

Report on	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes 15.09.21 & 19.10.21 2. Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 27.09.21 3. High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 4. TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22 5. NI Apprenticeship Week 2022 (NIAW2022)
Date of Meeting	8 December 2021
Reporting Officer	Assistant Director of Economy, Tourism & 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>Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes 15.09.21 & 19.10.21 Cookstown Town Centre Forum was established in 2002 to develop a partnership approach for the development and delivery of key town centre initiatives. The Forum meets at regular intervals throughout the year.</p>
2.2	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 27.09.21 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.</p>
2.3	<p>High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 The Northern Ireland Executive Office is seeking views on its initial findings and potential solutions for key issues facing our high streets.</p> <p>The High Street Task Force (HSTF), a group formed by The Executive Office, has identified the challenges and issues that our high streets face. The HSTF is now seeking views on solutions to support our high streets and to contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.</p>

2.4	<p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22 The Rural Micro Business Development Grant Scheme is funded through DAERA’s Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation programme (TRPSI). This year’s Scheme opened for applications on 1st July 2021 and closed at 12noon on 30th July 2021.</p>
2.5	<p>NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW2022) The Department for the Economy is facilitating the third annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week, which will take place from Monday 7th to Friday 11th February 2022. 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.</p>
3.0	<p>Main Report</p>
3.1	<p>Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes 15.09.21 & 19.10.21 Minutes of meetings of Cookstown Town Centre Forum held on the 15th September & 19th October 2021 are attached at Appendix 1</p>
3.2	<p>Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 27.09.21 Minutes of the meeting of Coalisland Town Centre Forum held on the 27th September 2021 are attached at Appendix 2.</p>
3.3	<p>High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 The High Street Task Force (HSTF) has undertaken work to identify challenges and issues that our high streets face. The HSTF is now seeking views on solutions to support our high streets and to contribute to the development of thriving and sustainable city, town and village centres.</p> <p>The vision is “Sustainable city, town and village centres which are thriving places for people to do business, socialise, shop, be creative and use public services as well as being great places to live.”</p> <p>As part of this process, the Executive Office launched a Call for Evidence, which is available on Appendix 3. The Call For Evidence opened on 25 October 2021 and closed again on 6 December 2021.</p> <p>Six workshops were held across NI, including one in the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre, Cookstown on Tuesday 9th November 2021 to which a number of Council’s economic development staff attended.</p> <p>HSTF identified 14 themes in this Call for Evidence with 46 questions seeking a response. The themes are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Partnerships 2 Follow Best Practice 3 Investment 4 Planning 5 Public Realm 6 Fiscal - Including Rates

- 7 Capacity
- 8 Energy, Climate Change and Sustainability
- 9 Housing and Other Infrastructure
- 10 Getting To and From the High Street
- 11 Tourism
- 12 Digital High Streets
- 13 Rural Settlements
- 14 People, Localism and Well-being

The High Street Task Force will collate all information gathered across the workshops and responses to the Call for Evidence to create a draft report, with recommendations, which will be subject to consultation and equality considerations before a final report is presented for agreement by the Executive by Spring 2022.

Council officers are currently undertaking a series of Traders meetings to obtain their views on the issues above and will also be engaging with the respective Town Centre Forums. The feedback received will then be collated into a Council response for submission by 6 December 2021 deadline. The consultation response will be brought to the next available meeting of the Development Committee to seek retrospective approval from Members.

TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22

3.4

This Scheme is targeted at the rural micro business sector and will provide capital grant aid of up to £4,999 funded at 50% of eligible costs. Mid Ulster Council has a funding allocation of £140,000 from DAERA for this year's scheme.

208 applications were received before the closing date and a further 12 received late. There was sifting of projects received to identify further late applications received in full or in part as well as applications submitted from other Council areas in error.

Eligibility checks were carried out on applications received before they were assessed and scored.

The value of applications received was in the region of £640,000 so considerably above the funding allocation available. Eligible applications were scored and ranked highest to lowest with grant awarded in ranked order until exhausted.

After assessment there were a total of 93 eligible projects, with grant award totalling £306,513.67. DAERA agreed to uplift their funding to allow all these projects to proceed and avail of funding.

Delegated authority was previously granted to the Chief Executive to sign and issue letters of offer approved under the Scheme. 3 businesses have withdrawn from the scheme since letter of offer issue.

A full list of all successful grant recipients is enclosed on **Appendix 4**.

3.5	<p>NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW 2022)</p> <p>There will be a programme of events taking place right across Northern Ireland as part of the second annual Apprenticeship Week NI from Monday 7 to Friday 11 February 2022. The theme of NIAW2022 is “<i>Apprenticeship is your future</i>”. 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. A survey completed in October 2021 identified that within 39 MEGA companies there are 643 current vacancies and the majority of these are within level 2 & 3 roles. South West College’s intake for September 2021 for level 2 apprenticeships dropped from 250 to 180. MEGA’s key target for 2022 is to promote apprenticeships at level 2 & 3 to ensure higher uptake for September 2022. As part of this year’s NIAW2021 programme, it is planned to support MEGA to develop promotional videos to help promote Level 2 and 3 apprenticeships; the target audience will include students, teachers, parents and employers.</p>
	<p>Other Considerations</p>
4.1	<p>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</p> <p>Financial: TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 21/22 Grant aid provided by DAERA. An administration budget of 10% of the funding allocation available to Council.</p> <p>Human: TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 21/22 Officers time</p> <p>Risk Management: TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 21/22 Council policies and procedures were adhered to in the roll out of this plan.</p>
4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications: TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme Equality and Good Relations screening has been carried out prior to commencement of the Scheme.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications: TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme Screening has been carried out prior to commencement of the Scheme.</p>

5.0	Recommendation(s)
	It is recommended that Members;
5.1	Cookstown Town Centre Forum Minutes 15.09.21 & 19.10.21 Note minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum held 15 September 2021 & 19 October 2021.
5.2	Coalisland Town Centre Forum Minutes 27.09.21 Note minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum held on 27 September 2021.
5.3	High Street Task Force: Call For Evidence 2021 Note the timescales to submit a response to the High Street Task Force consultation is 6 December 2021. Council's full consultation response will be provided to Members at the next available Committee in January 2022.
5.4	TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22 Note progress on the TRPSI Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021/22.
5.5	NI Apprenticeship Week (NIAW2022) Note update on NI Apprenticeship Week.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
	Appendix 1 – Minutes of Cookstown Town Centre Forum 5.09.21 & 19.10.21 Appendix 2 – Minutes of Coalisland Town Centre Forum 27.09.21 Appendix 3 - High Street Task Force 2021 Consultation Document Appendix 4 - List of successful applicants under the TRPSI Rural Business Development Grants Scheme 2021/22