

Title of Report:	Causeway Coast & Glens Local Economic Partnership
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	17 December 2024 returned 21 January 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Local Economy
Outcome	Council contributes to improving levels of business innovation in the Borough, improving median wage per employee, increasing business startup and survival rates and increasing early stage entrepreneurial activity within the NI norm
Lead Officer	Director Leisure & Development / Head of Prosperity & Place

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	Long-term objective

Budgetary Considerations	
Net Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	Revenue - Capital
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	No
Legal Opinion Obtained	N/A

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

To enable Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council to implement the requirements of the Local Economic Partnership following guidance (Annex A) from the Department for the Economy (DfE) including the identification of actions and development of projects that align with the Sub Regional Economic Plan.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On the 1st October 2024, DfE launched its Sub-Regional Economic Plan, a new strategic approach to economic development (**Annex B**). The aim is for local communities to be empowered to identify their own economic priorities through local partnerships working together to identify the main barriers to economic growth and the interventions that will unlock the area's potential.
- 2.2 The plan sets out the next steps DfE and Invest NI (INI) will take to bring about greater regional balance. The plan focuses on three strands of delivery:
1. Creation of new Local Economic Partnerships with dedicated funding;
 2. Enhancing the role of Invest NI at a regional level; and
 3. Realignment of departmental policies and programmes to help drive local growth.

3.0 Local Economic Partnership (LEP)

- 3.1 The empowerment of local communities is key to building a more regionally balanced economy. To ensure that there is full engagement and involvement, all 11 Councils have been asked to establish their own LEP. These can be specific to one council area or can expand, creating bigger partnerships, through collaborations with other council areas; they can build on existing partnerships such as Community Planning Partnerships or can be standalone.
- 3.2 With support from DfE and INI, the LEP will work to identify suitable local projects with proposals being made to access dedicated funding. Projects should aim to:
- Improve productivity;
 - Raise median wages;
 - Increase the employment rate;
 - Lower economic inactivity; and
 - Move towards delivering Net Zero and industrial decarbonisation.
- 3.3 Since Officers provided their last update, a meeting has taken place with DfE and INI officials to determine the preferred structure for Causeway Coast & Glens LEP and it was agreed that the current Economic Advisory Group (EAG) would be reconstituted into the LEP for our Borough. To facilitate this, a rationalisation exercise will need to take place to ensure the appropriate decision-makers are represented on the partnership.
- 3.4 It is proposed that Elected Members input is coordinated via the Community Planning Partnership to expediate proceedings.

4.0 Timeline

- 4.1 A proposed timeline was previously provided, this has since been expanded:

Initial setup – November 2024.

- DfE Strategic Advisor has now been appointed.
- Meeting to discuss structure has taken place.

- Council will in collaboration with the EAG agree the draft Terms of Reference (**Annex C**) along with DfE/INI.
- Once agreed, members to be invited to first meeting.
- At first meeting, draft TOR to be adopted – this process allows for membership/ representative board to be widened or for decision making process to be changed.
- Action Planning phase to be started on agreement.

Action Planning will follow – December 2024.

- LEP to agree core focus until end 26-27, e.g. productivity, economic inactivity etc. based on SREP evidence. To be agreed with DfE/ INI.
- LEP will decide how to choose actions to take forward – open call, private submissions, how to rank, appraise options etc. – DfE and INI will advise.
- DfE will confirm funding level to each LEP. Fund management guidance will be provided to council secretariat.
- Project and funding phase to be started on agreement.

Projects and Funding – January to March 2025.

- LEP will identify actions.
- DfE/ INI will work with LEP to identify projects that meets their core focus.
- Projects and actions will be assessed based on LEP methodology agreed.

- 4.2 Fundamentally the LEP seeks to involve communities in decision making. As such, the partnership is required to be in place to develop ideas, plans and inform decision making. The Council is responsible for establishing the partnership and will attend LEP meetings as part of fulfilling the role of the accountable body in relation to the funding received from the Department.
- 4.3 DfE have indicated that funding of circa £1.5m will be made available for each of the next three years to facilitate projects identified and agreed by the LEP, in collaboration with the Department and INI.
- 4.4 This programme sits alongside interventions such as the then Levelling Up Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund in supporting local regeneration in areas of the UK that have not previously seen significant investment. As previously noted, what makes the LEP distinctive is the economic development focus.
- 4.5 The Partnerships’ principal remit is to determine a core focus and develop projects that will support economic development aligned to the Sub-Regional Economic Plan. Officers previously presented a regional priorities paper to the Leisure & Development Committee on 18th June 2024 (**Annex D**), which identified a range of short, medium and long term strategic priorities for the Borough:

Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term
Key strategic roads/ infrastructure (NI Water & NIE) improvements across the borough.	Growth Deal - £72m capital investment – Innovation Pillar Projects. To support existing and new businesses (FDI and spinouts or new businesses) with the creation of high valued jobs/ GVA/ skills/ employment/ and increase productivity to align with Growth Deal projects and other regional initiatives	To develop tourism initiatives that will encourage growth in specific sectors and enhance the area’s tourism provision; as well as generating more visitors, motivating them to spend longer and visit throughout the year i.e. 4/5 Star Hotel Accommodation; signature attractions and facilities across the area to

		convert day to staying visitors and increase dwell time.
Development of new Enhanced Investment Zone for the Borough as part of the recent UK Government's £150 million commitment for Northern Ireland.	Greater availability of enterprise development land/sites across the Borough as current demand from businesses outstrips the limited supply of land available.	Sustainable Energy – development of SOLAR PVC Farms to make the Borough one of the UK's most sustainable regions by 2035; ensuring that sustainability and the development of a vibrant and growing economy go together.
A clearly defined 'value proposition' and promotion of same to encourage investment (indigenous and international) to the Borough.	Compulsory purchase powers to support the delivery of a range of development, regeneration, and infrastructure projects in the public interest.	
Increase demand from businesses in the Borough for mainstream government support, particularly new business start-ups and early stage growth. (Partnership Pathway initiatives / Bespoke Solutions).	Development of Sports / Leisure facilities across the borough.	
Enhanced innovation across key priority sectors as identified within Council's Economic Development Strategy – Recovery & Renewal i.e. advanced manufacturing; engineering; construction; financial business and professional services; retail; tourism and hospitality; agri-food; and sustainable energy.		
Greater linkages / partnership working with Higher Education and Further Education Colleges, and the lifting of the MASN cap at Ulster University Coleraine to increase the skills provision in the region to meet the current and future needs of businesses operating in our priority growth sectors		

4.6 It is these priorities that will help inform the LEP on the direction to take when determining which projects will have the greatest impact. Officers will advise the Partnership on work already undertaken within Council to develop projects. For example, Prosperity & Place have recently completed a scoping study of potential energy projects which was approved by the Leisure & Development Committee on 19th November 2024.

4.7 Similarly, projects which are complementary to other recent investments should be explored, i.e. smart town initiatives, deployment of 5G, improving road infrastructure, development of Blueways, promoting the circular economy etc.

- 4.8 Revenue funding will be available to support this process, which must deliver an agreed project submission by a date set by the Department. The submission is effectively a business case to secure the investment available. As such, it must set out the 'strategic case for change', which identifies the challenges that Borough faces and the opportunities to address them, using the funding available.
- 4.9 As per the existing Departmental guidance, Council will establish, chair, and operate the LEP within their area. In doing so, Council will bring together local economic stakeholders to reflect local needs and strengths, promoting collaborative working, and drive greater integration between local and central government economic initiatives.
- 4.10 The LEP will not be a legal entity, nor hold any finances, and it is anticipated that the final project proposals and any activity related to their implementation, will be formally presented to the Council in its capacity as accountable body prior to submission to the Department. This will ensure the plans and expenditure proposed are subject to appropriate scrutiny, within budget and adhere to relevant legislative, policy and procedural requirements. As the Accountable Body for the funding the council will ensure that at all times the LEP adheres to all relevant council procedures and policy.
- 4.11 As the LEP aligns with the Council area's Community Plan, it is now included as a new action (Action 31) under the Thematic theme Economy & Tourism. The LEP, through its secretariat, will provide updates to the Community Planning Partnership and will report to the Council's Corporate Policy & Resources Committee.

5.0 Local Economic Partnership Membership

- 5.1 DfE have published their guidelines and timelines for the LEP, therefore it is recommended that the Council proceed with the reconstituting of the EAG into the Borough's LEP. This approach will enable the Partnership to be quickly mobilised.
- 5.2 To establish the Partnership, the following criteria has been taken into consideration as per the Departmental guidance relating to LEP membership.
- Membership must include:
 - FE representative(s)
 - Local Enterprise Agency representative(s)
 - Local business representative(s)/ Chamber of Commerce representative(s)
 - Membership can also include:
 - University representative(s)
 - Third sector representative(s)
 - Financial services representative(s)
 - Industry and/or lobby groups
 - Public sector organisations(s)
 - CPP or LMP representative(s)
 - Trade union representative(s)
- 5.3 Membership should reflect local economic needs with no one sector dominating at the expense of others. Each organisation should have an equal vote.
- 5.4 Diversity in representation is encouraged; membership should not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, marital status and whether or not a person has dependents.
- 5.5 Based on the guidance, the following LEP structure and membership is recommended:

Chair (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive 	
<p style="text-align: center;">Core Members (5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Regional College • North West Regional College • Enterprise Causeway • Roe Valley Enterprises • Causeway Chamber 	<p style="text-align: center;">Additional Members (6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ulster University • Labour Market Partnership • Community Planning Partnership • Government Departments (Observer status e.g. Department for Economy) • Local Networks

5.6 To meet the requirements of the Guidance, it is proposed that a rationalisation exercise is undertaken regarding the current representatives attending the EAG. Moving forward only individuals who have authority to take decisions on behalf of their organisation will be invited to attend LEP meetings.

5.7 Only in exceptional circumstances may deputies attend. In this instance, deputies should have the full delegated authority to make decisions and approve documentation on behalf of the appropriate member and be sufficiently briefed to provide accurate and timely information to the LEP.

5.8 Secretariat support to the LEP will be provided by the Council's Prosperity and Place team, funded through the revenue funding provided.

6.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee accepts the following, and recommends to full council for approval:

1. To accept the funding of circa £1.5m per year (for the next three years) provided by the Department for the area that makes up the LEP geography and its role as the Accountable body for the funding.
2. To provide delegated authority to the Director Leisure & Development, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer, to commission appropriate external support as necessary to enable timely preparation of the LEP project proposals.
3. The LEP Membership as proposed in this report, including the process of establishing the LEP in line with the current guidance from the Department.
4. That the Elected Members input is coordinated via the Community Planning Partnership representative to expedite the project development process.
5. That the council provides the secretariat support to the LEP. This support will be resourced through the Council's Prosperity & Place team and funded through the revenue funding provided.