



**Causeway  
Coast & Glens  
Borough Council**

**Local Economic Partnership Meeting**

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2026 @ 03:00pm**

**Virtual Meeting via MS Teams**

**Elected Members:**

Alderman A Callan (DUP)  
Councillor K McGurk (SF)

**Council Officers:**

D Jackson, Chief Executive  
P Mulvenna, Director of Leisure and Development  
N McGurk, Head of Prosperity & Place  
O Duffy, Local Economic Partnership Manager  
M McGerty, Labour Market Partnership Manager  
S Mulhern, Principal Planning Technical Officer  
L McLoughlin, Business Support Administration

**External:**

A McNickle, Causeway Rural & Urban Network Manager  
D Farrell, The Honourable Irish Society  
D Gartland, Invest NI, Northwest Regional Manager  
J Taggart, CEO Enterprise Causeway  
K Yates, CEO Causeway Chamber  
M Craig, Department for the Economy (DfE) (Deputising for M Bowles)  
M Devlin, CEO Roe Valley Enterprises  
M O'Neill, Ulster University, Director of Regional Engagement  
P McKeown, North West Regional College, Finance Director  
P Steele, Northern Regional College (NRC) (Deputising for C Fairless)

**Apologies:**

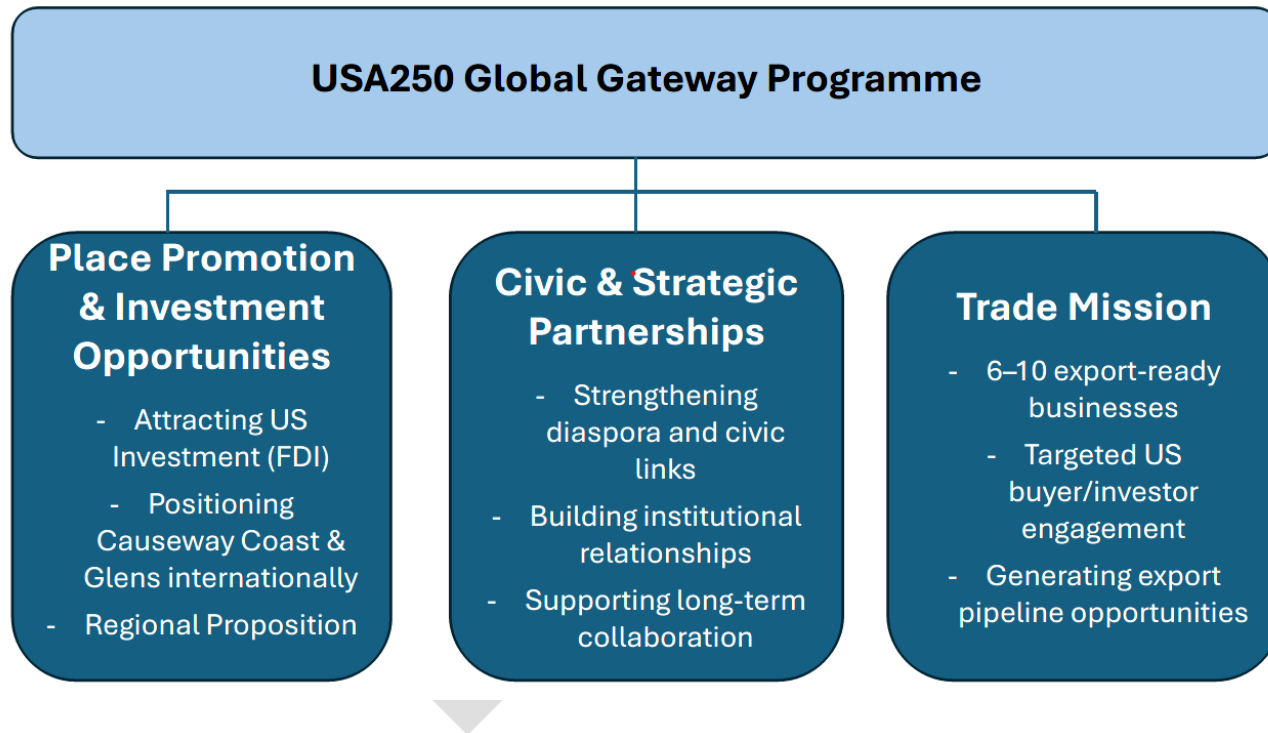
Councillor T Elder (DUP)  
M Bowles, Department for the Economy, DfE  
C Fairless, NRC Head of Marketing & Communications  
L McCloskey, North West Regional College (Deputising for P McKeown)

NO.		ACTIONS
1.	<b>Welcome &amp; Apologies</b>	
	P Mulvenna welcomed everyone to the ninth Local Economic Partnership (LEP) meeting, noting apologies. She extended her welcome to Michelle Craig, DfE.	
2.	<b>Conflicts of Interest</b>	
	<p>P Mulvenna encouraged Members to consider their need to declare a conflict of interest at relevant agenda items.</p> <p>K Yates declared her interest in the event for Connected Causeway: Agenda Item 4.3 and will leave the meeting whilst being discussed.</p> <p>J Taggart advised that Enterprise Causeway is one of the delivery partners for Go Succeed: Agenda Item 8 and although the element that they deliver is not being discussed she wished to clarify her position with the Partnership.</p>	
3.	<b>Minutes from Previous Meeting &amp; Action Points</b>	
	The minutes from 12 <sup>th</sup> March 2026 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting with Action Points being covered during today's meeting.	
4.	<b>LEP Decision Items</b>	
	<p>O Duffy thanked organisations for their input from the previous meeting, noting the positive progress in refining the programmes to ensure they are impactful and avoid duplication. He reminded Members of the three programmes being discussed today for decision providing a brief outline to further support the reports previously distributed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) USA250 Global Gateway Programme</li> <li>b) Thrive Causeway Grant Programme</li> <li>c) Connected Causeway Launch Event</li> </ul> <p><u>USA250 Global Gateway Programme</u></p> <p>O Duffy explained that this programme has been developed to address the local economic challenges and strategic opportunities within the Borough. It has been previously identified that there is a need to</p>	

improve local productivity, export performance and raise wage levels whilst aligning with Council's key strategies. He advised there is an opportunity to strengthen trade and increase the international visibility of the Borough through this programme.

USA250 proposes to target Advanced Manufacturing, Materials and Engineering in Charlotte, North Carolina with a budget of £170,000. He noted this not a stand-alone trade mission, rather it consists of three elements:

- 1) Place Promotion and Investment Opportunities
- 2) Civic and Strategic Partnership Engagement
- 3) Trade Mission – outlined in report.



	<p><i>O Duffy encouraged Members discussion</i></p> <p>A Callan noted that USA250 is reflective of the 2026 events happening in America and acknowledged that this programme intends to go beyond this year with the potential for developing relationships in Canada as well.</p> <p>O Duffy stated the programme's aims have been updated accordingly and confirmed the plan is to use the USA250 opportunity to develop a North America trade mission. He also noted that Canada is one of the four target markets identified in the Council's FDI Strategy.</p> <p>K Yates advised that Causeway Chamber of Commerce is a member of the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and that she has established a relationship with Suzanne Wylie (NI Chamber). She noted that two large companies were unavailable during NI Chamber's research and suggested that a broad sectoral approach would maximise engagement. She added that the Chamber will support the North Carolina element and confirmed she is happy to share further insights with O. Duffy.</p> <p>J Taggart referred to the third pillar, <i>Trade Mission</i>, and sought clarity on its scope to ensure it does not overlap with or duplicate support already provided by Invest NI (INI).</p> <p>O Duffy confirmed that a strong, transparent relationship with INI is essential to avoid duplication. He noted that a broad definition of Advanced Manufacturing has been identified as offering the greatest potential to increase trade and GVA and suggested presenting a cluster of businesses to showcase Causeway Coast and Glens effectively. He added that close engagement with INI is needed to determine how this element can progress and to ensure best use of LEP funding.</p> <p>N McGurk provided additional context, noting that the FDI Strategy was prepared by Declan Barry, an economic development and entrepreneurship advisor, and forms the foundation for the proposed programmes. He explained that the strategy was informed by an extensive research on insights and lessons learned across NI programmes, providing assurance that the USA250 Global Gateway Programme is a new and bespoke offering. He suggested a further sense check with D. Barry to ensure continued alignment with the LEP Action Plan and to avoid duplication.</p>	<p>KY to share insights from NI Chamber (OD)</p> <p>Re-share FDI Strategy (OD)</p> <p>Sense Check programme (OD)</p>
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D. Gartland endorsed the earlier comments, stressing the need to focus on the added value LEP can offer alongside INI. He advised that INI is organising a trade mission to Charlotte, North Carolina, to coincide with Charlotte FinTech Week, 8–12 June 2026 and noted the existence of an MOU between the NI Chamber and the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce, including wraparound support for the mission.

He emphasised the importance of complementary working and collaboration with the INI Trade Team as the target market develops to avoid duplication.

He questioned the purpose of the trade mission, asking whether it is purely a business-focused mission or one aimed at promoting Causeway Coast and Glens. He strongly recommended that LEP use the opportunity to support early-stage exporting companies in targeting newer markets, such as Ireland or Holland.

He cautioned that communication between INI and the LEP must remain open and transparent, noting that he acts as the conduit to ensure this. He welcomed the proposed approach of place promotion with a trade mission as a bolt-on and agreed this represents the most effective way forward.

P Mulvenna asked if any Causeway Coast and Glens businesses were scheduled to attend the INI trade mission event,

D Gartland advised that the target market is the technology and financial services sector, particularly businesses operating in fintech, regtech, insurtech, cyber security, data analytics, artificial intelligence and digital transformation. He noted that North Carolina is the second-largest banking hub in the United States after New York, making it likely that many Charlotte-based companies are already INI clients.

He added that NI Chamber is aware of the event and, as it is not taking place until June, there is still time for additional businesses to apply.

A Callan supported D. Gartland's comments, noting that place promotion is central to the USA250 Global Gateway Programme as a means of promoting Causeway Coast and Glens and building relationships. He acknowledged that the MOU could be leveraged by LEP and highlighted the Golden Bridges Conference in Boston on 12 November 2026 as a potential follow-on to the Autumn trade mission to further identify opportunities and develop CCG.



Connected Causeway Launch Event

*K Yates left the meeting at 15:40 to allow this agenda item to be discussed*

O Duffy advised that the proposed launch event will provide a platform for education providers, businesses and stakeholders to connect, share knowledge and build relationships. He noted it will also serve as the official launch of the CCGBC LEP, introducing Members and outlining the planned programmes.

The event will be delivered in partnership with Causeway Chamber on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2026 at the North West 200 Corporate Tent, with the LEP asked to contribute £10,000. Causeway Chamber intends for the event to become a sustainable annual flagship initiative in future years.

He outlined that the event will have two components:

1. A formal launch of LEP from 5.30pm to 6.30pm.
2. A business engagement session from 7.00pm onwards showcasing the region's strengths in sport, enterprise and innovation, promoting stronger links between education partners, businesses, Council and stakeholders, and including a Q&A session.

O Duffy shared a breakdown of what the costs include:

Item	Budget Amount
Venue / Marquee hire. (inc AV, security, staff, kitchen and bar facilities)	£5,000+vat
Poser Tables & Covers inc delivery	£2,000+vat
Printed Material (Programmes, pop ups, lanyards and name cards)	£2,000+vat
Content/ Media	£1000+vat
Catering	£6000+vat

Members discussed the proposal and raised a query regarding whether a four-week turnaround would allow sufficient time to develop impactful materials and event.

O Duffy confirmed that this is deliverable.

Concerns were raised that the LEP launch could be overshadowed by the NW200 and the wider flagship event.

O. Duffy advised that the LEP launch will take place first, with invited guests and ticket holders seated by 5.30pm, followed by the business engagement event. He assured Members that ensuring the LEP launch is not lost will be a priority.

Members queried whether ticket pricing (£35 per person, with a target attendance of 300, and VIP tables at £200 per table) would result in profits returning to Causeway Chamber.

O Duffy advised that he would seek further clarification on this point.

Members raised a concern regarding the £5,000 cost of marquee hire, given that Council already makes a significant contribution to the NW200.

O. Duffy advised that the agreement is between the NW200 and Causeway Chamber, rather than Council, but confirmed he would seek further clarification.

D Jackson proposed that K Yates be invited back into the meeting to address the outstanding concerns, as a decision was required at the meeting.

Members agreed.

*K Yates joined meeting at 15:57pm*

K Yates responded that the marquee is not provided free of charge to the Chamber, noting it is the largest marquee in Ireland and includes comprehensive AV provision, which alone could cost £3,000 or more.

She stated that the overall package represents good value and explained that the NW200 is seeking to sustain use of the marquee by hosting multiple events throughout the week, which accounts for the charge. She also highlighted the potential for live BBC coverage, including involvement from Steve Watson and sports personalities, to raise the event's profile.

	<p>K Yates further advised that, as this is the first year, there is no intention to generate a profit; the aim is to cover event costs and grow the event annually. She explained that ticket pricing was set to attract a minimum of 300 attendees and to enhance the event's profile. She also suggested bringing the launch event forward to 5.00pm to accommodate the Council meeting.</p> <p>She concluded that the report does not fully itemise the total event costs and, as such, a maximum sponsorship contribution of £10,000 has been requested towards the overall cost. She also expressed appreciation should the marquee cost be renegotiated between Council and the NW200.</p> <p><i>K Yates left meeting at 16:08pm</i></p> <p>P Mulvenna asked if Members were content to contribute a maximum of £10,000 towards Connected Causeway Launch Event.</p> <p>Members agreed.</p> <p><i>K Yates joined meeting at 16:09pm</i></p>	<p>Bring LEP launch event forward to 5pm (KY/OD)</p> <p>Council to renegotiate marquee fee (OD)</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>LEP Information Items</b>	
	<p>O Duffy advised that Year 1 expenditure has been outlined to the Department for the Economy (DfE), including details of the underspend and the associated rationale. He confirmed that the final end-of-year budget position was £102,000, noting that the original allocation was £205,088.</p> <p>M Craig acknowledged receipt of the budget information and advised that routine financial forecasting will be implemented going forward, noting that the underspend was anticipated due to the nature of the programme.</p>	
<b>6.</b>	<b>LEP Governance</b>	
	<p>O Duffy reminded Members who have not yet done so to return the signed documents in the Governance Pack, noting this is essential for the Council's internal audit process.</p> <p>He advised that the documents are available via the zip file attached to the meeting invite and will also be re-issued by email.</p>	<p>Email Governance Documentation to Members (OD)</p>

7.	<b>Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Investment Showcase 2025</b>	
	<p>K Yates briefed Members on the Showcase, noting that the morning event was held in the House of Commons and reflected on the strong atmosphere of the venue. She clarified that the afternoon event with Queen’s University coincided with, but was not formally part of, the Showcase.</p> <p><b>Headlines:</b>  <u>Key Area:</u> AMIC, The Factory of the Future.  <u>Key Message:</u> Planning was part of their Economic Development Department within Council to ensure building control is streamlined, business focused and provides confidence to investors in the area.  <u>Some of the companies in attendance:</u> Radox Health. Dan Owens, Chief Executive Officer at Belfast International Airport. Sam Turner, Chief Executive at AMIC. Shorlagh McConville, Business Development Manager at Mivan: Fit Out Contractor &amp; Specialist Joinery. Mark Sterritt, British Business Bank.  <u>Pitches –</u> Some areas applied to NI wide rather than Borough specific such as connectivity through the airport and helping businesses make new materials and sustainability. Other pitches included political stability and land availability to accommodate growth in scale and lobbying on aviation fuel tax.</p> <p><i>A McNickle left meeting at 16:17pm</i></p> <p>Lessons Learned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Some attendees were unclear about why they had been invited.</li> <li>b) A buddying approach and provision of an attendee list would be beneficial for future LEP events.</li> <li>c) Deanna Lucci (Office for Investment) identified as a potential future contact.</li> <li>d) Causeway Chamber will attend the Retail NI event in May.</li> <li>e) Engage with Peta Conn, Director GB &amp; Europe at Invest NI, regarding London engagements.</li> <li>f) Encourage more Westminster visits to strengthen relationships and opportunities.</li> <li>g) The Trade NI event in May presents a valuable opportunity to build relationships ahead of CCG events.</li> </ol>	
8.	<b>Go Succeed</b>	
	O Duffy advised that the Go Succeed Programme aligns with the LEP Action Plan in supporting resilience, start-ups and growth, and that the LEP is being asked to contribute £124,000 to support delivery in the 2026–27 financial year.	

He explained that £100,000 from the Thrive Causeway Programme will support mentoring and market-readiness through the Go Succeed Programme, with a further £24,000 proposed for reallocation from the Emerging Challenge Fund to support the capital element, maintaining balance for DfE.

K Yates asked whether LEP funding was the only option for supporting delivery of the Go Succeed Programme.

M Craig advised that DfE is developing a £1 million business case to address the Go Succeed underspend, though a funding gap will remain even if secured. She noted that the LEP was never intended to fund Go Succeed and that the funding reduction coincided with LEP's establishment, to DfE's disappointment. Each Borough will decide whether to allocate LEP funding, with decisions resting with individual Partnerships. She clarified that the funding cut was made by the UK Government, not DfE, despite lobbying by the DfE Minister.

J Taggart questioned how the Go Succeed Programme could proceed given that LEP funding was not intended for this purpose. She cautioned that LEP outcomes will be scrutinised and warned against diluting the LEP budget from its original purpose. She also expressed concern about further reducing funding for the scoping study and emerging challenges, emphasising the need to be mindful of how LEP will be evaluated.

A Callan asked what the alternative would be if LEP did not fund Go Succeed and what impact this would have on the programme. He expressed concern that the LEP was intended to deliver new solutions and opportunities for the area, rather than fund an existing programme.

N McGurk confirmed that Council has always made an annual contribution to local business support as a statutory requirement and must continue to meet DfE targets despite a reduced budget. He agreed with M Craig that this situation was unforeseen and noted that, as business support is a key LEP objective, funding could be allocated to Go Succeed if the Partnership agrees.

He advised that other councils have either fully funded the Go Succeed Programme or match-funded council contributions. He emphasised that the LEP is being asked for a maximum contribution of £124,000 for one year only, with potential for reduction as additional funding streams emerge. He added that advice from Solace is to seek LEP support.

A Callan sought clarification on the implications for the Go Succeed Programme if the LEP did not provide funding.

N McGurk confirmed that if the LEP did not fund Go Succeed, the programme would seek an increased contribution from Council, as delivery is a statutory requirement.

A Callan thanked N McGurk and reiterated his reluctance for the LEP to fund the Go Succeed element for the reasons previously outlined, noting his preference for the decision to be taken by Council Members.

J Taggart requested that all alternative funding routes be exhausted first, with LEP funding used only as a last resort.

M Devlin agreed with both A Callan and J Taggart emphasising that LEP funding was ringfenced for new opportunities.

O Duffy advised that the £100,000 allocated for Thrive Causeway mentoring and market-readiness support was intended for Capital Grant recipients. He noted that funding Go Succeed would generate additional outcomes by expanding support to beneficiaries beyond those receiving the Thrive Capital Grant.

D Farrell acknowledged that the LEP funding request is for one year only but expressed concern that, if funding applications are unsuccessful, this could carry over into the next financial year.

M O'Neill advised that, in principle, it is not appropriate to use one funding pot to address gaps in another. While acknowledging that Go Succeed aligns closely with LEP objectives, he reiterated that LEP funding should be a last resort.

A Callan reiterated that the decision should rest with Council, concurring with D Farrell's concerns about the potential for funding to roll over.

P Mulvenna asked Members to confirm that they were not content for LEP funding to contribute to the Go Succeed Programme and that officers should instead pursue alternative funding through Council.

Members agreed not to fund Go Succeed.

<b>9.</b>	<b>Any Other Relevant Business</b>	
	<p>Two items to discuss:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>O. Duffy advised that the LEP has been invited to attend the Trade NI event on 13<sup>th</sup> May at the House of Commons, with a minimum attendance of two representatives.</li> </ol> <p>Members discussed the invitation, noting that some are already attending in another capacity, other key events could be aligned to maximise the trip, and places are limited, requiring a prompt decision.</p> <p>P Mulvenna advised Members to email O. Duffy if they wished to be considered for attendance at the Trade NI event; otherwise, O Duffy will make a random selection to nominate two Members.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>O Duffy presented the option that LEP become an NI Chamber Corporate Member at a cost of £3,330 plus VAT.</li> </ol> <p>Following discussion, Members agreed that the LEP will not pursue Corporate Membership of the NI Chamber.</p> <p>P Mulvenna wished to remind Members to compile a list of stakeholder events as this will be added as a rolling agenda item for the next meeting.</p>	Organise Trade NI attendance (OD)
<b>10.</b>	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>	
	<p>O Duffy informed the next meeting coincides with LEP Launch event and proposed holding a meeting ahead of the event.</p> <p>Members agreed.</p> <p>Meeting TBC.</p>	Issue meeting invite (OD)

**END: 16:57pm**