

Report on	1. Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 2. Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme 3. Great Days Out 4. Sperrins Walking Programme
Date of Meeting	5 July 2023
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
	No	X
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon		

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>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023</p> <p>The Rural Micro Business Development Scheme funded through DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation programme (TRPSI) will run again in 2023 subject to approval of a business case and budget within the Department. This Scheme is again expected to offer a capital grant at 50% of eligible project costs up a maximum of £4,999 for business development and recovery activities.</p> <p>This Scheme has been running annually since 2019 and has proved very popular with rural businesses across the district with 416 letters of offer issued to the value of just over £1,315,977.22 in grant aid.</p>
2.2	<p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme</p> <p>Council previously received a letter of offer from the Department for Communities for £1,452,000 to deliver Tranche 1 & Tranche 2 Business Support Grants and Active Travel Scheme. Tranche 1 & 2 Business Support Grants has all been allocated and the Active Travel element is ongoing.</p>
2.3	<p>Great Days Out</p> <p>This event was previously run by Tourism Northern Ireland, catering for group organisers, church groups, sports and social clubs, community groups, retirement associations, gardening groups, historical groups, rotary clubs and many more from across NI.</p> <p>Council has previously delivered three Great Days Out in 2019 at Corick House Hotel, Seamus Heaney Home Place in 2020 and The Glenavon Hotel 2022.</p>

<p>2.4</p>	<p>Sperrins Walking Programme</p> <p>The Sperrins Partnership is a joint initiative involving the four Sperrins Councils with the purpose of delivering on a number of agreed action plans in a co-operative, co-ordinating manner under the themes of Tourism, Heritage, Infrastructure and Environment. The four Councils involved in the Partnership are Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Mid Ulster District Council.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023</p> <p>The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has indicated that in the absence of an Assembly or Minister, there was delays to the current budget being confirmed for the 2023 Rural Business Development Grants Scheme. This budget has just now been confirmed and subject to DAERA approval of a business case which will be jointly prepared by all Councils participating.</p> <p>Subject to DAERA approving the business case, a contract will be issued to each participating Council. Council acceptance of the contract will be needed before the Scheme can be opened.</p> <p>The overall TRPSI scheme across all Councils in 2023 will be in the region of £4 million capital and £2million resource. The Rural Business Development Grant Scheme element is valued at £1.5 million, similar to last year's budget. Individual Council allocations to be confirmed once the business plan has been completed.</p> <p>3.2 Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme</p> <p>There is one Active Travel scheme to be completed, which is the Clogher footpath scheme. This Clogher project is the development of a new footpath to complete a full loop from Station Road to Ballymagowan Road / McCreagh Park (approximately 400 metres). This section of road has remained incomplete and is unsafe for walkers in the area. DfI will adopt this path on completion.</p> <p>Landowner negotiations are well advanced and are positive. Council were required to have additional vehicular access points included and therefore had to formally submit a Planning application to ensure the process was fully transparent with appropriate approvals obtained. To date no formal objections have been raised against this application so from a positive viewpoint this is widely supported from the local residents.</p> <p>Recently a request was made by Council to the Department for Communities (DfC) seeking an extension of time until 31 March 2024.</p> <p>DfC has agreed to Council's request and furnished Council with a letter of variance granting an extension to the period of funding to 31 March 2024 as detailed on Appendix 1.</p>

3.3 Great Days Out

Great Days Out will directly target group organisers from across Northern Ireland and the border counties, such as church groups, community groups and retirement associations, Schools, Youth Groups, Young Farmers, Walking Groups.

The purpose of Great Days Out is to encourage these organisers and the general public to visit the Mid Ulster District by providing information on the wealth of fantastic group day visits available. It will showcase cultural experiences, heritage sites and special interest tours and will entice groups to visit locations which may not be familiar to them.

Great Days Out is designed to showcase the vast array of tourism businesses and experiences across the District. It will include attractions, activities and accommodation throughout the Mid Ulster Council area offering a range of great day trip experiences and overnights for a variety of groups from church, sports and social clubs to community groups, retirement associations, youth groups, schools and many more.

Group trip organisers, group leaders and the public will be given the opportunity to meet and sell directly to a range of exhibitors who can help them plan a day trip in Mid Ulster.

The event will take place in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 18 October 2023.

3.4 Sperrins Walking Programme

The four partner Councils wish to appoint suitably qualified professional guides / organisation to deliver a two-day Walking Programme that will develop and co-ordinate outdoor recreation participation programmes for the local community and visitors, resulting in increased participation and ultimately improve physical and mental health.

The successful organisation will consult with each council's tourism team to develop the programme to showcase the local heritage and the walking/countryside experience, provided technical knowledge and applications, co-ordinate participation at each event, including health and safety, guide orientation, event monitoring and evaluation, marketing and promotion and overall delivery of the programme.

The successful organisation will be responsible to seek permissions from landowners, statutory agencies, local community buy-in and consideration of other activities being undertaken e.g. commercial tree felling etc. When developing the programme the successful organisation must consider the landscape topography, sensitivity of the environment and its biodiversity.

	<p>It is anticipated that the two-day Walking programme will be spread over a number of weekends during the months of March/April and September and will focus on various locations throughout the Sperrins region, one programme delivered in each council area.</p> <p>Mid Ulster tourism team propose to hold the two-day Walking Programme on the weekend of the 23 and 24 September 2023 consisting of moderate and challenging walks around Slieve Gallion, Moydamlaght and Davagh. Other walks throughout the district will be promoted to correspond with Sperrins Walking Programme to include easy and family walks.</p> <p>Following review and evaluation of the 2022 Festival it was deemed a successful weekend for local tourism and hospitality businesses within proximity to the walks.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial:</p> <p>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 The scheme will be 100% funded by DAERA.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Funding has been received from DfC for £1,452,000 to be spent by March 2023. Letter of variance attached on Appendix 1 providing an extension to allow the Clogher footpath scheme to be completed by 31 March 2024.</p> <p>Great Days Out Within existing tourism budget, approximate cost is £2,500.</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Programme Maximum contribution of £3,000 from each of the four partner Councils</p> <p>Human:</p> <p>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 Officer time. An administration budget is to be agreed with DAERA. For the 2022, Scheme this was based on 10% of the total value of letters of offer issued.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Officer time.</p> <p>Great Days Out Officer time.</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Programme Officer time.</p>

	<p>Risk Management:</p> <p>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 Council policies and procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this scheme.</p> <p>Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme One aspect of the Active Travel scheme (Clogher footpath) requires an extension of time until 31 March 2024 to allow for landowner issues and planning matters to be finalised. DfC has issued Council with a letter of variance to accommodate this request.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 Screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme.</p> <p>COVID Small Settlements Regeneration Programme To be considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.</p> <p>Sperrins Walking Programme Screening will be carried out prior to commencement of the project. Local community involvement, promoting health and wellbeing, economic growth in rural businesses and promotion of the Sperrin communities to visitors. On evaluation of the 2022 Walking Programme, many local communities participated as well as visitors to the area.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	<p>It is recommended that Members: -</p> <p>5.1 Rural Micro Business Development Scheme 2023 Approve Council's participation in the 2023 Rural Business Development Grants Scheme.</p> <p>5.2 Covid19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme Approve authority for the Chief Executive to sign the Covid-19 Recovery Programme Letter of Variance on Appendix 1, dated 21 June 2023 which grants an extension to the period of funding to 31 March 2024, and to return the signed letter to the Department for Communities immediately following the Development Committee to meet the Department's response timeframe.</p> <p>5.3 Great Days Out Event Approve delivery of the Great Days Out event 2023 in the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on 18 October 2023 at the cost of £2,500.</p> <p>5.4 Sperrins Walking Programme Approve delivery of the Sperrins Walking Programme with the four Councils involved in Sperrins Partnership at a cost of £3,000 within Tourism budget constraints.</p>

6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix 1 - Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme – Letter of Variance