



Ballymena Business Excellence *Awards* 2026

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Ballymena

Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry



As Christmas 2026 draws near, we extend a warm invitation for you to join us in celebrating the season. May you be surrounded by the warmth and love of your family and friends during this magical time.



Festive Dining

McAllister's Whiskey Lounge is open daily from 10am until late. Our lounge offers the perfect ambience for cherished moments with family and friends with festive lunch, dinner and afternoon tea menus available.



Party Nights

Dance the night away to the captivating performances of Northern Ireland's finest live bands. This is a Christmas party not to be missed!



Gift Vouchers

Available to order online at www.tullyglass.com or purchase from Hotel Reception.

Welcome to the 2026 Ballymena Business Excellence Awards

Ballymena Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry are delighted to present the 2026 Ballymena Business Excellence Awards. The awards seek to give recognition to the hard work and dedication of businesses in the Ballymena area and enable us all to celebrate their success.

These awards help to celebrate the huge contribution made by our business community and help showcase the business excellence and entrepreneurial spirit that is so evident in our local economy. Ballymena is widely renowned as the premier shopping town in Northern Ireland, but it is sometimes overlooked that Ballymena has a vibrant and successful industrial and agricultural base as well as world class hospitality venues.

Despite many challenges the local economy has remained strong, and its growth is a testament to the hard work, dedication and vision of those involved in our businesses.

The Chamber of Commerce has for many years supported both established and new businesses in the area. There are 20 awards this year so there is a category to suit everyone – large or small businesses, retail, agricultural, hospitality or industrial and individual awards as well. You do not have to be a Chamber member to enter the awards with many awards each year going to non- Chamber businesses and individuals.

Chamber also endeavours to make a real difference within the local community, and we are very proud of our Community Outreach Programme. With donations from Chamber members, we have helped Good Morning Ballymena who support many vulnerable individuals across our community.

Chamber has also organised six Annual Charity Golf Days, again with the support of our members.

I am delighted to say we raised over £16,000 this year bringing our total for the six years to over £118,000 for The NI Children's Hospice. A cheque for this year's donation will be presented at the awards ceremony.

I would like to thank Mid and East Antrim Borough Council for agreeing to be the award's principal sponsor once again this year. Chamber has an excellent working relationship with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, and I look forward to continuing and indeed building upon this relationship.

I would also like to thank all other businesses who have sponsored awards or taken an advertisement in the awards brochure.

The judging process this year will be organised by Barbara Campbell Training and Consultancy, a local company who help to make the process easy and accessible for local businesses. This year I am delighted to say we will hold our glittering Gala Evening on Thursday 22nd October in the Tullyglass House Hotel.

This year's Gala Evening will be a major event in the Ballymena business and social calendar, so put the date in your diary now. We promise you an excellent evening, so come along, renew old acquaintances and make new ones but most important – help us celebrate and reward all that is best about business in the Ballymena area.

I wish all entrants every success.



Peter Houston

President

Ballymena Area Chamber of
Commerce and Industry



NI Hospice Care is our
chosen charity for 2026

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is proud to support the Ballymena Business Excellence Awards, celebrating the innovation, ambition and resilience of our outstanding local businesses.

Ballymena's vibrant mix of independent and family-run enterprises are at the heart of our community—delivering quality, creating jobs and enhancing everyday life across the area.

These awards provide a well-deserved opportunity to recognise and celebrate outstanding achievement. They shine a spotlight on the resilience, creativity and ambition of our entrepreneurs and business leaders — individuals and teams who continue to drive our economy forward.

As a Council, we remain fully committed to supporting our local business sector. We are focused on fostering economic growth, enhancing skills, improving infrastructure, creating employment opportunities and encouraging investment — all to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for our Borough.

Our retail, hospitality and tourism sectors continue to thrive, attracting visitors from near and far and showcasing the very best of what our area has to offer.

I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to all nominees and winners. You represent the very best of Ballymena - your achievements are truly inspiring.

I hope you have an enjoyable and memorable evening.



Alderman Thomas Gordon
Mayor of Mid and East Antrim
Borough Council

Ballymena
Business
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Awards 2026

OUR
2026 AWARDS

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Customer Service Award Retail Sector

Sponsored by Fuelwise

Shoppers are increasingly looking for a first-class shopping experience. This award recognises the retailers who can demonstrate individuality, quality service and innovative merchandising based on a keen understanding of their customer base. In particular, it rewards excellent, personable, face-to-face customer service.

This category will be judged by a **mystery shopper**. However, if the nature of your business is such that it involves a personal consultation or an appointment with the customer you should place your entry in the category Customer Service Award, Service Sector. The mystery shopper will be looking for:

- ✓ Delivery of excellent customer service
- ✓ Exceeding customer expectations
- ✓ Strong product knowledge
- ✓ Strong visual impact in store, and
- ✓ A good understanding of the local customer base.

The organisers reserve the right, after consultation with the entrant, to move entries from this category to the Service Sector category if they believe that this better serves the entrant's own interests

At Fuelwise, we help businesses across the UK and Ireland save time and costs through our fuel and fleet management solutions. We work with companies of all sizes, providing the tools, technology and support needed to manage vehicles, drivers and fuel usage more effectively.

Our fuel card solutions give businesses access to extensive fuel station networks, helping drivers refuel conveniently while improving control over fuel spending and reporting. Alongside fuel cards, we provide telematics, GPS tracking and fleet management solutions that help businesses improve visibility, monitor vehicle activity and make more informed operational decisions.

We understand that every business operates differently, which is why we take a tailored approach to supporting our customers. Whether you manage a small fleet or a large nationwide operation, we work closely with you to provide solutions that fit your specific operational requirements and growth plans.

At Fuelwise, customer service and long-term relationships are at the centre of what we do. Our team provides dedicated support and account management to ensure customers get the most value from their fuel and fleet solutions. By combining industry expertise with practical technology, we help businesses reduce administration, improve efficiency and keep their operations running smoothly.

From fuel cards and telematics to full fleet management support, our goal is to provide you with reliable, cost-effective solutions that simplify fleet operations and help you stay focused on running and growing your business.



Best Use of Digital Media Award

Sponsored by Bathshack

This award recognises organisations that demonstrate the best use of digital media, including social media / website to enhance loyalty, promote their services and interact with their customer base.

This category will be judged via an **interview** and the judging panel will be looking for evidence of the following:

- ✓ The establishment of clear objectives
- ✓ Innovation and creativity
- ✓ Tangible results
- ✓ An accessible and easy-to-use website
- ✓ Strong, relevant and engaging content on all digital media

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Bathshack is proud to sponsor the Best Use of Digital Media Award at the 2026 Ballymena Business Excellence Awards.

As one of the UK and Ireland's leading bathroom, tile and flooring retailers, digital media is central to how we connect with customers, inspire home transformations and support every stage of the customer journey.

From ecommerce and social content to digital advertising, video, email and showroom-led campaigns, we understand the power of strong digital storytelling to build trust, drive engagement and deliver measurable growth.

Supporting this award is a natural fit for Bathshack because we believe the most successful businesses are those that adapt, innovate and use digital channels to create real value for their customers.

Ballymena has a thriving business community, and we are delighted to celebrate the companies using creativity, technology and content to stand out, grow their audience and achieve meaningful results.

bathshack

Best Restaurant Award

Sponsored by Pilgrim's Europe

The winning restaurant will offer an enjoyable eating experience. Judges will be looking for an industry leader where service and culinary standards are inspiring.

This category will be judged by a **mystery shopper**, who will be looking for:

- ✓ Excellent service and rapport with customers
- ✓ An appealing and varied food offering
- ✓ Great ambience and a welcoming atmosphere in the venue
- ✓ Exemplary housekeeping and evidence of excellent food safety

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Entrants in this category will be asked to supply a voucher to allow a mystery shopper to assess your premises and offering.

Pilgrims Europe, one of the UK and Europe's leading food companies, employs 17,000 team members across more than 40 sites. With state-of-the-art facilities in Ballymena, the business is committed to delivering quality products while remaining people-focused, dedicated to the wellbeing and success of the communities in which it operates.

At the heart of the Ballymena operation is a strong connection to the local community, with team members from towns and villages across the area contributing to the continued success of the business.

Commenting on the importance of the sector and the company's support for the local hospitality industry, Michael Hempton, Site Director, said:

"The food industry plays a vital role in the Ballymena community. Delivering a quality experience is at the heart of everything we do, whether our products are enjoyed at home or served in one of our outstanding local eateries. The quality and range offered by hotels, restaurants and cafés across the Ballymena area is second to none, and we are very proud to sponsor the 2026 Best Restaurant Award."



Team of The Year Award

Sponsored by Clarke

Team of the Year Award recognises teams that demonstrate exceptional teamwork, collaboration, and positive impact on organisational performance or a specific project or area of work.

The Award will be judged by **interview** and the judging panel will be looking for evidence of :

- ✓ Effective communication
- ✓ Evidence of collaboration and shared goals
- ✓ Successful outcomes.
- ✓ A positive team culture
- ✓ A positive impact on the organisation

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Clarke, established in 1996 by Michael Clarke, is celebrating 30 years as a family run business in the Ballymena area. Operating as a full-service facade specialist, working on large scale, high value projects across the UK and Ireland, for some the most recognisable national names in construction from Barratt Redrow and Laing O Rourke to Mace.

As a specialist facade partner, Clarke is skilled across Remediation, Repurpose and New Build projects with a focus on sustainability and carbon capture.

With more than 150 highly skilled staff in many disciplines from Estimating through Design to Fabrication and Installation, having built a reputation for, quality, expert capability, cutting edge design innovation and a dynamic attitude, Clarke understand the fundamental and evolving importance of good team work and empowerment of staff for continued business success.



Customer Service Award, Service Sector

Sponsored by Riada Resourcing

This award will be presented to the business that has best demonstrated their commitment to delivering exemplary customer service that generates positive, additional business. If you are a service sector business that believes that the level of customer care you are offering to your client base is second-to-none, then this award is for you.

This award targets those businesses where staff interact more closely with customers by way of an interview or a consultation, such as dentists, accountants, beauticians and bridal suppliers. If you are in any doubt as to the eligibility for this category, please contact russell@barbaracampbelltraining.co.uk

This category will be judged by **interview** and judges will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ Expert, professional knowledge
- ✓ A warm welcome
- ✓ An attractive and appealing environment
- ✓ Exemplary customer service
- ✓ A friendly closure

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note: • The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Exceptional businesses are powered by exceptional people.

For 25 years, Riada has partnered with businesses across the Ballymena borough. By helping organisations attract and retain exceptional talent at operational, professional and executive levels, we've experienced first-hand the impact exceptional people have on business success and customer experience. As an Investors in People Platinum organisation, we're proud to sponsor the Customer Service Award - Service Sector and recognise those businesses setting the benchmark for customer experience.

We wish all nominees the very best of luck and look forward to an evening dedicated to celebrating the innovation, ambition and success that continues to drive our local business community forward.

If you're looking to attract and retain exceptional people within your organisation, speak to our team. For a confidential discussion, contact Gary Thompson on 028 2563 1555 or email Gary@riadaresourcing.com

 Riada Resourcing

Customer Service Award, Hospitality Sector

Sponsored by Kinecx Energy

This award will be presented to a hospitality business that has best demonstrated their commitment to delivering exemplary customer service that generates positive, additional business.

If you are a hospitality business that believes that the level of customer care you are offering to your clients is second-to-none, then this award is for you.

This category is judged by **mystery shopper** who will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ A warm welcome
- ✓ A willingness to 'go the extra mile'
- ✓ Friendly closure
- ✓ An appealing environment
- ✓ Congenial and knowledgeable service
- ✓ A diverse and attractive product offering

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Entrants in this category will be asked to supply a voucher to allow a mystery shopper to assess your premises and offering.

Kinecx Energy is a natural gas distribution company that has been connecting homes and businesses to its network since 2005. With over £200 million invested, the company has developed a 2,200 km pipeline network supplying natural gas to 35 cities, towns, and villages across Northern Ireland, including Ballymena.

Through this infrastructure, Kinecx Energy plays an important role in reducing carbon emissions by supporting the transition from oil to natural gas. This contribution will continue to grow with the future integration of renewable energy into the gas network, helping to support Northern Ireland's ambition to achieve net zero carbon by 2050.

We are proud to partner with Ballymena Chamber and to recognise the valuable contribution the local hospitality sector makes to the Ballymena area, particularly in delivering outstanding customer service.



Business Premises Award

Sponsored by Country Garage Ballymena BMW

The judges will be looking for a business premises design that is fit for purpose and exhibits design and layout excellence well matched to the requirement of its client base.

Competing business premises will be **visited by judges** by appointment in September.
The judges will be specifically interested in:

- ✓ The premises' initial visual impact
- ✓ Ease of access
- ✓ Design innovation
- ✓ How well does the premises serve the needs of its customers?
- ✓ How well does the premises serve the needs of its employees?
- ✓ Good use of the available space
- ✓ The quality and finish of the materials used in construction
- ✓ How construction materials have been used

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

The Country Garage Ballymena BMW are proud to continue their sponsorship of the prestigious Business Premises Award, as we fully appreciate and understand the importance of first impressions in business.

Since 1974, The Country Garage has been proudly serving the community in County Antrim and beyond as a family-owned business. At our Ballycowan Road showroom, we feature the latest BMW models available for test drives, as well as a wide selection of BMW Approved Used Cars. As an authorised BMW and MINI Service Centre, we also provide Genuine BMW Parts and M Performance Accessories.

For over 50 years, our loyal and long-serving staff have been dedicated to offering you the warmest of welcomes, and our commitment to maintaining the highest sales and service standards ensures that you can always rely on us to meet your needs and find exactly what you're looking for.



Skills Development Award

Sponsored by The Gallaher Trust

This award recognises an organisation which, through skills development, has made a significant improvement to its employees and to the performance of the business.

The award will be judged via **interview** and the judging panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ The setting of objectives for skills development
- ✓ Effective implementation and management of skills development programme
- ✓ Impacts and benefits for employees
- ✓ Impacts and benefits for the business
- ✓ Innovation

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Established in 2017, The Gallaher Trust is a registered charity which works alongside selected delivery partners to create jobs, develop skills and provide support to disadvantaged adults living in the wider Ballymena area.

Born out of a £5 million legacy which was donated by Japan Tobacco International (JTI), The Gallaher Trust has already committed £3.1 million to support projects which have helped create 486 jobs, develop skills of 1739 people and support 2158 disadvantaged adults.

By partnering with charities, social enterprises and non-profit organisations, The Gallaher Trust provides long-term support within the local community. In 2026, we plan to award around £400,000 to a small number of eligible, higher-value projects over a three-year period. This increased funding marks Ballymena's 400th anniversary.

More information is available on the website: www.thegallahertrust.org

The Gallaher Trust is delighted to support the Ballymena Business Excellence Awards and wishes the entrants every success!



Right Place to Work Award

Sponsored by Galgorm

Is your company a great place to work? Businesses have to fight hard to recruit and retain people and this award aims to reward those businesses that have really put people at the heart of their overall strategy.

This award is open to all businesses, regardless of size and turnover, that are committed to supporting employees and enhancing employee satisfaction and who have demonstrated an overall commitment to employees at all levels.

It will be judged by **interview** and the judging panel will be looking at:

- ✓ Company culture and values
- ✓ Commitment to learning and development
- ✓ The recognition of skills and achievements
- ✓ People management structures
- ✓ Employee support mechanisms
- ✓ What makes the business a better place to work

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

As a previous winner of the prestigious Ballymena Business Excellence Awards, Galgorm is proud to sponsor the Right Place to Work Award 2026. This highly regarded category recognises organisations that place their people at the heart of their business, championing strong leadership, meaningful development, and a culture where individuals are supported to grow and succeed.

At Galgorm, our team is the foundation of everything we do. As Northern Ireland's premier luxury resort, we are committed to investing in our people through continuous development, training, and a genuine focus on wellbeing. It is this commitment that has seen us recognised as the only hospitality group on the island of Ireland to achieve Great Place to Work accreditation.

Creating an environment where people feel valued, empowered, and inspired is no longer optional. It is essential. The most successful businesses understand that when wellbeing, opportunity, and culture are aligned, their people and their organisations thrive.

As proud supporters of the Ballymena business community, we are honoured to recognise and celebrate those who are leading the way in creating exceptional workplaces. We encourage businesses to share their stories and wish all entrants the very best of success.

GALGORM

Most Promising New Business Award

Sponsored by Bank of Ireland

Have you started your own business in the last three years? Is it exceeding expectations? Is it going to be around for a while? Enter this award and tell everyone about the success you've had to date.

This award will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking at:

- ✓ The business profile and its objectives
- ✓ Levels of innovation and individuality
- ✓ The structure and management of the business
- ✓ The business's performance to date
- ✓ Sustainability into the future

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- To be eligible for this category, your business must NOT have existed prior to October 2022.

Bank of Ireland UK operates across Northern Ireland and Great Britain, helping its customers, colleagues and communities to thrive. We are part of the Bank of Ireland Group, an international financial services group operating across Ireland, the UK, and internationally with offices in Germany, France and Spain, supporting 4 million customers, 11,000 colleagues, and 80,000 shareholders.

We support customers across a range of channels, including through our branch and business centre network, regional telephone contact centres, and a wide range of digital banking channels.

Having opened our first branches locally in 1825, we have been helping customers achieve their financial ambitions for over 200 years. We are proud of our history and heritage but our focus is strongly on the future. We are investing and building, growing our business sustainably and strengthening our offering to meet the needs of our customers now, and for generations to come.

We are pleased to partner with Ballymena Chamber and to recognise the important economic and social contribution of the wider Ballymena area.

To find out how Bank of Ireland can help your business thrive, contact Ian McCann or one of our Business Banking teams. Contact details can be found at:
www.bankofirelanduk.com/business/business-team/



Best Innovative Small Business Award

Sponsored by Michelin Development Limited

This award celebrates the small business and its ability to use innovation to exploit its size to best advantage. The award will be presented to the business that demonstrates innovation and best practice whilst being dynamic and retaining its individuality.

The award will be judged by **interview** and judges will be looking at:

- ✓ Levels of Innovation
- ✓ Clear evidence of business growth
- ✓ Sustainability of the business going forward
- ✓ How innovation has helped business performance
- ✓ A clear business strategy incorporating innovation

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom. Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- To be eligible, businesses must employ 20 people or fewer.
- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Michelin Development Ltd is proud to be associated with the Ballymena Business Excellence Awards and to sponsor the 'Best Innovative Small Business Award'.

In the current economic climate, when businesses are facing challenging times, it is important to support and encourage entrepreneurship and innovation as well as recognise and celebrate business achievement.

Michelin Development Ltd is dedicated to supporting local economic growth and job creation with the provision of both financial and mentoring support to help small businesses grow. We are also working in collaboration with local stakeholders to support people with disabilities or from socially deprived backgrounds to move into employment, extending the talent pipeline available to local businesses.

Over the past 22 years, Michelin Development Ltd has supported the creation of 930 jobs in the area.

Best wishes to all entrants in this year's awards.



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Ballymena
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Family Business of the Year Award

Sponsored by Danske Bank

This award recognises a successful family business that has grown and adapted to serve present and future markets while maintaining the identity and ethos of the family.

This award is judged by **interview** and the judging panel will be looking at:

- ✓ The family ethos and culture of the business
- ✓ The success of the business
- ✓ Business sustainability
- ✓ Succession planning
- ✓ Levels of excellence and best practice in management

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note: This award is open to all multi-generational family businesses that have at least two family members in key positions in the business.

The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Family-owned businesses are the backbone of the Northern Ireland economy, from small businesses to some of Northern Ireland's biggest corporates.

At Danske Bank we're committed to helping Northern Ireland businesses thrive, so we're delighted to continue our sponsorship of the Family Business of the Year Award and celebrate the many great family businesses in the Ballymena area.

We are privileged to work with many of the Borough's family businesses every day.

Whether your business is just starting out or you are looking to take your business to the next level, our local team of Relationship Managers and Small Business Advisers is here to help. Talk to the team in Ballymena at any time to discuss how we could help support your business's plans.

May I take this opportunity to wish all entrants every success.

Peter Houston, Head of North Business Centre in Ballymena
peter.houston@danskebank.co.uk

Danske Bank

Social Enterprise of the Year Award

Sponsored by Ballymena Business Centre

We want to celebrate Ballymena's most innovative, passionate and most successful social enterprises. If your organisation is fervent about achieving social or environmental change ahead of profit, then this is the award for you.

This category will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ A positive impact on society and/or the environment
- ✓ Clear leadership and management
- ✓ Innovation and individuality
- ✓ Sustainability and potential for future growth.
- ✓ Successful and measurable outcomes
- ✓ A clear breakdown of income

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Ballymena Business Centre is a registered Northern Ireland Charity and Social Enterprise helping individuals to start and grow their business in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area.

- ✓ Inspiring people to be enterprising
- ✓ Ensure enterprise is accessible to all within our community
- ✓ Encouraging the creation of new business and social enterprise
- ✓ Support growth within existing businesses including our tenants
- ✓ Promote a nurturing environment for businesses to start and to grow within our space
- ✓ Promote our enterprise hub model through the management of existing and new business space

To find out how we can help you and your business or to find out how you can support our charitable objectives contact...

Melanie Christie Boyle, Chief Executive, Ballymena Business Centre

www.ballymenabusiness.co.uk melanie@ballymenabusiness.co.uk Tel 079 3035 8982



Involvement in the Community Award

Sponsored by Cranswick Country Foods

This award acknowledges individuals or businesses that have had an ongoing relationship with the community through their voluntary contribution.

This category will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ Involvement with the local community
- ✓ Impact and benefits for the local community
- ✓ Impacts and benefits to the business
- ✓ Level of commitment in time and resources
- ✓ A strategy for ongoing involvement with the community

Community involvement must not be connected to the organisation's main business,

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Cranswick is a leading UK food producer specialising in premium pork and poultry products that are authentically made, sustainably produced, and crafted with passion from its 23 UK-wide sites.

At Cranswick Country Foods Ballymena, we pride ourselves on supporting the local community and we are delighted to be sponsoring the Involvement in the Community Award again this year.



Best Young Person in Business Award

Sponsored by Fairhill Shopping Centre

This award is open to individuals under the age of 35 (on the 21st August 2026) who have established and developed an owner-led business. It will go to a hard-working, creative and innovative individual who has demonstrated vision, clarity and focus in responding to challenges.

The category will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Entrant's track record in starting and running a business
- ✓ The design and implementation of a business strategy
- ✓ Vision and leadership
- ✓ Business achievements and financial success
- ✓ Sustainability and plans for the future

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Fairhill Shopping Centre is a renowned retail destination that caters to a diverse range of customers, encompassing various age groups, preferences, and budgets. With its array of high street stores and a steadfast commitment to delivering an exceptional shopping experience, Fairhill has firmly established itself as a premier retail hub in Ballymena. However, Fairhill's impact extends beyond its physical presence. We recognize the significance of supporting and acknowledging the valuable contributions made by young businesspeople in our area.

This year, Fairhill Shopping Centre proudly sponsors the 'Best Young Person in Business Award', an initiative aimed at honouring and celebrating the outstanding achievements of young entrepreneurs. This award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated innovation, effective leadership, and unwavering dedication in their pursuit of goals.

By sponsoring this award, Fairhill Shopping Centre highlights its commitment to empowering young professionals and fostering the inspiration of future leaders. The Best Young Person in Business Award provides a platform for showcasing the remarkable accomplishments of the chosen individual, while also promoting their endeavours and inspiring others to follow their example. This sponsorship embodies Fairhill's dedication to supporting the growth and success of young entrepreneurs within the local community.

FAIRHILL
SHOPPING CENTRE

Employee of the Year Award

Sponsored by Wrightbus

This award has a reputation as the hardest one to win each year! It's also, traditionally, the most difficult to judge. Has someone gone beyond the call of duty to help the business? Have you seen someone excelling in their day-to-day duties? Do you know of someone who has done something particularly noteworthy? If you can answer 'Yes' to any of these questions, then you might consider nominating that person for this award.

The category will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ How well the entrant has performed in their role
- ✓ How they have made a difference to the business
- ✓ How they are perceived by management, colleagues and customers
- ✓ Instances in which the entrant went above and beyond what was expected of them.

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- Entrants must have been in their current role for at least one year.
- Entrants **must be nominated** by their employer

Please note, it is the nominator who will be called for interview, **not** the nominated employee.

This year marks a major milestone for Wrightbus as we celebrate 80 years of British manufacturing, engineering innovation, and commitment to delivering world-class public transport solutions. We have reputation for pushing the boundaries in our pursuit of excellence and have been leading the way in the transportation industry with unwavering commitment since 1946.

Under the guidance of Chairman Jo Bamford, Wrightbus has raised the bar for the UK manufacturing with our exquisite one-of-a-kind fleet. Our zero-emission buses are at the forefront of decarbonising public transport across the UK, Ireland, Germany and further afield. We are on the way to ensuring a greener, cleaner future for this generation and the next.

From just 56 employees in 2019, Wrightbus has grown into a thriving business employing more than 2,300 people and supporting thousands more jobs throughout our supply chain.

Our people are at the heart of everything we do, and we are immensely proud of the skills, talent and dedication found across Ballymena and the surrounding area. The strength of our workforce continues to play a vital role in our success and in the growth of the wider regional economy.

We are therefore delighted to sponsor the Employee of the Year Award at this year's Ballymena Business Excellence Awards. This award recognises outstanding individuals whose commitment, professionalism and achievements contribute not only to the success of their organisations, but also to the strength, prosperity, and continued growth of our local business community. We are proud to support and celebrate the people whose dedication helps our region thrive.



Business Growth Award

Sponsored by Leap

Is your business managing to buck the trend despite the current difficult economic climate? Are your turnover or sales on the up? Is your business in growth mode despite all the present obstacles?

If the answer is 'yes', then this could be the award for you.

The category will be judged by **interview** and the panel will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ Your business and marketing strategy
- ✓ Financial and growth performance
- ✓ Improved resource efficiency with reduced costs
- ✓ Management of the business and its growth
- ✓ Future sustainability

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note:

- The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Leap Software Solutions is a custom software development and technology consultancy based in Ballymena. Founded by Chris and Julie Kitson, Leap specialises in engineering the cutting-edge digital infrastructure modern enterprises need to scale. Operating across local and international markets, the agency has secured major contracts within the US. It unlocks business momentum for its clients through custom development, seamless data integrations, advanced analytics, and tailored AI-driven automation. Their work spans critical sectors, driving technological advancement in healthcare outcomes, manufacturing, IoT, and financial services, and includes partnerships with world-leading tech giants like Salesforce and Google Cloud.

By transforming complex data into actionable insights and deploying smart AI workflows, Leap empowers companies to eliminate bottlenecks and make faster, intelligence-backed decisions. Leap understands first-hand what it takes to drive international expansion while remaining deeply committed to serving the local market in Northern Ireland. Leap is immensely proud to sponsor the Business Growth Award, celebrating the innovation, vision, and exceptional growth of Ballymena's business community.

The logo for Leap Software Solutions, featuring the word "Leap" in a bold, black, cursive-style font.

Sustainability Award

Sponsored by Power NI

This award is open to any businesses that can demonstrate that they have practices which promote and support the protection and/or improvement of the environment embedded within their business. Any organisation, irrespective of size or sector can apply.

This category will be judged by **interview**, and judges will be looking for evidence of:

- ✓ Waste reduction / efficiency, within your own business
- ✓ Emissions reduction, within your own business
- ✓ Management support for sustainability initiatives, within your own business

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note: The judges' decision will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Energy is essential and at Power NI, we believe in keeping it simple. You can trust us to give you great discounts, make it easy for you to manage your account and have expert, local support on hand when you need us.

With over 90 years of history and heritage here, we are Northern Ireland's largest energy supplier with around 40,000 business and farm customers.

Laura Hughes, Key Account Manager at Power NI, comments:

"We're delighted to continue our support of Ballymena Chamber and sponsor the Sustainability Award at this year's event. As part of Energia Group, Power NI is committed to innovating with the latest green products and technologies that transform the way our customers choose and use energy. We're here to help customers make smarter decisions, live more sustainably and save money. Good luck to all entries and we look forward to a great event."



Diversity and Inclusion Award

Sponsored by Robinsons Supermarket

The Diversity and Inclusion Award recognises individuals, teams, or organisations that demonstrate a strong commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in the workplace.

The Award will be judged by **interview** and the judging panel will be looking for evidence of

- ✓ Evidence of a diverse and inclusive workforce
- ✓ A clear strategy to promote diversity and inclusion
- ✓ Initiatives to encourage diversity and inclusion
- ✓ Evidence of cultural change
- ✓ Positive impacts on the business or organisation

Interviews will be held between 15th and 17th September via Zoom.

Appointments will be forwarded to shortlisted candidates in due course.

Note: The judges' decision is always final, and no correspondence will be entered into.

Robinsons is a family-owned independent supermarket on the Cullybackey Road Ballymena. In a recently redeveloped premises, we are proud to be celebrating the local community since 1985.

Gary Olphert, Robinsons long term Store Manager, comments: *"We are delighted to be back at the awards ceremony in 2026 and of course supporting the good work of the Ballymena Chamber. Our passion about retail is shared with and reflected by our staff. Therefore, we are pleased to put our name to the Diversity and inclusion Award, recognizing individuals, teams, or organizations that demonstrate a strong commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in the workplace"*



Commitment to Ballymena Award

Sponsored by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council is delighted to sponsor this award, especially as we already work hard with our stakeholders to maximise the potential for all our areas, including Ballymena.

Assessment will be based on submission by the nominator, of specific actions or activities of the individual(s) nominated which clearly demonstrate their dedication and contribution to Ballymena. The nominator will therefore be required to provide specific evidence to support their nomination.

Ballymena has grown over the years to become a major contributor for the Northern Ireland economy. This growth has not just come about by chance but through drive and dedication of both individuals and their organisations.

It is therefore appropriate that Council recognise this dedication and effort through the *Commitment to Ballymena Award*.

This Award allows Council to publicly praise and reward such efforts.

- No reference will be made to the nominating party although the judges, to substantiate any statements made within the submission, may contact them.



The Awards Process

We are continuing to use the online entry system. If your category is judged by a 'mystery shop' you will not have any questions to answer, simply register online and you will receive an email confirmation of your entry.

Entries will be continuously saved, so you won't lose your progress, and you can return to update your entry at any time right up until the closing date on August 21st. You can also easily add photos and documents to supplement your entry.

Businesses can apply for a maximum of 3 Awards. In addition to the 3 awards, you can also submit an entry for the **Employee of The Year** and **Commitment to Ballymena** Awards.

Businesses who have been successful in winning a particular category for the past 3 years will not be permitted to enter that category this year, you are welcome however to enter other categories.

Please do note, however, that there will no longer be the option to submit paper entries.

To get the entry process underway, read on...

Step 1: Read the awards brochure and decide which categories you would like to enter. Barbara Campbell Training + Consultancy Ltd. is happy to assist you in this decision, simply contact:
russell@barbaracampbelltraining.co.uk

All entries are treated in the strictest confidence.

The strict deadline for entering these awards is 5pm on Friday 21st August.

Step 2:

Go online to **ballymenabusiness.awardsplatform.com** to commence your registration. You may return to work on your submissions as many times as you wish right up to deadline.

Step 3:

If you have entered a MYSTERY SHOP category, you do not need to do anything else. You will receive an email confirmation of your entry and a mystery visit will be conducted.

Step 4:

All entrants in INTERVIEW CATEGORIES will be assessed by judges. Those that are successful in reaching the shortlisting stage will be called for interview. Details of interview times will be forwarded by email by September 2nd, 2026. **The judging panels will sit between September 15th and 17th. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom, details will be forwarded to entrants in plenty of time.**

Step 5:

Results for all categories will be collated and finalists will be notified on or before **Monday, October 5th, 2026. The judges' decision is final, and no correspondence will be entered into.**

The 2026 Ballymena Business Excellence Awards Gala Evening will take place at the Tullyglass House Hotel, Ballymena on Thursday 22nd October

Cut Your



Business
Energy Bills

Who are MJ Utilities?

You know the Meerkats on television who help find you the best car & home insurance deals? Well, we're a bit like those guys only for business electric & gas prices.

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Area Chamber of Commerce and Industry

FIVE REASONS TO JOIN CHAMBER

BECOME BETTER CONNECTED

**HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD
(LOBBYING AND REPRESENTATION)**

GIVE BACK TO YOUR LOCAL AREA

**TELL THE BOROUGH AND
BEYOND ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS**

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS



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CHAMBER'S ACTIVITIES IN 2025/26

- Chamber hosted a comprehensive series of Business Breakfasts and lunches – covering a wide range of topics including – Business Support, The Economic Brief, Women in Work-Capacity to Overload, The Artisan Christmas Fair, First Aid at Work, Artificial Intelligence, The Family Business, Chamber's Networking AGM, Meeting Your ESG Targets and a visit to The JAQ Group with our flagship event being The President's Lunch featuring Michael O'Neill the Northern Ireland football team manager as our guest speaker.
- We also partnered with members such as Ballymena Business Centre, Bank of Ireland, Power NI, Danske Bank, Kinecx Energy, Knockdene Healthcare, The Gallaher Trust, Keenan Finance, The Jaq Group, Nourish and Nurture, Habitat for Humanity and The Bank of England.
- Chamber has also continued to host a series of more informal 'drop-in' events, aimed at assisting our smaller businesses.
- Chamber organised a meeting between members and The Bank of England, to provide information for The Monetary Policy Committee.
- We continued to establish partnerships with members to deliver informative and innovative events.
- We also employed Gazelle Communications to design and build our fabulous new website.
- Members were given the opportunity to advertise business services and products on our social media channels, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram with major announcements featured on our website.
- Chamber's Monthly 'themed social media' campaigns, proved to be very successful.
- Chamber lobbied the Executive, Council and Central Government on your behalf. Meeting with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Environment and Economy Sub Committee discussing a number of issues raised by Chamber members.
- We are one of the most pro-active Chambers in Northern Ireland.



- We elected a new Management Committee at our AGM in May with the AGM being incorporated into a Networking Event sponsored by Kinecx Energy.
- Our Charity Golf Day was held at Galgorm Castle Golf Club in May, raising over £16,000. Chamber has now organised six Charity Golf Days for The NI Hospice and Children's Hospice, raising over £118,000.
- We have developed a Community Outreach Programme, presently supporting the work of The NI Hospice, The Children's Hospice and Good Morning Ballymena.
- Ballymena Chamber of Commerce is one of the fastest growing if not the fastest growing Chambers in Northern Ireland.



Chamber continued to grow through 2025 and 2026 and we now have over 184 members an increase of over 96% in the past 6 years.

Ballymena
Business
Excellence
Awards 2026





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