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| Title of Report: | USA 250 Economic Interventions |
| Committee Report Submitted To: | Leisure & Development Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 18 March 2026 |
| For Decision or For Information | For Information |
| To be discussed In Committee | NO |

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| 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 |

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

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| Budgetary Considerations | |
| Cost of Proposal | Costed within 26/27 £225,000 Global Gateway Budget (100% funded by DfE) |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | Yes (100% funded by DfE) |
| Capital/Revenue | Revenue (100% funded by DfE) |
| Code | N/A |
| Staffing Costs | N/A |

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| Legal Considerations | |
| Input of Legal Services Required | NO |
| Legal Opinion Obtained | N/A |

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

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the development of the USA 250 Global Gateway Economic Programme, including an export-focused trade visit to the United States, aimed at supporting local businesses to access new markets, increase export activity and generate measurable economic outcomes for the Borough.

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 In January 2025, Council agreed the DfE guidelines to establish the Causeway Coast & Glens Local Economic Partnership (LEP) and approved the proposed membership structure. Following establishment of the LEP, Officers worked in partnership with DfE and Invest NI (INI) to develop a bespoke Action Plan for the Borough.
- 2.4 The Strategic Analysis identified several structural economic challenges within the Borough, including lower productivity levels relative to the Northern Ireland average, below-average median wages and a sectoral profile weighted towards lower value-added activity. The analysis highlighted the need to strengthen the tradable sector, increase export intensity and support higher value employment growth.
- 2.5 In December 2025, following Council approval, DfE formally authorised the Action Plan and issued a Letter of Offer, confirming funding support under the Regional Economy Fund.
- 2.6 The LEP Action Plan places a strong emphasis on Collaboration, Growth and Innovation, including strengthening export readiness, supporting business scaling and improving productivity within the Borough's tradable sectors. This approach is firmly rooted in the Council's *Economic Strategy (2020) – Recovery and Renewal*, which identified persistent structural challenges including below-average productivity, lower median wages and limited representation in higher value-added sectors. The Strategy explicitly recognises export-led growth and sector competitiveness as key mechanisms to "turn the curve" on economic performance and deliver a stronger and more connected economy.
- 2.7 In parallel, the Council's *FDI Investment Action Plan (2024–2026)* seeks to strengthen the Borough's international economic profile, enhance its inward investment proposition and promote priority growth sectors. The FDI Action Plan recognises that increasing the Borough's visibility and strengthening strategic international relationships are essential to improving competitiveness, attracting investment and supporting local firms to scale beyond the domestic market.
- 2.8 Taken together, these strategies highlight a consistent theme, improving productivity and wage levels in Causeway Coast and Glens requires greater internationalisation of local businesses, deeper engagement with export markets and stronger alignment between sector development and global demand.

3.0 Programme

- 3.1 The USA 250 Global Gateway Economic Programme has been developed as a targeted, outcome-focused intervention designed to operationalise these ambitions. The programme will support a cohort of export-ready businesses to access the United States market through structured preparation, pre-qualified business-to-business meetings, and coordinated follow-up support over a 24 to 36-month period.
- 3.2 The inclusion of a Council officers, LEP/Elected Members within the delegation reflects the governance and relationship-building dimension of the programme. Civic engagement, diaspora links and institutional partnerships are recognised components of successful international trade visits.
- 3.3 The USA 250 Global Gateway Economic Programme represents a practical mechanism to translate the ambitions of the Sub-Regional Economic Plan, the LEP Action Plan, the Council's Economic Strategy and the FDI Investment Action Plan into delivery. It provides a focused opportunity to accelerate export growth, enhance the Borough's international competitiveness and ensure that local businesses are positioned to benefit from expanded transatlantic economic relationships.
- 3.4 See **Annex A** for further details on the draft USA 250 Project working group template.

Annex A: Draft USA 250 Project template for Working Group

| Inputs | Activities | Outputs | Outcomes | Progress |
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| What resources are needed to make your project operate? | What activities will take place during your project? | How many and what kind of products / outputs will be generated from those activities? | What will happen as a result of your project being delivered? | Detail progress to date |
| <p>Staff: LEP Manager Time</p> <p>Partnership: LEP Board, Collaboration, Growth and Innovation Task & Finish Group</p> | <p>Phase 1: Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch Expression of Interest (EOI) for Export Ready firms Assess export readiness and shortlist 6–12 firms Deliver export readiness workshops Conduct US market research Identify and secure relevant buyer meetings for businesses Prepare firms for US compliance and pitch delivery <p>Phase 2: US Trade Visit Deliver pre-arranged B2B buyer/investor meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host sector roundtable event Conduct site visits to relevant US businesses / facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 structured USA250 Export Visit delivered 6 - 12 businesses supported Minimum 10 qualified buyer/investor meetings delivered 6–12 individual US market action plans produced Delegation report presented to Council Committee 24/36-month monitoring framework implemented 1 Evaluation report of the programme | <p>Short-Term Outcomes (0–6 months)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributor and supply-chain negotiations facilitated Enhanced export capability within participating SMEs <p>Medium-Term Outcomes (6–12 months)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased production activity within borough Strengthened US distribution relationships <p>Long-Term Outcomes (1–3 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained US export market presence Increased productivity through scaling Diversification of export markets Increased Gross Value Added (GVA) within Causeway Coast & Glens | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEP Action Plan formally approved by DfE, L&D and CCGBC, including Global Gateway Programme. LEP Task & Finish Group established to design the USA250 Global Gateway programme Draft programme and outcomes framework developed. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver civic/diaspora networking reception • Undertake institutional engagement meetings <p>Phase 3: Post-Visit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support follow-up meetings and negotiations • Quarterly reporting on export pipeline and sales conversion • Hold a business engagement session showcasing lessons learned | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened transatlantic civic and economic links | |
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