

Title of Report:	Correspondence Report
Committee Report Submitted To:	The Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	20 June 2023
For Decision or For Information	For Information

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Local Economy Healthy Engaged Communities. Improvement and Innovation.
Outcome	
Lead Officer	Director of Leisure and Development

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	n/a
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	n/a
Code	n/a
Staffing Costs	n/a

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	N/A
Legal Opinion Obtained	N/A

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

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Correspondence for Members consideration.

2.0 The following are listed:

2.1 Correspondence from the Department for Communities regarding the Labour Market Partnership (Dated 09 May 2023)

Following the recent budget allocation announced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, correspondence has been received from the Department for Communities regarding budgetary shortfalls and the proposed pause in funding for the Labour Market Partnership. Final decisions will be taken after the 4 week consultation period for the EQIA.

The Chief Executive has issued a response outlining the concerns of this proposed cut in funding which is also attached to the report.

2.2 Correspondence from the Department for the Economy regarding Project Gigabit Public Review (Dated 01 June 2023)

Following the update provided in April 23 on plans by the Department for the Economy to launch a public review for the broadband intervention programme known as Project Gigabit, Councils are being encouraged to support awareness-raising of the upcoming Public Review by publicising the information through their websites and social media channels.

2.3 Correspondence from Hospitality Ulster on the Womens Night Safety Charter Northern Ireland (Dated 14 April 23)

In advance of the roll out of the Charter to businesses, key stakeholders in Northern Ireland, including Local Authorities, are being asked to sign up to the Charter and the pledges listed.

3.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members consider the correspondence.



Labour Market Partnership Team
Department for Communities
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

Email: LMP@communities-ni.gov.uk

Date: 9 May 2023

Dear LMP Chair,

LOCAL LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP (LMP) – PROPOSED PAUSE OF 2023/24 FUNDING

Following on from the recent budget allocation announced by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Department for Communities faces a significant budget shortfall of around £111m or 15.5% of its budget requirement this financial year. The Department has a range of statutory programmes and inescapable commitments that must be funded and given the scale of the shortfall this year, the Department will be unable to fund Labour Market Partnerships (LMPs) beyond the first quarter of this year. Effectively LMPs will receive 25% of their budget for this year with no guarantee of any future funding.

The Department's proposed plans for budget cuts will be published with an Equality Impact Assessment tomorrow. Final decisions on how the Department will utilise its budget allocation will be taken after the four-week consultation period for the EQIA.

Labour Market Partnerships had been the centre point of the Department's approach to developing employability provision and the Department remains committed to working in partnerships with local stakeholders. I recognise the difference that LMPs were making in the local labour market and deeply regret the need to pause funding.

The Department's LMP Team will be making contact with local LMPs to begin the process of planning for the pausing of LMP activity. I expect there will be a tail of expenditure in 2023/24 that the Department will meet from within the limited budget available for LMPs.

Any outstanding expenditure accrued from 2022/23 will be paid as usual through the Q4 2022/23 returns process.

I understand that this news will come as a disappointment to you and everyone who has worked hard on the Labour Market Partnership making it the success it has become. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work and assistance throughout the duration of the programme. Your contributions have been invaluable in helping individuals to develop new skills and access training to improve their employability.

I want to assure you that the Department remains committed to supporting individuals in finding employment and will continue to explore new avenues to provide assistance. We are grateful for the collaboration and partnership we have had with through Labour Market Partnership, and I hope that we can work together in the future.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or the wider LMP Team on LMP@communities-ni.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Deirdre Ward
Director, Work & Wellbeing

Deirdre Ward
Director, Work & Wellbeing
Labour Market Partnership Team
Department for Communities
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG

6th June 2023

Dear Deirdre

Re: Pausing of the Labour Market Partnerships

Thank-you for your letter on 9th May 2023 regarding the ‘pausing’ of funding for the Labour Market Partnerships (LMP’s). As Chief Executive, I would like to highlight several key concerns and impacts that this will have locally in the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area, and also across Northern Ireland.

The LMP is not a programme that can be ‘turned off’ and ‘back on’ again with no consequence. Over the past year the Causeway Coast and Glens LMP has created a really strong partnership which has had a very significant impact. Without the Partnership, our local economy will continue to face a number of challenges, mainly:

- Our economic inactivity rate is 30%, compared to the NI average of 27%.
- There are 26,000 economically inactive people.
- Claimant numbers were 2,830 in May 2023, which was 10% more than the pre-pandemic level.
- Youth NEET 16 to 24 years has risen sharply from 15.2% in 2016 to 18.2% in 2022.
- The number of people who are self-employed fell from 12,000 in 2018 to just 6,280 in 2022.
- 91.4% of businesses are micro-businesses and employ less than 10 people.
- The employment rate of people with disabilities was 42.9%, considerably lower than the UK disability employment rate of 52.7% in Q1 2011.
- We have the highest proportion of working age people with no qualifications in NI, and UUEPC forecasts a shortage of mid-level qualifications (QCF Level 3–5).
- Residents within the council area on average earn £26,940 per annum, which is more than £3,000 per annum lower than the NI average (£30,000), and more than £6,000 per annum lower than the Belfast average (£33,008).

- The working age population (16-64 years) is projected to decrease by 29.4% or 13,002 persons from 2018 to 2043 and the largest proportion of working population is getting considerably older.

Considering these worrying statistics, the urgent need for investment and funding for the Local LMP is undeniable.

Over the last year our LMP team and members have worked diligently to deliver programmes effectively and professionally, with promising outputs and impacts. They have built strong links as a team, with the partnership and other stakeholders, but most crucially with our communities. The relationships formed and the trust built has been critical to the successful implementation of our action plan throughout the last year. In the absence of funding the risk is that these staff will secure alternative employment and accordingly these relationships will be lost. Moreover, the skills and expertise of the team will be lost.

In the 2023/24 Action Plan we anticipated 183 direct employment outcomes with a cost per job outcome of £2,559. With this funding the Causeway Coast and Glens LMP programmes would have supported 540 people directly in employability and upskilling programmes, indirectly supporting over 2,000 more.

The LMP Team have submitted a revised action plan to DfC based on the 25% funding model, however, the budget of nearly £115k will result in losses to the LMP secretariat team and a very small budget for programmes. The 'low cost no cost' action plan has been designed in part to utilise other funding from DfE and DfC to LMP partner organisations to maximise the LMP outputs locally. This however is not sustainable and the impact will be a fraction of what initially anticipated.

Also, the impact of the 25% budget will have a significant and disproportionate negative impact on specific Section 75 groups including those who are disabled, and under-represented groups in a number of sectors, including women, young people, older people and ethnic minority populations. We will all be detailing the impact on Section 75 groups in more detail through our responses to the EQIA consultation.

Central Government investment and commitment is key to funding and directing such initiatives. Causeway Coast and Glens Council are always to happy to work with central government and DfC in areas as strategically important as the LMPs, however, we are concerned that the 'pausing' of funding will damage this model and spirit of cooperation with LMP Member organisations, employer stakeholders and local citizen beneficiaries.

The LMP model was an extremely effective model for applying a local lens to local issues and challenges in the labour market. The 'pause' in funding will damage the positive progress that was being made.

The relative level of investment required for the LMP's is very small, especially considering the anticipated economic and societal outcomes, and also wider savings in the benefit system and increased tax revenues.

Causeway Coast and Glens Council are asking for additional support this year and continued support beyond for the LMP's. 25% will have a significantly reduced impact on our local economy, especially when the need is so significant.

Yours sincerely

David H Jackson
Chief Executive

BROADBAND PROJECT DIRECTOR
Nigel Robbins



David Jackson
Causeway Coast & Glens

Adelaide House
39-49 **Adelaide** Street
Belfast BT2 8FD

email: nigel.robbsins@economy-ni.gov.uk

1 June 2023

PROJECT GIGABIT – PUBLIC REVIEW

Dear David,

I am writing to you further to a meeting attended by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and Local Council representatives on 4th April 2023, which was intended to update Local Councils on DfE's plans to launch a Public Review for the broadband intervention project known as Project Gigabit. As you may be aware, DfE is participating in the UK Government's Project Gigabit to develop a procurement approach with an ambition to improve gigabit-capable broadband across Northern Ireland, which is likely to be the first part of the UK, to have ubiquitous access to gigabit capable broadband, as a result of ongoing commercial investment and much needed public intervention, particularly in rural areas.

I would be most grateful if you would kindly encourage council officials to support awareness-raising of the upcoming Public Review. I can appreciate that this will be a particularly busy time for the council, and so DfE Telecoms has prepared some text which you may wish to consider posting on your council's website to help raise awareness and provide constituents with a link to access further information.

Below is a summary of Project Gigabit's aims and the Public Review exercise, which will launch on 5 June and close on 6th July 2023.

What Project Gigabit aims to achieve

The UK Government's ambition is to deliver nationwide gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible. DfE recognises that there is a need for Government intervention in the parts of Northern Ireland that are not commercially viable. The UK government has committed £5 billion for the hardest to reach parts of the country, ensuring that all areas of the UK can benefit. This will be spent through a package of coordinated and mutually supportive interventions, collectively known as Project Gigabit.

As part of this, DfE is working in partnership with Building Digital UK (BDUK), an Executive Agency sponsored by The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, to develop a procurement approach for funding contracts to suppliers delivering gigabit-capable wholesale infrastructure. BDUK will be allocating the entire capital funding requirement for Project Gigabit NI, with DfE, as the Contracting Authority, managing local project delivery requirements. The procurement approach for Project Gigabit NI will be a successor to the transformational Superfast broadband programme, including Project Stratum.

Our goal is to ensure we target the parts of Northern Ireland that need Government support. A key step in this ambition is to identify areas which will be left out because they are not commercially viable.

Public Review

In December 2022, DfE launched an Open Market Review (OMR) Request for Information (RFI) to establish existing and planned coverage of broadband services within the geographic area outlined in the PR documentation over the next three years (and beyond, if available). DfE sought responses from all existing and prospective broadband infrastructure suppliers that operate, or are planning to operate, within Northern Ireland.

DfE has assessed the industry's responses to the OMR and is now conducting a Public Review (PR) to validate the results of the OMR, including seeking validation of the eligibility of the premises for subsidy. The PR seeks information about current broadband network coverage and any future plans to roll out broadband infrastructure, particularly within the next three years. The PR will be open for feedback from any interested stakeholders and will run for one calendar month. When completed, DfE will confirm the eligibility of the premises for procurement(s) and will publish an Outcome Report outlining postcode level maps of the final Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) which have been designated as 'white' and eligible for subsidy under the Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy scheme.

What support we encourage from Local Councils

DfE is keen to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are aware of the Public Review, so we are asking that Local Councils help us to publicise the PR on their websites, on social media platforms, and any other means that Local Councils consider helpful. To this end we have provided below some suggested text that you might want to use. This includes links to the PR documents on the DfE website, as well as a link to an online address checker which allows users to find out how addresses have been assessed by DfE based on the information currently available. Contact details are provided if stakeholders want to get in touch with DfE.

SUGGESTED TEXT FOR LOCAL COUNCIL WEBSITE:

[Start of text]

Project Gigabit

The UK Government's ambition is to deliver nationwide gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible. The Department for the Economy (DfE) recognises that there is a need for Government intervention in the parts of Northern Ireland that are not commercially viable. The UK government has committed £5 billion for the hardest to reach parts of the country, ensuring that all areas of the UK can benefit. This will be spent through a package of coordinated and mutually supportive interventions, collectively known as Project Gigabit.

As part of this, DfE is working in partnership with Building Digital UK (BDUK), an Executive Agency within the Department for Innovation, Science and Technology, to develop a procurement approach for funding contracts to suppliers delivering gigabit-capable wholesale infrastructure. BDUK will be allocating the entire capital funding

requirement for Project Gigabit NI, with DfE, as the Contracting Authority, managing local project delivery requirements. The procurement approach for Project Gigabit NI will be a successor to the transformational Superfast broadband programme, including Project Stratum.

Our goal is to ensure we target the parts of Northern Ireland that need Government support. A key step in this ambition is to identify areas which will be left out because they are not commercially viable.

In December 2022 DfE launched an Open Market Review (OMR) Request for Information (RFI) to establish existing and planned coverage of broadband services within the geographic area outlined in the PR documentation over the next three years (and beyond, if available). DfE sought responses from all existing and prospective broadband infrastructure suppliers that operate, or are planning to operate, within Northern Ireland.

Public Review

DfE has assessed the industry's responses to the OMR and is now conducting a Public Review (PR) to validate the results of the OMR, including seeking validation of the eligibility of the premises for subsidy. The Public Review seeks information about current broadband network coverage and any future plans to roll out broadband infrastructure, particularly within the next three years. The PR will be open for feedback from any interested stakeholders and will run for one calendar month. When completed, DfE will confirm the eligibility of the premises for procurement(s) and will publish an Outcome Report outlining postcode level maps of the final Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) which have been designated as 'white' and eligible for subsidy under the Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy scheme.

DfE has published a **Request for Information that can be read on DfE's website at www.economy-ni.gov.uk** and is also providing an **online address checking facility** at <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfe/project-gigabitni-open-market-review-public-review> to allow the public, business and anyone interested in the Public Review to see how DfE has currently categorised addresses, as well as contact details to provide feedback to DfE.

Next Steps

The outcome of the Public Review will inform the procurement(s) that DfE will take forward and further information will be made available on the DfE website in the coming months following the conclusion of this Public Review.

[End of text]

Summary of next steps in terms of what will happen when the PR closes

When completed, DfE will confirm the eligibility of the premises for procurement(s) and will publish an Outcome Report outlining postcode level maps of the final Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) which have been designated as 'white' and eligible for subsidy under the Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy scheme.

The outcome of the Public Review will inform the procurement(s) that DfE will take forward and further information will be made available on the DfE website in the coming months following the conclusion of this Public Review.

We expect to be able to recommend the business case to the Department of Finance for approval later this year, prior to launching a competitive procurement process. Contract award is expected in Spring 2024, subject to internal approvals.

I hope you can help the Department with this important project, and I look forward to working with your Local Council over the coming months to achieve our ambition of further improving the availability of gigabit-capable broadband across Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Robbins', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

NIGEL ROBBINS

Broadband Project Director
Department for the Economy

14th April 2023

Dear David,

Re: Womens Night Safety Charter Northern Ireland

As key stakeholders, Hospitality Ulster and the White Ribbon NI charity have joined forces to adopt the Women's Night Safety Charter (WNSC) and support its rollout in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is a safe place, but research suggests that too many women feel unsafe when travelling, working, or going out at night. The Northern Ireland Executive Office is working with stakeholders to prioritise the safety of women and girls.

First established in London and now operating in several regions across the UK, the WNSC is a commitment by organisations and businesses involved / operating at night to support the campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

After signing up to the charter, organisations and business will be supported with White Ribbon NI's 'Listen, Learn, Lead' toolkit. Which offers simple ideas, inspiration, information, and resources to help organisations and businesses meet the charter's seven simple pledges. It advises on possible courses of action, some changes that may need to be made and how organisations can upskill their staff.

The rollout of the WNSC in Northern Ireland is supported by the Executive Office's Ending Violence Against Women & Girls (EVAWG) team and PSNI, with key stakeholders including Tourism NI and Translink having already signed the charter.

Before we begin the roll out of the WNSC to businesses, we are asking key stakeholders, including all Local Authorities in Northern Ireland to sign the Womens Night Safety Charter and its seven pledges (below).

The WNSC forms part of a wider Safer Socialising initiative led by the industry and supported by PSNI. To oversee these initiatives, we plan to establish a Steering Group with representation from key stakeholders including a nominated representative from SOLICE to represent Local Authorities in Northern Ireland.

I therefore invite Causeway Coast & Glens Council to support the safety of woman at night in Northern Ireland by signing the Womens Night Safety Charter and adding your logo to the Stakeholder section on the Charter.

The Charter Pledges:

- Nominate a champion in your organisation / business who actively promotes women's night safety
- Demonstrate to staff and customers that your organisation takes women's safety at night seriously, for example through a communications campaign

HEAD OFFICE

91 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP

Telephone (028) 9032 7578

Email enquires@hospitalityulster.org

www.hospitalityulster.org

- Remind customers and staff that Northern Ireland is safe, but tell them what to do if they experience harassment when working, going out or travelling
- Encourage reporting by victims and bystanders as part of your communications campaign
- Train staff to ensure that all women who report are believed
- Train staff to ensure that all reports are recorded and responded to
- Design your public spaces and workplaces to make them safer for women at night

I look forward to welcoming you as a signatory to the Womens Night Safety Charter NI, working to ensure all women and girls feel safe at night.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Neill', written in a cursive style.

Colin Neill, CEO Hospitality Ulster

HEAD OFFICE

91 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP

Telephone (028) 9032 7578

Email enquires@hospitalityulster.org

www.hospitalityulster.org