

<b>Report on</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) : Update on Call 5</li> <li>2. A5/N2 Cross Border Committee Minutes - 12.06.25</li> <li>3. Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25</li> <li>4. Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)</li> </ol>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday 3 December 2025
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Assistant Director of Economic Development, Tourism and Strategic Programmes

<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>
<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>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5</b></p> <p>In September 2022, Mid Ulster District Council approved Council's participation in the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF). To date, this has been the only cross-deal bid to be awarded funding (£6 million) under the first tranche of funding. The Fund is managed on a cross-Council basis utilising governance structure created through the existing Full Fibre NI Consortium, led by Newry, Mourne &amp; Down District Council, and its operation will be managed through cross Council governance structures. Local Council Economic Development Teams have a key supporting role to animate and promote the DTFF, assess funding applications etc. The DTFF aims to address the financial barrier that micro and small businesses face when seeking to digitally transform by providing a capital grant to support investment in the types of capital equipment considered critical to their strategic digital transformation ambitions (e.g. hardware, software, bespoke system development).</p> <p>The value of the fund is £7.5m (£6m from the Complementary Fund; £1.1m DAERA and £450,000 from Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC). DCSDC had secured funding from NI Executive for an Inclusive Futures Fund, so were excluded from applying to the Complementary Fund. Given their</p>

interest in participating, the Council secured an additional £450,000 to contribute to DTFF.

It offers a unique intervention rate of 70% (or up to £20,000) of total eligible project costs towards the purchase of capital equipment aligned to advanced digital technologies (to include: smart technologies (Internet of Things), process automation, big data and analytics, immersive technologies, artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies).

There will be up to 7 funding calls across the 3-year delivery period (ending March 2026). Pre-Application workshops are held both online and also in each Council area to help support and brief interested businesses. There are places for approx. 600 businesses to be funded (depending on level of funding requested) with 60 of these allocated to Mid Ulster.

## **2.2 A5/N2 Cross Border Committee Minutes - 12.06.25**

The A5/N2 Cross Border Committee was established in 2019 to lobby for the delivery of infrastructure improvements and upgrades to the A5/N2 route from Dublin to the Northwest and serving the border region and Northern Ireland, with a particular emphasis on projects on the A5/N2 corridor in the border region and Northern Ireland.

There are 5 Councils represented - Derry City and Strabane District Council, Donegal County Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Mid Ulster District Council and Monaghan County Council – each Council nominates up to 4 Members to the Committee. Donegal County Council is the lead Council for this year providing secretariat support to the Committee.

## **2.3 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25**

The Mid Ulster LMP was established by Council in October 2021 and aims to improve employability outcomes and labour market conditions locally by working through coordinated, collaborative, multiagency partnerships.

It is a requirement of the Department for Communities (DfC) that LMPs produce an Annual Report which is readily available to the public. The Annual Report should include an assessment of the LMP's performance against the targets contained in its Plan, achievements and specific information as to how the LMP has carried out its functions.

## **2.4 Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)**

Council agreed to provide £24,200 financial support to Lough Neagh Partnership for the 2025-2026 financial year. Council has in previous years provided a financial contribution towards core running costs for Lough Neagh Partnership to

	assist in the delivery of marketing tourism, recreational, environmental and heritage activities on Lough Neagh and the shoreline on behalf of Council.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<p><b>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5</b></p> <p>Since the DTFF Programme was launched, the following calls for applications have taken place;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call 1 opened in November 2023 and closed in January 2024.</li> <li>• Call 2 opened in March 2024 and closed in May 2024 (outcome previously reported to Council in September 2024).</li> <li>• Call 3 opened on 17 June 2024 and closed on 23 August 2024 with 10 Letters of Offer issued to Mid Ulster businesses.</li> <li>• Call 4 opened on 1 January 2025 and closed 30 April 2025, with 14 Mid Ulster applications being successful (outcome previously reported to Council in September 2025).</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Call 5</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call 5 opened in June 2025.</li> <li>• Mid Ulster Briefing Workshop held on 16 June 2025.</li> <li>• Online Application Clinic – 31 July 2025.</li> <li>• Assessment of the applications took place 17 October 2025 with all Councils and Queen’s University through individual scoring, a consensus panel and overview review by DTFF/Invest NI.</li> <li>• The number of Mid Ulster applications received was 14. After an assessment process 12 applications were deemed successful as detailed on <b>Appendix 1</b>.</li> <li>• The total project cost of the 12 applications amounted to £317,981.46 (this comprises of a total DTFF funding award of £208,409.84 along with business match funding of £109,571.62).</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Call 6</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current call (Call 6) for applications opened in September 2025, with Expressions of Interest (Eols) submitted by 24 October 2025. Businesses deemed eligible to apply must submit their application by the deadline of 5 December 2025.</li> <li>• The total number of Eols received across Northern Ireland was 386, with 294 being invited to submit a full application. Mid Ulster had the second highest number of Eols with 33 (of 38) being invited to apply.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Call 7</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only one more call (Call 7) is scheduled in the current round of DTFF funding, which is due to open in the first quarter of 2026.</li> </ul> <p>Council officers are continuing to promote DTFF and engage with interested local businesses to progress.</p>

Note that unsuccessful applicants are advised by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council of the issues which resulted in their application not scoring highly enough to be awarded funding and can submit a new application in any subsequent call.

**3.2 A5/N2 Cross Border Committee Minutes - 12.06.25**

The A5/N2 Cross Border Committee generally meets quarterly, and the role of Chair is rotated annually, with the Chair's Council providing the secretariat role. Councillor Gael Gildernew from Mid Ulster District Council undertook the role of Chair for 2024, with Council officers providing secretariat support.

At the meeting on 16 December 2024, the Committee agreed that the Lead Council for 2025 would be Donegal County Council.

At the final meeting of 2025 (held on 10 November 2025) it was agreed that Derry City and Strabane District Council would act as Lead Council for 2026, with the Chair to be agreed at the next meeting.

Minutes of the A5/N2 Cross Border Committee meeting on 12 June 2025 are attached for information on **Appendix 2**.

**3.3 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25**

The Mid Ulster LMP Annual Report 2024-25 details all programme outcomes delivered within the 2024-25 Action Plan. This report is available to the public on request via the website and has been circulated across all key stakeholders. A copy is attached on **Appendix 3**.

**3.4 Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)**

Lough Neagh Partnership has submitted their six month Progress Report from (1 April 2025 to 30 September 2025) to fulfil the requirements as outlined within their Service Level Agreement relating to Council's financial contribution of £24,200 in the 2025-2026 financial year.

The financial contribution allows Lough Neagh Partnership to continue to co-ordinate and promote tourism, environmental and heritage activities around the Lough Neagh Shoreline as outlined in their Service Level Agreement.

**4.0 Other Considerations**

**4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications**

Financial:

**Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) – Update on Call 5**

Grants are 100% funded by the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund. No financial contribution is required from Council.

**Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25**

Mid Ulster LMP is fully funded by the Department for Communities.

**Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)**

Funding of £24,200 has been allocated in Council's Tourism Budget 2025/26.

Human:

**Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5**

Officer time in supporting businesses to access the Fund and assessing applications (from one of the other 11 Council areas to avoid a Conflict of Interest), issuing payments and undertaking Verification Visits to check equipment is installed.

**Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25**

Officer time.

**Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)**

Officer time.

Risk Management:

**Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5**

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC) as Lead Council are responsible for the grants management, assessment of applications, issuing the Letters of Offer to businesses and verification of claims. Following processing, they then provide Payment Authorisation to each Council to instruct them to release the payments to businesses. Each Council then submits a Claim to NMDDC which is then reimbursed by Invest NI.

NMDDC have developed a Risk Register for the DTFF which is reviewed and updated monthly and presented to the Operations Group and the Project Steering Group.

**Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25**

LMP staff manage and monitor delivery of the Action Plans in line with current governance arrangements.

**Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)**

A six month update review and annual review is completed and presented to Council outlining how Lough Neagh Partnership is meeting the requirements /

	<p>targets within their SLA. The project will be managed in accordance with MUDC policies and procedures.</p>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	<p>Equality &amp; Good Relations Implications:</p> <p><b>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5</b> An EQIA was undertaken by NMDDC and Invest NI. The DTFF is a competitive process whereby eligible businesses are invited to apply through open calls.</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25</b> Equality and Good Relations Screening has been completed for the period 2024-27.</p> <p><b>Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)</b> Mid Ulster Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its activities with a focus on all visitors, citizens living and business owners within the Mid Ulster.</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p><b>Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5</b> A Rural Needs Impact Assessment was undertaken by NMDDC and Invest NI. The nature of the proposed fund is that it will attract all eligible businesses from across NI on a competitive basis. There is no adverse impact anticipated on any community/urban or rural section of the community.</p> <p><b>Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25</b> Rural Needs Screening has been completed on the Mid Ulster LMP Strategy for the period 2024-27.</p>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
	<p>It is recommended that Members;</p> <p><b>5.1 Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) - Update on Call 5</b> <b>Note</b> the outcome of the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund for Call 5.</p> <p><b>5.2 A5/N2 Cross Border Committee Minutes - 12.06.25</b> <b>Note</b> minutes of A5/N2 Cross Border Committee held on 12 June 2025.</p> <p><b>5.3 Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25</b></p>

<p><b>5.4</b></p>	<p><b>Note</b> Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Annual Report 2024-25.</p> <p><b>Lough Neagh Partnership Service Level Agreement (2025-2026) – 6 Month Update Report (1 April 2025 - 30 September 2025)</b></p> <p><b>Note</b> Lough Neagh Partnership’s 6 month Update Report outlining actions completed against their 2025/2026 Service Level Agreement targets for the period 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025.</p>
<p><b>6.0</b></p>	<p><b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b></p>
	<p><b>Appendix 1</b> - DTFF Call 5 - Letters of Offer issued to Successful Businesses</p> <p><b>Appendix 2</b> - Minutes of A5/N2 Cross Border Committee Meeting - 12.6.25</p> <p><b>Appendix 3</b> - Mid Ulster Labour Market Partnership Annual Report 2024-2025</p> <p><b>Appendix 4</b> - Lough Neagh Partnership 6 Month Update Report - 1.4.25 – 30.9.25</p>