

<b>Report on</b>	<p>1. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) – Action Plan 2023-24</p> <p>2. Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023</p>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	14 September 2023
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
<b>1.1</b>	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) – Action Plan 2023-24</b></p> <p>The Council previously agreed to participate in the development and delivery of a Local Labour Market Partnership (LMP), under the Employability NI Programme, led by the Department for Communities (DfC).</p> <p>The Mid Ulster LMP aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships. The LMP provides a unique opportunity to greatly impact Council's priorities for skills and employability ensuring that an appropriate skills pipeline is available to local industry both now and in the future.</p> <p>Following restoration of LMP funding and further to an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on DfC's budget proposals 2023-24, Council received a letter of offer (dated 27 July 2023) for £369,005.21 from DfC to support delivery of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-24.</p>
<b>2.2</b>	<p><b>Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023</b></p> <p>The Rural Business Development Grants Scheme offers rural based micro businesses capital grants (last year of up to £4,999) for actions, which aid business sustainability, recovery and development.</p>

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) – Action Plan 2023-24**

Mid Ulster LMP’s Action Plan 2023-24 was approved by the Regional LMP Board on 25 July 2023 and Council received a letter of offer (dated 27 July 2023) – **Appendix 1** for £369,005.21 from the Department of Communities (DfC) to support delivery of the Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-24.

The LMP funding amount covers both administration and operational/programme costs as detailed below: -

Administration	£93,928.60
Operational/Programme	£275,076.61
TOTAL	£369,005.21

As delegated authority was approved prior to the local elections, the letter of offer was signed by the Chief Executive and returned to DfC in August 2023.

Work is now on-going regarding procurement to expedite the appointment of delivery agents for each of the projects given the reduced timeline for delivery.

A summary version of the approved Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-24 is included at **Appendix 2**. Copies of the full Action Plan are available upon request from the Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership Secretariat.

**3.2 Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023**

Council has been notified by Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) that the Rural Business Development Grants Scheme (RBDGS) 2023 has been further delayed. It was anticipated that there would be a new grant scheme in early Spring 2023.

On 17 August 2023, DAERA informed Council that policy development work is still ongoing and finalisation of a business case to provide the necessary evidence to inform the decision to support a further RBDGS. Mid Ulster Council was working to an indicative launch of the scheme in our district on 5th September 2023, however this wasn’t possible due to the current delays advised by DAERA.

DAERA are unable to provide any further clarity around when they may be able to open the scheme, however they’ve committed to communicating their decision to Council as soon as they possibly can.

If this scheme is given approval, then mandatory pre-application funding workshops will be organised by Council. Council on behalf of DAERA will administer the Rural Business Development Grants Scheme. This is done through

	<p>a contract for funding which sets out delivery milestones for completion of key phases of the Scheme.</p> <p>The pre-application will again be promoted widely using the Council’s business directory database, which includes over 1000 businesses and via Council’s social media platforms as well through Council’s Community Development databases. Members will also be notified when the scheme opens to enable them to promote it to their networks also.</p> <p>If funding is approved by DAERA, it is anticipated that the RBDGS will be delivered along similar lines as previous years which means that businesses that received funding last year are not eligible for funding this year.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership – Action Plan 2023-24</b> Council is in receipt of a letter of offer for £369,005.21 from the Department for Communities (DfC) to support the work of the LMP up to 31 March 2024.</p> <p><b>Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023</b></p> <p>Previously Council received resource funding from DAERA equal to 10% of the value of letters of offer issued to successful applicants.</p> <p>Human</p> <p>Officer time</p> <p>Risk Management</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership – Action Plan 2023-23</b></p> <p>The risk level is mitigated as LMP activity is 100% externally funded. LMP staff will manage delivery of the Action Plan in line with current governance arrangements.</p>
<b>4.2</b>	<p><b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b></p> <p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership – Action Plan 2023-24</b> One of the key advantages of the LMP approach to improving employability is that it targets resources on specific groups, including those with access issues and barriers, which currently prevent them from accessing training and employment opportunities.</p>

	<p><b>Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023</b>          Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior to commencement of the Scheme.</p>
	Rural Needs Implications:
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
	It is recommended that Members:
<b>5.1</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership – Action Plan 2023-24</b></p> <p><b>Note</b> content of the report.</p>
<b>5.2</b>	<p><b>Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2023</b></p> <p><b>Note</b> a further briefing will be brought to a future Development Committee Meeting to keep Members updated on whether DAERA can support and fund this year's RBDG Scheme.</p>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	<p><b>Appendix 1</b> – Mid Ulster LMP Letter of Offer 2023-24  <b>Appendix 2</b> – Summary Mid Ulster LMP Action Plan 2023-24</p>