

Title of Report:	Causeway Coast & Glens Local Economic Partnership Strategic Analysis & Action Plan
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	21st October 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee Y/N	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	Head of Prosperity & Place

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	31 st March 2028

Budgetary Considerations	
Net Cost of Proposal	N/A
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	Revenue – Capital (100% funded by DfE)
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

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members approval for the Local Economic Partnership Strategic Analysis and Action Plan 2025 – 2028.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On the 1st October 2024, the Department for the Economy (DfE) launched its Sub-Regional Economic Plan, a new strategic approach to economic development. 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 In January 2025, then Minister for the Economy, Conor Murphy announced the Regional Economy Fund, which allocated £45m across all Council's, over the next three years. The fund is to be delivered in each Council area via a Local Economic Partnership (LEP).
- 2.3 Since then, Causeway Coast & Glens LEP has been established and Officers have been working with DfE and Invest NI (INI) to develop a bespoke Action Plan. To expediate this work jheSOLUTIONS were appointed to undertake a strategic analysis of the Borough and develop the Action Plan based on input from all the partners who sit on the LEP Board.
- 2.4 Following a successful LEP workshop on 2nd July 2025, jheSOLUTIONS developed the attached Strategic Analysis and Action Plan (**Annex A**), which incorporates the key objectives outlined by DfE in their scheme guidance:
- Improving productivity;
 - Raising median wages;
 - Increasing the employment rate;
 - Lowering economic inactivity; and
 - Moving towards delivering Net Zero and industrial decarbonisation.
- 2.5 The following three strategic themes were developed to help frame the activities to be undertaken by the LEP:

Collaboration, Growth & Innovation

Aligning directly with DfE's core metrics (tradable businesses, Invest NI clients, productivity) but also with local ambition and business interest. Businesses engaging with actions linked to this theme could have potential to take the next step into wider programmes and regional innovation projects.

Inclusive Entrepreneurship & Business Resilience

Addressing local challenges in start-up survival, rural enterprise, and low self-employment, creating the potential for community wealth building and true place-based prosperity and social inclusion. This theme can cut across into the vital third sector and community-based activity while supporting key economic drivers in Causeway Coast and Glens.

Sustainability & Skills for the Future

Aligning with Council and DfE priorities on decarbonisation, energy efficiency, and skills while building pathways from current council programmes and the work of the Labour Market Partnership.

- 2.6 The Action Plan has identified the following programmes to be delivered across the next two and half years, up to 31st March 2028:

1. Programme 1 – Global Gateway

Global Gateway will leverage the global spotlight of The Open Championship in Portrush (July 2025) to position Causeway Coast & Glens as a showcase for our core growth sectors, including ethical AI, sustainable energy, agri-tech, and tourism innovation. Through curated events, including investor roundtables, site tours, diaspora engagement, and a digital investor portal, the initiative will connect global capital with regional innovation assets. By aligning with partners through the LEP, Global Gateway provides a timely, high-impact platform that translates international visibility into tangible local outcomes, including investment, jobs, and long-term economic growth across the borough.

2. Programme 2 – Innovate360

Innovate360 is a joined-up platform to help CC&G firms solve real problems, win real contracts, and lift productivity. It brings anchor buyers and public bodies to the table via Innovation Exchange challenges, coupled with BIT/lean cohorts to hard-wire process gains on shopfloors and in service ops, and deploys a small innovation challenge fund so SMEs can rapidly prototype with FE/HE expertise. CONNECTED-style showcase & buyer labs widen market access, while a dedicated Challenge Catalyst Fund underwrites the last mile—from prototype to pilot—so solutions don't stall at "interesting" and can move to proof of concept quicker. This will also lift potential for business in the Agri-Food sector to engage and participate in the Region Deal project at Limavady. A small Navigator Desk will provide mentoring and coaching while it keeps firms moving through the pipeline and the Impact Lab verifies outcomes so we can demonstrate value for money within the funding window and beyond.

3. Programme 3 – Thrive Causeway

Thrive Causeway is a focused, capital-led programme that enables local enterprises to diversify, modernise and launch market-ready products/experiences. It replaces micro-grants with larger, outcome-oriented capital awards and couples this with a dedicated Mentoring & Coaching resource embedded in Council and delivered in partnership with Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs). The aim is impact with pace: simpler applications, proportionate evidence, and every award linked to a live route-to-market (e.g., booking/retail channels).

4. Programme 4 – FutureProof

FutureProof is a practical, business-led programme to cut energy costs, build skills for the future, and accelerate implementation of proven measures across CC&G. It responds to what local businesses told us they need, targeted diagnostics, co-funding to act, and help navigating grid/planning, and it scales up from Council's current Green Support Scheme by adding mobile skills delivery, audit-linked capital, circularity pilots, and a grid/renewables enablement offer. It will support SMEs in CC&G to reduce energy costs and transition towards a low-carbon economy.

- 2.7 It should be noted that there is flexibility within the scheme to allow for additional support programmes to be developed, should market trends indicate a need.

3.0 Implementation & Delivery

- 3.1 Implementation and delivery by the Local Economic Partnership will commence immediately and will be completed by 31st March 2028, as per DfE guidelines.
- 3.2 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will provide the Secretariat for the management and administration of the scheme.
- 3.3 DfE have issued the attached Memorandum of Understanding (**Annex B**) which details the funding commitment to be provided to CCG under this scheme, £4,509,000. The budget has been split into Resource and Capital, with the Resource budget providing staffing budget.
- 3.4 The funding allocation for the programme is £4,509,000:

**Officers are currently working with DfE to develop an annual budget for Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3.*

4.0 Recommendations

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Leisure & Development Committee recommends to Council:
 - a. The Local Economic Partnership Strategic Analysis and Action Plan be approved so that delivery of the programmes can commence immediately.
 - b. Authorise the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between DfE, Invest NI and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.



LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Strategic Analysis and Action Plan



August 2025

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Executive Summary	4
Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership Structure	8
Background Analysis	8
Potential Governance Format	10
Policy Context for Economic Activity in the Council Area	13
National and Regional Policy Frameworks	13
Local Policy and Strategic Direction	14
Economic Evidence and Cost Pressures	14
Causeway Coast and Glens Policy Focus	15
Cost Pressures and Business Environment	15
Policy Summary and Evidence Gaps	16
Process for the Strategic Assessment and Engagement / Consultation	17
Findings from the Strategic Assessment	20
Economic Data Analysis	20
Table 1: Economic Output and Productivity	22
Table 2: Labour Market and Income	22
Table 3: Skills and Education	23
Table 4: Sectoral Profile and Export Intensity	23
Comparative Region Analysis	23
Key Learning from the Strategic Analysis	25
Priorities and Turning the Curve	27
Lessons on Measuring Impact and Value for Money	27
Recommended KPIs for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP (Adapted from LEO Model)	28
Cross-Cutting Themes for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP	29
Long List of Potential Themes	29
Key Themes for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP	31
LEP Strategic Action Plan 2025–2028	33
Long List of Potential Actions	34
Actions for Consideration	35
Summary Comparison Table	38
Simplified KPI Table	39
Final Proposed Programme of Support	43
Annex 1: Budget	
Annex 2: Consolidated Action Plan Proposal	

Introduction

The Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership (LEP) has been established as part of a new, place-based approach to economic development in Northern Ireland. This strategy marks a significant shift in how local economic priorities are identified, resourced, and delivered, placing local voices, assets, and ambitions at the heart of



regional economic planning. The LEP is a collaborative structure, bringing together representatives from local government, business, education, community organisations, and statutory agencies to co-design and implement interventions that respond to the unique economic challenges and opportunities within the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough.

This strategic plan has been developed in alignment with the Department for the Economy's Sub-Regional Economic Plan (October 2024), which sets out a vision for a more regionally balanced, productive, and inclusive economy. It also responds to the findings of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre's (UUEPC) 2025 Cost of Doing Business Impact Report, which highlights the acute pressures facing local employers, particularly in low-margin sectors such as hospitality, retail, and care. These pressures, rising labour costs, energy prices, and regulatory burdens, underscore the need for targeted, locally informed economic responses.

The LEP's role is to act as a catalyst for economic transformation by identifying local priorities, coordinating investment, and ensuring that economic development activity is responsive to the needs of businesses and communities. This strategy outlines how the LEP will deliver on four pillars of the Department for Economy vision: increased productivity, more good jobs, reduced carbon emissions, and improved regional balance. It also reflects the ambitions of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's existing economic strategy and community plan, ensuring continuity and coherence across local and regional policy frameworks.

The strategy is underpinned by a commitment to inclusive growth, sustainability, and resilience. It recognises the importance of empowering local stakeholders to shape their economic future and of building strong partnerships to deliver shared outcomes. Through this plan, the LEP will set out a clear roadmap for action over the next three years, supported by a detailed one-year implementation plan and a transparent funding framework. Together, these elements will ensure that the Causeway Coast and Glens area is well-positioned to respond to current challenges and seize future opportunities.

The Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership is driven by a clear and collective ambition to deliver meaningful, measurable economic impact across the

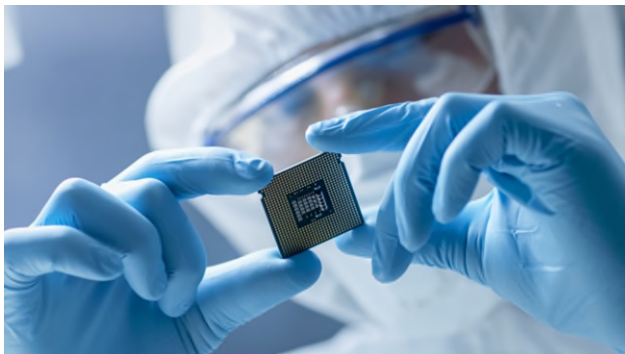
Borough. Council and stakeholders have expressed a strong desire to move beyond planning into action, focusing on simplicity, consistency, and boldness in delivery. With a commitment to resilience, collaboration, and targeting investment where it matters most, the LEP aims to empower local businesses, unlock sectoral growth, and position the Borough as a destination for innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive prosperity. The Partnership recognises that success will be defined not only by strategic vision but by its ability to remove barriers, respond to local needs, and deliver tangible outcomes that improve lives and livelihoods.

Executive Summary

The Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership (LEP) Strategy 2025–2028 sets out a bold, place-based vision for economic transformation across the Borough. Backed by £4.5 million in funding from the Department for the Economy’s Regional Balance Fund, this strategy marks a pivotal shift in how local economic priorities are identified, resourced, and delivered. It is rooted in the principles of regional balance, inclusive growth, and local empowerment, and is designed to unlock the full potential of the Borough’s people, businesses, and places.

The LEP is a collaborative structure, bringing together representatives from local government, business, education, community organisations, and statutory agencies. It is tasked with co-designing and implementing interventions that respond to the unique economic challenges and opportunities within the Causeway Coast and Glens area. This strategy aligns with the Department for the Economy’s Sub-Regional Economic Plan and Invest NI’s new regional strategy and is informed by robust evidence from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) and extensive stakeholder engagement.

Strategic Context and Challenges



Causeway Coast and Glens faces persistent structural challenges: low productivity, below-average wages, high economic inactivity, and sectoral reliance on low-margin industries such as tourism, retail, and care. GVA per capita stands at just 68% of the Northern Ireland average, and median earnings are among the lowest in the region. The Borough also suffers from demographic

pressures, with a shrinking working-age population and limited tertiary education attainment.

Despite these challenges, the area has significant untapped potential. It boasts strong natural assets, a vibrant artisan food and drink sector, emerging clusters in agri-tech and sustainable energy, and a committed network of local stakeholders. The LEP strategy seeks to harness these strengths to “turn the curve” on economic performance.

Vision and Mission

Creating a hook for engagement and differentiating Causeway Coast and Glens Council from the rest of NI could have significant value. The council has a unique proposition, and finding a way to sell this, with impact, could be part of the wider LEP impact.

Vision: "A bold, connected economy where businesses lead ideas flourish, and people prosper."

Mission: To drive inclusive, high-impact economic growth by supporting fresh thinking, empowering entrepreneurs, and building the skills and sectors that will shape the future of Causeway Coast and Glens.



***concept only**

Suggested focus statements to use in marketing the LEP could include:

- Ideas. Ambition. Prosper.
Captures the LEP's focus on ideas and thinking, entrepreneurship with ambition, and economic prosperity
- Grow Local. Trade Global.
Emphasises the ambition to support local businesses while expanding export and tradable sector activity
- Skills. Sustainability. Success.
Aligns with the LEP's third theme and highlights the pathway to long-term economic resilience
- Bold Growth. Shared Prosperity.
Reflects the vision of a bold economy and the mission to deliver inclusive outcomes
- Connect. Create. Compete.
Speaks to collaboration, innovation, and competitiveness — core to the LEP's strategic themes
- Turning Potential Into Impact.
A direct reference to the "Turning the Curve" approach and the LEP's outcomes-based focus

Strategic Themes

Following extensive analysis and consultation, the LEP has identified three core themes for investment and action:

1. Collaboration, Growth and Innovation

Aligning directly with DfE's core metrics (tradable businesses, Invest NI clients, productivity) but also with local ambition and business interest. Businesses engaging with actions linked to this theme could have potential to take the next step into wider programmes and regional innovation projects. These also drive areas of resilience, sustainability and skills and will support core economic activity as well as new opportunities

Actions in this area could focus on R&D, digitalisation, export readiness, cluster development & collaboration and general innovation.

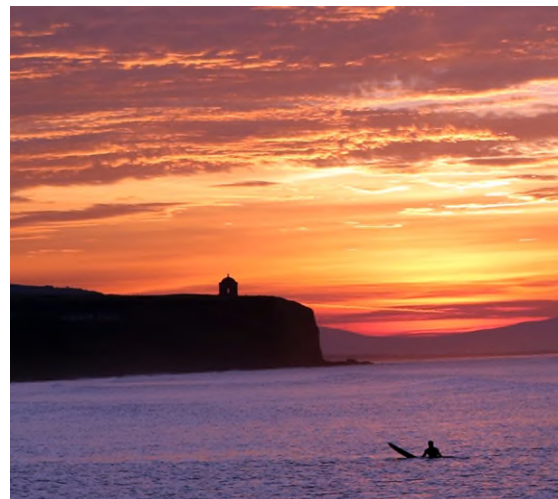
2. Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience

Addressing local challenges in start-up survival, rural enterprise, and low self-employment, creating the potential for community wealth building and true place-based prosperity and social inclusion. This theme can cut across into the vital third sector and community-based activity while supporting key economic drivers in Causeway Coast and Glens which are critical to economy and can support growing a true business ambition culture. A wide range of actions could be considered here including; start-up survival support, micro-grants, mentoring, rural innovation, social enterprise and off-season business activity.

3. Sustainability and Skills for the Future

Aligning with Council and DfE priorities on decarbonisation, energy efficiency, and skills while building pathways from current council programmes and the work of the Labour Market Partnership. Support here can support rural business activity and provide steps to improving staff retention and competitiveness

Potential actions include: Green skills academies, energy audits, circular economy pilots, digital upskilling, business improvement skills and collaboration between council, colleges and university to support business.



Governance and Delivery

The LEP operates under a collaborative governance model, with the Council as the accountable body. It is supported by a strategic oversight board, potentially thematic subgroups, and a dedicated LEP Manager. Governance principles include transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and integrity, with robust conflict of interest management and alignment with DfE's MoU and funding conditions. The LEP is to be chaired by a senior council official, this should not hinder business engagement and leadership in membership of the LEP.

Impact and Outcomes

The LEP's action plan provides a clear and confident platform from which a range of high-impact activity can be developed and delivered. The specific interventions have been shaped by local need, stakeholder input, and delivery capacity, the ambition is consistent: to unlock economic potential, support business resilience, and drive inclusive growth across the Borough. The LEP will act as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainability, ensuring that every pound invested delivers measurable value for businesses and communities. This is not about short-term activity, but about laying the foundations for long-term transformation.

Underpinning all activity will be a robust performance framework, focused on outcomes that matter, jobs created or sustained, businesses supported, skills developed, and productivity improved. By adopting a "Turning the Curve" approach, the LEP ensures that interventions shift the trajectory of key indicators and deliver lasting impact. These outcomes will not only support the Council's wider strategic goals, including the Labour Market Partnership and Growth Deal projects, but also provide a compelling case for future investment and co-funding.

The LEP is ready to lead with purpose, deliver with integrity, and grow with ambition.

Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership Structure

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has been working strategically around the local economic landscape for a considerable period. Prior to the Regional Balance Strategy and LEP structures, the Council has had an Economic Advisory Group working around key challenges and opportunities for the council area. This work leaves a strong foundation and legacy for the LEP to build on and deliver impact with the funding made available over the next three years.

Background Analysis

In June 2025, local independent economist, Maureen O'Reilly, published a new report *Infrastructure to Promote and Support Subregional Business Start-Up & Growth – Final Report (June 2025)*, suitable for inclusion in a governance analysis. The executive summary for the report states “This research sets out to inform that renewed model of subregional business support in Northern Ireland by considering three very different models of subregional business support - the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) model in Ireland, County Development Centres (CDCs) in Estonia and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE). The first two have locations throughout their countries while SOSE is an economic and community development agency responsible for a specific geography within Scotland.”

The report highlights significant governance challenges and opportunities in the development of subregional business support structures in Northern Ireland, drawing on comparative models from Ireland (LEOs), Scotland (SOSE), and Estonia (CDCs).

Governance Challenges

1. Fragmented Responsibilities and Ambiguity

Northern Ireland's economic development landscape is marked by overlapping responsibilities across multiple departments (DfE, TEO, DAERA, Communities, Finance) and councils. This lack of legislative clarity results in fragmented delivery, duplication, and gaps in support. Unlike Ireland's LEO model, which is embedded in legislation and local authority structures, Northern Ireland lacks a unified statutory framework for subregional economic development.

2. Underpowered Regional Offices

Invest NI's regional offices are under-resourced, receiving only 4% of the agency's budget and operating with limited staff. This contrasts with SOSE and LEOs, which have dedicated funding, staffing, and strategic mandates. The absence of clear performance metrics and reliance on enquiry tracking rather than business outcomes further weakens accountability.

3. Lack of Integration and Coordination

The current model lacks formal mechanisms for coordination between Invest NI, councils, and delivery partners. This siloed approach hinders strategic alignment and limits the effectiveness of local economic partnerships (LEPs). The report

recommends formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to clarify roles and responsibilities.

4. Inconsistent Local Authority Engagement

In the LEO model, some councils are more engaged than others, leading to variability in delivery. This inconsistency is a risk for Northern Ireland, where council buy-in is essential for LEP success. The report notes that dual accountability (e.g. to both Enterprise Ireland and local authorities) can create tension and confusion. This will be a further risk to the LEP as councils are receiving no specific support in terms of resource to deliver the activity.

5. Overemphasis on Volume Metrics

A focus on input/output metrics (e.g. number of businesses supported) rather than long-term impact (e.g. productivity, wage growth) limits the strategic value of interventions. This is a shared challenge across models and highlights the need for more meaningful performance frameworks. There is greater challenge for the LEP in that this is only a three-year programme.

Governance Opportunities

1. Adopting a 'First Stop Shop' Model

The LEO and SOSE models demonstrate the value of a clearly branded, locally embedded support hub. Embedding LEPs within councils, with clear identity and access to local services (planning, rates, environment), can enhance responsiveness and reduce duplication.

2. Centre of Excellence Model

Enterprise Ireland's Centre of Excellence provides oversight, training, and performance management for LEOs. A similar structure in Northern Ireland could support consistency, quality assurance, and shared learning across LEPs.

3. Multilevel Governance and Regional Strategies

Estonia's CDCs and Scotland's REPs show how regional development strategies can align local and national priorities. Embedding LEPs within broader regional frameworks (e.g. Growth Deals, Smart Specialisation) can improve coherence and impact.

4. Private Sector Leadership and Accountability

All models emphasise the role of business in governance, through grant panels, steering groups, and strategy development. Ensuring private sector leadership within LEPs can enhance credibility, focus, and delivery.

5. Digital and Data-Driven Governance

The LEO network's use of CRM systems and digital portals supports transparency and performance tracking. Northern Ireland should adopt similar tools to improve engagement, monitoring, and evaluation.

Potential Governance Format

Composition and Representation

The LEP brings together a cross-sectoral group of stakeholders, including:

- Local Government: Elected Members and senior officers from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Business Community: Representatives from key sectors (e.g. tourism, agri-food, manufacturing), local chambers, and entrepreneurs
- Education and Skills: Further and higher education institutions (e.g. NRC, NWRC, Ulster University)
- Community and Voluntary Sector: Social enterprises, rural networks, and community development organisations
- Statutory Agencies: Invest NI, DfE, InterTrade Ireland, and other relevant departments. While Tourism sits outside the core team leading this within council, Tourism NI's involvement in the panel should be strongly considered

This inclusive structure ensures that the LEP reflects the economic diversity and needs of the Borough. Business and community leadership is critical, both for relevance and ensuring accountability. This leadership will bring a complete focus on outcomes and impact. Co-ownership by council will ensure process is followed and supports best practice and broader integration with other strategies, investments and council activities.

Governance and Decision-Making

The LEP already operates under a collaborative governance model, with the Council acting as the accountable body for funding and delivery. Key features include:

- LEP Board: A strategic oversight group chaired by a senior council official with representation from all sectors
- Secretariat: Provided by the Council's Economic Development team, with support from a dedicated LEP Manager
- Decision-Making: Consensus-based, with clear escalation protocols and delegated authority for project approvals within agreed thresholds

Thematic subgroups focused on priority areas that will come through in the programmes and be the bedrock of the measures for success could add value. These can draw in expertise and key businesses within each element to ensure the programmes meet need and are achieving the impact needed to make a difference for Causeway Coast and Glens.

Alignment with DfE and Invest NI

The LEP is aligned with the Department for the Economy's Sub-Regional Economic Plan and Invest NI's new regional strategy. Key integration mechanisms include:

- Regional Balance Unit: A DfE-led structure supporting LEPs and ensuring alignment with national policy.
- Invest NI Regional Office: A key delivery partner, with increased staffing and a new client model for businesses under £2m turnover.

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): Recommended between the LEP, Council, and Invest NI to clarify roles, responsibilities, and referral pathways.

Beyond this it will be incumbent on both DfE and Invest NI to ensure the Council and the LEP are fully aware of initiatives, programmes of activity and broader opportunities that would otherwise not be readily known at a local or sub-regional basis. An MOU or similar structures must be a two-way engagement, only on this basis can the investment in funding make the impact it has been envisaged for.

Governance Challenges and Risks

As a non-statutory body, the LEP faces several governance risks:

Challenge	Risk	Mitigation
Lack of legal status	Ambiguity in authority and accountability	Formal MoU and Terms of Reference
Overlapping remits	Duplication or conflict with other agencies	Clear role definition and coordination protocols
Political influence	Risk of short-termism or bias	Council chair and balanced representation
Capacity constraints	Delivery delays or underperformance	Dedicated LEP Manager and shared services
Conflict of interest	Undue influence in funding decisions	Transparent declarations and recusal procedures

Importance of Business Leadership

International best practice (e.g. Ireland's LEOs, Scotland's SOSE) highlights the value of strong business leadership in regional economic partnerships. Business leaders bring:

- Market insight and credibility
- Focus on outcomes and delivery
- Ability to champion the LEP externally

It is recommended that the LEP has a strong business presence, with a clear mandate to represent the partnership and drive performance. This is common practice in larger bodies within central government in both London and Dublin. This would be done in partnership with the Council chair of the LEP and in line with the principles required by DfE. A Council chair within this model can also help to avoid conflict of issue challenges.

While there has been a broad business organisation representation, consideration should be given to ensuring there are several business leaders directly involved, addressing sectoral, scale and rural / urban balance. Lack of attendance by business membership should clearly lead to removal from the partnership.

Governance Principles

To ensure effective operation, the LEP will adopt the following principles:

1. Clarity of Roles: Defined responsibilities for Council, DfE, Invest NI, and LEP members.
2. Transparency: Open decision-making, published minutes, and clear reporting.
3. Accountability: Compliance with MoU, Letters of Offer, and public finance rules.

4. Inclusivity: Representation from all sectors and geographies.
5. Business Leadership: Council chair with and active business engagement and participation informing action
6. Integrity: Robust conflict of interest management and audit processes.

Conflict of Interest Management

The MoU requires adequate declarations of interest at all stages. The LEP will implement:

- Annual declarations by all members.
- Recusal from discussions or decisions where a conflict exists.
- Independent oversight of funding decisions.
- Documentation of all declarations and decisions.

It will be essential this is closely managed, it is natural that there may be a churn of elected representations and business members will have some form of conflict arise for a variety of reasons. Best practice in this area can be found in FE College governance and there are standard structures in this area that could be borrowed and adopted by the LEP to avoid issues arising.

Compliance with DfE Guidance

The governance model must reflect:

- Council-led project approvals and assurance procedures.
- Minimum project threshold of £20k, with exceptions requiring justification.
- No external consultancy over £10k without Ministerial approval.
- Alignment with scheme outcomes (tradable businesses, Invest NI clients, wage growth), though it should be noted this presents specific challenges to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and the scheme outcomes are skewed by the change in client definition (as an example) and therefore other council specific measures are essential.
- Annual action plans and financial profiling submitted to DfE.
- Internal audit and post-project evaluation requirements.

It is important that within the governance structure these become standing items on the agenda and regularly discussed by the LEP.

Policy Context for Economic Activity in the Council Area

The economic development landscape in Causeway Coast and Glens is shaped by a complex interplay of national, regional, and local policy frameworks. These policies provide both the strategic direction and operational levers through which the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) can deliver meaningful, place-based economic outcomes. This section outlines the key policy drivers, thematic priorities, and evidence sources that underpin the LEP's strategy, while also identifying areas where further analysis or policy refinement may be required.

National and Regional Policy Frameworks

The Department for the Economy's (DfE) Sub-Regional Economic Plan (October 2024) represents a pivotal shift in economic governance in Northern Ireland. It introduces a locally led model of economic development, empowering LEPs to co-design and deliver interventions that reflect the unique characteristics and challenges of their areas. The Plan is built around four strategic pillars: increasing productivity, creating more good jobs, accelerating decarbonisation, and achieving regional balance. These pillars are not only thematic priorities but also performance benchmarks against which LEP activity will be assessed.

Complementing this is the DfE's broader Economic Vision, which articulates a long-term ambition for one that is innovation-driven, inclusive, and sustainable. The Vision emphasises the need to build economic resilience through investment in skills, innovation, and infrastructure, while also addressing persistent structural inequalities across Northern Ireland. The LEP's strategy aligns closely with this vision, particularly in its focus on inclusive growth, sectoral diversification, and the green economy.

The Northern Ireland Programme for Government (PfG) reinforces these priorities, with a strong emphasis on wellbeing, regional equity, and sustainable development. It recognises the need to tackle economic inactivity, improve educational outcomes, and support innovation-led growth. The PfG's outcomes-based approach provides a useful framework for the LEP's monitoring and evaluation processes, ensuring that interventions are not only delivered but also demonstrably impactful.

Invest Northern Ireland's new regional strategy, launched in 2025, marks a significant evolution in the agency's role. It commits to increasing the proportion of investment outside the Belfast Metropolitan Area from 56% to 65% by 2027 and introduces a more proactive, place-based approach to business support. The strategy includes the expansion of Invest NI's regional office network, enhanced support for indigenous firms, and a renewed focus on regional clusters and innovation ecosystems. For Causeway Coast and Glens, this presents a critical opportunity to attract investment, support local enterprise, and build sectoral specialisms in areas such as advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and sustainable tourism.

InterTrade Ireland also plays a vital role in the regional economic ecosystem, particularly in supporting cross-border trade and innovation. Its programmes, such as Acumen, Elevate, and Fusion, offer valuable support for SMEs seeking to expand into new markets, develop new products, or build collaborative partnerships. Given the Borough's proximity to the border and its strong base of micro and small enterprises, the LEP will work closely with InterTrade Ireland to maximise participation in these programmes and to explore opportunities for cross-border economic collaboration.

Local Policy and Strategic Direction

At the local level, the Council's 2020 Economic Strategy, "Recovery and Renewal," provides a robust foundation for the LEP's work. Developed in response to the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategy identifies seven priority sectors: advanced manufacturing, agri-food, construction, tourism and hospitality, professional services, retail, and sustainable energy. It also outlines six thematic areas for action: labour market activation, business start-up and survival, business evolution, connectivity, green transition, and town and village renewal.

These themes remain highly relevant and are being actively progressed through a range of initiatives. The Girona Project, for example, is a smart energy demonstrator that positions the Borough at the forefront of the green transition. The Full Fibre NI broadband rollout enhanced digital connectivity, while the Council's support circular economy pilots is helping to build local supply chains and promote sustainable enterprise. These initiatives align closely with the Sub-Regional Plan's emphasis on decarbonisation, regional balance, and local empowerment.

Economic Evidence and Cost Pressures

The Ulster University Economic Policy Centre's (UUEPC) 2025 Cost of Doing Business Impact Report provides critical insight into the economic pressures facing local employers. The report highlights the disproportionate impact of recent policy changes on Northern Ireland businesses, particularly the increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and the National Living Wage (NLW). For example, a full-time employee on the NLW now costs employers an additional 10.4% annually, while part-time staff on the same wage cost 14.17% more. These increases are especially burdensome in sectors such as hospitality, retail, social care, and agriculture—sectors that are prominent in the Causeway Coast and Glens economy.

The report also notes that Northern Ireland has the lowest median wage in the UK (£15.06 per hour in 2024, compared to the UK average of £17.09), and the highest proportion of workers on the NLW (9.9%). This wage profile, combined with rising energy and insurance costs, places significant strain on local businesses and underscores the importance of targeted support and policy flexibility. This is compounded for Causeway Coast and Glens with the lowest median wages in NI and a broadly rural community that is impacted by energy costs more than most. Energy costs remain a major concern, with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland recording some of the highest industrial electricity prices in Europe. Although prices have stabilised since their 2022 peak, they

remain substantially above pre-pandemic levels, affecting the competitiveness of energy-intensive sectors.

Causeway Coast and Glens Policy Focus

The Council's 2020 Economic Strategy, "Recovery and Renewal," remains a foundational document for the LEP. It identifies seven priority sectors and six thematic areas for action, including labour market activation, business evolution, and the green transition. These themes are being actively progressed through initiatives such as:

- The Girona Project, a smart energy demonstrator supporting decarbonisation
- The Full Fibre NI broadband rollout, enhancing digital connectivity
- Circular economy pilots, promoting local supply chains and sustainable enterprise

These initiatives align closely with the Sub-Regional Plan's emphasis on decarbonisation and local empowerment. This should also be placed alongside the significant impact Project Kelvin can still untap, the key submarine fibre connection between North America and UK / Ireland. This comes ashore in Coleraine and remains a connection that could deliver huge potential to Northern Ireland, but especially the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area.

The UUEPC Regional Balance Report (2025) provides a detailed analysis of economic disparities across Northern Ireland. It highlights that Causeway Coast and Glens consistently underperforms on several key indicators:

- GVA per capita is just 68% of the NI average, the second lowest of all 11 councils
- Median workplace earnings are 86% of the NI average
- The area has one of the highest economic inactivity rates (124% of the NI average)
- Only 81% of the working-age population hold tertiary qualifications, compared to the NI average of 100

Despite these challenges, the Borough has shown above-average growth in productivity over the past two decades, suggesting some convergence with higher-performing areas. However, the Shift-Share Analysis in the UUEPC report indicates that this growth has not been driven by favourable sectoral composition or local competitiveness. Instead, the area has suffered from:

- A negative industrial mix effect, due to underrepresentation in high-growth sectors like ICT and professional services.
- A negative regional effect, reflecting weaker local business dynamics.
- A negative industry-place interaction effect, particularly in the construction sector.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to improve sectoral performance, attract investment, and enhance local competitiveness.

Cost Pressures and Business Environment

The UUEPC Cost of Doing Business Report (2025) highlights significant cost pressures facing local employers:

- Employer NICs and the National Living Wage (NLW) have increased sharply, with a full-time NLW employee now costing 10.4% more annually.
- Energy costs remain among the highest in Europe, despite recent stabilisation.
- Insurance and regulatory costs are disproportionately affecting low-margin sectors such as hospitality, retail, and care sectors that are prominent in the Borough.

These pressures are compounded by the fact that Causeway Coast and Glens has the highest proportion of workers on the NLW in Northern Ireland. This reinforces the need for wage progression strategies, skills development, and business support to improve productivity and resilience.

Policy Summary and Evidence Gaps

Policy/Strategy	Level	Key Themes	Relevance to LEP	Gaps/Considerations
Sub-Regional Economic Plan (2024)	Regional (DfE)	Productivity, Good Jobs, Decarbonisation, Regional Balance	Core framework for LEP structure and funding	Requires localised data to inform project selection and impact measurement
Programme for Government (PfG)	National/NI Exec	Inclusive Growth, Skills, Sustainability	Outcomes-based framework for LEP evaluation	Limited granularity in PfG indicators for sub-regional performance
Invest NI Regional Strategy (2025)	Regional	Place-based investment, Regional Clusters, Export Growth	Opportunity to attract investment and support local firms	Need for stronger alignment between Invest NI support and LEP priorities
InterTrade Ireland Programmes	Cross-border	SME Growth, Innovation, Market Expansion	Supports cross-border trade and innovation for local SMEs	Awareness and uptake among local businesses could be improved
CC&G Economic Strategy (2020)	Local	Sectoral Growth, Green Economy, Connectivity, Skills	Foundation for LEP priorities and ongoing Council activity	Strategy predates Sub-Regional Plan—requires alignment and refresh
UUEPC Regional Balance Report (2025)	Evidence Base	GVA, Productivity, Inactivity, Skills, Sectoral Performance	Highlights structural weaknesses and informs LEP targeting	Need for real-time data and localised business sentiment analysis
UUEPC Cost of Doing Business Report (2025)	Evidence Base	Labour Costs, Energy, Insurance, Sectoral Pressures	Highlights cost pressures and informs LEP targeting	Ongoing monitoring of business resilience and wage progression needed
NISRA Labour Market and GVA Data	Evidence Base	Employment, Productivity, Inactivity, Sectoral Trends	Supports baseline assessment and performance tracking	Data lag and limited granularity at sub-council level

The policy context for economic activity in Causeway Coast and Glens is both enabling and challenging. While there is strong alignment between national ambitions and local priorities, the Borough faces persistent structural disadvantages that require targeted, evidence-based interventions. The LEP is well-positioned to act as a delivery mechanism for these interventions, but success will depend on continued collaboration, adaptive planning, and robust monitoring. Addressing the identified policy and evidence gaps, particularly around sectoral performance, business resilience, and skills alignment, will

be critical to ensuring that the LEP delivers meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable economic outcomes.

Process for the Strategic Assessment and Engagement / Consultation

The development of the Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership (LEP) Strategy 2025–2028 has been underpinned by a comprehensive and inclusive process of strategic assessment and stakeholder engagement. This process has ensured that the strategy is not only evidence-based but also deeply rooted in the lived experiences, insights, and ambitions of the Borough’s businesses, communities, and institutions.

The strategic assessment began with a desktop review of economic data and policy context. Drawing on sources such as the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC), NISRA, and local economic datasets, a detailed analysis of the Borough’s economic performance was completed. This included metrics on Gross Value Added (GVA), employment and unemployment rates, sectoral composition, wage levels, business birth and survival rates, and educational attainment. The UUEPC’s 2025 Cost of Doing Business Impact Report and Regional Balance Report were particularly influential, highlighting the acute cost pressures facing local employers, the structural weaknesses in productivity and wage growth, and the demographic and skills challenges unique to the area.

This data-driven foundation was complemented by a structured programme of stakeholder engagement, designed and delivered by jheSOLUTIONS Ltd on behalf of the Council. The engagement process was multi-phased and iterative, ensuring that insights gathered at each stage informed the next. It began with a desktop review and horizon scanning exercise, which mapped the strategic landscape at national, regional, and local levels. This included alignment with the Department for the Economy’s Sub-Regional Economic Plan, the Council’s Recovery and Renewal Strategy, and the £100 million Growth Deal for the Borough.

Following this, a series of targeted engagement activities were undertaken. These included one-to-one interviews, thematic workshops, and LEP board meetings. Stakeholders engaged included Elected Members, council officers, local enterprise agencies, business leaders, education providers (NRC, NWRC, Ulster University), community and voluntary sector representatives, and statutory partners such as Invest NI and DfE. The LEP meeting held on 2nd July 2025 exemplifies the depth and breadth of this engagement. It brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss economic challenges, review data insights, and co-design strategic priorities.



At this meeting, Eoin Magennis from UUEPC presented a detailed economic overview, highlighting the Borough's underperformance in GVA and productivity, the challenges of self-employment and labour market participation, and the structural issues affecting sectoral growth. His analysis sparked a rich discussion among attendees, who reflected on the need to support local scaling, address skills mismatches, and capitalise on the area's tourism and agri-food assets. The meeting also explored the implications of demographic trends, such as an ageing population and high levels of caring responsibilities, which contribute to economic inactivity.

The engagement process was not limited to formal meetings. It included informal consultations, sector-specific discussions, and follow-up sessions to test emerging ideas. The methodology adopted by jheSOLUTIONS was grounded in the principles of Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) and the "Turning the Curve" approach. This ensured that stakeholder input was not only captured but translated into actionable insights. Participants were asked to define what success would look like, identify barriers to progress, and co-create strategies to overcome them. This approach fostered a sense of ownership and alignment among stakeholders, ensuring that the final strategy reflects shared priorities. These conversations revealed several consistent themes:

- **Collaboration and Partnership:** Stakeholders emphasised the need for stronger collaboration across councils, with educational institutions, and between businesses. There was a clear appetite for building local supply chains and leveraging unique regional assets.
- **Entrepreneurship and Start-Up Support:** While there is a natural concentration of start-ups in hospitality and tourism, stakeholders called for broader entrepreneurial activity across sectors. They stressed the need for financial and physical space to nurture growth, including co-working hubs and micro-grants.
- **Skills and Workforce Development:** High-value roles in construction and manufacturing were identified as key to raising wages and productivity. Stakeholders advocated for more apprenticeships, targeted upskilling, and reskilling programmes to build a robust skills pipeline.
- **Rural Economy and Agri-Food:** The Borough's strong agri-food base was seen as a strategic asset. Stakeholders called for targeted support to grow rural enterprise and strengthen local communities.
- **Infrastructure and Planning:** While not core to the LEP's remit, land availability and planning processes were repeatedly cited as critical enablers of growth. Energy costs were also raised as a concern, with calls for better evidence and advocacy.
- **Governance and Long-Term Leadership:** There was a strong consensus that the LEP must be more than a three-year programme and have business leadership embedded as a key principle.
- **Trust and Realism:** Stakeholders stressed the importance of building trust through realistic expectations. There was scepticism about the likelihood of a major FDI boom, and a preference for supporting organic growth and local scaling.
- **Defining Success:** When asked what success would look like in three years, stakeholders pointed to tangible outcomes such as higher wages, more resilient

businesses, and improved sectoral diversity. They also emphasised the importance of storytelling and data to demonstrate impact.

This engagement process has shaped every aspect of the LEP strategy. It has informed the selection of strategic themes, the design of interventions, and the development of KPIs. It has also built a strong foundation for ongoing collaboration, ensuring that the LEP remains responsive, inclusive, and grounded in local realities.

Findings from the Strategic Assessment

The strategic assessment of the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough reveals a region of significant potential but persistent structural challenges. Drawing on evidence from the UUEPC Regional Balance Report, the UUEPC Cost of Doing Business Impact Report, and the Council's own economic strategy, this section outlines the key economic trends, sectoral dynamics, and spatial disparities shaping the local economy.

Economic Data Analysis

Employment and Productivity Trends

Causeway Coast and Glens has experienced modest employment growth over the past two decades, with improvements in unemployment and economic inactivity rates. However, the area continues to lag behind the Northern Ireland average in terms of productivity and value-added per job:

- GVA per capita in CC&G stands at just 68% of the NI average, one of the lowest among all 11 councils.
- Median workplace earnings are approximately 82% of the NI median, reflecting a persistent pay-productivity gap.
- While employment and GVA per job have grown, the gains have not been sufficient to close the structural gap with higher-performing areas such as Belfast and Mid Ulster.

The Shift-Share Analysis conducted by UUEPC attributes this underperformance to a combination of:

- A negative industry mix effect, due to over-reliance on lower-growth sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and small-scale manufacturing.
- A modest regional effect, where local assets (e.g. Bushmills Distillery, artisan food producers) provide some uplift but are insufficient to offset structural disadvantages.

Sectoral Strengths and Weaknesses

The CC&G economy is characterised by a high concentration of employment in sectors that are both economically and socially significant, but also vulnerable to cost pressures and low productivity:

- Tourism and hospitality are major employers, but face challenges from seasonal demand, low wages, and rising energy and labour costs.
- Agri-food and small-scale manufacturing provide local employment and export potential, but are constrained by scale, innovation capacity, and market access.
- Retail and social care are essential but low-margin sectors, disproportionately affected by increases in Employer NICs and the National Living Wage.

The UUEPC Cost of Doing Business Report highlights that these sectors are particularly exposed to:

- Rising energy and insurance costs.
- Labour shortages and recruitment difficulties.
- Low uptake of apprenticeships due to cost and regulatory barriers.

Despite these challenges, there are clear opportunities to build on existing strengths:

- Develop an artisan food and drink export cluster, leveraging local brands and heritage.
- Scale eco-tourism through integrated rural experiences and off-season offers.
- Support digital transformation and energy efficiency in vulnerable sectors.

Skills and Demographic Challenges

Skills shortages and demographic constraints are key barriers to economic growth in the Borough:

- Tertiary education attainment in Causeway Coast and Glens is significantly below the NI average (28% vs. 36% in Belfast), limiting access to higher-value employment.
- The “good jobs” rate, defined by secure, well-paid employment, has improved but remains among the lowest in NI.
- Economic inactivity, particularly among women and older workers, remains high and is often linked to caring responsibilities and health conditions.

The LEP must address these challenges through:

- Expansion of pre-apprenticeship and upskilling programmes, particularly in green construction, agri-tech, and hospitality.
- Development of mobile FE “skills hubs” in rural towns to improve access to training and innovation support.
- Targeted support for workforce participation, including flexible work models and welfare-to-work pathways.

Infrastructure and Planning

Gaps in infrastructure still create challenges for the council area. The council has a large number of rural settlements along with outstanding natural assets that create specific challenges to both infrastructure and planning. This has a knock-on impact economically. These issues, almost in entirety, sit outside the remit of the LEP, however, they have come up throughout the engagement and in the desk research as important to sub-regional economic balance.

- Transport connectivity could be improved through dualling, electrification and speeding up connectivity with Belfast on the rail line.
- Planning delays, ease of judicial review and lack of ability to move quickly in this area inhibits ambitious, growth orientated businesses.
- Readiness of publicly owned land needs improved to attract tenants. This includes correct power and grid connections, water and waste and suitable gas, fibre broadband and road readiness.

The LEP could consider a number of areas to help address this:

- Potential for a pilot industrial 5 or 6G testbed to support growth in innovation focused businesses or those seeking to improve real time data monitoring.



- Advocacy for improved rail and grid infrastructure.
- Close engagement with other elements of council to ensure issues inhibiting economic growth and ambition are properly understood and addressed.
- Digital connectivity mapping and support to address any blackspots that inhibit rural communities and businesses.

Spatial Disparities and Clustering Opportunities

The Borough exhibits significant intra-regional disparities, with rural wards facing higher levels of deprivation, lower connectivity, and fewer employment opportunities. However, there are also clear opportunities for place-based clustering:

- Agri-food innovation in the north and west of the Borough, building on existing producers and supply chains.
- Eco-tourism and cultural heritage clusters along the coast and Glens, with potential for off-season and international growth.
- Green energy and circular economy initiatives, particularly in collaboration with neighbouring councils (e.g. Mid & East Antrim on offshore wind servicing).

The LEP should consider establishing sector-specific subgroups (e.g. Rural & Agri-Economy, Tourism & Hospitality) to drive targeted action and stakeholder engagement.

Comparative Region Analysis

Based on the UUEPC Regional Balance Report and publicly available data from comparable regions, the following is a set of economic comparison tables that benchmark Causeway Coast and Glens (CC&G) against:

- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (UK)
- Western Region of Ireland (e.g. Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon)
- Highlands and Islands (Scotland)

These tables focus on key indicators relevant to regional economic development and LEP strategy design. There is significant comparative similarity, this section goes on to consider potential interventions from these three regions which provide further thinking to how the LEP will deliver impact and outcomes for the council area.

Table 1: Economic Output and Productivity

Indicator (2022)	CC&G (NI)	Cornwall (UK)	Western Region (IE)	Highlands & Islands (SCT)
GVA per capita (£)	~£17,000	~£20,000	~€22,000 (£18,800)	~£21,000
GVA per job filled	92 (NI=100)	85 (UK=100)	88 (IE=100)	89 (UK=100)
Productivity growth (2002–2022)	+16 pp	+12 pp	+14 pp	+15 pp

Sources: UUEPC (2025), ONS Regional GVA, CSO Ireland, Scottish Government Statistics

Table 2: Labour Market and Income

Indicator (2024)	CC&G	Cornwall	Western Region	Highlands & Islands
Median workplace earnings (£)	~£24,000	~£25,500	~€29,000 (£24,800)	~£26,000
Employment rate (%)	~69%	~72%	~68%	~71%
Economic inactivity rate (%)	~26%	~23%	~28%	~24%
% earning above Real Living Wage	~77%	~79%	~75%	~80%

Sources: NISRA, ONS ASHE, CSO Labour Force Survey, Scottish LFS

Table 3: Skills and Education

Indicator	CC&G	Cornwall	Western Region	Highlands & Islands
% with tertiary education (RQF 4+)	~28%	~34%	~30%	~32%
Apprenticeship uptake (per 1,000)	Low	Moderate	Low	Moderate
FE/HE presence	NWRC, NRC, UU (nearby)	Falmouth Uni, Truro College	GMIT, ATU (regional)	UHI, Inverness College

Table 4: Sectoral Profile and Export Intensity

Indicator	CC&G	Cornwall	Western Region	Highlands & Islands
Export intensity (% of GVA)	~14%	~16%	~18%	~20%
Dominant sectors	Tourism, agri-food, care	Tourism, creative, marine	Agri-food, tourism, medtech	Tourism, renewables, food
FDI presence	Low	Low-Moderate	Low	Low

Key Takeaways for Causeway Coast & Glens

- Productivity and wages are consistently below peer regions, though not dramatically so.
- Skills and education gaps are more pronounced, particularly in tertiary attainment and apprenticeship uptake.
- Export intensity is lower, suggesting a need to internationalise local sectors (e.g. artisan food, eco-tourism).
- Sectoral similarities with these regions suggest that Causeway Coast and Glens can adopt and adapt successful interventions (e.g. rural innovation hubs, green tourism accelerators, community wealth building).

Comparative Region Analysis

A quick review of the three comparative regions as part of the strategic analysis highlights some of the activity that has been undertaken to develop them economically and generate outcomes with impact.

1. Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (UK)

Key Interventions

- Local Industrial Strategy (LIS): Focused on clean energy, digital connectivity, and inclusive growth.
- Smart Specialisation: Invested in marine tech, space/aerospace (via Goonhilly Earth Station), and creative industries.
- Community-Led Local Development (CLLD): EU-funded programme supporting micro-enterprises, social enterprises, and rural innovation.
- Cornwall Rural Enterprise Scheme: Grants for farm diversification, food processing, and rural tourism.
- Superfast Cornwall: One of the UK's first rural broadband rollouts, enabling digital business growth and remote working.

Lessons for CC&G

- Use natural assets (coastline, heritage) to build niche sectors like eco-tourism and marine innovation.

- Combine digital infrastructure with business support to enable rural entrepreneurship.
- Leverage community-led funding models to support hyper-local innovation and social enterprise.

2. Western Region of Ireland (e.g. Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon)

Key Interventions

- Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC): A cross-county initiative to develop a connected regional economy along Ireland's west coast.
- Connected Hubs Network: Over 300 remote working hubs established in rural towns to support digital workers and microbusinesses.
- Western Investment Fund: A €75m fund managed by the Western Development Commission (WDC) to support SMEs and creative industries.
- Creative Economy Strategy: Targeted support for film, animation, and design sectors in rural areas.
- Agri-Tech and Bioeconomy Pilots: Innovation hubs in food processing, sustainable farming, and circular economy.



Lessons for CC&G

- Develop a network of rural innovation hubs to support remote work, training, and microenterprise.
- Use regional branding (e.g. "Atlantic Corridor") to promote exports and tourism.
- Establish a local investment fund or micro-grant scheme to support start-ups and creative industries.

3. Highlands and Islands (Scotland)

Key Interventions

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE): A dedicated regional development agency with a focus on inclusive growth and community resilience.
- Community Wealth Building: Local procurement, land ownership, and social enterprise development.
- Renewable Energy Clusters: Investment in offshore wind, wave energy, and hydrogen innovation.
- University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI): A distributed university model with campuses in rural towns, supporting local skills and research.
- Tourism Leadership Programme: Upskilling and mentoring for rural tourism operators.

Lessons for CC&G

- Advocate for a dedicated rural economic development unit or sub-regional agency.
- Invest in green energy and circular economy pilots (e.g. anaerobic digestion, biochar).

- Build education-industry partnerships through FE/HE institutions to support rural skills and innovation.

Key Learning from the Strategic Analysis

The Borough's rural character is both a defining feature and a strategic opportunity. Agriculture, agri-food, and land-based industries remain central to the local economy, with over 10% of Northern Ireland's farms located in the area. Not only this but the council area has the one of the largest lengths and most beautiful coastlines, along with the wonderful Rathlin Island.

The rural economy must evolve to remain competitive and will remain a cornerstone part of the council area economy. The Energy Scoping Study (commissioned by Causeway Coast & Glens Council) highlights the potential for community-led renewable energy



projects, such as solar PV and green hydrogen, which could simultaneously address energy poverty, create green jobs, and retain wealth locally, key principles of Community Wealth Building (CWB).

CWB offers a compelling framework for Causeway Coast and Glens, particularly in rural and deprived areas. By leveraging anchor institutions, local procurement, and cooperative models, the Borough can ensure that economic growth is inclusive and locally rooted. The Preston model in England and the Plymouth Energy Community in the South West provide tangible examples of how councils can lead in this space, aligning economic development with social equity and environmental sustainability.

Consideration beyond tourism must be given to the coastal assets and potential of the marine environment of the council area. Causeway Coast and Glens' extensive coastline presents a significant opportunity for a dedicated marine and coastal scoping study. This would assess how natural assets, including harbours, beaches, and marine biodiversity, can be sustainably leveraged for economic growth, tourism, aquaculture, and renewable energy. Models such as the Blue Economy Strategy in Ireland and Scotland's Marine Planning Partnerships demonstrate how coastal regions can balance economic use with environmental protection. A similar approach in CC&G could unlock new investment, support community wealth building, and enhance resilience, while safeguarding the Borough's unique natural heritage for future generations.

Tourism and Hospitality: A Growth Engine

Tourism is a standout strength, with the Borough ranking second in Northern Ireland for visitor nights and spend. Signature attractions such as the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede, and Royal Portrush Golf Club have global appeal. However, the sector faces seasonality, infrastructure gaps, and a need for diversification. Strategic investment in premium accommodation, year-round experiences, and hospitality innovation —

including digital and green tourism — will be essential to unlock further growth and resilience.

Tradable Services, Export and Innovation

Despite strong SME density, the Borough underperforms in productivity, export intensity, and Invest NI engagement. The Economic Strategy and Regional Priorities both emphasise the need to grow tradable sectors such as advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, and professional services. The Innovation Exchange model, BIT training, and CONNECTED-style events proposed in the LEP action plan are designed to address this gap, stimulating innovation, improving productivity, and connecting SMEs to larger markets and buyers.

The council Energy Scoping Study reinforces this direction, identifying significant renewable generation capacity and appetite among local businesses for sustainability-led innovation. With the right support, these sectors can become engines of high-value job creation and export growth.

A Cohesive Vision for Inclusive Growth

Rather than viewing rural development, tourism, and innovation as competing interests, the LEP strategy positions them as complementary pillars of a resilient, inclusive economy. For example:

- **Hospitality and tourism** can be enhanced through digital innovation and low-carbon infrastructure.
- **Rural enterprises** can benefit from BIT training and participate in the Innovation Exchange.
- **Community wealth building** can underpin all sectors by ensuring local ownership, fair employment, and reinvestment.

This integrated approach reflects best practice from similar regions such as Cornwall, West of Ireland, and the Highlands & Islands, where councils have successfully aligned climate action, economic growth, and community empowerment all ensuring their core tourism and hospitality sectors can continue to flourish. The final and most critical point is that all of this requires a longitudinal approach with consistent funding and focus on collaboration. Three years is a short space of time and should be considered as a “sandbox” activity in readiness for longer term investment. True impact will only be able to be considered over a period of a decade to provide conclusive evidence of impact.

Priorities and Turning the Curve

Taking a “Turning the Curve” approach, underpinned by outcomes-based planning, enables the Council to focus on what truly matters, particularly measurable improvements that have created impact. Rather than simply tracking activity, this method identifies key indicators and designs interventions that shift performance in a meaningful direction. The approach has fostered collaboration, will produce accountability, and driven innovation in thinking, all ensuring that resources are targeted where they will have the greatest impact. By aligning programmes with clear, shared outcomes, the Council is demonstrating commitment, ambition to see progress, adapt responsively, and build a resilient, inclusive economy that delivers lasting value across the Borough.

Previously referenced, Mauren O’Reilly’s report provides valuable lessons on measuring impact and delivering value for money outcomes, particularly through the lens of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) model in Ireland, and to a lesser extent, the SOSE model in Scotland and Estonia’s CDCs. These lessons are highly relevant for shaping the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) performance framework in Northern Ireland.

These lessons will help shape the priorities. Later in this section a long list of priority activities that came up during the engagement sessions, workshops and one-to-one discussions is listed and then rationalised. However, learning lessons in where there is likely impact and how various agencies interact to ensure value for money and impact that will turn the curve provides sound rationale for future thinking.

Lessons on Measuring Impact and Value for Money

It must be recognised that these lessons are not entirely compatible to the Causeway Coast Glens LEP, they come from a review that looked at statutory bodies, underpinned by multi-year activity, budgets driven by long term policy guidance and frameworks. The current work has a three-year horizon. None the less, these lessons can help in ensuring actions and KPIs can have a positive impact.

1. Structured Performance Frameworks
 - o The LEO model is underpinned by a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and an Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement (OPDA) between Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.
 - o These agreements define clear KPIs, reporting protocols, and performance review mechanisms, ensuring accountability and consistency across regions.
2. Use of KPIs and Metrics
 - o LEOs track a range of quantitative indicators, including:
 - Number of businesses and jobs supported
 - Net new jobs created
 - Grant support value
 - Subregional impact (e.g. % of jobs created outside Dublin)

- Training participation and loan approvals
- o These metrics are tied to budget drawdown, reinforcing a value-for-money culture.
- 3. Centre of Excellence Model
 - o Enterprise Ireland's Centre of Excellence supports LEOs with:
 - Benchmarking
 - Quality assurance
 - Training and development
 - Monitoring and evaluation
 - o This centralised support ensures consistency and continuous improvement across the network.
- 4. Client Transition Protocols
 - o LEOs have a defined process for transitioning high-potential clients to Enterprise Ireland, ensuring businesses receive the right level of support as they grow.
 - o While the transfer rate is low (~3%), the model avoids unrealistic expectations and focuses on appropriate support at each stage.
- 5. Challenges in Impact Measurement
 - o The report notes that LEOs and SOSE still rely heavily on input/output metrics (e.g. number of grants, training sessions) rather than outcome-based indicators (e.g. productivity gains, wage growth)
 - o This highlights the need for LEPs to develop impact-focused KPIs that measure long-term change.

Recommended KPIs for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP (Adapted from LEO Model)

To ensure success and value for money, LEPs could adopt a tailored set of KPIs such as are outlined below. It must be noted these do not all align with the DfE guidance and are as noted adapted from the Irish LEO model. However, these provide a solid basis for the LEP to compare actions, base line and need while being in line with focus on “turning the curve” and an outcomes-based approach.

The consideration is based on core KPIs, that should be impacted by all activities, strategic measures that support DfE / Invest NI / FE colleges or other statutory bodies and locally specific under the term thematic, as they will potentially be very specific to Causeway Coast and Glens.

Core KPIs

- Number of businesses supported (start-ups and growth)
- Number of jobs created/safeguarded
- Net employment gain
- Grant support value and leverage
- Number of training/mentoring participants

Strategic KPIs

- Increase in tradable businesses (aligned with DfE guidance)
- Growth in Invest NI client companies
- Median wage growth in target areas
- Business survival rates (1-year, 3-year)
- Number of businesses transitioning to higher-level support

Thematic KPIs

- Number of businesses supported in digitalisation and decarbonisation
- Uptake of energy efficiency and green grants
- Number of new exporters supported
- Participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. women, rural entrepreneurs)

The LEO model offers a robust blueprint for the LEP to build a performance framework that balances local flexibility with national consistency. By adopting a structured KPI set, supported by clear governance and monitoring mechanisms, Causeway Coast Glens LEP can demonstrate impact, ensure accountability, be flexible or adapt as needed and deliver value for money.

Cross-Cutting Themes for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP

The Department for the Economy (DfE), through the Regional Balance Fund Project Guidance, encourages LEPs to focus on strategic themes that align with regional economic priorities and measurable outcomes. While flexibility is allowed, thematic focus is essential for:

- Ensuring alignment with DfE's economic vision.
- Demonstrating impact on productivity, wages, and employment.
- Avoiding fragmented or low-impact interventions.
- Supporting monitoring, evaluation, and value for money.



The Department for the Economy's economic vision for Northern Ireland is built around four strategic pillars: increased productivity, more good jobs, regional balance, and decarbonisation. Together, these priorities aim to create a globally competitive, inclusive, and sustainable economy. By focusing on innovation, skills development, and green growth, the vision seeks to raise wage levels, improve

employment quality, and ensure that prosperity is shared across all regions. This framework has the potential to establish a strong foundation for local economic partnerships to align their strategies and deliver measurable impact.

Long List of Potential Themes

Based on the strategic analysis and the stakeholder engage the following is a straight list of themes that cover the breadth of the conversations, engagement and strategic

analysis in support of creating an action list. This list shows ambition and demonstrates how much the regional stakeholders could take the local economy given the right support and structures that deliver impact.

The council has been working across much of this and has a long track record in seeking to build activity in some of these themes. These themes therefore provide a basis for other thinking and future work for the council as well as those focuses that this list will be distilled into by for the LEP to support the action plan.

1. Entrepreneurship and Start-Up Support
2. Business Scaling and Growth
3. Sectoral Development (e.g. agri-food, tourism, construction, life sciences)
4. Innovation and R&D
5. Green Economy and Decarbonisation
6. Digital Transformation
7. Skills Development and Workforce Resilience
8. Commercial Property and Land Activation
9. Export Development and Internationalisation
10. Cluster Development and Collaboration
11. Rural Enterprise and Inclusion
12. Tourism Diversification and Seasonality
13. Social Enterprise and Community Wealth Building
14. Infrastructure Enablement (e.g. broadband, utilities)
15. Youth and Female Entrepreneurship
16. Circular Economy and Sustainability
17. Business Resilience and Cost Mitigation
18. Creative Industries and Cultural Economy
19. Place-Based Investment Zones
20. Cross-Border Economic Collaboration

DfE and Invest NI Recommendations (from Guidance)

The DfE Project Guidance and MoU highlight the following as priority areas:

- Tradable business growth (especially in underperforming areas)
- Increase in Invest NI client companies
- Median wage and employment rate improvement
- Spending areas:
 - o Entrepreneurship and scaling support
 - o Sectoral development
 - o R&D and innovation
 - o Energy efficiency
 - o Digital/engineering upskilling
 - o Cluster development
 - o Commercial property/land

These are not prescriptive but are strongly encouraged as they align with the fund's business case and measurable outcomes. There is significant alignment

Key Themes for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP

After synthesising all sources, the following three themes are recommended for strategic focus. These are, in all cases, a mixture of the long list. They embody the core premise of the regional balance strategy, the wider economic vision but most importantly recognise the ambition and focus that was brought through the stakeholder engagement.

None of the three are mutually exclusive either. Innovation is not exclusive to tradeable services; there can be significant additional impact to median wages through innovation in the hospitality and tourism sector. Supporting business resilience and survival could lead to greater interest in export and market access support. Cutting across all three of these themes is the thought of community wealth building and inclusion. This will be furthered by these the LEP and Labour Market Partnership working closely on bringing those from outside the workplace to a position where they are work ready and have skills needed to deliver across these themes.

1. Collaboration, Growth and Innovation

Why: Directly aligns with DfE's core metrics (tradable businesses, Invest NI clients, productivity) but also with local ambition and business interest. Businesses engaging with actions linked to this could have potential to take next step into wider programmes and regional innovation projects. These also drive areas of resilience, sustainability and skills and will support core economic activity as well as new opportunities.

Includes: R&D, digitalisation, export readiness, cluster development & collaboration, innovation hubs as potential areas of action.

Turns the Curve: Drives productivity, wage growth, and competitiveness.

2. Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience

Why: Addresses local challenges in start-up survival, rural enterprise, and low self-employment, creating the potential for community wealth building and true place-based prosperity and social inclusion. This theme can cut across into third sector and community-based activity while supporting key economic drivers in Causeway Coast and Glens which are critical to economy and can support ambition culture.

Includes: Start-up survival support, micro-grants, mentoring, rural innovation, social enterprise, off season business activity.

Turns the Curve: Builds a resilient, inclusive business base and supports job creation therefore embedding regional balance.

3. Sustainability and Skills for the Future

Why: Aligns with Council and DfE priorities on decarbonisation, energy efficiency, and skills while building pathways from current council programmes and the work of the Labour Market Partnership. Actions can support rural business activity and provide steps to improving staff retention and competitiveness.

Includes: Green skills academies, energy audits, circular economy pilots, digital upskilling, business improvement skills and collaboration between council, colleges and university to support business.

Turns the Curve: Reduces business costs, supports Net Zero, can enable diversification, and builds future-ready workforce.

Why Not More Themes?

Simply, focus equals impact. A smaller number of themes allows for deeper, more strategic interventions, and actions adopted can have potential to address all the themes. Monitoring should mean it is easier to track and evaluate outcomes across fewer, well-defined areas. Focusing the LEP on a small number of strategic themes therefore supports clarity and coherence. It enables the Council and its partners to concentrate resources on areas with the greatest potential to “turn the curve”, shifting focus towards long-term outcomes rather than delivering fragmented activity. This approach directly supports the LEP’s vision of “a bold, connected economy where businesses leads, ideas flourish, and people prosper,” and aligns with its mission to drive inclusive, high-impact growth.

By prioritising a few high-value themes, the LEP can deliver measurable change, foster collaboration, and build momentum across the Borough’s economic ecosystem. There is an element of funding / time constraints and prioritisation helps avoid dilution. It also allows for alignment with DfE’s business case and Council’s strategic goals which is important.

LEP Strategic Action Plan 2025–2028

The Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership (LEP) is built on a foundation of strategic clarity and purposeful ambition of previous Council activity and structured analysis of need in the Borough. Following extensive analysis and engagement, three core themes have emerged that reflect both the unique strengths of the Borough and the priorities of the Department for Economy: Collaboration, Growth and Innovation, Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Business Resilience, and Sustainability and Skills for the Future.

These themes are not standalone silos; they are interconnected drivers of transformation. Together, they offer a balanced and integrated approach to economic development, ensuring that innovation and export growth are matched by inclusive opportunity and environmental responsibility, all at the same time considering the



people and skills needed. This thematic focus aligns directly with the LEP’s succinct vision of “a bold, connected economy where businesses leads, ideas flourish, and people prosper,” and its mission to deliver high-impact, inclusive growth.

By concentrating on a small number of strategic priorities, the LEP can maximise resources, foster deeper collaboration, and deliver measurable

outcomes. Each theme has been selected for its potential to “turn the curve” — shifting long-term trajectories in productivity, resilience, and sustainability. The following section sets out a series of targeted actions, designed to unlock local potential, support business ambition, and build a future-ready economy across Causeway Coast and Glens.

These actions can be combined, used individually or adapted to reflect need and the £4.5m budget (with split between capital and resource) through to March 2028. Supporting annexes to the document will outline an initial plan for the three years, a year one specific plan and budget information. It will also include KPIs and measurement to support successful outcomes.

Use of Regional Balance Fund During LEP Lifetime

The Regional Balance Fund (RBF) provides a flexible, outcomes-driven funding mechanism to support local economic development through the LEP over a three-year period (2025–2028). Councils, as accountable bodies, are empowered to allocate funding across capital and resource projects aligned with agreed annual action plans. Eligible expenditure includes entrepreneurship support, sectoral scaling, R&D, energy

efficiency, digital and engineering upskilling, and commercial property development — all designed to improve productivity, increase the number of tradable businesses, and raise median wages.

Funding can be drawn down annually in arrears, with flexibility across years and between capital and resource allocations. Councils may also allocate a proportion of resource funding to support LEP administration and delivery capacity. All projects must be completed by March 2028 and must comply with state aid/subsidy control rules. A minimum project threshold of £20,000 per year applies, with exceptions considered.

Long List of Potential Actions

The desk research, strategic analysis but especially the stakeholder engagement has helped develop this long list of potential actions for the Causeway Coast and Glens LEP. They often cut across multiple themes and either borrow or build on previous or existing interventions delivered in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom or Ireland. Each action seeks to also build local capability in delivery. This may be through anchor institutions such as Invest NI, the Council or FE Colleges or in conjunction with key organisations such as the local enterprise agencies.

Reducing delays through procurement will be important, but it is also right to seek to ensure the right delivery partners have been identified and the action maximises engagement and potential.

There are also some broader actions, that will not involve specific programmes of activity but will need to be shaped by the LEP to ensure the right structures are in place to maximise engagement. Like the following actions, this is not a complete list of supporting activities that could add value to the impact of the LEP, and actions undertaken:

- Analysis and scoping exercise of land, property and infrastructure around the council, including public and private land. This should consider major sites such as Ballykelly to former council offices and include thinking on road, rail and wider transport and utilities challenges.
- Formal engagement and regular collaboration with the council Labour Market Partnership (LMP) to enhance connectivity between actions and supports being offered.
- While a digital platform is listed as an action this does not, and should not, preclude the right level of physical resource needed for delivery of the LEP actions. This resource should be considered around business engagement and fostering collaboration between the organisations engaged in the LEP and the wider business community across Causeway Coast and Glens.
- Regular LEP interaction with UUEPC and other statutory organisations, such as Tourism NI to keep abreast of emerging economic or policy.
- Work with relevant council resource to identify other funding opportunities that could enrich the LEP actions and build programmes of activity beyond the three-year funding horizon. This should also be used to identify partnership opportunities with other councils locally that could enhance impact and value for money in delivery.

- Invest NI and Intertrade Ireland are doing significant work on cluster activity, to drive regional balance, some form of seed funding could be considered, potentially to support organisations such as the Causeway Chamber, to build local clusters in food, tourism or creative sectors. This can be linked to other council objectives or growth funds for manufacturing, life-sciences or innovation intense sectors.
- While the key message during engagement was property for scaling a feasibility study or analysis of current land availability in the borough could help attract business or enable growth. This should consider land owned by Invest NI or other stakeholders and look to unlock use quickly, addressing planning, infrastructure or utility challenges.

Actions for Consideration

This is not a final or prescriptive list of actions, it is intended to provide the LEP with a menu of options to deliver the right programmes. Within the list there is some analysis and commentary, with some recommendations. Ultimately, the choices and focus will be for the LEP to decide. One key consideration has been made in all of this, scale and council wide engagement. It is vital that the activity of the LEP demonstrates ambition and covers rural and urban areas, and the actions listed endeavour to do this.

These are not in any particular order, some are born out of the initial strategic analysis (and supporting desk research), others from the wider stakeholder engagement or workshop activity and finally some collective thinking in drawing together this document. They look to engage local partners, utilise the capability of anchor institutions, while building out on other current interventions rather than seeking to “reinvent the wheel”.

Budgets and outcomes are indicative and rough order of magnitude; the annexes provided with the document will bring these into a detailed structure.

Tradable Sector Innovation & Growth Hub

Purpose: Support high-potential businesses in tradable sectors (e.g. Agri-tech, advanced manufacturing, digital) with space, mentoring, and R&D support.

Capital Investment: £1.2M (refurbishment of workspace, digital infrastructure)

Resource Spend: £300K (business support, mentoring, innovation vouchers)

Impact: Increase in Invest NI client companies and drive higher business survival and scaling rates

Likely Outcomes:

- 30+ businesses supported
- 10 new tradable businesses created
- 50+ jobs created or safeguarded

There is significant risk associated with this action, high cost and significantly reliant on the Innovation Hub, proposed within the region hub, coming online quickly.

Green Skills & Energy Efficiency Programme

Purpose: Upskill local workforce in green technologies and support SMEs to reduce energy costs.

Capital Investment: £600K (equipment for training centres, energy audits)

Resource Spend: £300K (training delivery, SME advisory services)

Impact: Reduces business overheads and builds a pipeline of skilled workers for emerging sectors

Likely Outcomes:

- 200 individuals trained (e.g. in retrofitting, renewables)
- 50 SMEs supported with energy audits
- 10% average energy savings per business

Rural Enterprise & Tourism Diversification Fund

Purpose: Enable rural and tourism-based microbusinesses to diversify and extend their seasonality.

Capital Investment: £1.2M (micro-grants for equipment, digital upgrades)

Resource Spend: £200K (business planning, marketing support)

Impact: Potential to increase resilience of seasonal economy and encourages innovation in rural areas

Likely Outcomes:

- 100+ businesses supported
- 20 new products/services launched
- 15% increase in off-season revenue

Innovation Exchange Model

Rationale: Connects SMEs with large firms to solve real-world challenges.

Delivery Lead: This is a Skillnet Ireland programme who could deliver this programme through Futurus in partnership with the Council

Capital: £100,000 | Resource: £250,000

Likely Outcomes:

- 20+ challenges posted per year
- 250+ SMEs engaged
- 50+ contracts awarded
- 100+ jobs created/safeguarded

Subsidy Alignment: MFA compliant

Turning the Curve: Stimulates tradable sector growth and productivity

Business Improvement Techniques (BIT) Training

Rationale: Upskills workforce in lean processes and continuous improvement.

Delivery Lead: NRC / NWRC

Capital: £0 | Resource: £200,000

Outcomes:

120+ employees qualified

40–60 businesses engaged

5–15% productivity improvement

Subsidy Alignment: Training typically exempt

Turning the Curve: Improves productivity and workforce capability

LEADER-style Rural Development Programme

Rationale: Supports community-led rural innovation and microenterprise.

Delivery Lead: Council / Local Action Groups

Capital: £300,000 | Resource: £150,000

Outcomes:

- 50+ rural businesses supported
- New tourism products and trails
- Social enterprise growth

Subsidy Alignment: MFA or De Minimis

Turning the Curve: Inclusive growth and rural resilience

CONNECTED-style Innovation Events

Rationale: Promotes HE/FE-business collaboration and showcases innovation.

Delivery Lead: Ulster University / FE Colleges

Capital: £0 | Resource: £50,000

Outcomes:

- 100+ businesses engaged
- Increased uptake of R&D support
- New partnerships formed

Subsidy Alignment: Typically exempt

Turning the Curve: Fosters innovation and collaboration

Business Support Portal

Rationale: Centralised digital access to all business support services.

Delivery Lead: Council / Digital Partner

Capital: £70,000 | Resource: £30,000

Outcomes:

- 1,000+ businesses registered
- 2,500+ services accessed
- Improved engagement and transparency

Subsidy Alignment: Public infrastructure, not a subsidy

Turning the Curve: Improves access and business engagement

Artisan Food Export Readiness Programme

Rationale: Supports local producers to access export markets.

Delivery Lead: Council / Invest NI / Food NI

Capital: £100,000 | Resource: £200,000

Outcomes:

- 15–20 producers export-ready
- 5–10 new export contracts
- £250,000+ in new turnover

Subsidy Alignment: MFA compliant

Turning the Curve: Grows tradable sector and rural enterprise

Start-Up Survival Support

Rationale: Improves first-year survival rates through grants, mentoring, and co-working support.

Delivery Lead: Council / Local Enterprise Agencies

Capital: £150,000 | Resource: £100,000

Outcomes:

- 100+ start-ups supported
- 75%+ survival rate
- 150+ jobs created

Subsidy Alignment: MFA compliant

Turning the Curve: Boosts entrepreneurship and employment

Summary Comparison Table

Intervention	Capital / Resource Split	Potential Delivery Partners	Key Outcomes	Turning the Curve Contribution
Tradable Sector Innovation & Growth Hub	£1.2M / £300K	Council, Invest NI, Innovation Hub, FE/HE	30+ businesses supported, 10 new tradable firms, 50+ jobs	Drives productivity, scaling, and Invest NI engagement
Green Skills & Energy Efficiency Programme	£600K / £300K	NRC/NWRC, Council, Energy Advisors	200 trained, 50 SMEs supported, 10% energy savings	Reduces costs, supports Net Zero, builds skilled workforce
Rural Enterprise & Tourism Diversification Fund	£1.2M / £200K	Council, Tourism NI, Enterprise Agencies	100+ businesses supported, 20 new products, 15% off-season revenue growth	Builds rural resilience, supports innovation and seasonality
Innovation Exchange Model	£100K / £250K	Futurus, Skillnet Ireland, Council	20+ challenges, 250 SMEs, 50 contracts, 100+ jobs	Stimulates tradable sector growth and collaboration
BIT Training	£0 / £200K	NRC / NWRC	120+ employees trained, 40–60 businesses, 5–15% productivity gain	Improves productivity and workforce capability
LEADER-style Rural Development Programme	£300K / £150K	Council, Local Action Groups	50+ rural businesses, new tourism trails, social enterprise growth	Supports inclusive rural innovation and resilience
CONNECTED-style Innovation Events	£0 / £50K	Ulster University, FE Colleges	100+ businesses engaged, new R&D partnerships	Fosters innovation and HE/FE-business collaboration
Business Support Portal	£70K / £30K	Council, Digital Partner	1,000+ businesses registered, 2,500+ services accessed	Improves access, transparency, and engagement
Artisan Food Export Readiness Programme	£100K / £200K	Council, Invest NI, Food NI	15–20 producers export-ready, £250K+ new turnover	Grows rural tradable sector and export capacity
Start-Up Survival Support	£150K / £100K	Council, Enterprise Agencies	100+ start-ups, 75%+ survival, 150+ jobs	Boosts entrepreneurship and early-stage resilience

**As noted – budgets and outcomes are entirely indicative and will be developed in the annexes supporting this document*

Measuring this will be a key requirement of the Department for Economy and Invest Northern Ireland. However, the Council carries full burden of delivering and managing, while ensuring they are delivering locally. On that basis, while respecting the original DfE business case and Invest NI interests the KPIs should not only support these and demonstrate turning the curve, but:

- Easy to measure by the Council
- Business-focused (showing how many are impacted)
- Synergistic, highlighting how interventions reinforce each other
- Cross cutting to other Council activity (such as the Labour Market Partnership and Region Deal projects)
- Provide a platform for making decisions on future funding or seeking co-funding from other partners to grow impact and outcomes from activity

The following simplified KPI table, is focused on the long list of potential actions. It looks beyond the prescribed KPI's and requirements of the MoU document. These requirements have been assumed as mandatory and standard across all eleven councils. This table is based entirely on Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and the long list of actions. It is an example of what could or should be measured. It is not a final list, this will be developed by the LEP, the starting point for it will be provided within the annexes provided with this document.

Simplified KPI Table

KPI	Description	Measurement Method	Strategic Contribution
Businesses Supported	Total number of businesses receiving direct support across all programmes	Count from programme records	Demonstrates reach and relevance of LEP activity
New Business Creation	Number of new businesses started or registered because of LEP interventions	Business registration data / programme tracking	Supports entrepreneurship and regional balance
Jobs Created or Safeguarded	Total employment impact across all interventions	Council and promoter reporting	Aligns with Labour Market Partnership and Region Deal goals
Export-Ready Firms	Number of businesses supported to enter or expand in export markets	Invest NI engagement / programme outcomes	Drives tradable sector growth and productivity
Energy Efficiency Gains	Average % reduction in energy costs for participating SMEs	Post-audit reporting	Supports Net Zero and business resilience
Skills Accreditations Achieved	Number of individuals gaining qualifications or certifications	Training provider data	Builds workforce capability and supports future funding bids
Off-Season Revenue Growth	% increase in revenue during off-peak periods for tourism/rural businesses	Business self-reporting / grant follow-up	Enhances seasonality and rural diversification
Innovation Engagements	Number of businesses participating in R&D, innovation exchanges, or events	Event and programme attendance	Fosters collaboration and innovation culture
Digital Engagement	Number of businesses accessing services via digital platforms	Portal analytics	Improves access and supports future digital investment cases
Co-Funding Leveraged	Value of external funding or investment secured alongside LEP activity	Council finance tracking / partner reports	Demonstrates value for money and scalability

Synergy Highlights

The proposed LEP interventions form a strategically aligned portfolio that leverages the unique strengths of Causeway Coast and Glens while directly addressing its economic challenges. Programmes such as the Innovation Exchange, BIT Training, and the Tradable Sector Growth Hub work in tandem to stimulate high-value business activity, enhance productivity, and grow the tradable sector, all key metrics within the Regional Balance Fund. These initiatives are reinforced by complementary actions like the Business Support Portal or other business engagement tool (in person will need to be considered also) and CONNECTED-style events, which improve access, visibility, and collaboration across the business ecosystem. Together, they create a pipeline of support that enables businesses to start, scale, and innovate.

Importantly, these actions are not isolated; they are designed to be synergistic and crosscutting. For example, the Green Skills and Energy Efficiency Programme aligns with Labour Market Partnership goals around workforce development, while rural-focused initiatives such as the Tourism Diversification Fund and LEADER-style programme support inclusive growth and community wealth building. This integrated approach ensures that interventions reinforce one another, creating a multiplier effect that drives measurable outcomes. It also provides a robust platform for future investment decisions and co-funding opportunities with regional partners, enabling the Council to scale impact and deliver long-term economic resilience.

Additional Consideration – Support for Start-Ups

In reviewing engagement with LEP members and wider discussion there was significant discussion on the challenges, tourism / hospitality / retail start-up skew in the council area and what could be done to drive broader start up. This, however, always morphed into a conversation on the challenges for new starts, first year issues and how to improve start up survival rates.

This leads to an important strategic question:

“Should the LEP focus on more new business starts or on supporting survival and growth in the first 12 months?” A key issue raised was a general dissatisfaction with the current programmes, none resonating clearly with those engaged with. This could be for a raft of reasons; however, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council face a very specific variety of challenges. This needs to be reflected in the programmes and tailoring for the sub-regional issues.

Looking at the long list and the current interventions, the following endeavours to find a way forward for the LEP.

Current Landscape in Northern Ireland

Existing Start-Up Support (New Starts)

Programme	Lead	Focus	Coverage
Go Succeed Start	Local Councils (via Enterprise NI)	Pre-start and early-stage advice, workshops, mentoring	NI-wide
Start Her Up	Women in Business	Female entrepreneurship	NI-wide
Exploring Enterprise	Enterprise NI	Pre-start support for unemployed	NI-wide
Young Enterprise NI	YENI	Youth entrepreneurship (schools/FE)	NI-wide

Existing Survival & Growth Support

Programme	Lead	Focus	Coverage
Go Succeed Grow	Councils / Invest NI	Business planning, mentoring, growth diagnostics	NI-wide
Invest NI Early-Stage Support	Invest NI	Export-focused start-ups with growth potential	Selective
Social Enterprise Hubs	DfC / Councils	Support for social enterprise start-up and growth	Urban-focused
Local Enterprise Agencies	Local	Co-working, mentoring, micro-grants	Borough-level

Strategic Options for Causeway Coast and Glens LEP in this area can be split into two:

Option A: Focus on More New Starts

Pros:

- Encourages entrepreneurship in rural and deprived areas
- Builds pipeline of future employers and innovators
- Aligns with inclusive growth and youth engagement

Cons:

- High failure rate without follow-on support.
- Risk of duplication with Go Succeed Start and Enterprise NI

Option B: Focus on Survival and First-Year Growth

Pros:

- Addresses a known gap in the ecosystem
- Builds resilience and job creation in early-stage firms
- Stronger alignment with LEP's "turning the curve" goals (productivity, wages, employment)

Cons:

- Smaller volume of businesses supported
- Requires more intensive support per business

Recommended Approach: Prioritise Survival & Growth Support

While argument could clearly be made for either approach, based on the strategic analysis and wider issues facing the borough, a programme focused on sustaining start-ups and setting them on pathway to success, growth and economic impact is likely to have the greatest impact on the region. The rationale is threefold for this focus:

Causeway Coast and Glens already has access to Go Succeed Start and Exploring Enterprise for new starts.

The Borough's challenge is not just starting businesses—but keeping them alive and helping them grow.

The LEP should complement existing provision by focusing on post-start survival and scaling, especially in rural and tradable sectors. Building on the actions in the long list and taking into Start-Up Survival & Growth Accelerator

Programme Summary

A 12-month support programme for early-stage businesses (0–18 months old) in CC&G, focused on survival, resilience, and growth.

Delivery Partners

Local Enterprise Agencies (Enterprise Causeway, Roe Valley Enterprises)

NRC / NWRC (for skills and digital training)

Go Succeed (Grow strand) and Invest NI (for export-ready firms) could, like other agencies or statutory bodies, step in to support as appropriate or this activity would be a springboard to other programmes.

Programme Components

Component	Description
Business Resilience Bootcamp	2-day intensive on finance, marketing, and operations
1:1 Mentoring	Monthly sessions with sector-specific mentors
Micro-Grants	Up to £2,000 for equipment, digital tools, or marketing
Peer Learning Circles	Quarterly networking and problem-solving sessions
Co-Working Access	Subsidised space in local enterprise hubs
Digital Toolkit	Access to Be the Business tools and diagnostics

Target Sectors

- Artisan food and drink
- Tourism and hospitality
- Creative industries
- Green and circular economy
- Care and wellbeing

Budget and Delivery **estimated only*

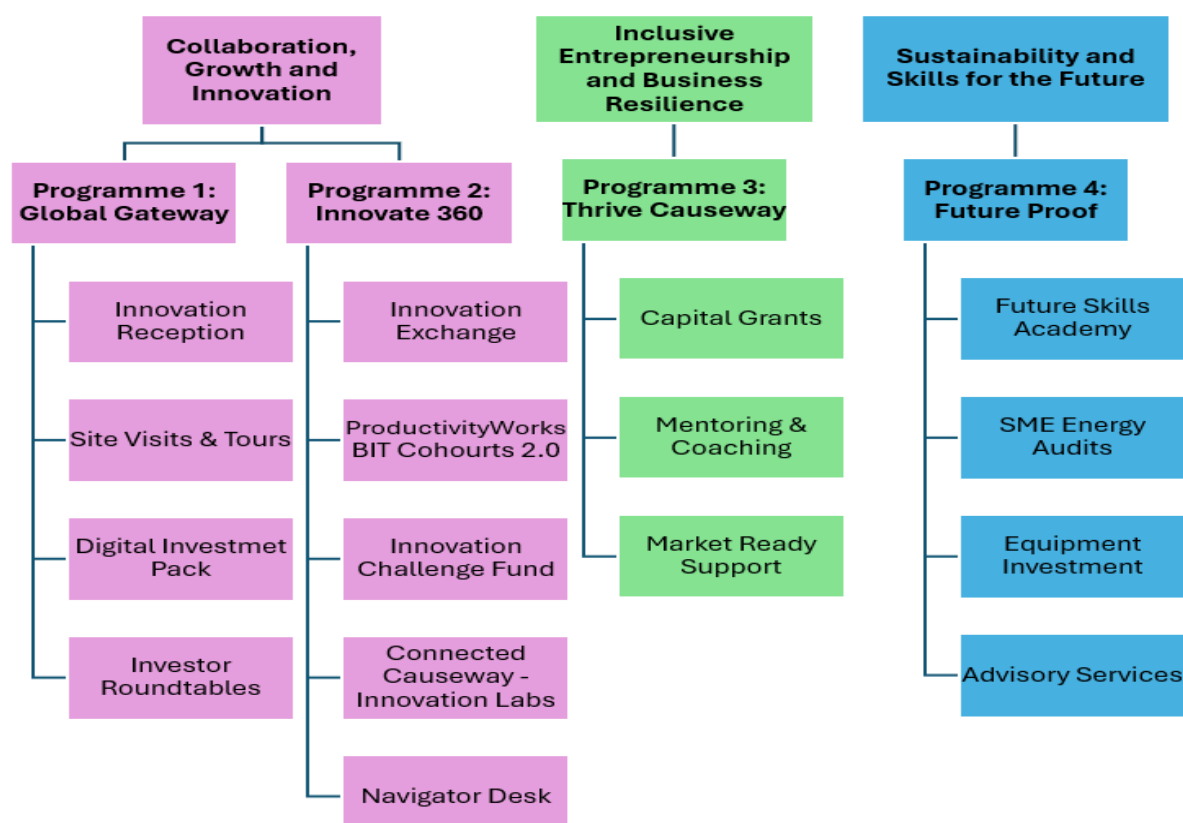
Item	Cost Estimate
Micro-grants (100 x £2,000)	£200,000
Mentoring and workshops	£100,000
Programme coordination	£50,000
Co-working subsidies	£50,000
Evaluation and reporting	£10,000
Total (Resource)	£410,000

KPIs and “Turning the Curve” Impact

KPI	Target	Curve Impact
Start-ups supported	100+	Builds foundational economy
12-month survival rate	75%+	Improves business resilience
Jobs created / sustained	150+	Boosts employment
Turnover growth	10%+	Drives productivity
Businesses accessing further support	60%	Strengthens pipeline to Invest NI / Go Succeed Grow

Final Proposed Programme of Support

The final four programmes were shaped by a combination of robust economic analysis and targeted business engagement during August and September 2025. The evidence base highlighted persistent structural challenges: low productivity, below-average wages, high economic inactivity, and a sector mix dominated by low-margin activities such as tourism, retail, and care. Rising energy and labour costs have compounded these issues, particularly for SMEs in rural and seasonal sectors. Skills gaps remain significant, with tertiary attainment below the Northern Ireland average and apprenticeship uptake low. **Annex 2** provides the supporting detail on how the four programmes are being delivered.



Business engagement reinforced these findings and added practical insight. Firms asked for interventions that reduce complexity in engagement, provide real mentoring and focused support, and where providing capital grants they should be simple to apply for and manage. They emphasised implementation support rather than diagnostics alone, innovation linked to buyers and paid pilots, and mentoring and vendor services that deliver tangible outcomes. There was a clear call for focus: fewer, better-designed programmes that can demonstrate impact quickly and build confidence in the LEP model.

FutureProof responds to cost pressures and skills gaps by combining energy audits with mobile green skills delivery and quick-install measures that can be evidenced within months. Thrive Causeway addresses seasonality and thin margins by linking small capital awards to mentoring and market-ready assets, ensuring diversification translates into revenue. Innovate360 tackles weak innovation diffusion and productivity plateaus

through challenge-led problem solving, lean cohorts, and a catalyst fund for prototype-to-pilot conversion. Global Gateway positions the Borough for inward investment and buyer engagement through curated events, digital investor assets, and structured follow-up, creating a pipeline for future years.

Community wealth building runs through all four programmes. Each is designed to retain more value locally by leveraging anchor institutions, local supply chains, and collaborative delivery models. This approach aligns with the Borough's rural character and the Strategy's emphasis on inclusive growth. The Labour Market Partnership plays a critical role by connecting these programmes to workforce activation and accredited learning pathways, ensuring that demand-side interventions are matched by supply-side readiness.

Further education colleges and Ulster University provide the technical capacity for accredited training and applied innovation, while local enterprise agencies deliver mentoring, workspace, and trusted brokerage for early-stage firms. The Causeway Chamber strengthens market access and cluster development, ensuring programmes remain business-led and responsive.

The decision to concentrate resources on four programmes reflects a commitment to impact and deliverability. It avoids dilution, aligns with procurement and governance constraints, and sets realistic expectations for Year One. These programmes create measurable early wins, business engagement, cost savings, skills uplift, and market exposure, while laying the foundation for longer-term outcomes such as productivity growth, wage progression, and export expansion.

This integrated approach demonstrates how evidence and engagement have been translated into action. It provides a clear rationale for investment, a credible pathway to turning the curve on key indicators, and a model of partnership that embeds community wealth building at the heart of economic development in Causeway Coast and Glens.

Ready-Reckoner Table: Why These Four Programmes?

Programme	Core Need Addressed	Key Actions in Year One	Strategic Impact	Delivery Partners
FutureProof	High energy costs; skills gaps	Diagnostics+, mobile Academy, quick-install grants	Cost reduction, Net Zero, workforce capability	FE Colleges, energy advisors
Thrive Causeway	Seasonality; thin margins	Mentoring hub, vendor panel, quick-win diversification	Business resilience, new revenue streams	Local Enterprise Agencies, Chamber
Innovate360	Weak innovation diffusion; productivity plateau	Innovation Exchange cycle, BIT cohort, Connected showcase	Productivity uplift, tradable sector growth	FE/HE institutions, anchor firms
Global Gateway	Low investor visibility; weak pipeline	Investor pack, CRM, curated roundtable/site visits	FDI engagement, buyer access, export potential	Invest NI, DBT, Chamber

Annex 1 – Draft LEP Action Plan Budget

Three-Year Total (2025/26–2027/28)

Programme	Capital (£)	Resource (£)	Total (£)
Global Gateway	50,000	400,000	450,000
Innovate360	950,000	500,000	1,450,000
Thrive Causeway	1,450,000	150,000	1,600,000
FutureProof	650,000	500,000	1,150,000
Programme Management	–	360,000	360,000
Grand Total	3,100,000	1,910,000	5,010,000

(Estimated Budget. Includes allocation for Council-led delivery, governance, and technical assistance.)

Statement on Year One Spend and Technical Assistance / Delivery Costs

The Partnership intends to begin delivery in Year One (Oct 2025 – Mar 2026) with a focus on mobilisation, procurement, and preparatory activity, alongside a limited number of quick-win interventions that can be defrayed before 31 March 2026. However, given the short timeframe and the need for compliance with CPD and Council approval processes, there is a recognised risk that a significant proportion of Year One spend will be committed rather than fully defrayed. The priority will be to establish frameworks, secure delivery partners, and initiate activity that creates momentum for Year Two, while maximising impact where feasible. Alternate funding sources will be actively pursued to supplement the Regional Balance Fund and extend programme reach.

The Local Economic Partnership has adopted a pragmatic approach to budget allocation across the four programmes and the overall delivery framework. The three-year envelope is designed to maximise impact while recognising the operational realities of procurement, compliance, and governance. Approximately 7–10% of total funding is reserved for Council-led management and technical assistance to ensure robust delivery, monitoring, and reporting. This allocation supports programme coordination, procurement oversight, governance compliance, and performance evaluation—critical enablers for success and accountability.

While the Partnership intends to initiate activity in Year One, the short timeframe and approval processes present a risk that significant expenditure will be committed rather than fully defrayed before 31 March 2026. The priority will be to establish delivery structures, secure frameworks, and commence preparatory actions that create momentum for Year Two. Quick-win interventions will be pursued where feasible, but the focus remains on building a strong foundation for sustained impact. The Council will actively seek alternative funding streams to supplement the Regional Balance Fund, ensuring that resources are leveraged effectively and outcomes are maximised without compromising realism or compliance.

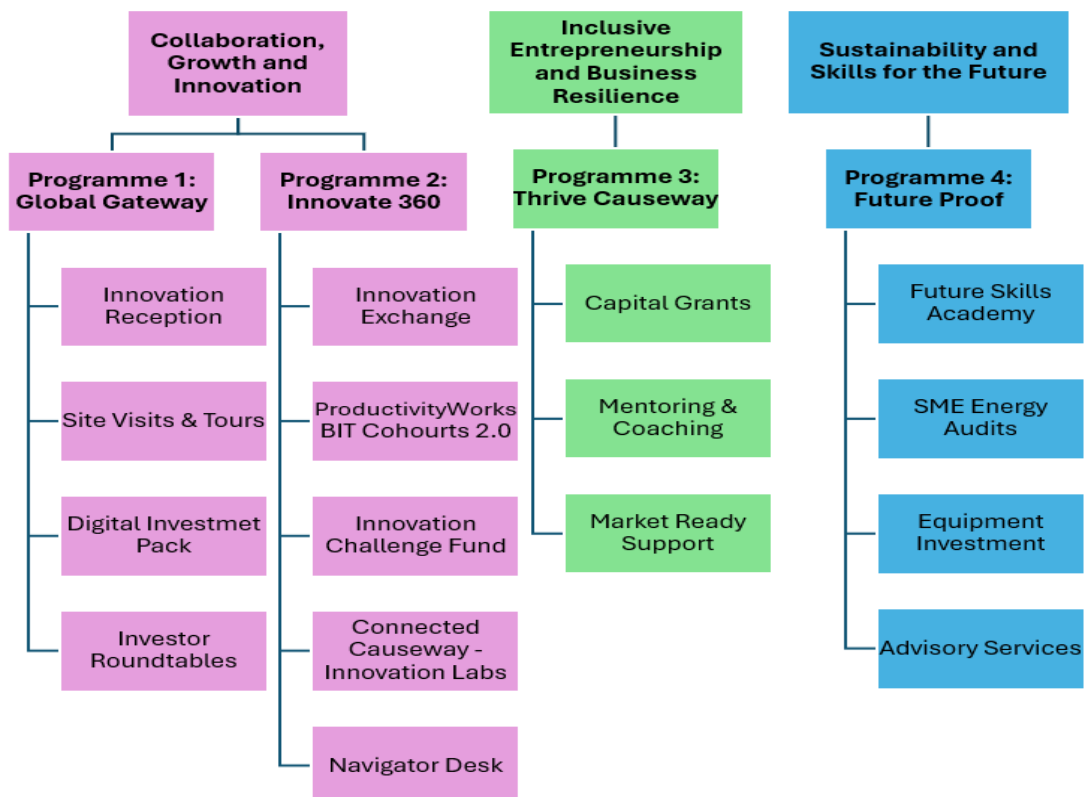
Key Principles for Budget Allocation

- Maintain realism and deliverability: avoid over-promising in Year One; prioritise actions that can be evidenced.
- Ensure impact and value for money: focus on interventions that reduce costs, build skills, and create market access.
- Allocate technical assistance (7–10%) for Council-led programme management, governance, and compliance.
- Profile major capital and complex interventions into Years Two and Three for effective delivery.

Annex 2 Proposed Programmes

The Causeway Coast and Glens Local Economic Partnership has developed four targeted programmes to address the Borough's most pressing economic challenges and opportunities. These programmes are the product of detailed strategic analysis and extensive engagement with businesses and stakeholders during August and September 2025. They respond directly to structural issues such as low productivity, high economic inactivity, and sectoral reliance on low-margin activities, while leveraging local strengths in tourism, agri-food, and emerging green technologies. Each programme is designed to deliver measurable outcomes within the funding window and to lay the foundations for long-term transformation, aligning with the Department for the Economy's priorities of productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation, and regional balance.

Global Gateway positions the Borough for inward investment and buyer engagement through curated events, digital investor assets, and structured follow-up. Innovate360 accelerates innovation and productivity by connecting SMEs to anchor-sponsored challenges, applied training, and paid pilot pathways. Thrive Causeway enables rural and tourism enterprises to diversify and become market-ready through scaled capital grants and embedded mentoring. FutureProof tackles energy cost pressures and skills gaps by combining diagnostics, mobile green skills delivery, and audit-linked implementation. Together, these programmes form a coherent, mutually reinforcing portfolio that prioritises impact, deliverability, and community wealth building, supported by strong partnerships with FE Colleges, Local Enterprise Agencies, and the Causeway Chamber.



Programme 1 – Global Gateway

Proposed FDI-Focused Intervention for LEP Action Plan

Title: *CC&G International Investment & Innovation Showcase – The Open 2025 Platform*

Overview

Leverage the global spotlight of The Open Championship in Portrush (July 2025) to host a targeted investment and innovation showcase, positioning Causeway Coast & Glens as a destination for ethical AI, sustainable energy, agri-tech, and tourism innovation. This aligns with:

- The LEP’s vision of *“a bold, connected economy where businesses lead, ideas flourish, and people prosper.”*
- The Council’s strategic ambition to be a testbed for innovation and attract FDI in high-value sectors
- Use activity to showcase both the major Region Deal projects, both Foodovation and Food & Drug Discovery
- The FDI Action Plan’s goals to host delegations, define the borough’s offer, and convert leads into investment

Key Components

Element	Description	Funding Type
Innovation Reception	Invite global investors, DBT, Invest NI, and sector leaders to a curated evening event showcasing CC&G’s assets and opportunities	Resource
Site Visits & Sector Tours	Host targeted visits to AICC, Atlantic Link, Foodovation, and tourism assets	Capital (transport/logistics)
Digital Investment Pack	Develop a high-impact digital brochure and investor portal with sector propositions and case studies	Capital
Diaspora Engagement	Invite NI diaspora business leaders to reconnect and explore investment opportunities	Resource
Investor Roundtables	Host thematic discussions on ethical AI, green energy, and agri-tech with Ulster University and industry	Resource
Follow-Up Account Management	Assign a dedicated Council officer to manage investor leads post-event	Resource

Strategic Value

- Proves additionality: Builds on national efforts by DBT and Invest NI, but delivers localised engagement and sector-specific propositions
- Meets LEP goals: Drives innovation, collaboration, and business-led growth
- Delivers within timeframe: Planning begins Q4 2024; event delivered July 2025; follow-up managed through March 2028
- Subsidy compliant: No direct financial support to investors; all activity is promotional, infrastructure, or engagement-based

What it looks like: 120–150 investor/partner delegates; multi-venue showcase; co-branded with national partners. Using the impact and visibility of the Borough from

the 2025 Open at Royal Portrush and will require significant co-operation from Ulster University, Invest NI and DBT to deliver. For benchmark the 2023 NI Investment Summit cost around £2m.

What impact can you reasonably expect?

Measure outputs, leading to outcomes and therefore impact using the same concepts DBT uses (projects, jobs, GVA, capex), so results align with national reporting

Outputs (0–6 months)

- Investors engaged (named firms, markets, sectors)
- Delegates (investors, DBT, Invest NI, diaspora)
- 1:1 meetings and site tours completed
- Media reach; investor-portal visits & downloads

Indicative ranges by tier:

- Flagship+: 120–150 delegates | 200–260 1:1s | 6 site tours

Outcomes (6–24 months)

- Marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) → sales-qualified leads (SQLs) (firms with timetabled follow-ups)
- Prospectuses issued / NDAs signed / data-room access
- Live proposals (pilot/testbed, JV, expansion, greenfield)

Is this speculative—or measurable?

It's measurable. This is a lightweight but rigorous M&E framework tied to DBT/Invest NI practice and NI business-case guidance:

Before the event (baseline)

- Define target lists with DBT & Invest NI; pre-qualify “priority investors”
- Set KPIs and stage-gates (Lead to MQL to SQL to Proposal to Landed)
- Configure a simple CRM & data standard so everything is attributable (Council as data owner; DBT/Invest NI where involved)
- Align with Better Business Cases NI/NIGEAE for proportionate appraisal and post-project evaluation

During the event

- Capture attendance, meetings, site-tour participation; collect opt-ins for follow-up; record sector interest and timeframes

After the event (12–24 months)

- Account management cadence (30/90/180-day follow-ups), pipeline health checks, and conversion reporting to DBT standards (projects, jobs, GVA, capex)
- Take a cue from the NI Investment Summit 2023 evaluation: set clear targets (attendance, sector coverage), gather structured feedback, and plan legacy tracking for economic impact
- Be mindful that the Public Accounts Committee has urged stronger attribution/evaluation for investment promotion—our framework is designed to answer exactly those questions

Subsidy control and compliance

- Activities like generic promotion, place-marketing, investor engagement, information provision, site tours and portals open to multiple firms are typically not subsidies if they *do not* confer a selective economic advantage to a specific enterprise. Keep the offer open, transparent, and non-discriminatory, and document the four-limb test
- If any direct financial support to named firms is contemplated (e.g., cash grants), a Subsidy Control self-assessment (and publication on the database where applicable) is required; we're not proposing that here

Why this is timely?

- The Open 2025 provided a global window when investor attention and media are already focused on the area
- Invest NI Strategy 2024–27 emphasises a more regionally balanced model and partnership delivery, this event is a practical, co-owned mechanism to deliver that at borough level

Risks & mitigations

- Investor attendance risk: lock in via DBT/Invest NI channels plus diaspora business leaders; provide high-value site tours
- Attribution risk: adopt DBT definitions/CRM from day one; agree joint attribution protocols
- Compliance risk: keep activities non-selective and documented under Subsidy Control guidance

Programme 2 Innovate360

Proposed Competitiveness & Growth Accelerator Focus for LEP Action Plan

Title: Accelerating innovation, productivity, and collaboration across the CC&G economy

Innovate360 is a joined-up platform to help CC&G firms solve real problems, win real contracts, and lift productivity. It brings anchor buyers and public bodies to the table via Innovation Exchange challenges, couples that with BIT/lean cohorts to hard-wire process gains on shopfloors and in service ops, and deploys a small innovation challenge fund so SMEs can rapidly prototype with FE/HE expertise. CONNECTED-style showcase & buyer labs widen market access, while a dedicated Challenge Catalyst Fund underwrites the last mile—from prototype to pilot—so solutions don’t stall at “interesting” and can move to proof of concept quicker. This will also lift potential for business in the Agri-Food sector to engage and participate in the Region Deal project at Limavady. A small Navigator Desk will provide mentoring and coaching while it keeps firms moving through the pipeline and the Impact Lab verifies outcomes so we can demonstrate value for money within the funding window and beyond.

What’s genuinely additional?

- Paid pilot pathway: ring-fenced funds and lightweight contracts to move from concept to in-situ demonstrations.
- Buyer-ready challenges: more anchor/public sponsors, standard IP/commercial terms, and a cadence that ends with procurement-ready artefacts.
- Embedded delivery: BIT cohorts applied to live challenge sponsors’ value streams, not generic training; Innovation Challenge funds include hands-on technical time (tooling, test rigs, data).
- Brokerage & measurement: the Navigator Desk actively routes firms to Invest NI, InterTrade, KTP, SBRI etc.; the Impact Lab tracks hard metrics so learning loops back into delivery.

Programme Components

Innovation Exchange

What it is: A challenge-led marketplace where anchor firms & public bodies post problems; local SMEs and researchers co-develop solutions through 3 staged sprints:

- Discover (4–6 wks): problem framing, data access, site walks
- Develop (6–8 wks): solution design, rapid prototype, business case
- Demonstrate (8–12 wks): paid pilot on sponsor site (via Catalyst Fund see later in programme detail)

Innovation Exchange is currently delivered in Ireland by Skillnet / Futurus. At the Innovation Exchange members benefit from a structured and supported process for understanding corporate innovation challenges, developing appropriate solutions and

getting deals done. The benefits for scaling companies extend way beyond signing a contract. By building the right capabilities and engaging with prospective customers via the Innovation Exchange, scaling companies can gather valuable industry insights, market intelligence and direct feedback, benefiting product development and sales and marketing strategy.

Delivery detail: 3 cycles/year × 6–8 challenges each (incl. public-sector challenges). 10–15 SMEs per challenge at Discover to 3–5 to Develop to 1–2 paid pilots. Standard IP/licensing templates; privacy & data-sharing protocols; supplier onboarding pack.

ProductivityWorks – BIT Cohorts 2.0

What it is: Sector-specific BIT/lean cohorts (manufacturing, food, construction, tourism ops) that apply tools to live sponsor value streams—OEE uplift, scrap/defect reduction, changeover time, service throughput. Includes on-site diagnostics, supervisor coaching, and digital lean (e.g., basic MES/OEE logging). This is about soft / transversal skills, building employee resilience, labour market mobility and creating improvement through skills that are sector agnostic.

Innovation Challenge Fund (with Embedded Technical Time)

What it is: £100k challenge fund routed through FE/HE with embedded expert days (sector specific). Optional top-up micro-grants for consumables, prototype tooling, user testing. Prioritised for those that would have potential in either of the two agreed region growth deal projects: Food & Drug Discovery and Foodovaiton. It would however benefit multiple sectors and can build on a similar concept within the DfE Connected programme.

Connected Causeway – Showcases & Buyer Labs

What it is: Quarterly mini-expos (50–100 delegates) with challenge sponsors, buyers, funders; includes reverse pitches, “ask an engineer” clinics, and a Demo Dozen zone for working prototypes. It would also allow the FE Colleges, universities, Invest NI, InterTrade Ireland and the growth deal projects to showcase their work and activity. These could be ran via the DfE Connected programme. They currently find these events always over subscribed.

Challenge Catalyst Fund – Prototype-to-Pilot Conversion

What it is: Competitive micro-contracts to pay for in-situ trials that emerge from Innovation Exchange projects. Awards would be to support businesses develop their technology or product (up to £25k), covering instrumentation, safety & compliance, pilot integration, short-term insurances, materials and university or FE college support costs (to a point, would not be 100% for any party).

Governance: Transparent scoring (technical merit, ROI/benefit, additionality, scale-up potential). Lightweight Ts&Cs and post-pilot adoption plan.

This may be a challenge for subsidy and keeping a light touch bureaucracy. It would however be a way to prime activity and interest and demonstrate or test how much interest there is in with the Foodovation project and the concept of an Innovation Hub for Coleraine.

Navigator Desk – Innovation Brokerage & Account Management

What it is: A small, proactive mentoring and coaching resource that routes firms through the pipeline (Exchange → Voucher → Pilot → Buyer), aligns with Invest NI, InterTrade, KTP/SBRI pathways, and curates sector clusters (food, tourism, manufacturing, construction). This could sit with the FDI resource or help create a number of FTE resources to both and build engagement with wider networks. Could also work alongside Funding Team to identify future funding opportunities.

Impact Lab – Evaluation & Learning

What it is: A simple M&E spine: dashboards for OEE, defects, lead time, cost-to-serve, export wins, plus challenge conversion rates (Lead→MQL→SQL→PO). Case-study “playbooks” captured each cycle to accelerate replication. Could be done through UUEPC.

There will need to be some additional consideration as all innovation activity is deemed capital in DfE activity.

Compliance & Additionality Summary

- **Open, non-selective access** to challenges/events; **transparent scoring** for pilots and vouchers.
- **No direct firm subsidy** outside published criteria; pilot contracts delivered via standard, competition-based micro-procurement.
- **Additionality** is explicit: paid pilot pathway, embedded technical time, applied BIT on live sponsor problems, and structured brokerage to higher-level supports.

Programme 3: Thrive Causeway

A Capital Led Programme for Cross Borough Business Growth

Title: Targeted programme to diversify their offerings, extend seasonality, and build long-term resilience

Thrive Causeway is a focused, capital-led programme that enables local enterprises to **diversify, modernise and launch market-ready products/experiences**. It replaces micro-grants with **larger, outcome-oriented capital awards** and couples this with a **dedicated Mentoring & Coaching resource** embedded in Council and delivered in partnership with Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs). The aim is **impact with pace**: simpler applications, proportionate evidence, and every award linked to a **live route-to-market** (e.g., booking/retail channels).

Rationale for Thrive Causeway

Thrive Causeway is designed as a **targeted capital intervention** because evidence from the strategic analysis and stakeholder engagement shows that many local enterprises, particularly in tourism, hospitality, and rural sectors, face structural barriers to diversification and growth. These businesses often operate on thin margins, with limited borrowing capacity and restricted access to commercial finance. Without catalytic capital support, the risk is that they remain locked into low-value, seasonal models. By providing **larger, outcome-linked grants**, the programme enables firms to make step-change investments in product development, quality improvements, and digital readiness that would otherwise be out of reach. This is not about subsidy for survival; it is about **unlocking private co-investment and accelerating readiness for market opportunities**, ensuring that public funds leverage measurable business outcomes.

The programme's design goes beyond transactional grant-giving. Every award is tied to **mentoring and market-ready support**, ensuring that capital spend translates into **new revenue streams, extended trading periods, and improved competitiveness**. This integrated approach addresses the root causes of fragility, low productivity, over-reliance on peak season, and limited digital capability, by combining financial enablement with capability building. In doing so, Thrive Causeway directly supports the LEP's "Turning the Curve" ambition: shifting key indicators such as business survival, off-season revenue, and GVA contribution in a positive direction. The model draws on the principles of the **LEADER approach**, community-led, locally informed, and focused on diversification—but adapts them for a more commercial, outcomes-driven context. It prioritises **impact over volume**, ensuring that fewer, larger interventions deliver visible change and create a stronger platform for future growth.

What's genuinely additional?

- **Scaled capital:** moving from micro-awards to **£15k–£30k tiers** so investments are material enough to change capacity, quality and offering.

- **Embedded capability:** a **Council-employed Mentoring & Coaching** function (with LEAs) for **pre-award planning** and **post-award adoption**, ensuring ROI from capital.
- **Simplified access:** short, **5-question application**, **10-day decision**, and **70/30 milestone payments** with light evidence (photos, commissioning note, live listing/route-to-market).

Programme Components

Capital Diversification Grants (CDG)

What it is: Tiered **capital awards** for equipment and fit-out that enable **new products, added capacity, accessibility upgrades, quality improvements** and **market-readiness** (e.g., production/serving kit, small-scale premises adaptations directly linked to the offer, digital-ready infrastructure such as POS/booking hardware).

Mentoring & Coaching Hub (Council & LEAs)

What it is: A **Council-employed** specialist (with LEA delivery) providing **pre-award readiness** (investment planning, compliance, procurement tips) and **post-award coaching** (pricing, digital listings, packaging/merchandising, launch plans). Capped at **up to 6 hours per firm** to stay lean.

Market-Ready Support (Vendor Panel linked to Causeway Chamber)

What it is: Light, **pre-procured vendor packages** to finish the job: compliance checks (H&S, accessibility, insurances), **booking/retail channel enablement** (OTA setup, inventory sync, payments), and **brand/asset touch-ups** (photography, copy) so funded products go live.

Delivery notes and fixes to known issues

- **Simple, proportionate process:** 5-question form → **10-day decision** → **70/30 milestone payments** (order proof; completion photos + live link).
- **Clear eligibility & scoring:** borough location; sectors in scope; match funding confirmed; scoring on **additionality, readiness, value for money**.
- **Evidence that fits the work:** before/after images, commissioning note, booking/retail link; **90-day revenue snapshot in bands** (no sensitive raw data).
- **No proliferation of activity:** three components only; mentoring is integrated, not a separate scheme; vendor panel is call-off, not a new grant.

Indicative KPIs (programme-level, 28 months)

(Adjusted for remaining LEP funding window)

Capital projects funded: 30 to 40

Businesses mentored/coached: up to 100

New/updated products & experiences: 15 to 30

Median revenue uplift (grantees): +10–15%

Alignment & Compliance

- **Open, non-selective** application windows; **transparent criteria** and published unit rules
- Capital awards follow standard **asset retention** and **claw back for non-delivery**; mentoring and vendor support are service-based (resource)
- Format and component structure align with **FutureProof** and **Innovate360** for governance and reporting consistency across the Action Plan

Programme 4: FutureProof:

Proposed Future Skills & Energy Transition Programme

Title: A targeted programme to upskill the local workforce in and support SMEs to reduce energy costs and transition towards a low-carbon economy

FutureProof scales and sharpens the council's current green support offer. It broadens access, links diagnostics to implementation with verified savings, brings mobile skills to rural firms, pilots' circularity for direct cost reduction, and unlocks grid/PPA routes to harness CC&G's exceptional renewables base. The programme's structure is designed to deliver measured cost savings, emissions reduction and capability uplift across the borough within the funding window."

FutureProof is a practical, business-led programme to cut energy costs, build green skills, and accelerate implementation of proven measures across CC&G. It responds to what local businesses told us they need, targeted diagnostics, co-funding to act, and help navigating grid/planning, and it scales up from Council's current Green Support Scheme (50 firms; technical support + small grants) by adding mobile skills delivery, audit-linked capital, circularity pilots, and a grid/renewables enablement offer.

FutureProof also tackles bottlenecks surfaced in the council funded Scoping Study and stakeholder sessions (grid headroom, lengthy planning timelines, need for co-investment and clear communications), so that firms can move from plans to action at pace.

What's genuinely additional?

- Broader eligibility & fairer access: remove the VAT-registration barrier (replace with a minimum turnover threshold) and permit farm/combined-supply premises via sub-metering, two issues that excluded willing applicants under the current scheme.
- Audit to Implement, with M&V: tie grants to the Carbon Reduction Action Plan (CRP) and measure verified savings (kWh, £, tCO₂e using Utility Regulator factors).
- Mobile delivery & circularity pilots: take accredited training to rural firms and trial waste-to-value solutions that reduce disposal costs (a council pressure) and increase resilience.
- Grid-ready & renewables enablement: pooled grid studies, a club PPA option to match local generators to business demand, and standardised connection/planning packs to help shorten cycles that currently average circa 72 weeks for renewables decisions.

Programme Components

FutureProof Academy – Future Skills Hubs

What it is: Short, accredited modules in digital (AI, coding, automation) and green (retrofit, PV/heat pumps, energy auditing, M&V, circularity) delivered in mobile hubs across the borough with FE partners, aligned to CRP actions and vendor-neutral best practice.

Additionality: Moves beyond classroom pilots by bringing training to rural sites, linking learners directly to audit findings and grant pipelines, and embedding measurement & verification skills locally.

Diagnostics+ – Energy & Circularity Audits with M&V

What it is: Enhanced CRP diagnostics with instrumented audits, implementation roadmaps, and 12-month M&V to verify savings (kWh/£/tCO₂e using Utility Regulator factors).

Additionality: Expands volume and depth (incl. circularity scans), aligns to club procurement, and feeds grant eligibility automatically—no duplication with Invest NI; it activates it.

Implement-to-Save Grants – Audit-Linked Capital

What it is: Audit-verified co-investment for measures that pay back (LED/process optimisation, controls, heat pumps where viable, insulation, compressors/variable speed drives, energy monitoring). Two tracks:

- Core Grants: up to £10k at 50% intervention (avg. £5k award)
- Pathfinder Awards: up to £25k at 40–50% for high-energy users with strong paybacks

Additionality: Larger caps than the current £5k ceiling; no VAT-only gate; farms eligible where sub-metered; monitored savings; explicit link to the CRP.

CircularX Sprints – Waste-to-Value Pilots

What it is: Time-boxed pilots (12–16 weeks) to reduce waste volume/costs, reuse heat, valorise by-products, or redesign packaging—run as competitive cohorts with mentoring and supplier demos.

Additionality: Connects circular economy opportunities to direct OPEX savings for firms and lower waste handling costs locally.

Grid-Ready & Renewables Enablement (PPA Club & Connections)

What it is: A support package to help firms connect and contract—grouped grid studies with NIE Networks/SONI, standard “grid-ready” packs for planning, and a club PPA (power purchase agreements) option to match local business demand with CC&G’s strong renewable generation (second-highest installed capacity in NI).

Additionality: Tackles the connection/approval friction (average renewables decision time circa 72.4 weeks) with pooled technical/legal work and a ready-to-use documentation set.

Delivery notes and fixes to known issues

- Eligibility reset: Replace “VAT-registered” with minimum turnover (e.g., £50k) and allow agri-businesses with shared supply if sub-metered—directly addressing the early scheme’s exclusion effects.
- From plans to action: Tie all grants to Diagnostics+ CRPs and verify outcomes via 12-month M&V (kWh, £, tCO₂e using Utility Regulator fuel-mix factors).
- Communications & peer support: Build on the Go Succeed peer network but add case-study toolkits and a live pipeline dashboard to show progress and encourage replication.
- Grid & planning friction: Provide pooled studies and standard packs; coordinate NIE/SONI touchpoints given the documented capacity and timeline constraints.
- A place-based renewables angle: Use the PPA club to connect businesses with CC&G’s significant local generation base, turning a borough strength into a price-certainty benefit.

Indicative KPIs (programme-level, three-year)

- People trained (accredited): 350–450; businesses engaged in skills: 180–220.
- Diagnostics+ delivered: 220–280; audit-to-grant conversion ≥60%.
- Projects implemented: 170–210 (Core + Pathfinders); average 8–12% energy reduction in participants (M&V).
- Circular pilots: 30–40 with 25–35% waste reduction in targeted streams.
- Grid/PPA support: 60–90 firms advised; 12–20 PPA deals explored; 10–15 connection applications progressed.

Alignment and compliance

FutureProof aligns with DfE’s Path to Net Zero (efficiency, renewables, green economy) and the Sub-Regional Economic Plan (productivity, good jobs, decarbonisation, regional balance). Activities are open and non-selective (promotion, audits, skills, pooled studies), with grants issued on transparent criteria; M&V assures value for money and outcomes.



Department for the

Economy

An Roinn

Geilleagair

www.economy-ni.gov.uk

**Local Economic
Partnerships**

**Memorandum of Understanding on the
Regional Balance Fund between the
Department for the Economy, Invest NI and
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council**

19 August 2025

1. PARTIES

- 1.1 The Department for the Economy of Adelaide House, Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8FD (“**DfE**”).
- 1.2 Invest Northern Ireland a non-departmental public body, whose headquarters are at Bedford Square, 1 Bedford Street, Belfast, BT2 7ES (“**Invest NI**”).
- 1.3 Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (the “**Council**”).

(each a “**Party**” and together, the “**Parties**”).

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

- 2.1. This Memorandum of Understanding (“**MoU**”) is not intended to be legally binding, and no legal obligations or legal rights shall arise between the Parties from this MoU. However, the Parties enter into this MoU intending to honour all their obligations and its terms to be followed.
- 2.2. The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to set out DfE’s, Invest NI’s and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council’s respective duties, roles and responsibilities in relation to the policy, design, operation and delivery of the Regional Balance Fund (the “**Fund**”) as a funding scheme (“the **Scheme**”) in respect of its Local Economic Partnership (“**LEP**”), and the basis on which the Parties will collaborate and work towards a successful delivery of the aforementioned scheme.
- 2.3 The Scheme, which is funded by DfE as the Regional Balance Fund and will be administered by the councils to award funding to project promoters selected by the LEP and supported by the council to advance local economic projects in their area providing these align with the scheme criteria.
- 2.4 Total funding of £45 million over 3 years will be allocated by DfE to the 11 councils to deliver the Scheme. Funding will be transferred via S29 of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Overall, 3-year funding envelopes for each council in respect of their LEP are detailed later in this MoU.
- 2.5 This MoU shall commence on the date on which the last of the three Parties executes this document (“**Commencement Date**”) and shall remain in effect unless and until the completion of the three-year funding detailed within this MoU.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1. The following definitions shall apply in this MoU:

(a) “**Accountable Body**” The Accountable Body, for the purposes of this MOU, is the council.



- (b) **"Promoter"** A project promoter is a beneficiary that enters into a contractual relationship with the Accountable Body and is responsible for the fulfilment of all obligations against the Accountable Body during the project under the contract.
- (c) **"Projects"** Individual local economic projects advanced by the LEP, approved by the Council to be funded under the Scheme.
- (d) **"Eligibility Criteria"** means the criteria to be used to operate the scheme, which has been determined by DfE and provided to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and is set out in the Regional Balance Fund project guidance.
- (e) **"MPMNI"** means the Department of Finance (**"DoF"**) guidelines: [Managing Public Money NI \(MPMNI\) | Department of Finance](#)
- (f) **"MoU"** has the meaning given in paragraph 2.1.
- (g) **"Payments"** means any and all financial payments to be made to applicants.
- (h) **"Post Payment Assurance Procedures"** (as set out in section 6.5) means the assurance procedures determined by DfE to assess compliance of applications to the Scheme with the Eligibility Criteria.
- (i) **"Post Project Evaluation"** means an assessment of the scheme success.
- (j) **"Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures"** means the assurance procedures adopted by the council to assess compliance of applications to the Scheme with the Eligibility Criteria; and
- (k) **"SRO"** means Senior Responsible Officer.

4. PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATION

4.1. The Parties agree to adopt the following principles in relation to the Scheme:

- (a) collaborate and co-operate. The Parties agree to work proactively together to deliver the policy objective as effectively as possible within the planned timescales.
- (b) be accountable. Take on, manage and account to each other for performance of the respective roles and responsibilities set out in this MoU.
- (c) communicate. Communicate openly about major concerns or issues relating to the Scheme.



- (d) act in a timely manner. Recognise the time-critical nature of the Scheme and respond accordingly to requests for support.
- (e) manage stakeholders effectively.
- (f) deploy appropriate resources. Ensure sufficient and appropriately qualified resources are available and authorised to fulfil the responsibilities set out in this MoU; and
- (g) Make arrangements to share information to support effective design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the scheme and projects supported by it, implementing improvements as needed.

5. OVERVIEW OF SCHEME

Regional Balance Fund

5.1 The rules and characteristics of the scheme will be set out in an annual Letter of Offer to be issued by the DfE and signed by the Council.

5.2 The Scheme will allocate Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council a total funding of:

- (a) £4,509,000 over the full 3-year funding envelope per the funding formula and allocations set by the Minister for the Economy on 27th January 2025.
- (b) An annual allocation with a total annual fund, split into capital and resource funding, based on assessment of, and engagement with, the annual action plan submitted by the Council for the LEP, with associated financial forecasting.

5.3 The Scheme will be administered by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. Full details will be included in the Letter of Offer.

5.4 It is the responsibility for the Council to maintain relationships and processes with regards their LEP as it comes to project calls, applications scoring and prioritisation. This should align with best practice, LEP Terms of Reference and requirements applicable to the Council in line with MPMNI. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council should ensure this demonstrates that any criteria set link to the delivery of Scheme outcomes as set out in the Fund project guidance.

6 DUTIES OF PARTIES

6.1 DfE, Invest NI and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will perform a variety of roles in connection with the design, operation and delivery of the Scheme as set out below:

6.2 Scheme Establishment

(a) DfE shall:



- (i) Appoint a Senior Responsible Officer (“**SRO**”). The DfE SRO is accountable for the successful delivery of the Fund itself and not the delivery of funded Projects.
- (ii) obtain and retain any ongoing permissions/approvals required for the operation of the Scheme throughout the life of the Scheme.
- (iii) secure funding for the Scheme on an annual basis and over the 3-year basis in respect of the overall scheme Outline Business Case “**OBC**”.
- (iv) define and design the Scheme to include: the scope/purpose of the Scheme; broad definition of qualifying projects; metrics, outcomes and annual action plans, ineligible costs, controls, reporting, expectations from annual action plan proforma in relation to LEP activity and implement and monitor any other stipulations required by the scheme OBC.
- (v) Work with councils on business case development to ensure these demonstrate clear alignment with spending objectives, development of metrics and support consistent monitoring and evaluation at an aggregate Scheme level.
- (vi) review submitted annual action plan and financial profiling and forecasting information for the financial year ahead based on this plan.
- (vii) Issue an annual Letter of Offer which sets out financial and budgetary allocations for the year ahead.
- (viii) be responsible for the securing of resources to undertake the Post Payment Assurance Procedures for the aspects of which it has responsibility.
- (ix) ensure regulatory and statutory impacts are screened for the overall scheme (for example equality impact assessment).
- (x) agree a process for making payments to the Council and for monitoring and reporting on budgetary information and taking corrective action.
- (xi) support council requests for information and engagement including in relation to thresholds for funding specific projects, requests to engage on project evidence and alignment with metrics, outcomes and baseline information.
- (xii) support councils with Post Project Evaluation (“**PPE**”) development.



- (xiii) Ensure appropriate declarations of interest are made i.e. by Project Board members.
- (xiv) Seek an internal review from DfE internal audit to ensure the fund has been developed, managed and overseen appropriately e.g. in line with the MoU, LoO.

(b) Invest NI shall:

- (i) Support DfE in assessment of annual LEP action plans and strategic advice in relation to the delivery of the overall scheme.
- (ii) Support Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in developing LEP Project proposals.
- (iii) Assist Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council with appropriate data and analysis to assist in identification of areas of action, priorities, project selection and development,
- (iv) Work to ensure contact for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council with appropriate Invest NI contacts to assist in project, policy and programme alignment.

(c) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council shall:

- (i) work proactively with DfE to implement the Scheme.
- (ii) provide resources to deliver the aspects of the Scheme they have agreed to undertake in this MoU.
- (iii) submit an annual action plan prior to the commencement of the financial year and work with DfE to provide financial forecasting and profiling information and comply with requirements around eligible expenditure and delegated limits.
- (iv) manage and maintain the submission of project applications and collection of application information from Promoters based on the Eligibility Criteria provided by DfE. In particular, processes must be implemented to ensure no duplication of funding with similar schemes.
- (v) develop and implement the infrastructure to facilitate the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures.
- (vi) Ensure compliance with the requirements of MPMNI. In particular, ensure the business case process is followed for each instance of funding a project under the auspices of the Scheme. The Council should work with DfE at the outset of the Scheme on business case template development to ensure these demonstrate clear alignment



with spending objectives, development of metrics and support monitoring and evaluation at an aggregate level.

- (vii) be responsible for Scheme delivery including delivery of Projects funded by the Scheme.
- (viii) collate and process the information collected during the application process in line with the requirements as set out in section 6.4 below.
- (ix) Councils will each appoint a delivery SRO, with responsibility for all elements of procurement, audit, delivery and reporting. The councils will therefore hold responsibility for the procurement and delivery of agreed Projects financed by the fund, and as such will manage procurement processes for suppliers (including procurement call, selection process and award) according to their council's procurement policy. This should align with the requirements of the NI Public Procurement Policy for each Project.
- (x) Any associated procurement should take into account social value considerations in line with DoF PPN/01/21.
- (xi) SRO details should be shared with DfE.
- (xii) carry out appropriate regulatory and statutory impact screenings for individual projects funded under the Scheme.
- (xiii) be responsible for the completion of the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures. Consideration should be given to the expected controls set out by the DfE in the LOOs including treatment of State aid and subsidy control requirements.
- (xiv) the Council is responsible for approving any funding awarded, taking into account evidence submitted by the Promoters. Payments should be made in line with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's internal finance and payment processes.
- (xv) issue LOOs to the successful Promoters – the LOOs should accurately reflect relevant evidence held by the Council. Payment should not be made until a signed LOO has been submitted by the applicant.
- (xvi) provide information on request to the DfE to enable them to complete appropriate post payment verification checks in line with the Letters of Offer.
- (xvii) agree a process with the DfE for submitting claims and receiving payments.



- (xviii) provide the DfE with regular updates in terms of expenses and delivery monitoring reports as agreed.
- (xix) conducting PPE against Scheme and Project metrics, outcomes and baselines for a) each individual project funded under the Scheme b) the overall suite of projects funded across each year by the Council and c) on overall completion of the 3-year Scheme and at intervals beyond this as set out by DfE;
- (xx) conduct interim evaluation of administration and delivery of the Scheme by end of year 1 to assess progress, lessons learned and implement improvements for future years to ensure continued value for money into year 2 and 3.
- (xxi) Ensuring a timely Internal Audit Review is conducted on Council administration of the Scheme and compliance with the MoU, the LOO and provide DfE with the outcome.
- (xxii) At all stages by all Parties involved there should be adequate declarations of interest by those involved and these should be documented.

6.3 **Eligibility Criteria**

- (a) Councils have autonomy to determine eligibility, in line with the spirit of the Schemes and the broad guidelines/criteria set by DfE. They should engage with DfE directly, via DfE membership of their LEP, alongside central DfE contacts, on any questions around project eligibility and alignment with Scheme objectives as set out in the Fund project guidance.
- (b) Although DfE will set out suggested controls in the LOO, it is up to councils to determine whether the evidence submitted by promoters adequately demonstrates eligibility. The Council must be content projects which are approved for delivery are providing value for money, affordable, deliverable and aligned with the scheme outcomes and contribute to key indicators and objectives. They should follow the business case process in line with MPMNI and DfE stipulations to quantify this. The Council is required to use local knowledge to assess projects and where necessary seek further information from third parties.
- (c) To the extent that the Eligibility Criteria is changed following the launch of the Scheme, the Parties acknowledge that it may not be possible to reflect the impact of such changes in the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures already completed. The Parties agree to work together to determine how such changes can be managed.
- (d) With regards delegated limits in relation to council authority, expenditure and approval of individual project level business cases, DfE will not set a specific maximum financial threshold for individual project business cases



at a council level regarding resource or capital expenditure, to be submitted to DfE for approval other than the conditions outlined in DAO (DoF) 08/21 (Revised) and the DfE specific delegations within, provided other eligibility criteria and responsibilities set out in this MoU and in the annual LOO are met. Councils can engage with DfE if there are concerns or queries on this approach.

- (e) A minimum project level financial threshold has been set at £20k per individual project per year to ensure projects are of sufficient scope and scale to impact outcomes. An exception process is in place to consider project business cases/proposals below this financial level which can be deemed to contribute to scheme objectives.
- (f) Spending on ineligible projects will not be accepted and will not be funded by DfE. In the unlikely event a Council issues payment to a supplier for a project for which funding is not eligible per the scheme requirements, as per previous line this will not be eligible for drawdown from DfE, and the Council will have to assume the financial impact or contractual consequences. Overspending will not be funded by DfE.

6.4 Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures

- (a) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council have autonomy in determining the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures.
- (b) Consideration should be given to the expected controls to be set out by the Department in the LOOs including no duplicative funding.
- (c) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will be responsible for agreeing projects for progression for funding under the Scheme in accordance with those procedures and in line with the eligibility criteria referred to in section 6.3
- (d) The Parties recognise that DfE may seek to rely on the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures completed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council as part of its Assurance Procedures.
- (e) Where DfE are to source and provide data to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to facilitate the completion of the Pre-Payment Assurance Procedures such data will be provided in a form and format to facilitate the procedures and will be provided in a timely manner.

6.5 Post-Payment Assurance Procedures

- (a) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will provide suitable data sets to DfE upon request to assist with Post-Payment Assurance Procedures, the content and timing of such data sets to be agreed between the parties.



- (b) DfE will undertake and complete, or procure the undertaking and completion of, the Post-Payment Assurance Procedures for which it is responsible for.
- (c) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will undertake and complete whatever Post-Payment Assurance Procedures considered necessary to adhere to their internal processes.

6.6 **Risk of Fraud, Error and Clawback**

- (a) DfE will retain the right to clawback any monies as a result of fraud or error or deemed to be ineligible in respect of the eligibility criteria. In such instances the appropriate action will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The Parties agree to consult in relation to this.
- (b) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council shall be responsible for investigating instances of potential fraud or error, including the completion of any clawback procedures.

6.7 **Payments**

- (a) The overall budget for the Scheme at the date of this MoU is set at a maximum of £45 million.
- (b) Causeways Coast and Glens Borough Council's overall allocation as announced by the Minister for the Economy on 27th January 2025 is £4,509,000.
- (c) DfE shall provide the budget required to facilitate payments under the Scheme in the current and next financial years via Letters of Offer. DfE shall transfer funds to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to cover eligible payments. Eligible funding, per the requirements set out previously and in LOO, will be drawn down from DfE by the councils for in-year, in arrears on the basis of expenses, for delivery of projects via suppliers.
- (d) Templates for submitting claims/making payments will be agreed between the DfE and the council.

6.8 **Reporting**

- (a) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will conduct an Internal Audit Review on the administration of the Scheme and compliance with the MoU and LOOs. This should be conducted at the end of year 1 with improvements implemented. This is in addition to ongoing audit activities regarding expenditure, business cases etc. This should be shared with DfE.
- (b) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will work proactively with DfE in relation to information which DfE requests for reporting purposes.



- (c) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council shall provide DfE with updates on specific projects approved for funding under the Scheme when requested.
- (d) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will provide regular reporting on progress against action plan including Red Amber Green (“**RAG**”) status, progress to date, milestones, issues and other considerations.

6.9 **Post Project Evaluation**

- (a) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council should conduct interim evaluation of administration and delivery of the Scheme by end of year 1 to assess progress, lessons learned and implement improvements for future years to ensure continued value for money into year 2 and 3.
- (b) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will be responsible for undertaking a post implementation review on the administration and delivery of the Scheme in line with the requirements of this MoU.
- (c) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will be responsible for conducting PPE and other evaluations against Scheme and project metrics, outcomes and baselines for a) each individual project funded under the scheme b) the overall suite of Projects funded across each year by the Council and c) on overall completion of the 3-year scheme and at intervals beyond this as set out by DfE.
- (d) DfE will be responsible for undertaking a PPE of the scheme which will consider whether the scheme’s objectives were met and whether value for money was achieved.

6.10 **Costs of Implementation**

- (a) Given the collaborative nature of the project the Parties agree to provide reasonable resources to support the development and delivery of their respective roles on the Scheme.
- (b) Councils are authorised to draw an element of resource costs from their annual LEP allocation, this should be proportionate and utilised to further increase their capacity and capability to deliver on local economic projects in line with the Scheme outcomes. This information should be detailed in annual financial profiling.

6.11 **Communications**

- (a) Any media enquiries relating to the policy of the Scheme will be handled by the DfE Press Office.



- (b) Any media enquiries relating to the operation of the Scheme will be handled by the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Press Office.
- (c) The parties agree to collaborate where necessary on briefings or other communications where the source information is held across both Parties (including Freedom of Information requests).

6.12 Payment Mechanics

- (a) Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council will make payments to project promoters in line with its internal processes.
- (b) Once satisfied that the overall Scheme budget is not going to be exceeded, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council shall make Payments accordingly as per (a).
- (c) Payments in excess of the overall annual and 3-year funding envelope will not be accepted and will not be covered by DfE in its budget transfer.

6.13 Data and Sharing of Information

- (a) The Parties agree to ensure that appropriate data sharing agreements are in place to facilitate all required data transfers.
- (b) Each Party will take responsibility for completion of their respective Data Protection Impact Assessment.
- (c) Where applicable, the Parties will retain and dispose of the data in line with their respective organisational policies or the relevant data sharing agreement.
- (d) The Parties agree to share data in line with their respective organisational policies and other agreements which may be in place.
- (e) If a Party receives any requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (or other regulations including the Environmental Information Regulations 2004) in relation to the Scheme, the matter shall be promptly notified to the other Party. No action shall be taken in response to any such request without prior notification to the other Party.

7 CHANGES TO THIS MOU

- 7.1 Any proposed changes to this MoU, including the Fund Project Guidance, will be made in writing and only implemented following the agreement of all Parties.



8 DISPUTE RESOLUTION

- 8.1 The Parties to this MoU will attempt, in good faith, to resolve any dispute arising out of, or in connection with the Scheme or any matter in this MoU.
- 8.2 The Parties agree to adhere to the following process as part of any 'good faith' resolution:
- (a) the Parties shall try to resolve the problem through peer dialogue.
 - (b) if unresolved, the matter shall be escalated internally to the respective SRO for each of DfE and the Council and the Regional Business Director within Invest NI.
- 8.3 If a Party receives any formal inquiry, complaint, claim or threat of action from a third party (including, but not limited to, requests for information made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 & EIR 2004) in relation to the Scheme, the matter shall be promptly notified to the other Party. No action shall be taken in response to any such inquiry, complaint, claim or action without the prior approval of the other Party.



The terms of this MoU are hereby accepted by the following signatories on behalf of the Parties.

Signed for and on behalf of

THE DEPARTMENT FOR THE ECONOMY

Signature:

Name (block capitals):

GIULIA NI DHULCHAOINTIGH

Position:

Director Social and Regional Economy

Date:

19th August 2025

Signed for and on behalf of

CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL

Signature:

Name (block capitals):

Position:

Date:

Signed for and on behalf of

INVEST NORTHERN IRELAND

Signature:

Name (block capitals):

IAIN JOANNIDES

Position:

Director Regional Business

Date:

19th August 2025