

<b>Report on</b>	<p>Economic Development Report – OBF1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mid Ulster Skills Forum Update</li> <li>2. Mid Ulster Skills Forum – OECD Workshop</li> <li>3. Cookstown Bypass Scheme Minutes 7.1.20</li> <li>4. Chinese Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</li> <li>5. Cypriot Business Delegation Study Visit to Mid Ulster</li> <li>6. US Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</li> <li>7. Christmas Trade in Mid Ulster Towns</li> </ol>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> February 2020
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Fiona McKeown, Head of Economic Development

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
If ‘Yes’, confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update Members on the undernoted matters.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p><b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum Update</b></p> <p>The Mid Ulster Skills Forum identified a number of priority actions contained within the Mid Ulster Skills Report and Action Plan 2018-2021 for delivery in the current financial year. These included a potential Collaborative Growth Project focussed on the challenge facing local employers in relation to engaging with school career teachers and pupils and a Careers Attractiveness Initiative focused on Mid Ulster’s key priority sectors.</p>
2.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum – OECD Workshop</b></p> <p>In October 2019, the Department for the Economy (DfE), in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), held events in Belfast and L’Derry aimed at opening up the discussion on how we best develop Northern Ireland’s strategic direction for skills for the next decade, building on the current Skills Strategy, ‘Success through Skills -Transforming Futures’. Over 150 participants attended these events, which provided a valuable insight into the views of stakeholders in Northern Ireland. Recognising that Mid Ulster has been involved in some pioneering work to address skills issues locally, DfE and the OECD team requested an opportunity to meet with members of the Mid Ulster Skills Forum and MEGA Network to present and test out some of the recommendations from their research and engagement.</p>

<p>2.3</p> <p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p> <p>2.7</p>	<p><b>Cookstown Bypass Scheme Minutes 7.1.20</b> Councillors and Council officers met with the Department for Infrastructure regarding the Cookstown Bypass Scheme on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Minutes and action points from the meeting are attached on <b>Appendix 1</b>.</p> <p><b>Chinese Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</b> The Chinese Consul General Madame Zhang visited Mid Ulster on Tuesday 21 January 2020. The purpose of the visit was to learn more about the area in terms of business, education and heritage. Photographs from the visit are enclosed on <b>Appendix 2</b>.</p> <p><b>Cypriot Business Delegation Study Visit to Mid Ulster</b> A delegation of ‘Into Business’ delivery partners from Northern Cyprus visited Council on Thursday 23 January 2020. The visit was organised by the Northern Ireland Co-operation Overseas Innovative, Entrepreneurship Project. The purpose of the visit was ‘Experience Sharing’ introducing examples of strategic economic development initiatives and programmes delivered by Mid Ulster District Council to the Business Delivery Partners, who can then replicate this knowledge and experience into similar type initiatives in their own regions of Northern Cyprus. Photographs from the visit are enclosed on <b>Appendix 3</b>.</p> <p><b>US Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</b> Following a recent appearance by Ms. Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, U.S. Consulate General Belfast on the BBC, where Ms Kennedy Trudeau noted the role poetry can play in offering insight into a country and a place, and expressed admiration for Seamus Heaney- SHHP was prompted to issue a letter of invitation for her to visit Bellaghy.  In accepting Council’s invitation, the Consul General’s office also expressed an interest in using the opportunity to visit a business in Mid Ulster which had US connections. The Council made contact with representatives from Emerson’s (Cookstown) who agreed to host the business visit. Photographs from the visit are enclosed on <b>Appendix 4</b>.</p> <p><b>Christmas Trade in Mid Ulster Towns</b> Following a request at January 2020 Development Committee meeting for an update from businesses in our main towns on what their experiences had been over the Christmas period, contact was made with traders serving on the 5 respective Town Centre Forums in Cookstown, Magherafelt, Maghera and Coalisland and Dungannon Traders Association.</p>
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<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum Update</b></p> <p>(i) <u>Collaborative Growth Programme</u>  As previously reported, Council officers identified an opportunity to apply for funding under Invest NI’s Collaborative Growth Programme to undertake a Phase 1 Scoping study to engage and collaborate with local employers, schools and 13-18 year olds in a co-design of the future ‘industry/education engagement’ products and services. In doing so, the outputs from such a co-design process would take into account the existing landscape, the opportunity to ensure engagement/careers advice, placement, recruitment processes etc. are brought in line with the ‘Generation Z’ requirements (the current name for the cohort born from the mid-1990s). Such a collaborative approach would also help inform existing government services such as NI’s ‘Connect to Success’ and perhaps enable all stakeholders to stream line engagement and ensure information is provided in real time, perhaps exploring options for alternative technological solutions/products. An application led by Henry Bros. on behalf of the collaborative network (which includes TES Group, McAvoy Group, Specialist Joinery Fittings and Edge Innovate) has been successful and the company is in receipt of a letter of offer for £20k from Invest NI to appoint a facilitator to undertake the scoping study. If the Phase 1 Scoping Study produces a positive outcome, this may then open up further opportunities for further funding.</p> <p>(ii) <u>Careers Attractiveness Initiative</u>  This project is aimed at enhancing the image and attractiveness of Mid Ulster’s key priority sectors and strengthening linkages between local industry and education. The project will create and provide inspirational storyboards and bite size videos showcasing six key sectors (Manufacturing &amp; Engineering; Food and Agri-Food; Construction; Retail; IT; and Hospitality) to career teachers and year 10 children in all post primary schools within the Council area. These resources will detail career opportunities and pathways, interesting developments, potential earnings, skills, attributes and qualifications needed to gain entry.</p> <p>Following a Council procurement process, a consortium led by Giraffe Associates and including Conor Diver Design and BlueSky Video Marketing have been appointed to deliver the project in 2019/20.</p>
<b>3.2</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum – OECD Workshop</b></p> <p>In October 2019, the Department for the Economy (DfE), in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), held events in Belfast and L’Derry aimed at opening up the discussion on how we best develop Northern Ireland’s strategic direction for skills for the next decade. Recognising that Mid Ulster has been involved in some pioneering work to address skills issues locally, DfE and the OECD team requested an opportunity to meet with members of the Mid Ulster Skills Forum and MEGA Network to present and test out some of the recommendations from their research and engagement.</p>

Council officers organised a Mid Ulster Stakeholder workshop which was facilitated by OECD on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 in Ranfurly House Arts and Visitor Centre, Dungannon, with 30 representatives from the Mid Ulster Skills Forum and MEGA Network in attendance. Similar events were held in Belfast (22<sup>nd</sup> January) and L'Derry (23<sup>rd</sup> January). The workshop provided a fantastic opportunity for local stakeholders in Mid Ulster to shape and influence the future skills agenda for Northern Ireland by discussing a series of potential recommendations that OECD have identified under the following four priority policy areas:-

1. Reducing skills imbalances
2. Creating a culture of lifelong learning
3. Transforming workplaces and the business environment to make better use of skills
4. Strengthening the governance of skills policies

The session proved to be very successful and brought a new perspective to the discussions around a future Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Comments from Department for the Economy and OECD following event;

*“Thanks for organising the Skills Forum meeting yesterday in Dungannon, I know the OECD found it a really useful session with lots of feedback from the participants.”* **Michael Gould, Department for the Economy**

*“Thank you for the great event in Dungannon yesterday. It definitely was a success from our perspective; great discussions, engaged stakeholders, and many interesting ideas were presented.”* **Bart Staats, OECD Centre for Skills – National Skills Strategy**



### 3.3 Cookstown Bypass Scheme Minutes 7.1.20

A productive meeting was held with officials from the Department of Infrastructure on 7 January 2020 by way of updating Council Members and Officers on the Cookstown Bypass Scheme. A number of progressive actions were documented and agreed by all in attendance before the meeting concluded. A copy of the minutes and agreed actions are enclosed on **Appendix 1**.

3.4

### **Chinese Consul General's Visit to Mid Ulster**

The visit involved a meet and greet with the Chairperson, Chief Executive and Director of Business and Communities at Council's Magherafelt Office.

Following this, a visit to Rainey Endowed School allowed Madame Zhang to learn about the Rainey's links with the Bilingual Kindergarten in Hangzhou, China. This is an innovative project, creating a bilingual nursery school where children learn in a bilingual context from a young age.

The Consul General then visited SDC Trailers where the Chief Executive Officer delivered a presentation about the company's growth from a small start-up in 1979 to its current status as UK and Ireland's largest semi-trailer manufacturer producing over 8,000 trailers per annum. SDC is part of the CIMC Group; a global player within the container, trailer and tanker industries, with annual sales of 110,000 vehicles. Before leaving, Madame Zhang was given a factory tour.

A visit to Seamus Heaney HomePlace for lunch and a tour of the exhibition concluded the visit.

The Chinese Consulate expressed her thanks to Council for organising the visit, which they found very informative. They are keen to develop links with Mid Ulster and Officers will work to explore potential opportunities over the coming months.

Photographs of the visit are enclosed on **Appendix 2**.

### **Cypriot Business Delegation Study Visit to Mid Ulster**

3.5

The study visit to the Council Offices, Magherafelt on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2020 was part of a schedule of 'Experience Sharing Visits' across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by the 'Into Business' delivery partners / organisations accompanied by Brian Murray (NICO).

Following a welcome address by the Chairperson, the Director of Business and Communities delivered a presentation providing an overview of strategic initiatives and programmes delivered by the Council's Economic Development Section. A Q&A opportunity took place allowing the participants to exchange views and share their experiences.

The delegation expressed their thanks and appreciation for the warm welcome received and for the exchange of learning, knowledge and information, which they found particularly relevant and useful. The Director of Business & Communities reiterated Council's willingness to share its experience and knowledge in any area deemed beneficial to the group.

Photographs of the visit are enclosed on **Appendix 3**.

3.6 **US Consul General's Visit to Mid Ulster**

Elizabeth Kennedy Trudeau, U.S. Consul General in Belfast, visited Seamus Heaney HomePlace Bellaghy on Friday 10 January 2020. Ms. Trudeau was welcomed to HomePlace by the Chair of Mid Ulster District Council, Councillor Martin Kearney, before experiencing the award winning Man and Boy Exhibition. Also, welcoming Ms Kennedy Trudeau was Director of Business and Communities and the Manager of Seamus Heaney HomePlace. Following the visit to the exhibition, the delegation had lunch in the HomePlace Café.

Ms. Kennedy Trudeau described SHPP as a 'superb facility' and described the staff as an 'exceptional team'.

In the afternoon's visit to Emerson (Cookstown), Mrs Kennedy Trudeau met senior managers and was given a presentation on the company by Paschal Doran (Plant Manager) and Liz Kearns (HR Manager), outlining its development over the past 22 years and it's future plans. This was followed by a tour of the factory.

Mrs Kennedy Trudeau was very impressed with the visit and the senior representatives she met and before departing she extended her appreciation for the hospitality provided during the visit.

Photographs of the visits are enclosed on **Appendix 4**.

3.7 **Christmas Trade in Mid Ulster Towns**

Feedback from retail members on each of the Town Centre Forums/Traders Association indicates that across the five main towns in Mid Ulster, trade was slightly down from 2018. Retailers acknowledged that trade has been decreasing on a yearly basis over the past 5 - 10 years. There was a general consensus that footfall was down, however, those businesses that have an online presence stated that online sales were increasing on a yearly basis. Many traders added that the last few shopping days before Christmas (21-24 December 2019) as being very busy, however, these sales did not offset poor performances experienced in the first three weeks of December. Retailers introduced discounts and sales in early December to encourage people to purchase gifts locally, where these normally wouldn't be introduced until the New Year sales began. Christmas sales are only a snapshot of one shopping season and traders have many challenges to face throughout the year, just to keep their doors open for business.

Cognisance should be taken that the overall UK retail trading conditions for the month of December 2019 have stated that we are now in the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive month of overall decline, retail footfall is down by 2.6%, decline is 'undeniably strong evidence that retailers can no longer rely on Christmas trading'.

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial: N/A
	<u>Careers Attractiveness Initiative</u> Cost of project is £18,791.00 excluding Vat. Funds available in economic development budget in 2019/20.
	Human: Officer Time
	Risk Management:
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	<b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum</b> Note update.
5.2	<b>Mid Ulster Skills Forum – OECD Workshop</b> Note update on Mid Ulster Skills Forum OECD Workshop.
5.3	<b>Cookstown Bypass Scheme Minutes 7.1.20</b> Note minutes of the meeting held on 7 <sup>th</sup> January 2020 with the Department for Infrastructure regarding the Cookstown Bypass Scheme
5.4	<b>Chinese Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</b> Note details of Chinese Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster on 21 January 2020.
5.5	<b>Cypriot Business Delegation Study Visit to Mid Ulster</b> Note details of Cypriot Business Delegation Study to Mid Ulster on 23 January 2020.
5.6	<b>US Consul General’s Visit to Mid Ulster</b> Note details of US Consul General’s visit to Mid Ulster on 10 January 2020.
5.7	<b>Christmas Trade in Mid Ulster Towns</b> Note update.

<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Minutes of Meeting re Cookstown Bypass Scheme with Department for Infrastructure on 7.1.20</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Photos of Chinese Consul General's Visit to Mid Ulster on 21.1.20</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Photos of Cypriot Business Delegation Study Visit to Mid Ulster on 23.1.20</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Photos of US Consul General's visit to Mid Ulster on 10.1.20</p>