



Department for the
Economy
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PLACE 10X

A SUB-REGIONAL ECONOMIC APPROACH



MAY 2023

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locally designed interventions to deliver innovative, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth; building on the existing strengths of a place to unlock potential, to empower communities, and to tackle sub-regional and local inequality.

CALL FOR EVIDENCE
May 2023

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PLACE 10X

A SUB-REGIONAL ECONOMIC APPROACH

DfE is responsible for the economy across Northern Ireland and the [10X Vision](#)¹ is the Department's plan to create a pathway to transform the entire economy innovatively, inclusively, and sustainably at a regional level. This is a long-term plan where Northern Ireland will become one of the top performing small, advanced economies in the world.

With 10X driving ambition at the macro level, and councils leading economic development at a local level in partnership with statutory partners such as Invest NI, there is a need to consider the sub-regional focus² and how the three levels link together. This is where [Place10X](#) comes in. This is why DfE is asking for your help to develop this approach.

This Call for Evidence is to create a body of information which will inform policy makers and a future Minister in the Department for the Economy of what central intervention and support is needed or wanted.

We are also looking for your thoughts on the best way to measure success. We would like you to share your thoughts on these so that we can co-produce a collective approach to sub-regional economic initiatives.

Embedding a concept like *place* takes time. This is not going to be quick or easy. It will take a Minister to be in office to set new policy directions. It will require a realignment of policy teams and programme delivery bodies to reprioritise their focus. Results may be visible in some areas instantly and some change may be generational. We do not want to duplicate or challenge your efforts but to build on them.

1 [10X Economy - an economic vision](#)

2 Sub-regional here is taken in the context that NI is the regional level, the 11 council areas are each a local level and hence, sub-regional is an area (to be defined) in between these levels. See page 7 below.

What is Place?

Place at its most general refers to three main components:

- location – where it is on a map, e.g. an area, city, town, or village;
- locale – the material social setting, e.g. workplaces, shops, neighbourhoods, churches; and
- a sense of a place – how we feel emotionally about a location or locale.

Taken together it can be an idea of identity and belonging, both physically and culturally, and allows some to define the special quality of a place.

When used in policy making and programme development it demands that those designing interventions are cognisant of the uniqueness of a place, while working with those based there, to design initiatives to be complementary and specialised.

Place based interventions are not simply a local version of a macro approach, they often aim to tackle an inequality or disadvantage too. In this way *place* based interventions can accelerate the development of a more robust local ecosystem, identifying and unlocking capability while removing systematic weaknesses.

This means working to build on the existing strengths of a place: its people and its businesses, councils and community organisations, local knowledge, and experience, and agreeing how to use these assets to harness this untapped potential to deliver inclusive and sustainable change.

What is Place10X?

DfE's responsibility is the economic remit, and as *place* refers to a much broader concept encompassing the work of other NI Executive departments such as community, justice, education, and health, there is a need to distinguish what the Department can and cannot do.

[Place10X](#) is used here to remove any confusion with the wider concept. This is the start of a conversation that will lead to a strategic approach to determine what intervention and support is required within the economic remit, and to determine what role the Department for the Economy can and should play in places across Northern Ireland.

The [Place10X](#) Team in DfE will develop this work stream throughout 2023 beginning by listening to stakeholders through this Call for Evidence.

The Call for Evidence – Overview

This requires several questions be answered:

1. What is the problem we are trying to solve?
2. What geographic areas should [Place10X](#) cover?
3. What is expected of delivery partners?
4. What interventions could or already occur?
5. What does success look like?
6. Is the Department's view of *place* and use of [Place10X](#) correct?

We will ask these questions and highlight early thinking throughout this document. A response form is attached at the end, but we would also like to meet with stakeholders to listen to your ideas. We are happy to do this via videoconference or in person. We would appreciate sight of relevant plans in your organisation that consider *place*.

This will be done in three cohorts:

- Local Government, third sector, business, academia, community groups, and trade bodies;
- DfE and ALB partners; and
- NICS *place* teams & delivery partners.

Once views have been collected, we will analyse responses to develop a position paper to test those ideas with you. This will be followed by a consultation to co-produce what the final [Place10X](#) strategic approach should be.

1 – What is the problem we are trying to solve?

- a. Firstly, there is a Departmental macro regional approach (10X) and there are local government approaches but no defined DfE sub-regional approach and no strategic link between those three levels. Is there a need for a sub-regional level?

The 10X Vision is clear that *place* based thinking should be applied to the programme of work DfE is involved in. This holistic approach is important to ensure that everyone in society can avail of the economic opportunities 10X will bring.

Taking this as a starting point, an initial analysis of sub-regional disparities was undertaken to create a snapshot (see Annex A) based on the geographic model of the four City and Growth Deal (CGD) regions. The CGD regions were chosen here as sub-regionally representative to provide an illustrative evidence base. The metrics showed disparities existed and a further snapshot of metrics at council area level revealed differences within the CGD regions. Even within areas that are doing relatively well there appear to be variations of economic prosperity.

While this isn't comprehensive, and it doesn't dig deeply into the factors behind the metrics, it does point to the need to at least consider there are disparities. Many of these areas will continue to show disparities unless we change our approach – the status quo has not worked to date. There is also the chance to maximise opportunities in areas that are performing better and to examine if central government support can accelerate growth. It highlights there is a challenge for the Department to consider.

- b. Further, if the Department has a role to play at a sub-regional level, does it then follow there is a role at council area? What could this be given the role and remit of local government? Should DfE be involved only sub-regionally initially leaving the local space to councils, business, academia, and communities?

The metrics point to the need for more joined up thinking across the public sector given the range of issues and the levels of government involved. Adopting a sub-regional approach and linking this to 10X and local council area plans would appear to be a sensible course of action. It could remove silos, maximise limited resources, enable delivery bodies to pivot and realign to more targeted programmes, and it brings a greater range of expertise to bear. Given the scale of this issue, it makes sense for DfE to play a central role at sub-regional level. The Department has a range of drivers and influence that can support and supplement other stakeholders to remove or lessen disparities.

This doesn't mean always taking the lead or being the decision maker but can be a role acting as a co-ordinator between a range of partners. The Department has a range of Arm's Length Bodies (ALB) such as Invest NI and Tourism NI that can play an important function here too. ALBs are already embedded in sub-regional and local level work streams, have inputted to local development plans, and have a wealth of experience at working within the unique characteristics of a place. Their knowledge will be essential in landscape mapping now, and in horizon scanning going forward.

At local level any work must be undertaken in partnership with those already acting in those places. There is even an argument that DfE should never be in the lead, but how this may manifest itself is discussed alongside geographic considerations below.

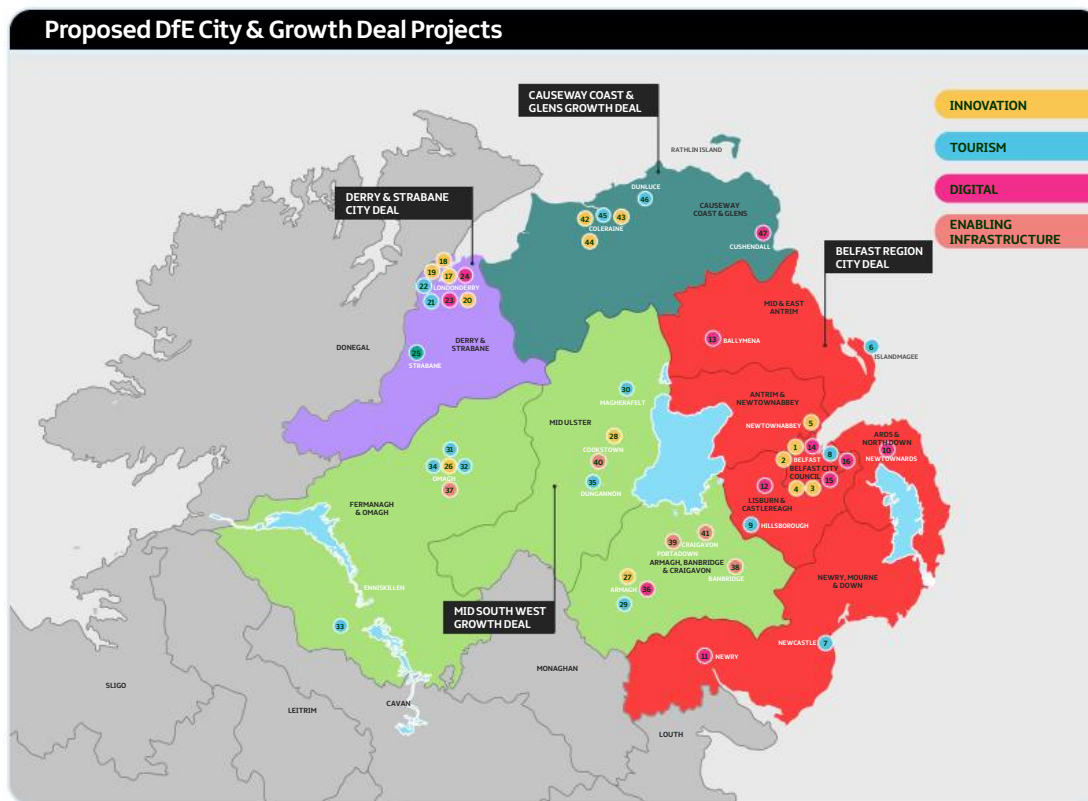
2 – What geographic areas should Place10X cover?

There are three possible strands to a geographic approach:

- sub-regional;
- local; and
- custom focused.

With 10X as the macro regional NI approach, a local level approach could be appropriately classed as a council area. In turn sub-regional would then be anything aggregating council areas together. A custom focus, such as cross-border initiatives like the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership and the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor can be supported or a more localised approach could be developed based on need.

The City & Growth Deals (CGD) Programme has established good relationships between DfE, local government, universities, and other government departments. Invest NI and Tourism NI act as investment decision makers for new project proposals giving them an insight to sub-regional needs and they will already be applying a *place* based approach when considering CGD business cases. DfE and its delivery partners are already considering how resources can be reprioritised to maximise the Deal projects' potential; taking a consistent approach beyond the programme for this purpose would therefore be reasonable. It would appear to be the most appropriate starting sub-regional model for [Place10X](#).



Source: Department for the Economy NI

While some *place* interventions need to be at CGD project size, given the scale requirements, some must be at a more granular level due to the challenge they are tackling or that they are not able to be delivered through a City & Growth Deal project. These are the local level interventions.

With councils in the lead of local economic development and with statistical data often collected at this level, it makes sense that council areas are considered as the ‘local level’ in terms of [Place10X](#). While some *place* interventions may need to occur at ward level or lower, developing metrics and indicators could prove difficult. Given that the macro level is directed by central government and that the CGD sub-regional level is a partnership of central and local government, it follows that local area *place* interventions should be designed and led by that community – whether local government, or community and third sector, or business groups – not DfE. There is a space for the Department to support and monitor actions that will aggregate towards achieving 10X goals and this should be explored with local government.

Regardless of lead, these levels are interlinked and can be complementary, allowing both top-down and bottom-up design to tackle the same issue.

3 – What is expected of delivery partners?

If DfE can use the evidence base to further identify sub-regional disparities, and policy teams are able to apply a *place* based lens to realign objectives and prioritise localised interventions, programme delivery partners – such as Invest NI – could then direct focused support to tackle those disparities at that level. With regional offices established, InvestNI is well placed to support [Place10X](#). Discussions are already underway to consider how this could operate.

There is also the potential to work with other NICS departments, such as through the Department for Communities and Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs led Test and Learn project. Universities, as CGD partners, could not only support actions and interventions directly, but could also support the development of policy and a metrics dataset using their academic expertise.

Local councils can play a key role in working with the Department to align their priorities with DfE's macro level indicators for success. There are also partnership opportunities if one or more councils have the same issue that the sub-regional work streams are not dealing with.

4 – What interventions could occur?

Interventions can take a range of forms – from policy and legislative changes to enable greater focus on disparities and inequalities or to remove barriers to success, to funded programme interventions that are targeted rather than rolled out at regional level as may occur at present.

Even before establishing any of these, launching a [Place10X](#) policy, building a *place* based dataset, embedding the concept in DfE and its ALBs, and forming a network of stakeholders committed to this approach would be a step change.

A collaboratively produced delivery plan setting out the way forward should capture not only DfE interventions but those at local government level, and associated actions of other NICS *place* projects with some economic benefit.

It is important that all partners have a say in the prioritisation of interventions.

5 – What are the indicators of success?

10X metrics and indicators of success will inform those considered to measure [Place10X](#). However, the [Place10X](#) dataset must be bespoke to meet the unique challenges that apply sub-regionally and locally. It should also be flexible to monitor emerging challenges and priorities.

We recognise that each place is unique with its own strengths and needs and that the realities of people's lives are best captured at a local and community level. We need to map out disparities and strengths at a local level as well as sub-regionally. Your evidence will help us to build up a unique picture.

To be successful we need strong evidence to provide a collective, evidence applied approach to developing robust metrics. The evidence we gather and the deeper analysis we complete will provide us with a strong foundation on which to add value. Robust evidence informed policy making will lead to sustainable and lasting *place* based interventions.

It will also highlight gaps in our knowledge and will be a reference point on which we can commission research.

Suggested metrics to map out an area should be comparative across geographic areas and initially based on data that is readily available.

Council level data is already collected across a wide range of topics, and this would be a focus to begin with. This does not discount other geographic information gathering such as education statistics or information from other sources but is to be seen as a starting point for discussion. If data can be produced at council area it can be aggregated up for sub-regional purposes. Similarly, some macro level data cannot be disaggregated. Your evidence and thoughts will be key in deciding which are the best indicators to use for measuring growth and success.

Below are a range of proposed themes for metrics that could provide a holistic view of [Place 10X](#) supported change at a local level:

- Population and its makeup;
- Breakdown of industry;
- Entrepreneurship and Business Growth;
- Labour Market;
- Skills & Qualifications;

- Quality of Life, Wellbeing and Equality; and
- Innovation.

This list is not definitive and had been created to start discussion; further detail is provided at Annex B.

There will need to be a project undertaken to link local and sub-regional indicators to 10X metrics to ensure value of [Place10X](#) interventions can be analysed alongside macro strategic initiatives.

There is a need to consider if a toolkit is required within DfE to monitor how policy and programme proposals consider [Place10X](#). Existing tools such as the various impact assessments could be utilised to avoid creating a layer of bureaucracy that becomes a barrier to success. This work will be taken forward internally.

6 – Is the Department’s definition of Place and use of Place 10X correct?

We know the concept of *place* is wider than just the DfE remit and there is a need to ensure that [Place10X](#) works alongside other departmental and local government interpretations of what *place* in an economic context is, but an initial working definition is proposed:

Place 10X: *locally designed interventions to deliver innovative, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. Building on the existing strengths of a place to unlock potential, to empower communities, and to tackle sub-regional and local inequality.*

This is not intended to be prescriptive or for others to have to adopt. This is to separate the DfE *place* role from that of other departments and to create a focus in establishing a sub-regional and local level response in tackling disparities.

Summary

This call for evidence sets out DfE initial thinking around what *place* is in an economic context

Place 10X – locally designed interventions to deliver innovative, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth. Building on the existing strengths of a place to unlock potential, to empower communities, and to tackle sub-regional and local inequality.

and provides you with the opportunity to help us create evidence that can be used to shape a tailored, *place* focused approach to policy creation and interventions:

1. Is there a need for a sub-regional level intervention?
 - a. What sub-regional geographic areas should [Place10X](#) cover?
 - b. If the Department has a role to play at a sub-regional level, is there is a role at council area? What could this be given the role and remit of local government? Should DfE be involved only sub-regionally initially leaving the local space to councils, business, academia, and communities?
2. What is expected of delivery partners?
3. What interventions could or already occur?
4. What does success look like?
5. Is the Department's view of *place* and use of [Place10X](#) correct?

How to respond

You can answer the questions above and you can offer any relevant statements or evidence by sending a written response to the [Place10X](#) Team **by 9th July 2023**.

Please email responses to Place10X@economy-ni.gov.uk or in writing to:

Place10X
Department for the Economy
Adelaide House
39 - 49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

In addition to written responses, we would like to speak with organisations and stakeholders to discuss [Place10X](#) and if you would like to take part in those conversations, please let us know.

Annex A – Evidence Snapshot

Extensive work and consultation have already been completed by the Department, through the ‘Measuring Success’ report, on creating a comprehensive suite of Tier 1 and Tier 2 metrics for 10X which will help shape all Departmental activity. Analysis of these highlighted that we have significant and long-standing problems in our economy. While Tier 1 metrics measure growth on an international map, the Tier 2 metrics will help us look at growth and from a PLACE perspective.

The 10X Vision pillars of innovation, inclusivity and sustainability have been identified as capturing the 10X vision for Northern Ireland. Innovation is essential for economic growth and social wellbeing and can monitor changes in productivity, entrepreneurship, and R&D. Inclusivity ensures that growth is distributed fairly across society for people and place and creates opportunities for all. The Department’s aim is to help people from underrepresented groups and places to skill up, ensure they are equitably paid when in employment, have ‘good quality’ work and experience a fairer distribution of wealth.

This evidence snapshot is provided using a mixture of the indicators across the Innovation and Inclusivity pillars and is not intended to duplicate the extensive work already done. Instead, the following are being provided for illustrative purposes only to inform discussion. Similarly, the different geographic boundaries have been kept flexible.

After analysis of evidence collected through this, a bespoke set of Tier 3 metrics will be created, linked to the themes already set out in the ‘Measuring Success’ report.

Labour Market Indicators

(Tier 1 –Inclusive Growth)

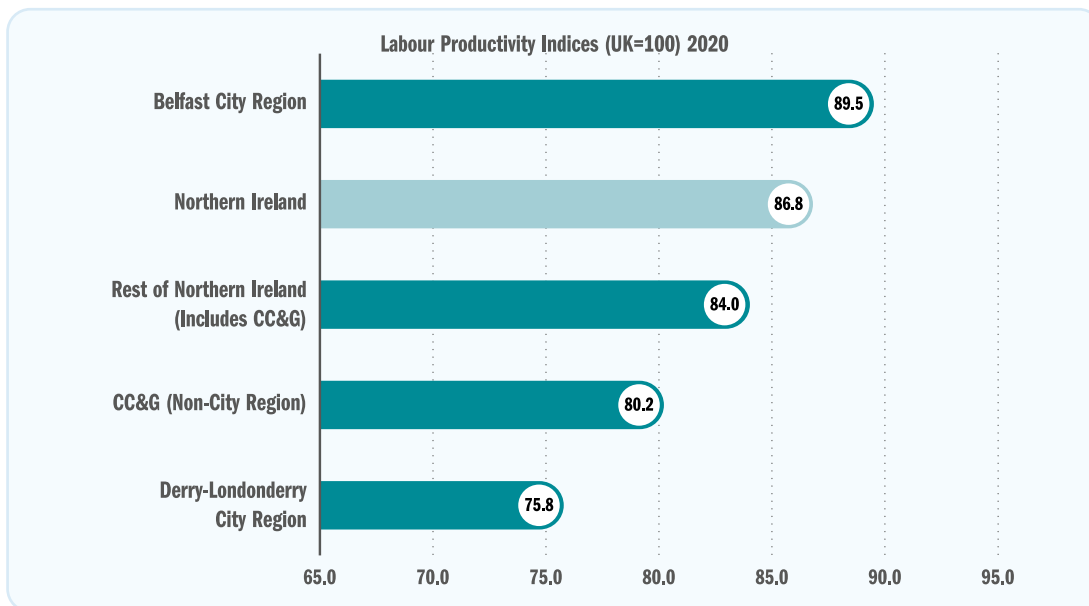


Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by City Deal region based on 2020 figures

*Estimates for City Regions comprising of one LGD subject to greater uncertainty year on year due to sampling constraints. Significant volatility in estimated inactivity rates from 2012 -20. Rates presented above are 5y average values (to 2021) to account for this.

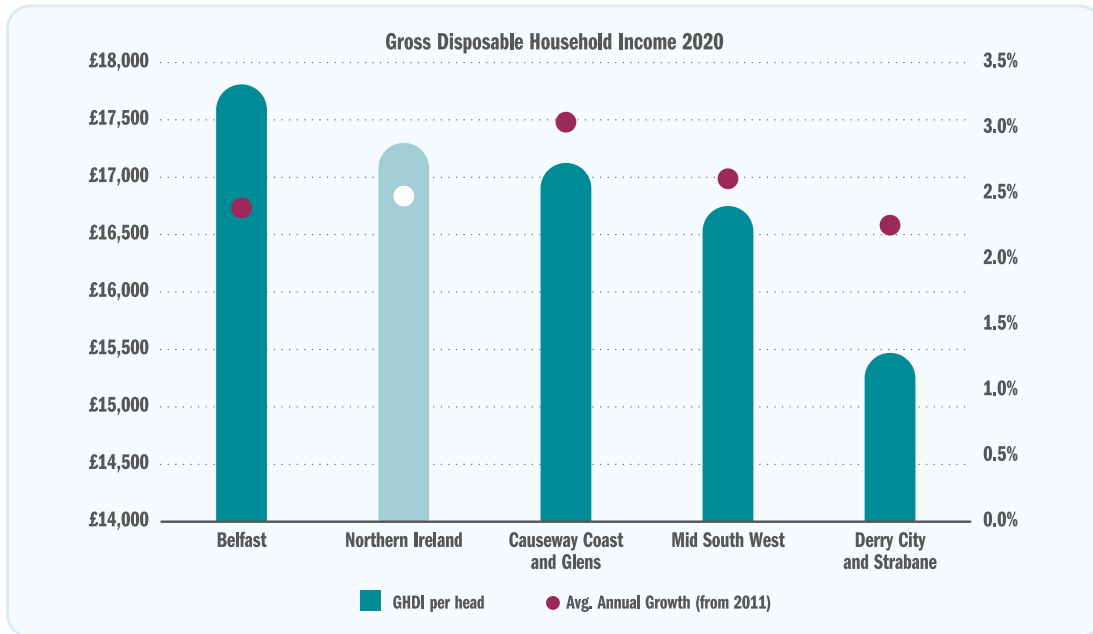
Labour Productivity

(Tier 1 –Innovation Led Growth)



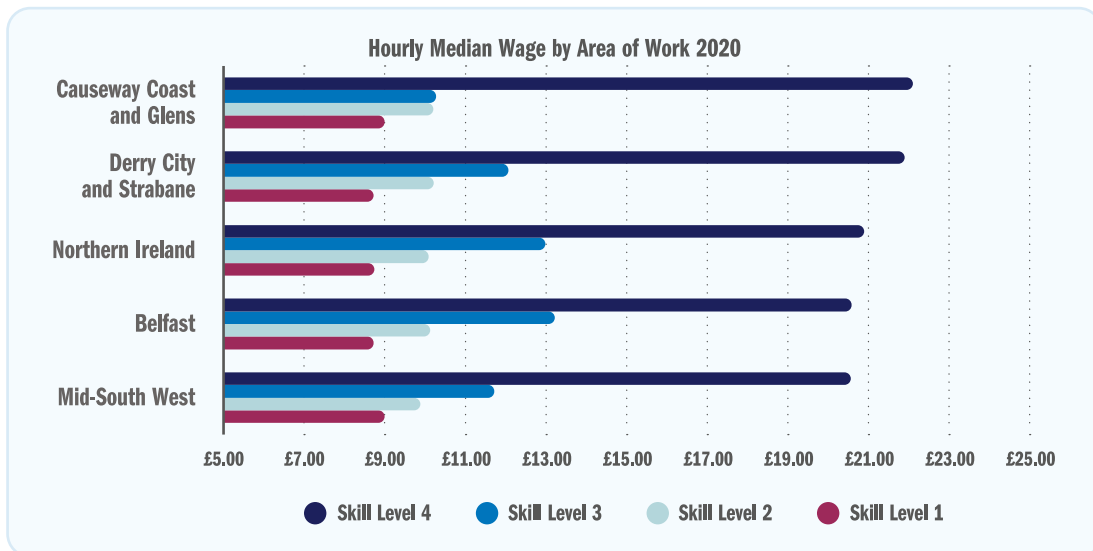
Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by City Deal region based on 2020 figures

Gross Household Disposable Income (Tier 1 – Inclusive Growth)



Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by City Deal region based on 2020 figures

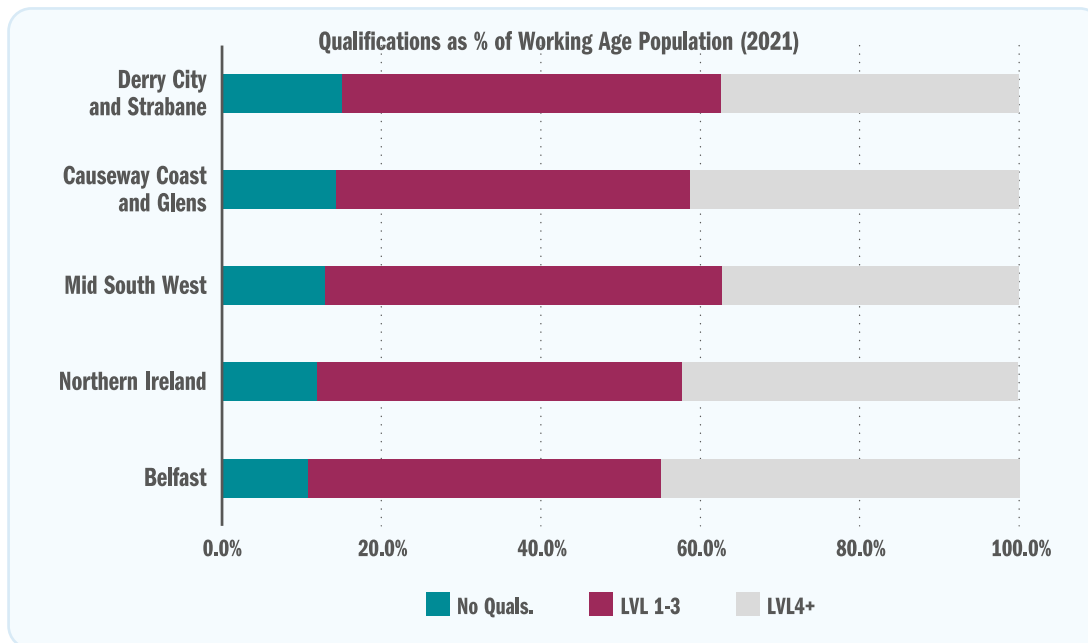
Hourly Median Wage (Tier 1 – Innovation Led Growth)



Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by City Deal region based on 2020 figures

Qualifications

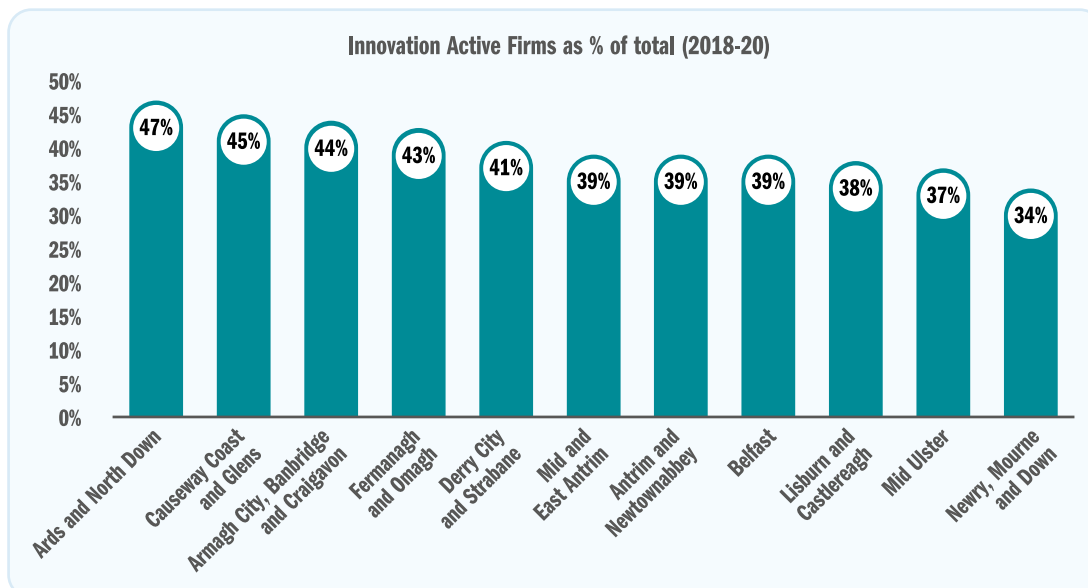
(Tier 1 –Inclusive Growth/Tier 1 –Innovation Led Growth/ Tier 2 –Inclusive Growth)



Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by City Deal region based on 2021 figures

Innovation Active Firms

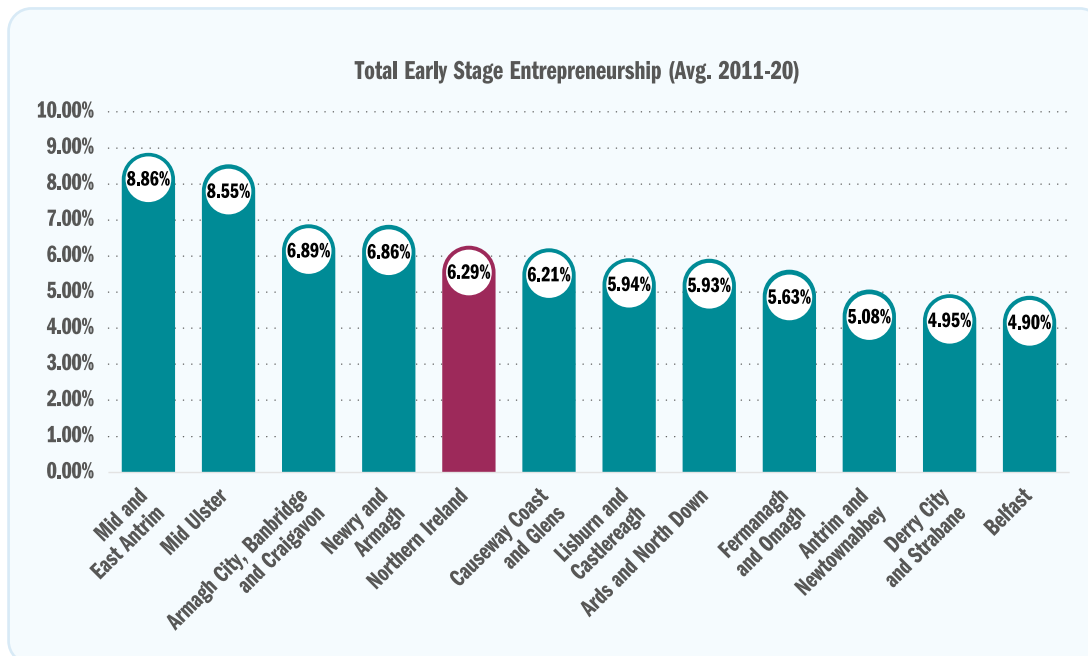
(Tier 2 –Innovation Led Growth)



Source: NISRA/DfE, 2022 by NI Council region based on figures 2018-2020

Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurship

(Tier 1 – Innovation Led Growth)



Source: GEM NI report, 2021 by NI Council region based on figures 2011-2020

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor measures the propensity of individuals to be entrepreneurial and may not match official statistics.

Annex B – Examples of Indicators

The indicators below are set out for example purposes only.

Theme	Metric
Population	Population breakdown by age
	Number of employed and unemployed
	Economically inactive – broken down by gender, disability, and caring responsibilities
Industry	Number of companies by industry and size
	Number of people employed and where
Business Growth	Industry breakdown by council
	Startups
	Tech startups
	Business Survival Rates
Entrepreneurship	Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity in NI (LGD)
	Early-stage Female Entrepreneurial Activity in NI
	Number of Social Enterprises
Innovation	Number of R&D companies
	Number of R&D FTE
	Number of Innovation Accredited Businesses
	Innovation infrastructure e.g. City Deals projects
Social	Living Wage
	Quality of Life – Life Satisfaction and Wellbeing
	Gross disposable income
	Prosperity
	Culture
Equality & Inclusion	Comparison of wages by gender
	Number of people registered disabled in the workplace
	Number of SEN pupils leaving school and going into FE, training or work

Theme	Metric
Skills	Number of pupils with at least 5 GCSE's
	Number of pupils leaving education and going into FE, training, or work
	Number of pupils leaving school with no qualifications
	Proportion of the population aged 16+ with qualifications at Level 2+
	Proportion of the population aged 16+ with qualifications at Level 3+
	NEET

Further Information

Email Place10X@economy-ni.gov.uk

Web www.economy-ni.gov.uk/Place10X

Response to Department for the Economy Place 10X – A Sub Regional Economic Approach: A Call for Evidence

July 2022

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department for the Economy's Call for Evidence on the Place 10X 'A sub-regional economic approach'.

The Council understands this Call for Evidence is to create a body of information which will inform policy makers and a future Minister in the Department for the Economy on what central intervention and support is needed or wanted and recommend the best way to measure success.

The Council's response comprises comments on the areas requested by the Call for Evidence, and, in addition, also provides an insight into examples of critical issues which have severely and adversely impacted the growth of the Mid Ulster economy, where a 'place-based approach' could be used to tackle such 'place' based challenges and drive local economic growth.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF MID ULSTER

The Mid Ulster District Council area represents a multicultural population of more than 150,000¹ across 1,714 km² (14% of the NI land mass) and is the fastest growing new Council area in Northern Ireland (its population is expected to grow to 165,000 by 2030). The area is within a 30-minute reach of Belfast (Dublin - 2 hours) and shares a land border with Republic of Ireland providing access to 450,000 people within a 50km radius.

Mid Ulster is recognised as one of the most entrepreneurial and enterprising regions in Northern Ireland. Its economy is private sector driven, boasting the largest business base outside the Belfast Metropolitan area with 9,430 VAT registered businesses. Over the last 5 years Mid Ulster had the fastest pace of employee job creation of any council area in NI growing at 13% (6,680 new jobs) compared to a total NI growth rate of 7%.

¹ Census Statistics 2021

The region has higher productivity per head of population compared to the Northern Ireland average and a GVA² of £3.97bn (producing 8.1% of NI's economic output).

The Council area has strengths in key sectors, including Manufacturing & Engineering; Food and Agri Food; Construction; Retail, IT and Hospitality. Our businesses are the most export-intensive, accounting for 12% of NI's exports. Mid Ulster businesses embrace innovation, and the region has the largest uptake of Invest NI's Innovation Accreditation Awards outside of the Belfast region.

Mid Ulster has an international reputation for manufacturing excellence, hosting several of NI's leading advanced manufacturers, leading it to be recognised as the centre of manufacturing and engineering in Northern Ireland, where it accounts for 29% of the local economy (approx. 17,066 jobs), compared to 11% in NI. The sector is estimated to deliver c£1.67bn GVA contribution to the local economy and over £710m in local wages, directly and indirectly. This world class cluster is of profound importance to the area'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 and agri-food sectors. For instance, the area boasts a world-class High Growth Cluster that manufactures more than 40% of the world's mobile crushing and screening equipment.

3.0 A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

The Council fully supports with the Department's proposal to move to a more 'place-based' approach, as outlined in the document. The definition of 'place' set out in the Place 10X consultation document is satisfactory, however, the aim to tackle inequality and disadvantage will require local and specific considerations as there are significant differences between council areas.

In policy making and programme development, this will require those designing interventions to be cognisant of the uniqueness of a place, while working with those based there to design initiatives to be complementary and specialised.

Thus, Council would advocate a more targeted localised approach of place-based thinking, ensuring the Department (and any relevant Agencies) will involve Councils from the policy development stage, through to co-design and delivery. Councils play a pivotal role, being the key drivers of local economic development in their respective communities and can offer a wealth of experience and unique insights into the dynamics, nuances, and characteristics of their local economies.

Council agrees that a place-based approach can have one or more of three strands as outlined i.e. sub-regional, local (i.e. Council level) and custom focussed. In determining the targeting of geographies, Council would suggest that in the case of any new policy or development initiative, it is essential that the Department consults with Councils from the initial concept stage to determine the approach or 'strand' (or combination) would

² Office for National Statistics 2021

be most appropriate to adopt. While some may be at Growth/City Deal level, others may need to be at a more localised level.

The key determining the approach to be selected should be informed by robust and structured engagement with Councils from the early stages to both scope the need and plan the most effective approach to delivery.

4.0 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A BROADER CONTEXT

The Call for Evidence advises that its focus is primarily to ‘determine what interventions are required within the economic remit and what role the Department for the Economy can play’. The lack of a joined-up thinking and working across departments has been an increasingly challenging issue faced by Councils in recent years, constraining their ability to deliver Department-led initiatives in an effective and efficient manner. Effectively, economic development cannot be addressed in isolation; economic growth is inextricably linked to a range of other factors, including infrastructure, regeneration, skills and education.

It is frustrating that there appear to be, as yet no plans in place to begin the process of aligning Departmental strategies, budgets, policies, or funding streams, where the objectives, target sectors, outputs or issues are the same, or where there is scope for complementary delivery. More integrated working across Departments should be a key requirement in planning the delivery of any future collaborative ‘place-based approach’, to reduce the need for Councils having to liaise with a number of Departments on the same issue and help to achieve a more efficient mechanism for the management, resourcing, and delivery of initiatives.

Going forward, this new approach presents a key opportunity to design structures to facilitate a joined-up and more fully integrated approach to economic development e.g. working with the Department for Communities in regeneration and skills/employability initiatives, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for addressing the specific needs of our rural economies, the Department for Infrastructure to bring forward improvements to the roads/transport network for more efficient local economies, the understanding of the impact of a new Childcare Strategy can have on enabling parents to have the opportunity to re-engage with the labour market.

Failure to acknowledge the need for cross-departmental working on these, and many other areas, will continue to cause inefficiencies in delivery and furthermore will limit the ability of any future place-based approach to achieve meaningful and sustainable economic impact.

▪ Longer Term Strategic Approach

Council acknowledges the constraining factors being as noted in the document i.e. it will take a new Minister to be in office to set new policy directions, and that it will require a realignment of policy teams and programme delivery bodies to reprioritise their focus. However, it agrees the development of this new way of working must embed a longer-term approach, both in policy development *and* budgetary provision. The current

fragmented “ad-hoc” approach does not work. There is a need for 3 year annual budgets to allow Councils to plan ahead effectively.

Future interventions must adopt a co-design approach, involving local Councils from the outset and be adequately resourced, with an appropriate long-term budgetary allocation (multi-annual budgets). This approach towards funding is critical to enable local councils to plan, develop and drive the identified interventions and deliver sustainable and inclusive growth as part of a coherent strategy.

Any future plans must also be based on SMART principles, to ensure effective monitoring, capturing all relevant baseline data, identifying specific ‘place-based indicators’, including not just economic but also, for example, societal, and/ or environmental data to measure the broader impact of adopting this new approach and inform the development of future initiatives, key learnings, and the direction of future planning. In addition, the views of local businesses should be collated to determine to what extent have their needs been addressed. To be of optimum value, this too should involve cross-Departmental working to assist with baselining, monitoring and the collection of appropriate data to facilitate effective evaluation.

▪ **Invest NI**

Mid Ulster is home to the largest business base outside of Belfast, primarily made up of micro and small indigenous businesses (comprising 98.4% of the 9,430 total businesses). In delivering the recent Investment for Growth and Jobs (IGJ) Programme (2014-2022), NI Councils worked in partnership with Invest NI colleagues in the Regional Offices, using a joined-up approach to support the local micro and small businesses sector, with Councils building the capacity of local businesses with growth potential, and providing a ‘pipeline’ of clients progressing to access further support from Invest NI. In Mid Ulster alone, support was delivered to 706 businesses over 4 Programmes.

There is significant scope to build on this approach to deliver a longer term localised and integrated businesses support across the eco-system, from Council’s role in driving entrepreneurship and growth, through to businesses availing of further support from Invest NI. In the IGJ Programme, Invest NI match funded Councils’ contribution (each providing 20%). Going forward, with Councils continuing to build business’ capacity, many of whom will progress to access Invest NI clients, Council believes the partnership approach to resourcing should also be maintained.

Council understands the Invest NI Omagh office (which serves the Mid South West sub-region) currently has a reduced complement of 4 staff (previously was 14). Mid Ulster has the highest business base outside Belfast, the MSW sub-region makes up *almost 33%* of NI’s businesses and makes a significant contribution to the NI economy (including some major exporters), these figures provide a poor reflection on the current approach to resourcing and supporting economic development in this key Western sub-region. Any future ‘place-based approach’ should have as its key priority, from the outset, to significantly scale up the Invest NI resource allocation across this sub-region, to recognise the contribution Mid Ulster and the MSW economies make to the overall regional economic development.

Given Mid Ulster's recognised contribution to the NI economy, the Council requests that Invest NI should establish an office within the council area, not least as Mid Ulster is one of the Council areas where Invest NI does not have a presence. Such investment would further support partnership working and drive a more integrated and coherent approach to addressing local economic development issues.

One of the key constraints which continues to stifle economic growth and investment within Mid Ulster is the absence of Invest NI serviced sites to facilitate the growth of indigenous business in the area. 10X advises that encouraging more companies to scale up and achieve high growth is considered to be a key element in creating more employment opportunities. It is clear the issue of providing industrial serviced sites is compounded by Invest NI's lengthy timeframe for land acquisition (4+ years) and the Department's approval processes. Such protracted timescales inhibit the ability to be agile and flexible to respond effectively to the pace of change and private sector business needs.

▪ **Availability of Industrial Land**

As mentioned above, the acute shortage of serviced sites is a huge barrier to investment in Mid Ulster. This issue has forced high growth businesses to relocate employment opportunities outside the region (and NI) resulting in a subsequent loss of exports and GVA.

Council members and officers receive regular representations from frustrated local businesses asserting that they are unable to access affordable and suitable industrial lands to grow their business. Furthermore, this asset deficit is also a barrier to promoting new start-up businesses.

A 'place-based approach' could provide an opportunity to address the deficiencies in the supply of industrial land to meet growing demand for existing and new businesses in the Mid Ulster. Council has been working with Invest NI colleagues over recent years and in 2021 a Working Group was established between Invest NI and the Council.

Council acknowledge that Invest NI has recently been subject to an external review. That Review recommended that Invest NI should move quickly on acquisition and development in areas where there is a clear need and develop a clear longer-term strategy for site acquisition/development in collaboration with strategic partners.

In the interim, the Council has employed its economic role in exploring local opportunities to meet the industrial site deficit. Council is keen to work in partnership with the Department (and its agencies) to undertake a pilot project(s) to address the immediate demand for industrial serviced sites in Mid Ulster. Two potential pilot projects include Desertcreat and the former Maghera High School site. Both projects would test the proposed place-based approach through collaborative working addressing economic need.

The Council is convinced that addressing this key economic constraint would unleash private investment, encourage enterprise and support a dynamic business sector that can create better jobs, nurture skills and invest in innovation.

▪ **Infrastructure Challenges**

A key barrier for businesses and entrepreneurs across Mid Ulster (and indeed wider MSW sub-region) has been the long-standing and chronic infrastructural deficits in broadband, mobile coverage and transport infrastructure. As home to a third of NI's businesses and many world-leading export businesses, the MSW region requires the infrastructure to move products to market quickly and maintain efficient supply chains. Investment from across relevant Departments (including the Department for Infrastructure) using a 'place-based approach' transport infrastructure is critical to ensure businesses in the sub-region do not lag behind their counterparts in the east of the province and can maintain a competitive edge.

Facilitating transport, advanced cross-border connectivity, greater access to road, rail, ports and airports, progressive digital communication capability, access to industrial land, energy and water are all considered by Council as the bedrock to economic prosperity for the economy.

Decades of underinvestment in our road and rail network has left communities marginalised and isolated from essential services as well as businesses facing a daily battle in the movement of freight to export markets via non-classified road networks, with consequent impacts on growth, productivity and competitiveness.

Within the Mid Ulster Community Plan, '*Infrastructure*' has been identified as one of five themes and a key action is to advance the development of the Strategic Road Network (the A29 – A31, A4, A6 and A5), including bypasses for the main towns and villages on the strategic routes.

The Mid Ulster region is growth dependent on the A29, and investment in Hub Bypasses in Cookstown and Dungannon would strengthen economic competitiveness, enhance accessibility to regional services and reduce peripherally. The further economic development and regeneration of Mid Ulster as an industrial and commercial hub will be supported by expanded economic networks and trade facilitated by the A29 infrastructure investment.

▪ **Skills deficits**

Skills and access to labour are both a major current and future constraint to economic growth in Mid Ulster. The predominant recurring theme from industry consultation is on the growing "People Crisis" facing every sector in the region.

The main messages from industry confirm that:

- Large numbers of jobs vacancies currently exist and are not being filled;
- Businesses are having to decline customer orders due to the lack of people, resulting in a loss of revenue and a negative impact on the region's productivity.

The Council has been at the very forefront of the skills agenda in Northern Ireland, having established the first ever industry-led Mid Ulster Skills Forum to address the skills and employability issues within our current and potential workforce that are impacting on the economic future of the District.

An outcome of the Forum's work is the highly regarded MEGA Collaborative Network which aims to attract suitable talent into the Manufacturing and Engineering industry and reduce the skills and labour shortages which currently exist within that sector in Mid Ulster. The Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership is supporting a working group of local companies representing the Construction sector to replicate this model and further support our key industries.

As mentioned earlier in this response, a place-based holistic approach to economic development must involve better and stronger integrated working on key issues such as skills which are a driver for a modern, high performing economy.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Mid Ulster District Council fully supports the approach outlined in the document and notes that Councils must be instrumental in the planning and development of any future 'place-based approach' due to their pivotal role in their local economies and their unique insight into the specific issues and challenges faced by their communities.

It is critical that future interventions are designed, developed, and properly resourced in partnership with Councils to ensure inclusive and sustainable local solutions to local problems. Any new place-based strategy must be locality focused and flexible enough so that each council can focus on its individual needs.

However, this new approach will have limited impact if it does not acknowledge that real change in local economies should best be delivered through a broader and more holistic approach to economic development, which involves more integrated working across Departments on other key economic issues, such as infrastructure, skills, regeneration and infrastructure.

In taking forward this approach, the Department must recognise the scale of the Mid Ulster business base (and, consequently, the contribution Mid Ulster's economy makes to the region) and reflect this by significantly uplifting its apportionment of investment and resources to both the district and sub-region.

This Response should also be considered alongside the Response being submitted by the Mid South West Region (on behalf of the Councils of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster).

Council thanks the Officers from the Department who met with the Mid South West Director Team on 2 June 2023 and looks forward to working in partnership with both the Department and other related bodies to progress the issues discussed in this Response.

As discussed at the meeting, (and also in this Response) Mid Ulster Council requests the Department consider the development of a 'pilot' project for this place-based approach in a priority area and proposes the industrial land proposal at Desertcreat as one such opportunity.