

<b>Report on</b>	1. TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)  2. Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	9 July 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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	<p><b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b> Further to agreement at the June 2020 Committee Meeting to permit Council to participate in the TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (funded by DAERA) during 2020/21, a further update is provided to Members seeking approval to grant delegated authority to senior Council officials as outlined in Section 5.1 (a), (b) and (c).</p>
1.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b> To seek approval from Members for the Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan and associated delegated authority approvals sought to progress the scheme as outlined in Section 5.2 (a), (b), (c) and (d).</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p><b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b> TRPSI (Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation) is a DAERA funding initiative aimed and reducing poverty in rural areas across NI. In 2019/20 a pilot micro business development scheme was rolled out across NI administered by Local Authorities offering up to £4,999 in grant aid for rural micro businesses. DAERA has indicated that this scheme will be repeated in 2020/21.</p> <p>Members approved Council participation in the 2020/21 roll out of this Scheme at the June Committee meeting. This report now sets out the timescales envisaged for a condensed roll out of the 2020/21 Scheme to ensure grant aid becomes available to the micro business sector as quickly as is physically possible factoring in the application and assessment process.</p>
2.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b> The unprecedented effects of COVID-19 has greatly impacted Mid Ulster's town centres and the businesses located within them.</p>

	<p>Following widespread consultation and validation by traders and other town centre stakeholders, through our Town Centre Forums and Traders Associations, in Mid Ulster's 5 main Towns and numerous other businesses throughout our town centres, a Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan has been developed to address a number of short/medium term measures to support town centre businesses and encourage customer confidence to return to their local high street.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b></p> <p>For the 2020/21 phase of the Micro Business Development Scheme, all 11 Council areas will be participating. The overall project budget available to all 11 Council areas is in the region of £577,500. The methodology for dividing the overall funding allocation between participating Councils will reflect the concentration of rural micro businesses in each area. Mid Ulster will receive approx. £62,000 plus a 15% project administration fund. This will come to Council in the form of a formal contract from DAERA similar to that used for the 2019/20 scheme and is currently being drafted by DAERA staff. The grant level remains at 50% of eligible expenditure up to a maximum of £4,999. Payment of grant aid to successful applicants will be made direct from DAERA and not from Council.</p> <p>The opening of this scheme will happen simultaneously across all Council areas participating once individual contracts with DAERA have been accepted. Contracts have to be signed by the Chief Executive and a Director.</p> <p>It is envisaged the contract will be issued to participating Councils w/c 29th June 2020 so will not be available for inclusion in the July committee papers. The opening date for this scheme is not yet finalised but envisaged for the first week of August 2020. It is envisaged the call for applications will remain open for a 4-6 week period followed by assessment by Council officers.</p> <p>Advertising and promotion of this scheme needs to commence as soon as possible following contract acceptance to allow interested businesses to plan for the call opening date in early August 2020.</p> <p>Letters of offer can be issued as soon as successful promoters participate in a funding workshop by virtual means. In the interests of getting letters of offer out to successful businesses as quickly as possible following assessment, it may be necessary for the Director of Business and Communities to approve letters of offer for issue notification of such to Committee, depending on when project assessments complete relative to the date of the next Committee meeting.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b></p> <p>As lockdown restrictions ease in our towns, the economic development team have been engaging now for several months with town centre stakeholders, including representatives from our Town Centre Forums, Traders Associations, town centre businesses, and public bodies to devise a co-ordinated approach towards town centre recovery. To this end we have collated the findings both from our town centre stakeholders and from research conducted across Ireland, Great Britain and beyond to prepare a Towns Recovery Plan to support our businesses recover from</p>

the pandemic. The Recovery Plan has attained the buy-in from Town Centre Forums and Traders Associations and is contained in Appendix 1 for Members attention. Whilst a range of actions can be taken forward in the short term, it should be noted that not all schemes may be able to be progressed in the current year (2020/21) due to budget limitations, unless further external funding is obtained.

The focus of the Towns Recovery Plan will be centred on the 5 main towns (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera), if Council is awarded funding from Department for Communities to progress a number of these proposed initiatives.

If additional funding is obtained from DAERA, then some of these schemes, such as the proposed Covid19 business grants scheme, could also be rolled out to assist businesses in rural areas.

It should be noted however, that much greater strategic support from Government in the months and years ahead to regenerate our town centres is urgently needed. Our town businesses require significant capital funding interventions to rejuvenate, revitalise and remodel their existing infrastructure/buildings, many of which are vacant whilst others are not fit for purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other parts of the UK have been afforded funding through a Future High Streets Fund but with no similar funding available in NI, our towns continue to suffer through a lack of investment. An injection of funding in the form of a Future High Street Fund is urgently needed to aid Mid Ulster towns and businesses redesign and redevelop their properties to enable high streets to be more appealing and attractive to the modern day shopper. The scope of this work is not contained in the Towns Recovery Plan in Appendix 1, as currently no funding is available to take these much needed plans forward.

**Other Considerations**

**4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**

Financial:

**TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)**

An administration budget will be built into the TRPSI Micro Business Scheme for staff costs. All grant aid will be paid to successful project promoters by DAERA.

**Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan**

A funding allocation from Department for Communities is expected to be made available to Council to deliver a few actions contained within the Towns Recovery Plan.

Human:

**TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)**

Officers Time

**Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan**

Officers Time

	<p>Risk Management:  <b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b>  Urgency of delivery – to be mitigated by governance and approval processes as set out in recommendation section below.</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b>  Urgency of delivery – conditions of governance on grant element of funding.</p>
<p><b>4.2</b></p>	<p><b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b></p> <hr/> <p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications:  <b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b>  N/A</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b>  Equality Screening will take place of the Towns Recovery Plan</p> <hr/> <p>Rural Needs Implications:  <b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b>  This scheme is aimed at supporting rural micro businesses across Mid Ulster.</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b>  This project is focused on Mid Ulster’s 5 largest towns (Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Coalisland and Maghera). Funding has been sought from DAERA to support rural businesses with Covid19 recovery actions.</p>
<p><b>5.0</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p>
<p><b>5.1</b></p>	<p>It is recommended that Members;</p> <p><b>TRPSI Micro Business Development Scheme (DAERA funded initiative)</b></p> <p><b>(a) Approve</b> delegated authority to the Chief Executive and Director of Business and Communities to sign and accept the contract for 2020/21 TRPSI micro business scheme, subject to review by Council’s solicitor.</p> <p><b>(b) Approve</b> promotion and marketing of this scheme to commence immediately following acceptance of the contract and before the full Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> July in light of the anticipated call opening of the first week of August 2020.</p> <p><b>(c) Approve</b> delegated authority be granted to the Director of Business and Communities to sign off on letters offer to successful participants up to a maximum grant of £4,999 with a full list of approved projects to be brought to Committee for noting.</p>

5.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</b></p> <p>(a) <b>Approve</b> the Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan (on Appendix 1).</p> <p>(b) <b>Approve</b> delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive and/or Director of Business and Communities to sign and accept any letters of offer/contracts received by Council offering funding for Covid19 Towns Recovery Plan actions, in response to funding bids made by Council, subject to review by Council’s solicitor.</p> <p>(c) <b>Approve</b> delegated authority be granted to the Director of Business and Communities to develop and roll out a business grants scheme to urban and rural businesses, <u>if funding is made available to Council</u> by the Department for Communities (for urban businesses) and DAERA (for rural businesses). Also to <b>approve</b> authority be granted to the Director of Business and Communities to sign off on letters of offer to successful participants on a business grants scheme, with the list of approved projects to be brought to Committee for noting.</p> <p>(d) <b>Approve</b> existing budgets in economic development (which weren’t required due to activities not happening as a result of the pandemic), be reassigned to assist with other Covid19 business supports as identified in the Towns Recovery Plan (on Appendix 1), and undertake appropriate procurement of schemes, as far as budgets extend. It should be noted that not all schemes may be able to be progressed in the current year (2020/21) due to budget limitations, unless further external funding is obtained.</p>
6.0	<p><b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Mid Ulster Covid-19 Towns Recovery Plan</p>