

<b>Report on</b>	1. Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP) 2. Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group 3. Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	13 May 2021
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Head of Economic Development

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	<p><b>Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)</b>  Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (the LAG) is responsible for the delivery of a local rural development strategy in Mid Ulster funded through the LEADER element of the current Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.</p>
2.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group</b>  The Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group was established in September 2018. The Council is aware of a significant number of prevailing broadband deficiencies across our district. We have major concerns that whilst the Department for the Economy and their delivery partner, Fibrus, are focusing their efforts on rolling out Project Stratum, there remains many parts of our district that will be left behind. As such, these premises will not benefit from any upgrade works, nor be in line to receive a 30mbps broadband service.</p>
2.3	<p><b>Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure</b>  A delegation led by the Council Chair met with senior Bank of Ireland officials on 25th March 2021 to voice Council concerns following the bank's announcement (on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021) that it will close 15 branches in Northern Ireland, including its Dungannon Town Centre branch.</p>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)</b> Funding of £9.33m was allocated to MURDP for the duration of the current RDP 2014-20 for the delivery of the LAGs local rural development strategy.</p> <p>The LAG has now reached 100% commitment of available funding with £8.14m in grant aid spent to date across funded projects within rural Mid Ulster. The remaining balance of grants will be claimed by March 2022.</p> <p>There will be no further calls for applications by the LAG within the current RDP. The service level agreement between the LAG and Council for the provision of administration support will also cease come March 2022.</p> <p>An evaluation of the LAGs local rural development strategy will now be carried out to report on achievement of strategy objectives and the effectiveness of the LEADER approach for delivery of the strategy.</p> <p>A promotional piece is also being developed to showcase a variety of the RDP projects assisted during the 2014-2020 period.</p> <p>In terms of future support for rural development initiatives post March 2022, DAERA is due to launch a public consultation on the new Rural Affairs Policy Framework this summer to seek views on the nature of support needed within the rural economy. Thereafter DAERA will use the consultation feedback to finalised potential support initiative as well as delivery arrangements.</p>
<b>3.2</b>	<p><b>Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group</b> Minutes of the Broadband Working Group meetings on 21 January 2021 and 24 February 2021 are attached on <b>Appendices 1 and 2</b>.</p> <p>From 15<sup>th</sup> February until 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Council undertook a Project Stratum Broadband survey across the district to gauge the level of broadband concerns that were arising from the roll out of Project Stratum from January 2021 onwards.</p> <p>In January 2019, postcodes that were within the “White postcode list” as identified by the Department for the Economy (DfE) were to be included in Project Stratum. In January 2021, it became evident that there were many premises within DfE’s “White postcode list” that were not included in Project Stratum.</p> <p>In order to explore the extent of the problem, Council undertook a Mid Ulster Project Stratum Broadband Survey (<b>Appendix 3</b>) to seek comment from our residents and businesses. The short survey conducted over a 3 week period in March 2021, produced a significant body of evidence to suggest there are many issues which need addressed right across Mid Ulster. A high number of respondents indicated that whilst their postcode was on DfE’s “White Postcode List”, when they checked Fibrus’ Hyperfast broadband checker, their address had been excluded. Another sub-set of respondents provided evidence to say they do not currently receive a 30mbps broadband connection and had received no</p>

	<p>indication from their current broadband supplier that they would be upgrading their service. This is another major concern, and needs urgent attention by DfE, as these respondents would need to migrate to DfE's "White Postcode List" and therefore, benefit from Project Stratum. If they remain on the "Grey Postcode List" where they are, they will not benefit from any broadband improvements via Stratum.</p>
3.3	<p><b>Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure</b>  A file note of the meeting held with senior Bank of Ireland officials on Thursday 25th March 2021 is attached on <b>Appendix 4</b>.</p>
4.0	<b>Other Considerations</b>
4.1	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial:
	Human: Officer Time
	Risk Management:
4.2	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
	It is recommended that Members:-
5.1	<p><b>Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership (MURDP)</b></p> <p><b>Note</b> progress in the delivery of the Local Rural Development Strategy (2014-2020) for Mid Ulster.</p>
5.2	<p><b>Mid Ulster Broadband Working Group</b></p> <p><b>5.2.1 Note</b> update on the body of ongoing work to address the issues related to the rollout of Project Stratum in Mid Ulster.</p> <p><b>5.2.2</b> Also to <b>note</b> two sets of Broadband Working Group Minutes on 21.1.21 &amp; 24.2.21 and Mid Ulster's Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report (March 2021)</p>
5.3	<b>Bank of Ireland (Dungannon) Branch Closure</b>

	<b>Note</b> enclosed 'File Note' on meeting held with senior Bank of Ireland officials on 25th March 2021 regarding the closure of their Dungannon Branch.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Broadband Working Group Minutes - 21.1.21</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Broadband Working Group Minutes – 24.2.21</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Mid Ulster Project Stratum Broadband Survey Report - March 2021</p> <p>Appendix 4 – File Note - Meeting with Bank of Ireland on 25.3.21 – Closure of Dungannon Branch</p>