

Digital Causeway Project	12th February 2019
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
Outcome	Enhancement of skills and job creation opportunities
Lead Officer	Head of Prosperity and Place
Cost: (if applicable)	£20k matching funding towards EU Programme Costs. Monies to be allocated within 19/20 Business Plan

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the Digital Causeway Project and to seek approval to accept a letter of offer for funding granted under the EU Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme which requires a level of match funding by Council.

The Programme

The Digital Causeway Project will operate in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCGBC) area and will provide an opportunity for local Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Social Enterprises (SEs) to embrace digital technology. It will encourage SMEs and SEs to apply the latest technologies to bring innovation to their business operations and procedures.

The Project will cover all aspects of business development that digital technology can help to make a business grow; e.g. Online Sales, Social Media, Artificial Intelligence, Marketing, Commercial Photography, Promotional Films, Website, Smart Phone App, Advertising, Customer Service, etc. SMEs and SEs will be able to access expert one-to-one mentoring to enable them to introduce and/or enhance products and services. The project will also allow for specialist mentoring in respect of business strategy and growth plans.

Programme Details

Eligibility

- Small/micro business <50 employees (inc SE).
- Potential to grow and create jobs.
- Potential to progress to Invest NI for financial support.

Degree and type of support provided will be dependent on;

- Scale of Job creation.
- Potential to meet Invest NI criteria for financial support.
- Alignment with Councils Economic Development Strategy's Grow and Step Change Sectors.

Key project actions

- Recruit at least 350 businesses to participate on the programme by 31/12/22.

- Deliver a minimum of 930 mentoring days, with participants receiving more than 4.5 days by 31/12/22.
- Deliver at least 8 workshops with a minimum of 12 participants per workshop by 31/12/22.
- Produce a mid-term evaluation within 18 months of commencing the programme.
- Produce a final evaluation for period to 30/06/23 by 30/09/23

Project performance indicators

- Undertake all reasonable endeavours to create at least 291 jobs by 30/06/23.
- Undertake all reasonable endeavours to refer at least 20 quality Invest NI referrals for financial support by 31/12/22.

Costs and Grant

This Programme attracts 80% funding from the European Regional Development Fund and Invest NI. The overall cost of the whole programme is £389,500; the grant available is £311,600 and Council contribution is £77,900 over 4 financial years. Provision has been made in next year's budget for this match funding.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Council accepts the letter of offer from Invest NI, with roll out of the programme to commence in April 2019.