

Report on	1. Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce 2. Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme
Date of Meeting	10 December 2020
Reporting Officer	Fiona McKeown, Head of Economic Development

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	Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce (Jan-Dec 2021) The NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry has a business network with a membership circ. 1,200 businesses representing over 100,000 employees. Mid Ulster District Council has been a member for the last four years.
2.2	Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme Members are advised that Invest NI has invited local Councils to submit a collaborative bid for remaining funds under the ERDF Local Economic Development Measure. The overall resources available are in the region of £1.1million (based on £660,000 ERDF; £220,000 Invest NI and £220,000 match funding from Councils). Funding allocations are likely to be committed over two financial years.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce Membership renewal is now due for the period January 2021–December 2021 at a cost of £2,500+Vat. The renewal request invoice is attached in Appendix 1 . The benefits to Council for renewing membership are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of a global network and its business membership of circa 1200 members. • Regularly actively represents members interests at the highest political levels

- Provides a quarterly magazine of current affairs
- Monthly newsletter update on what is happening in business in NI.
- Organises monthly business events throughout NI
- Helps promote Mid Ulster Council events to its membership
- Opportunity to host NI Chamber event in Mid Ulster bringing approx.100 business people into this area (many for the first time).

3.2 **Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme**

Following discussion in relation to shared priorities, it has been agreed that the proposal should be focused on Digital Transformation. This programme will be additional to any current digital support programmes which Councils are delivering and will seek to complement the proposals under any future Mid South West Growth Deal.

Based on preliminary findings, it is proposed that this programme will be focused on a relatively small number of businesses. These businesses will have the potential to embrace a digital transformation of their business. Another potential work strand will focus on increasing the number of companies that can engage with the range of Challenge Funds that are likely to emerge as part of some of the Growth Deal's work. Currently, the number of NI companies engaging in these initiatives is relatively limited and the uptake of funds from organisations such as Innovate UK is low compared to other UK regions.

In order to move forward, assistance is required to draft the technical application to Invest NI and it is proposed to appoint a consultant, the indicative cost of which (£9,000) is proposed to be shared across the Councils. This contribution will form part of the Councils collective match funding required as part of the overall £1.1 million programme.

A further report will be presented to members in due course providing the detail of the programme, once the consultant has worked up the specific detail.

Members will also be aware of the Complementary Fund of £100 million linked to the Growth Deals announced earlier this year. It is proposed that this fund could facilitate a relatively small-scale proposal (£3-4 million) to establish a flexible support fund providing capital grants for SMEs seeking to invest in digital transformation, for example new equipment, software etc. This opportunity whilst distinct from the collaborative ERDF application, has the potential to add value by providing a mechanism to address financial barriers to digital transformation. It could also substantially enhance the leverage that could be brought to the ERDF application and is likely to increase the chance of securing approval from Invest NI.

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	<p>Financial: Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce Annual corporate membership of £2,500 (+Vat) for Jan-Dec 2021.</p> <p>Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme Councils are requested to provide £820 each towards technical assistance costs to prepare a detailed and comprehensive Digital Transformation Business Programme application to Invest NI. Funding can be provided within the Council's existing economic development budget.</p>
	Human: Officer time
	Risk Management:
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members:
5.1	<p>Renewal of Membership with NI Chamber of Commerce Approve Mid Ulster Council's annual Corporate Membership Renewal with NI Chamber of Commerce, costing £2,500+Vat for the period of 1 January to 31 December 2021.</p>
5.2	<p>Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme Approve the development of the Collaborative Digital Transformation Business Programme and provide a contribution of £820 towards technical assistance costs to prepare a comprehensive bid to Invest NI.</p>
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix 1 - NI Chamber of Commerce - Membership Renewal Invoice (2021)