

Report on	Economic Development - OBFi 1. BT Openreach: Delivering the Broadband Universal Service in Mid Ulster 2. Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 7.12.20 3. Virtual NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW 2021)
Date of Meeting	11 March 2021
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
	To receive updates on the matters detailed above.
2.0	Background
2.1	BT Openreach: Delivering the Broadband Universal Service in Mid Ulster It was agreed at a previous meeting of the Broadband Working Group to provide a short briefing note to Members on implications between the Broadband Universal Service Obligation and Project Stratum.
2.2	Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 7.12.20 Coalisland Town Centre Forum was established in March 2019. It is a partnership of public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations working together to deliver a range of strategic economic actions to develop Coalisland town.
2.3	Virtual NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW 2021) The Department for the Economy is facilitating the second annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week, which will take place from 26 th to 30 th April 2021. This week will offer an opportunity through a dedicated week of virtual events and online promotional activity to demonstrate how apprenticeships work for individuals, businesses, communities and the wider economy.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Update from BT: Delivering the Broadband Universal Service Obligation (USO) in Mid Ulster

BT Openreach had issued correspondence to Council (**Appendix 1A**) to raise awareness that since 20th March 2020, every home and business in Mid Ulster has had a legal right to request that BT delivers a 'decent' broadband service to them. A "decent broadband service" is defined as one that supports a 10 Mbps download speeds and 1 Mbps upload.

BT Openreach has indicated that within Mid Ulster up to 94.8% of premises already have access to 'decent' broadband. They believe that there are approximately up to 2,873 premises, which may be eligible to request a decent broadband connection under the USO. Therefore, BT Openreach is currently in the process of writing out to all these premises the Mid Ulster Council area that may be eligible.

In the letter to residents and business owners BT Openreach advise if they are likely to meet the cost threshold beyond £3,400 per premise. If the cost is below this threshold, BT will arrange for an upgrade to happen at no cost to the resident or business owner within 12 months. If the upgrade work costs more than this, BT Openreach will give the owner the option of paying the difference.

The USO is not designed to meet the challenges of connecting very remote places, which are more expensive to do so.

It is important to note at the same time, the Department for the Economy is currently working with Fibrus to roll out a fibre to the premises solution via Project Stratum to households and businesses in Mid Ulster, included on their "White Postcode List" (ie, premises which do not receive a 30mpbs broadband service). This provides a future proofed fibre solution.

Mid Ulster households and businesses should consider carefully whether to choose the short term gain of availing of the "Wireless Option" under the Broadband USO, as described in the Briefing Note in Appendix 1B, as doing so may result in them being removed from Project Stratum's White post code list (if they are deemed eligible to receive a long term future proofed fibre solution under this).

3.2 **Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 7.12.20**

Minutes of the meeting of Coalisland Town Centre Forum held on the 7 December 2020 are attached on **Appendix 2**.

3.3 **Virtual NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW 2021)**

There will be a programme of virtual events taking place right across NI as part of the second annual Apprenticeship Week NI from Monday 26th to Friday 30th April 2021. The theme of NIAW 2021 is *"Strengthen and Grow Your Team with an Apprentice"*.

One of the main priorities of the industry-led MEGA Network is to increase the number of apprenticeships within the manufacturing and engineering sector in Mid Ulster. MEGA Network companies are still recruiting apprentices to fill skills and

	labour shortages in the current economic environment. As part of this year's NIAW 2021 programme, it is planned to support MEGA to implement a five-day social media campaign to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and the existing opportunities within local industry. MEGA also plan to develop a creative animation to promote the MEGA Degree Apprenticeship in Manufacturing Engineering with specialism in Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation, in partnership with Ulster University. This will be the first ever Manufacturing & Engineering Degree Apprenticeship and supports DfE's OECD Skills Strategy NI Report 2020.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Virtual NI Apprenticeship Week Event 2021 – Support MEGA Network with costs of up to £950 associated with delivering activities throughout NIEW 2021.
	Human: Officer Time
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members: -
5.1	BT Openreach: Delivering the Broadband Universal Service in Mid Ulster Note update and documents from BT Openreach and Briefing Note on Appendices 1A and 1B.
5.2	Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 7.12.20 Note minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum held on 7 December 2020 on Appendix 2.
5.3	Virtual NI Apprenticeship Week (NIEW 2021) Note details of Mid Ulster Apprenticeship Week virtual events and online promotional activity planned to take place from 26-30 April 2021. Virtual events to be organised by the MEGA Network with funding from Council's economic development budget of up to a value of £950.

6.0	Documents Attached & References
	<p>Appendix 1A – Correspondence from BT Openreach re Universal Service Obligation</p> <p>Appendix 1B – Briefing Note - Broadband Universal Service Obligation in Mid Ulster</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes - 7.12.20</p>