

Report on	1. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 2. Go Succeed Grants 2024/25 3. DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan
Date of Meeting	10 January 2024
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26</p> <p>In September 2022, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council's participation in the new 11-Council Digital Transformation Fund (DTFF). This Fund is led and managed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NM&DDC) and seeks to provide grants to 600 micro and small businesses / social enterprises from across the 11 Council areas to resource their digital transformation plans (it is estimated that 10% or 60 of these will be in the Mid Ulster District Council area). The DTFF has £7.5million of funding available, funded by the Complementary Fund (£6m), the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (£1.1 million) and Derry City and Strabane District Council. Having secured funding from the NI Executive for an Inclusive Futures Fund, DCSDC (City Deal Region) were excluded from applying to the Complementary Fund. However, the Council has committed £450,000 to pay for their involvement.</p> <p>The DTFF grants are worth between £5,000 and £20,000 and can fund up to 70% of the cost of a project with 30% match funding from the applicant.</p> <p>Newry, Mourne and Down Council are responsible for leading the assessment process, issuing Letters of Offer to successful applications and verifying claims submitted. They will then give instruction to Councils to issue the payments to successful businesses in their respective Council areas, following which Councils will subsequently reclaim the monies from NM&DDC.</p>

	<p>Call 1 has opened in November 2023 with Letters of Offer scheduled to be issued in January 2024. There will be 4-5 more calls up until December 2025 (or until all funding has been allocated).</p> <p>2.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25</p> <p>Go Succeed is the new 11-Council enterprise support service for new starts and existing businesses seeking to grow. It is led by Belfast City Council with Contractors delivering in each Council area and is funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund and the 11 Councils. In February 2023, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council’s participation in the new Service, to March 2025.</p> <p>Funding has been allocated within the Service for a Small Grants provision to new ‘high growth’ starts (i.e. those seeking to create employment opportunities in addition to the owner) and for existing business with growth ambitions.</p> <p>Once a business has completed 50% of their mentoring, they can then be invited to apply for a grant of up to 70% (£4,000) for a total spend of £5,714.</p> <p>This can be towards an activity which is specifically aimed at driving business growth objectives (purchasing equipment, marketing materials, consultant support etc).</p> <p>The grants will be managed and delivered by each Council, who will be responsible for the assessment of Applications, issuing Letters of Offer and verification of items purchased, processing claims, and claiming all expenditure from Belfast City Council.</p> <p>2.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>The Department for the Economy (DFE) has launched a public consultation on a draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland which outlines a 10-year plan to increase the value of tourism in Northern Ireland.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26</p> <p>Delegated authority is therefore sought for the Chief Executive to approve the issue of payments to successful applicants from Mid Ulster District Council area under the DTFF, in line with the amount that will be advised by NM&DDC Council. A full list of successful applicants will be brought to Committee thereafter for information.</p> <p>3.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25</p> <p>Delegated authority is therefore sought for the Chief Executive to approve the issue of Letters of Offer to successful applicants under “Go Succeed”, and subsequent grant payments. A full list of successful applicants will be brought to Committee thereafter for information.</p>

3.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan

DFE's draft Tourism Strategy sets out a vision that seeks to establish Northern Ireland as a year-round world class destination which is renowned for its authentic experiences, landscape, heritage and culture and which benefits communities, the economy and the environment, with sustainability at its core.

The consultation advises that the draft Tourism Strategy will be a key enabler of the DFE's 10x Economic Vision, to help position the region internationally as an attractive place to visit, making our visitors feel welcome whilst at the same time helping to make the lives better of all our citizens.

It will seek to deliver on the objectives of 10x by generating economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive and innovative.

It is premised on five themes and seeks to strive for a new and ambitious growth trajectory that is:

- Innovative and uses our creative skills
- Inclusive by bringing opportunities for all
- Sustainable for generations
- Attractive to visitors and investors
- Collaborative to deliver a shared vision

The consultation document identifies the key challenges and opportunities for growth.

During the development of the draft Tourism Strategy, DFE engaged with stakeholders across government, its delivery partners Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland and a number of other industry stakeholders. DFE/TNI also organised a consultation workshop at Hill of the O'Neill, Dungannon on 27th November 2023, where two officers from each of the 11 Councils were invited to attend.

A select number of industry/businesses and sectoral bodies were invited by DFE/Tourism NI to attend consultation workshops on;

- 29 November 2023 – Bishops Gate Hotel, Derry/Londonderry – (Industry workshop).
- 1 December 2023 - Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick – (Industry workshops x2).
- 11 December 2023 -Tourism NI HQ, Belfast (Sectoral body workshop)

Officers from Mid Ulster Council requested Tourism NI to invite a greater sample size of tourism trade businesses from Mid Ulster to the industry workshops to ensure their voice was heard. To assist Tourism NI, Council Officers provided further names of tourism trade businesses from across the district.

Council's Tourism Team, with the assistance of a Consultant Facilitator, organised further consultations/workshops to which Mid Ulster's tourism trade, stakeholders, elected representatives etc were invited to attend. These virtual consultations/workshops took place with the following groupings on:

- 12 December 2023 – Mid Ulster Tourism Development Group
- 13 December 2023 – Mid Ulster - Open Industry Engagement Session
- 15 December 2023 – Mid Ulster - Open Industry Engagement Session

DFE’s public consultation and final submission of consultation responses must be made to the Department by Friday 12 January 2024.

During the above consultations, Mid Ulster tourism businesses communicated their concerns of the timing of DFE’s consultation taking place over their busiest trading period ie, Christmas/New Year. Council Officers made contact with DFE/TNI to seek an extension to the closing date of 12th January 2024, outlining the concerns of tourism businesses and the short response turnaround time coinciding with Christmas and New Year. DFE/TNI declined Council’s request, indicating this date was set to meet current deadlines.

Taking on board the collective feedback provided to Council from Mid Ulster stakeholders, a comprehensive and robust response is currently being developed on behalf of Mid Ulster District Council. The draft response will be shared with Members ahead of the Development Committee Meeting on 10 January 2024.

DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Consultation Document is enclosed on **Appendix 1**.

Mid Ulster Council’s draft Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan is on **Appendix 2**. *(NB: Appendix 2 to follow prior to meeting as a late paper).*

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>4.1.1 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 Grants are 100% funded by the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund.</p> <p>4.1.2 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Grants are 100% funded by the Go Succeed Fund. It is anticipated that Council will receive resource funding equating to 10% of the value of letters of offer issued to successful applicants.</p> <p>4.1.3 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Consultancy fee of £2,850 to facilitate a range of workshops with key tourism stakeholders and collate views and draft comprehensive consultation response on behalf of Council and stakeholder organisations.</p>

	<p>Human:</p> <p>4.1.4 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 Officer time to process payments and submit claims to Newry, Mourne & Down District Council.</p> <p>4.1.5 Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Officer time to assess applications, draft and issue letters of offer, verify claims, process grant payments and submit claims to Belfast City Council for reimbursement.</p> <p>4.1.6 DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan Officer time to facilitate consultation response.</p>
	Risk Management:
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>4.2.1 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 & Go Succeed Grants 2024-25 Equality and Good Relations screening was carried out by the respective lead Councils prior to commencement of both schemes.</p>
	<p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>4.2.2 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26 & Go Succeed Grants 2024/25 Rural Needs screening has been carried out by the respective lead Councils prior to commencement of the Schemes.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	<p>It is recommended that Members;</p>
5.1	Digital Transformation Flexible Fund 2024-26
	<p>5.1.1 Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief to approve the payment of grants to successful applicants from the Mid Ulster Council area in line with the Letters of Offer. A report will be brought to the Development Committee thereafter to update Members on the outcome of assessment and to note approved projects.</p>
5.2	Go Succeed Grants 2024-25
	<p>5.2.1 Approve that delegated authority be granted to the Chief to approve the issuing of Letters of Offer to successful applicants. A report will be brought to the Development Committee thereafter to update Members on the outcome of assessment and to note approved projects.</p>

5.3	<p>DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>5.3.1 (i) Approve Mid Ulster Council’s draft Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan and;</p> <p>(ii) Grant delegated authority for Council’s Chief Executive to submit MUDC’s Consultation response to DFE, by the deadline of Friday 12 January 2024, prior to Council Meeting on 25 January 2024.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – DFE Consultation on Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 – MUDC Consultation Response to DFE’s Draft Tourism Strategy for NI – 10 Year Plan (<i>to follow</i>)</p>