



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

Local Economic Partnership Meeting

Thursday 12th March 2026 @ 10:00am

Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

Elected Members:

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

Council Officers:

N McGurk, Head of Prosperity & Place
O Duffy, Local Economic Partnership Manager
M McGerty, Labour Market Partnership Manager
L McLoughlin, Business Support Administration

External:

M Bowles, Department for the Economy, DfE
D Gartland, Invest NI, Northwest Regional Manager
M O'Neill, Ulster University Director of Regional Engagement
J Taggart, CEO Enterprise Causeway
P Steele, Northern Regional College (deputising for C Fairless)
L McCloskey, North West Regional College (deputising for P McKeown)
D Farrell, The Honourable Irish Society
A McNickle, Causeway Rural & Urban Network Manager

Apologies:

D Jackson, Chief Executive
P Mulvenna, Director of Leisure and Development
P McKeown, North West Regional College, Director of Finance
M Devlin, CEO Roe Valley Enterprises
C Fairless, NRC Head of Marketing & Communications
K Yates, CEO Causeway Chamber

NO.		ACTIONS
1.	Welcome & Apologies	
	N McGurk acted as Chair in P Mulvenna's absence and welcomed everyone to the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) meeting, noting apologies.	
2.	Conflicts of Interest	
	N McGurk encouraged Members to consider their need to declare a conflict of interest at relevant agenda items. None declared.	
3.	Minutes from Previous Meeting & Action Points	
	The minutes from 3 rd December 2025 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting with all Action Points completed.	
5.	LEP Update – Year one spend and Year two mobilisation	
	<p>O Duffy reminded Members of the fast-approaching financial year end, 31st March 2026 and today's focus will be on reaching a decision on the proposed spend items.</p> <p><u>Year One Spend</u> Global Gateway O Duffy advised that the Task & Finish Group have made great progress and have identified two opportunities for spend within the Global Gateway Programme.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Develop a draft Terms of Reference for an enhanced website which will provide an opportunity to showcase investment opportunities, highlight prospects brought by Coleraine Future Town Fund (CFTF) and other initiatives. 2) Purchase LEP merchandise such as pop-up stands, banners, pens, cups etc. <p>M Bowles questioned if the marketing material will include brochures?</p> <p>O Duffy confirmed that as part of Invest Causeway, an online brochure would be updated and available on the website.</p> <p>D Farrell highlighted the importance of ensuring the right message is being communicated through both the brochure and the website and asked if the content could be reviewed by LEP Members?</p>	

<p>O Duffy agreed it could and will share for review when available. He also informed that Council could update content to their website, as and when necessary.</p> <p>O Duffy sought agreement from Members for both spend items as outlined above. All members agreed.</p> <p>Innovate 360</p> <p>O Duffy advised that this programme aims to host a Connected Causeway style Event to showcase the opportunities within the Borough. After discussions with both colleges, and reflection on previous comparable events, it seems unlikely that LEP will be able to host a high-level event as previously anticipated.</p> <p>He informed that K Yates presented an opportunity to partner the event in the North West 200 Corporate Business tent on the 5th of May. The space offered by North West 200 is neutral and will allow colleges to showcase equipment at North Coast's most iconic event of the calendar year.</p> <p>Both A Callan and J Taggart concurred that it was a brilliant opportunity and is a great avenue for launching Innovate 360.</p> <p>O Duffy sought agreement from Members on hosting the event at the North West 200. All agreed.</p> <p>FutureProof</p> <p>O Duffy reminded Members that the aim of this programme is to upskill the workforce in green technologies and support SME's to reduce energy costs and transition towards a low-carbon economy. He advised that ongoing engagement with colleges and DfE on how to efficiently manage Green Skills Academies is ongoing.</p> <p><i>M O'Neill joined the meeting at 10:18am</i></p> <p>M Bowles confirmed that DfE are working hard to find the best mechanism on how to procure this item.</p> <p>Scoping Study & Emerging Trends</p> <p>O Duffy informed the scoping study will be split into two elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Commercial properties in the Borough - Currently CFTF are carrying out a comprehensive scoping study and it is hoped that details of the wider borough could be obtained from the report. 	<p>Share brochure content for review when available (OD)</p>
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2) Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly – Capital Works Team is developing a draft Term Of Reference (TOR) to ensure a robust study is carried out.

A Callan informed Councils Asset Register could be used to dove tail into the scoping study noting this register is ready for use. He highlighted that there may be further opportunity to explore other buildings that are potentially becoming or due to become available in the future.

J Taggart queried if sufficient funds have been allocated to the technical assistance for the scoping study as it has previously come out strongly in delivering growth for the area. She expressed the importance of not under resourcing the work which needs to be carried out.

O Duffy explained that the LEP budget can be reallocated where funds are necessary.

N McGurk agreed with J Taggart, reflecting on the need for business space in the Borough which was supported by the extensive scoping study carried out last year. He noted that this work would be a continuation to further support the need for space, whether that be new build or repurposing vacant properties. He reminded Members that the LEP budget is flexible which will allow support to be provided where needed.

D Farrell noted the implementation costs of the study would be useful.

N McGurk advised Members of the procurement policy within Council, noting that management have levels of delegated budget authority. In order to maintain momentum, openness and transparency a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be brought to LEP once prepared.

A Callan advised that if the Partnership is updated via a report, then he expects no issue or objection.

Year Two Mobilisation

O Duffy informed that Task and Finish Groups have been discussing both Thrive and USA250.

USA250 Global Gateway Economic Programme

He provided an overview of the USA250 Global Gateway Economic Programme informing that it is designed to support export-ready businesses, allowing them to access the United States market. It was identified that a structured preparation plan will include an Expression of Interest (EOI) for Export Ready

Share associated costs once developed (OD)

Share MOU once prepared (NMcG)

firms, developing a business shortlist and delivering workshops will be required. This will be followed by a US Trade Visit and a subsequent Post Trade Visit with the aim of securing investors and establishing supply chains.

He encouraged discussion of the following:

- 1) Is USA still a viable market?
 - >America remains a key export channel.
- 2) Which business sector would CCG choose?
 - >Advanced manufacturing, if so, what defines this sector as it is broad.
 - >Align with Growth Deal on Life and Health Science or Drug Discovery
 - >Niche Market

M O'Neill reflected on what CCG is doing locally which is Bioscience, Drug Discovery and Foodovation and suggested a specific strand of innovation would be better as Advanced Manufacturing can be very broad.

O Duffy acknowledged that if there were enough businesses ready for export in those fields that this could be explored.

D Gartland informed that if businesses are ready to export, then they should be Invest Northern Ireland (INI) clients and if firms are incurring costs for exporting, then there may be existing funding streams already available to support. He advised that the first stage, for first time export companies, tend to distribute within Ireland and United Kingdom (UK) and then build up to exporting to USA. He noted the importance of building a proposition and aligning closely together to avoid duplication.

N McGurk acknowledged that duplication needed to be avoided but ensured this was a bespoke programme led by the knowledge within the Partnership to help achieve that. He noted the need to choose a sector which will create high level jobs and increase wages to meet the ambitions of LEP advising that innovation was coming through very strongly, but Alliance is also coming forward and bringing opportunity to CCG. He recognised direction from Ulster University (UU) and the Colleges will be necessary when choosing the right business sector.

A Callan reflected on the paper brought forward to the Task and Finish Group which aligns with Councils Economic Strategy and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy. He informed that 53% of INI is in the manufacturing space with 19% exporting to USA. He indicated that a dedicated resource is

needed not only in the USA but also for London and Europe and how key relationships can leverage an advantage for CCG. He noted the key to successful development is identifying the right resource.

In addition, he informed that NI Chamber have a MOU with North Carolina and is a potential region to consider for USA250 given the initial connections are established. He advised that Advanced Manufacturing is a key sector in that State.

D Farrell wished to share that at a recent meeting with City of London Corporation, they have identified Life and Health Science as a developing sector.

N McGurk reflected on K Yates recent conference visit to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Investment Showcase 2025. The feedback was extremely positive, noting her de-brief will be added to the agenda for the next LEP meeting.

Thrive

O Duffy reminded Members that the aim of Thrive was to support Enterprises through Capital grants, mentoring and provision for support.

He advised that some elements of the grant support included funding of £5000 to £30,000, maximum of seven capital items with both micro and SME businesses being eligible. It is anticipated that grants will open on the 18th of May 2026 with Letters of Offer being issued by mid-July which corresponds closely with the Innovate 360 event thus a great opportunity to promote Thrive grants.

In addition, a mandatory workshop will be required, and businesses must be trading for a minimum of two years.

D Gartland highlighted that it was important to look at the target market as some SME's are INI clients. It would be an important step to link with the Client Executive to ensure there is no duplication.

O Duffy clarified that the grant should therefore stipulate that 1) exclude INI clients or 2) If an existing INI client, then duplication checks with INI Chief Executive will be required before proceeding.

A Callan concurred with D Gartland advising there is a need to capture businesses who are not INI. Thrive needs to develop businesses and provide a stepping stone towards INI or if a previous INI client, then a connection back to them would be made available.

Add K Yates de-brief to agenda for next meeting (OD)

	<p>J Taggart asked if the approach was only considering Capital expenditure? She reflected on the business focus group, where it was identified that businesses don't always need physical items but rather resource and questioned if there was an opportunity to capitalise some resource elements?</p> <p>O Duffy advised that under the TOR in the Action Plan, 66% of the budget is required to be used on capital initiatives adding that there is a separate budget for mentoring and there is potential for synergies.</p> <p><i>A Callan left meeting at 10:57am</i></p> <p>M Bowles advised that resource budgets are tight however INI are there to provide support for growth, so it is important to establish a pipeline. He noted the mandatory workshops provide an opportunity to engage with businesses and advised extending an invite to INI.</p> <p>A McNickle questioned how Thrive grants will be promoted and wondered if the Global Gateway website could be used as a platform?</p> <p>O Duffy said it would be unlikely the website would be developed in time; however, it will be promoted through the Funding Unit and Economic Development Ezines and through Councils social media. All links will subsequently be shared with Members, and he noted his appreciation if Members could share through their distribution channels.</p> <p><i>D Farrell left meeting at 11:03am</i></p> <p>O Duffy informed that grants would be retrospective to mitigate risk of recovering funds.</p> <p>D Gartland agreed on this approach, noting that INI also use retrospective funding.</p> <p><i>T Elder left meeting @ 11:05am</i></p> <p>N McGurk suggested that terms of the Thrive Causeway Program be distributed to Members to allow for a robust review with feedback brought to the next LEP meeting.</p>	<p>Extend invite to INI for pre workshops (OD)</p> <p>Share Thrive Causeway Program with Members (OD)</p>
6.	Any Other Relevant Business	

	<p>N McGurk provided an overview of the Go Succeed Programme noting that Council is seeking an alternative funding stream. He sought Members thoughts on match funding, approximately £123,000 for one year for the Go Succeed Programme.</p> <p>K McGurk expressed concern about the single large amount being allocated to one item but acknowledged the synergies between Go Succeed program and the ambition of LEP .</p> <p>J Taggart highlighted that the focus and purpose of LEP is growth and to achieve INI status, she asked if LEP contributed to Go Succeed would it be for the growth aspect?</p> <p>N McGurk agreed that it would be the primary focus.</p> <p><i>L McCloskey left meeting at 11:12</i></p> <p>M Bowles informed that the Department is looking for additional funding and exploring options on how Go Succeed can continue. He added that LEP funds have not been ruled out for Go Succeed however no other Council has yet been approved. The Department is working on a resolution, noting it is a priority.</p>	<p>Bring paper to seek approval for match funding (NMcG)</p>
6.	Date of next meeting	
	<p>A short discussion took place and concluded that the next LEP meeting would be held online on Thursday 2nd April, pending corporate calendar check. Time to be confirmed.</p>	<p>Issue meeting invite (OD)</p>

END: 11:19am