased need for social inclusion following the pandemic and a focus on wellbeing. Funding which promotes social inclusion regardless of background will therefore assist in meeting this need and continue to support the development of a peaceful and just society where everyone can live in safety and in the absence of prejudice.

Additional clarity on how this activity strand is distinct from the Empowering Communities strand (1.2) would be beneficial in ensuring complementarity of funded initiatives and clarity for potential applicants.

1.4 Re-imaging Communities

Significant issues still exist in relation to the segregation of communities and the prevalence of contested spaces. In many cases this is not restricted to visible manifestations of contested space (such as peace walls), but also includes many areas within the region where patterns of segregation are reinforced by community infrastructure which accommodates segregation and prolongs community division. The fear of using unfamiliar spaces can deter people from using accessible facilities and spaces and thereby impede community cohesion.

The funding allocated to reimaging communities is a priority, however the scale of funding proposed at €60 million may not be sufficient to achieve the impact needed.
Theme 2 – Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation

The Council, in partnership with Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon and Omagh & Fermanagh Councils are developing a Growth Deal bid. Development of a Mid-South West (MSW) Growth Deal that will 'supercharge' the growth of our economy and ensure inclusive prosperity for the Mid-South West region. Any work by Peace Plus

on Economic Regeneration and Transformation should be done so in partnership with the MSW Growth Deal to ensure resources and benefits are maximised.

Investment programmes for research, green economy, economic growth etc. and need to have greater outreach to rural areas. This investment should be aligned to programme for government priorities to drive the regional forward, and to match fund key investments such as the MSW Growth Deal.

2.1 SME development and transition

The Mid Ulster region straddles the border and is a highly entrepreneurial, private sector led economy and the Council welcomes the focus of this particular policy objective. Despite the area's high concentration of SMEs and above average concentration of activity in advanced manufacturing, there is a need to foster higher levels of innovation, R&D and enabling advanced technologies e.g. AR and VR.

Assistance in the form of business support mechanisms such as training and mentoring programmes at a local level to help SMEs grow and develop is required, as well as building the capacity of others to take the first step towards entrepreneurship. Sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, agri-food, construction, retail, hospitality and ICT contribute significantly to the economy of Mid Ulster. Going forward therefore, it is critical that a broad range of SME's from these sectors receive support to consider ways of becoming more innovative and export orientated, thus driving growth and productivity. The Council believes that a key component of driving economic development and growth is the provision of assistance for capital programmes to acquire and develop modern business support infrastructure (Business Parks, Innovation Centres, and Digital Tech Hubs).

Investment is required to reinvigorate the tourism sector which has been significantly impacted by pandemic restrictions. This sector requires not only innovation funding, but also support in ensuring visibility on a national and international stage and ensuring economic sustainability. Funding which enables clustering of tourism business and increased linkages around natural and cultural heritage tourism offerings would assist, as would infrastructure investment

The support and further development of the SME sector will address issues of economic inequality and enable sustainable economic and social development within the Border region, through increased opportunities for people to obtain employment, post Brexit.

2.2 Innovation Challenge Fund

The engineering sector is of profound importance to Mid Ulster's economy – especially in key specialisms such as the manufacture of mining and quarrying machinery, production of general and special purpose machinery etc., which have linkages and supply chain associations with the construction and food & agri-food sectors. For instance, 40% of world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is made in Mid Ulster. However, the continued growth and success of the engineering sector in the Mid Ulster area cannot be taken for granted. The sector faces challenges going forward including Brexit, technological disruption, skills shortages, access to talent and planning for Industry. The MSW Growth Deal aims to bring forward an Engineering Centre of Excellence within the district, dedicated to the pursuit of innovation in the

engineering sector and based upon the UK Catapult model. The MSW Growth would welcome support from the Peace Plus programme to this.

Given the need to upskill our young people and to increase regional STEM competitiveness, STEM based activities for young people should not be limited to designated TSN areas of deprivation. Many rural areas which are not economically competitive within this sector do not fall within the designation of disadvantaged/deprived, despite significant economic and social challenges. Young people across the region struggle to find job outside the traditional employment areas of retail, service and hospitality. Therefore, all should be eligible to benefit from additional STEM oriented training opportunities.

2.3 Programme areas skills development

Addressing the gap between skills demand and skills supply to create new jobs in the Mid Ulster region is a key priority. The Mid-Ulster sub region is home to over 8,500 small businesses, which is the second largest concentration of small businesses outside of the Belfast Metropolitan area. As the most entrepreneurial region in Northern Ireland, its business base provides the lifeblood of the local economy, whilst the skills and capabilities of its workforce are vital to its sustainability and growth. The availability of a high performing workforce, appropriately equipped to meet the current and future needs of the local industry's key sectors is therefore of vital importance. From education through to industrial strategy, the skills that are developed are important both for the local economy and for providing an opportunity for individuals. However, the Council is in a strong position to target skills needs of priority/emerging growth sectors through the industry-led Mid Ulster Skills Forum, which have been established to bring a collaborative dynamic between local businesses, colleges/universities and industry sectoral bodies. The Council believes that skills and labour shortages can be addressed to meet the European Pillar of Social Rights through providing opportunities for equal access to skills training, apprenticeships and leadership development. This will add value by improving labour mobility and having better gender opportunities, equal rights, social protection and working conditions.

2.4 Smart Towns and Villages

The Mid Ulster region is facing challenges with the declining health of our town centres and villages as a result of online shopping and out of town shopping. These urban and rural centres play an important role in bringing citizens together and providing a social and community focal point for people all ages. However, they need urgently to adapt, transform and find a new focus in order to survive. The PEACE PLUS Programme provides an opportunity to enable the development and re-imagination of these centres as multi-functional places with a diverse offer, which contribute to the economic performance of the area as a whole. Investment in developing 'shared spaces' will contribute to peace and reconciliation.

It is noteworthy that local government is requesting the transfer of "Regeneration" powers and budgets from the Department for Communities. Such powers would enable Councils to maximise the potential funding under this particular policy objective.

Mid Ulster has the second worst broadband coverage in NI and therefore, the Council would support broadband enhancement across the region – with an emphasis on fibre and addressing key deficits in high speed broadband provision across the border region ensuring that existing limitations in provision do not become barriers for future provision. The increased use of remote working has emphasised the lack of broadband connectivity in rural areas and placed already disadvantaged communities. Funding is needed to support fibre broadband connectivity to public buildings, digital hubs, co-working spaces.

The potential also exists for 'innovation projects / hotspots' in selected areas with higher capacity (e.g. 5G networking) which have the potential to bring higher connectivity benefits to a larger critical mass of economic activity. These hotspots will help make locations 'technology ready testbeds' capable of attracting companies and related investment.

Theme 3 – Empowering and investing in our young people.

3.1 Shared Learning Together Education Programme

It is important under PEACE PLUS to consider the wider implications of people and society when engaging in peace building. Bringing people together has a role; however, a greater priority is social mobility through economic opportunity; through creating the environment and conditions to develop such opportunities.

The Council is of the view that the new Programme needs to give consideration to the overall outcome of what it is seeking to achieve and a more strategic direction is required. PEACE PLUS should concentrate on the strategic issues impacting on peace; including social mobility and poverty, which are impacted by education (including skills) to access economic opportunities. The wider environment to support people in education and long-term impact on change is also important including housing, environment etc. Delivery should be through a number of strategic organisations through co-design via community planning and focus investment on priorities and in particular education (education not just formal but education through skills development).

The new Programme should not seek to tinker at the edges of society in terms of addressing a peaceful society through small programmes, but focus on establishing a society where all people have the best opportunity in life through education (and skills) to access job opportunities alongside the creation of an environment where our services and spaces are shared and open to all (developing shared spaces and services).

It is recognised however, that young people need support now. Inclusive education provision within NI is most commonly achieved at early years and third level education. Therefore, priority should be placed on funding shared education activities for the primary and post- primary sectors.

3.2 Peace Plus Youth Programme

The Council is of the view that peace building activities for children and young people should be delivered through our schools and Education Authority (EA) Youth Division, to maximise young people's participation. There are existing projects such as the Signature project and EA Youth cross community leadership programme, where PEACE PLUS could add real value. Delivery within school time is important to give as many children and young people as possible the opportunity to develop cross community friendships.

The restricted age profile of potential beneficiaries (14-24) is a significant concern, particularly when recent press reports highlighted that children as young as 12 were engaged in active displays of violence on our streets. The approach taken in the shared learning together programme of incorporating "sharing from the start" should be mirrored for this investment area, to avoid losing a generation of young people whose views become entrenched before intervention is possible. Activity also needs to be allowed within the school day to maximise participation.

3.3 Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Recent reports outline that NI has one of the world's highest prescription rates for anti-depressants and prescriptions. Ulster University identified in 2020 a survey of mental health in young people 12.6% of children and young people in NI experience common mood disorders such as anxiety and depression – 25% higher than other UK nations. This investment area is therefore of high priority and budgetary provision should be reflective of the actual need.

There are good examples delivered with schools, universities and the Trust such as the Mid Ulster Post Primary Schools Peace IV funded Schools for Hope programme to engage all post primary schools across the district in a focused programme to improve children and young people's resilience and mental health. The Schools for Hope model needs to be sustained and extended to primary schools. Any mental health initiatives need to be through agreement with the Trust/ EA and link to the Mental Health Strategy for the areas.

Q7   Theme 4 – Healthy and inclusive communities.

4.1 Collaborative Health and Social Care
The Covid pandemic has highlighted the need for integrated and collaborative mechanisms for delivering effective health care to the whole population regardless of land borders. The pandemic will however, also have resulted in many individuals being delayed in obtaining diagnostic care and/or health care treatments for ill health and a huge challenge will be to clear waiting lists and deliver services on both sides of the border. Ensuring cross-border collaboration in the development and delivery of care packages will be a benefit to both jurisdictions.

Cross-border funding has played a key role in advancing and promoting health cooperation between the jurisdictions. CAWT is a very good example of how funding has advanced this and created an excellent model of partnership working.

4.2 Rural regeneration and Social Inclusion

The pandemic has amplified the benefits of remote working and quality of life to be achieved within a rural environment. This creates an opportunity to focus support on key investments including enabling remote working through enhancing infrastructure and developing a network of remote working hubs, and rejuvenating rural towns and villages, including addressing dereliction. Cross border connections cannot be about bringing people together on programmes it is the larger strategic infrastructure that will create sustained contact and real engagement between areas and communities. Examples include: the Ulster Canal, road links, shared services, creating shared spaces at our border communities.

In learning from Peace IV it is important that the new PEACE PLUS Programme give consideration to key principles and outcomes and not setting restrictive targets regarding engagement and contact time. Whilst it is important to bring people and communities together, it is still recognised that there are times when communities are clearly demonstrating they are moving forward and particularly in relation to the development of shared space. For example if a community is prepared to develop shared space through removal of graffiti, emblems, bonfires and reimaging art pieces; these are key outcomes for peace without the need to have cross community contact hours.   Local delivery should concentrate on changing places and space for wider society.

4.3 Victims and Survivors

As referenced in the document.

Theme 5 – Supporting a Sustainable and Better Connected Future.

5.1 Biodiversity, Nature Recovery and Resilience
A Green Society is becoming increasingly important, and the focus and champions among young people is of great value to ensure our environment is not only sustained for our future but that it supports an equitable and quality life for all. The climate change agenda is important and there is a need for a coordinated approach to ensuring that everyone plays their part and contributes to protect our environment. We also must provide for economic sustainability and growth, as well as equitable quality of life for people so that they can afford the quality of lifestyle needed to support good health.

The focus of this policy objective should be inclusive of all opportunities for green innovation and target support to promote resource efficiency among SMEs. This would provide an opportunity for the private sector across Mid Ulster and the border region to make a positive impact on the environment.
Given the increased focus on biodiversity and the clear need to halt further decline, the current budget identified for this investment area has not significantly increased from Interreg VA. The actions detailed may be hindered by the indicative budget of only €15m.

5.2 Marine and Coastal Management
5.3 Water Quality and Catchment Management

5.4 Water Quality Improvement Programme

This investment area is supported. It is recognised that provision of good water quality is essential to both human health, and the health and vitality of our natural heritage ecosystems. The potential exists under this policy to improve water and waste treatment which is a major constraint on housing and on the development of serviced industrial land in Mid Ulster. This issue poses potential threats to the environment and delivery of the 'green agenda'. Also more sustainable solutions such as SUDs needs to be explored, to offset rainwater capture to alleviate pressure on the sewerage system re capacity. Council would therefore support greater consideration and investment in our sewer network and new eco-friendly development.

5.5 Geothermal Energy Demonstration Programme

The investment in renewables should be broadened across the spectrums to encourage hydro-power, tidal energy, passive heating and latest innovation in solar power. There is a need for enhanced support for the development of renewal/alternative energy sources drawing on the assets of the region. For example, Mid Ulster with its natural landscape has the potential to be sustainable through utilising its natural assets. Investigating and harnessing the potential of hydro-electric power as an alternative source of energy is one which should be strongly considered for inclusion within this policy objective.

The region needs significant investment in energy efficiency, particularly in older housing stock, which is common throughout our communities and which many home owners are unsure how to improve in a cost effective and sustainable way.

5.6 Enhanced Travel Connectivity

A Quality and fast moving road network is central to providing connectivity between towns and building our economy. There are currently significant delays occurring our strategic hub towns. This not only causes delay for travellers but reducing the environmental quality of these settlements. By taking the through traffic away from the town centres, it will be possible to take further actions to increase the attraction amenity and accessibility and improve the vitality and viability of those centres.

Following decades of underinvestment in infrastructure across the border region, there is potential under this objective to address key roads transportation infrastructure priorities including improved connections between the border region and key urban centres north and south. This includes upgrading roads as appropriate to facilitate necessary cross border linkages and access to services.

In particular, there is a clear need for providing connections and the development of a number of new roads, including the A29 Dungannon and Cookstown bypasses to ensure the border region is connected on an East-West axis and North-South basis. The rail network in Northern Ireland is limited to the North and East with no connections in Tyrone or Fermanagh. It is an objective of the Regional development Strategy to increase use of more sustainable forms of transport, therefore it is important to

investigate whether it would be feasible to extend the railway network to the towns in mid Ulster.

In addition, investment in environmentally friendly solutions including the establishment of additional cross-border Greenways and connected Blueways would have multiple benefits including increased community cohesion. The Ulster Canal is one of the last major waterway projects awaiting restoration on the island of Ireland. Most major waterway routes have been restored or are undergoing restoration. The re-opening of the Ulster Canal is seen as a major cross-border infrastructural project with broad political, Government and community support on both sides of the border. There is also have a real need for sustainable transport options to enhance cross border, regional and local mobility. In the interests of balanced regional development and to help address the well-established transport infrastructure deficit across the region, it is argued that the use of this significant level of Peace Plus funding allocated, should be reconsidered towards resolving these long-standing deficiencies.

Theme 6 - Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration

6.1 Strategic Planning and Engagement

6.2 Maintaining and Forging Relationship between Citizens
These relationships are important but as a result and outcome of investment in programmes to support society take advantage of a peaceful society.

Administration

It is important that future funding has a shorter 'lead-in' time from Application submission to provision of funding to facilitate a longer period of preparation and delivery, which will maximise the impact and benefit of projects.
Further efforts to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries are necessary. A more simplified appraisal and decision–making system reducing unnecessary bureaucracy should be agreed.
Accountability is very important and there must be the proper safeguards in place. However, a balance needs to be found between enabling an initiative to be implemented more efficiently and the administrative procedures required from an accountability perspective.