



Report of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism

**To the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel
17th July 2019**

Local Government Services to Rural Communities

Purpose:	To brief/update the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel on Local Government Services to Rural Communities
Content:	A briefing/update on the Swansea Rural Development Partnership (SRDP) LEADER programme which is aimed at the eight rural wards within Swansea.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member via a letter from the Panel Convener
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Francis-Davies, Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism
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1. Background

- 1.1 In November 2018, the Wales Audit Office produced a report “Local Government services to rural communities”. Link to report <http://www.audit.wales/publication/local-government-services-rural-communities>

2. Briefing/Main body of report

It should be noted that Council services are universal and no distinction or separate provision is made between rural and urban areas.

This paper sets out a response to the Wales Audit Office recommendations from a Swansea Rural Development Partnership (SRDP) LEADER perspective which is targeted at the eight Swansea rural wards.

Appendix A provides a very short overview of the Swansea Rural Development Partnership (SRDP) LEADER programme

Note: LEADER is a French acronym, standing for 'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale', meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'. LEADER is included in the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

WAO Recommendation 1

Socio economic change, poor infrastructure and shifts in provision of key services and facilities has resulted in the residualisation of communities in rural Wales. (See paragraphs 1.2 – 1.16) We recommend that Welsh Government support public bodies to deliver a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by:-

WAO Recommendation 1.1

Refreshing rural grant programmes to create sustainable financial structures, with multi-year allocations;

Comment

- Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 are direct issues for Welsh Government to address itself. However, comments from a Swansea RDP LEADER perspective are shown.

Swansea RDP LEADER 1.1

- Swansea Council RDP Local Action Group (LAG) Officials are aware that the Welsh Government have been working on successor arrangements to replace EU funding in Wales in the absence of any policy/funding clarity from Westminster. Building on consultation held in 2018, work has been ongoing to establish a new regional policy team within WEFO, funded from the Welsh Government's EU Transition Fund. A cross-government board has been established to guide this work across departments.
- Swansea Council RDP LAG Officials will attend a Welsh Government event (initial 13th March date postponed) at which a discussion on LEADER future funding will take place. These discussions may well start to formulate policy in line with the above bullet point in due course. The Swansea RDP LEADER approach is perhaps more important than ever in the context of diminishing resources and helping to make the best use of local talent and ambition within our rural communities.
- Within the Swansea RDP LEADER funding pot, new "application windows" are promoted as guided by the LAG with a current window in place between April and September 2019.

WAO Recommendation 1.2

Helping people and businesses make the most of digital connectivity through targeted and more effective business and adult education support programmes.

Swansea RDP LEADER 1.2

- The Swansea RDP LEADER LAG are keen to explore options for enabling digital connectivity for rural communities and enterprises where there is currently no provision of services. By supporting digital inclusion the LAG recognises that this not only helps lead to job creation through rural SMEs but will enable skills development within the community;
- Therefore, the LEADER programme has allocated £40K to fund a 2 year-pilot programme entitled Swansea Rural Community Voice (SRCV). The SRCV improves on community consultation and engagement within the eight rural wards. This will be achieved by establishing a Swansea Rural Community Voice project, run by Community Organising Teams using VocalEyes Digital Democracy tools and other methods to engage local people. Although not directly aimed at adult education programmes the programme and innovative digital technology is seen as a key driver for future rural engagement.
- Following the Welsh Government review of the Community and Town Council Sector in Wales, there are a number of the immediate actions that will be now be taken following the report's recommendations which include conducting a survey to understand how more about how social and digital mediums are utilised to engage communities, and what scope there might be for support in this area. The SRCV project is well placed to meet this intention.
- Within the 2007 to 2013 Swansea RDP programme, LEADER funded the development of the Barham Centre, Gower, which is a community building for meetings and IT connection in the Gower. The project improved of a range of basic services including the development of a range of activities in answering the significant demand from young people themselves for activities in their local rural communities. This includes the establishment on an IT club. The rural access grant scheme also funded 10 to 12 business within the rural areas.

WAO Recommendation 2

The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales (see paragraphs 2.2 to 2.9 and 2.28 to 2.31). We recommend that PSB public services partners respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:

WAO Recommendation 2.1

Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Governments Rural Proofing Tool and identify and agree the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability;

Swansea RDP LEADER 2.1

- The Swansea RDP [Local Development Strategy](#) (LDS) sits within a wider policy and strategy framework in South West Wales at local and regional levels. The most relevant local, national and regional and local strategies that could be impacted by the LDS are contained within the LDS and in each case there is a brief summary of the scope of the strategy or plan and the potential links to the LDS.
- Rural Proofing is a part of good policymaking. Rural areas face particular challenges. Many of these characteristics such as geographic isolation, an ageing population and an economy based on micro enterprises and SMEs are found in other parts of Wales. In rural areas they may be more severe or combine to form a set of circumstances that may hinder the effective implementation of policy. This screening tool has been developed to help rural proofing of policy. The purpose of rural proofing is to assess the impact that policy may have on rural areas, identify barriers to effective implementation in rural areas and help to formulate rural appropriate solutions. Swansea RDP LEADER is not a direct policy maker, although it can influence and lobby. The tool will be considered by Swansea RDP Officials as regards future applications to the scheme.

WAO Recommendation 2.2

Ensuring the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for 'place' with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges.

Swansea RDP LEADER 2.2

- Swansea's Local Well-being Plan "Working Together to Build a Better Future" is designed to improve well-being in the local area. In Swansea, we believe in the rights of every person. Through this plan, the Council vision is to work together to make Swansea a place which is prosperous, where our natural environment is appreciated and maintained and where every person can have the best start in life, get a good job, live well, age well and have every opportunity to be healthy, happy, safe and the best they can be.
- For rural wards, Swansea RDP LEADER is an essential component in providing capacity to match these aspirations as listed above.

WAO Recommendation R3

To help sustain rural communities, public services need to think differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils provide a more effective response to the challenges faced by rural communities by:

WAO Recommendation R3.1

Ensuring service commissioners have cost data and qualitative information on the full range of service options available;

Swansea RDP LEADER 3.1

- The LDS provides a detailed picture of each of the 8 rural wards across a range of topics such as qualifications; welsh language skills; employment data; occupational breakdown; travel to work; health; etc. This information provides a baseline definition of the Swansea rural area and population covered by the LEADER programme. To achieve this Swansea RDP LEADER makes use of existing data and qualitative information provided via a number of Council sources e.g. [Swansea Ward Profiles](#).

WAO Recommendation R3.2

Using citizens' views on the availability, affordability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability

Swansea RDP LEADER 3.2

- The Swansea RDP LAG has commissioned a number of studies in which citizens views were sought as part of each project within the overall programme. NB: These projects and citizen contact did not ask what citizens think of Council Services. These Swansea RDP LEADER studies are as below and short description is provided against each project:-
 - Ref 01: Gower Sunday Explorer 2016.
The provision of a revised and improved bus service between Swansea and Gower on Sundays in mid and high season, building on the success of similar services over the past five years. To develop the visitor travel market and visitor economy and improve accessibility for local residents.
 - Ref 03: Swansea Rural Community Voice.
To improve on community consultation and engagement of the eight geographic rural communities. This will be achieved by establishing a Swansea Rural Community Voice project, run by Community Organising Teams using VocalEyes Digital Democracy tools and other methods to engage local people.
 - Ref 04: Gower Sunday Explorer 2017 – 2019.
The continued provision of a revised and improved bus service between Swansea and Gower on Sundays in mid and high season.
 - Ref 07: Rural Swansea Resource / Visitor Centre Feasibility Study.
To carry out an independent and comprehensive assessment to identify and quantify the needs of businesses / enterprises, residents of, and visitors to rural Swansea, in relation to the development and use of dedicated facilities and services with the aim of supporting the rural economy, with special regard to the tourism sector.

- Ref 24: Feasibility Study for Port Eynon&Horton Foreshore and Settlements. To undertake a feasibility study of the amenities and localised facilities at one of our key destination sites ie: Port Eynon.
- Ref 05: Digital Marketing for Sustainable Transport in Rural Swansea. By creating a first class interactive information service on more sustainable means of travel to and around rural Swansea, the project aims to attract more visitors and more travel by local residents by means other than the private car. A website "[Swansea Bay Without a Car](#)" is now live.
- Ref 13: Sustainable Transport Network for Rural Swansea Feasibility Study. A study aimed at producing a sustainable integrated transport strategy, designed to improve access and connectivity for rural Swansea. The study would identify gaps in the current provision and suggest where the network can be developed and enhanced.
- Ref 16: Feasibility Study to investigate viability of Community Carbon Offset. To develop a community led, not for profit social enterprise offering carbon offsetting through planting of community grown, local provenance trees. The feasibility study will be the first stage in developing this innovative project into a robust, self-sustaining business model that maximises social and biodiversity values.
- Ref 27: Market at the Mill. To pilot outdoor evening produce markets at Parkmill with associated educational activity.

The [RDP webpage](#) includes a copy of all completed reports (PDF version) and other projects.

- The major strand of citizen engagement within the Swansea RDP LEADER programme is the LEADER ref 03: SRCV project as described in Swansea LEADER 1.2. The project does allow for citizens to raise and rank issues of local concern. It is anticipated that the SRCV project will provide a new and truly innovative way of citizen engagement. This will add value to the tried and tested models of normal citizen engagement.

WAO Recommendation R4

To help sustain rural communities, public services need to act differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils do more to develop community resilience and self-help by:

WAO Recommendation R4.1

Working with relevant bodies such as the Wales Co-operative Centre to support social enterprise and more collaborative business models;

Swansea RDP LEADER 4.1

- A representative from the Wales Co-operative Centre is a Swansea RDP LAG member.
- The Wales Co-operative Centre were also involved a Swansea RDP LEADER Roadshow held on the 27th March.
- Via the above, much valued assistance is provided to support and encourage the growth of Social Businesses in Swansea. Together with colleagues the representative provides a National coverage of support across Wales, able to share ideas, knowledge and expertise for the benefit of social business development with particular emphasis in the growth of businesses and social improvement of the rural wards of Swansea.

WAO Recommendation 4.2

Providing tailored community outreach for those who face multiple barriers to accessing public services and work;

Swansea RDP LEADER 4.2

- The Swansea RDP LDS includes 4 Cross-Cutting Themes of
 - Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming;
 - Sustainable development;
 - Tacking poverty and social exclusion; and
 - Welsh language
- All project applications have to demonstrate how they adhere to these themes. In doing so there are a number of examples of how the projects address issues of barriers to accessing services e.g. SRCV includes wider engagement aimed at involving more people; not always the usual suspects as well as harder to reach / less commonly engaged groups, especially young people, via active outreach.
- Swansea RDP LEADER is also aware that Workways+, also run from the Economic Development and External Funding Team, offers the following:
 - Workways+ offers employment support to unemployed and economically inactive people living in all areas outside of Communities first in Swansea. Mentors and Employment liaison officers have been assigned to geographical areas to set up community outreach at venues that are accessible to all citizens across the county.
 - Community outreach sessions are held weekly at the libraries and community centre in Pontarddulais, Pennard, Gowerton, Gorseinon and the Clydach Valley.
 - The sessions are held alongside Job clubs and free basic IT skills classes. Workways+ mentors and ELOs also attend events such as Local produce markets and the Gower show to engage with and support rural citizens who have barriers to accessing employment.

- Workways+ provides 1-2-1 mentoring support to overcome barriers to employment. The support available includes an individual action plan to identify the need for training, confidence building, volunteering placements,
- paid work opportunities, job search, CVs and employment opportunities. Financial assistance is available for training courses to upskill and transport for people who have difficulty accessing public transport.

WAO Recommendation 4.3

Enhancing and recognising the role of town and community councils by capitalising on their local knowledge and supporting them to do more;

Swansea RDP LEADER 4.3

- The opportunity to pilot new products, services or ways of doing things provided by Swansea RDP LEADER through the LDS has great potential to act as a catalyst across Swansea and the wider South West region.
- There is an increasing appetite in private, third and community sectors to 'make a difference', coupled with an imperative to find new and more cost-effective ways of providing services. There is demand from community / town councils and third sector groups to work on adoption of local services and also thematic demands around, for example renewable energy options. It is very apparent that local solutions depend on appropriate people, places and resources coming together at the right time to enable solutions to be developed. This has to be a bottom-up approach rather than top-down. Listening as opposed to looking is the way forward.
- Two Community Councillors and one Council Ward member are also Swansea RDP LAG members.
- The Council Champion for Rural Economy is also a Swansea RDP LAG member. All cascade programme information to their counterparts.
- A dedicated Swansea RDP LEADER presentation has been delivered to the One Voice Wales Swansea Area Committee. One Voice Wales is the voice of town and community councils in Wales.
- The SRCV project previously referred to can capture local knowledge and enables citizens to act upon their views at a local level

WAO Recommendation 4.4

Encouraging a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by establishing pan-public service community hubs, networks of expertise, and clusters of advice and prevention services;

Swansea RDP LEADER 4.4

- The Swansea RDP LAG Economy & Community sub-group have approved an initial expression of interest from Pennard Community Council for a Feasibility Study into a Community Hub / Pavilion on Pennard Playing Field. A Full Application is awaited and will be considered by the sub-group and a recommendation then made to the Swansea RDP LAG to approve or not. If approved and upon completion of the study, a report will be posted to the [Swansea RDP website](#) as well as the [Welsh Government Wales Rural Network website](#) for all to view. This is the case with all approved projects.
- Public sector mainstreaming could be more difficult to achieve in view of shrinking resources. However, new approaches to service delivery that could involve community adoption of basic services, as well as testing approaches for local 'hubs' as outlined above could result in entirely new ways of working that result in public sector cost savings and more active buy-in from local communities to delivering the services they require at local level. Opportunities for mainstreaming and dissemination are actively explored and discussed throughout the Swansea RDP LEADER programme.
- Swansea RDP LEADER is also aware that the Council is currently piloting a community hub in the Clydach Valley. It is based at Clydach Library and offers direct skype links to Civic centre based services. Third parties are using the hub as a touch down and an agile working area has been created for use by community based staff. The council has worked closely with all stakeholders including, health, police, employability services, local churches and the community council to share 'what's going on'. A volunteering group has been created to help those citizens unfamiliar with more IT based services and to sign post them to local and council services. There are plans to develop the pilot into five main county wide hubs.

WAO Recommendation 4.5

Enabling local action by supporting community asset transfer identifying which assets are suitable to transfer, and having the right systems in place to make things happen;

Swansea RDP LEADER 4.5

- Meetings have been held with Council staff who manage the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) process to discuss potential overlap and possible opportunities for merging any rural activity.
- CAT is included in discussions with potential applicants if the need arises. Swansea RDP LEADER is aware that of the Community Action Transformation Fund approved projects, only one is in a rural ward i.e. Round 5 in October 2016 to Llanrhidian Higher Community Council and Graig-Y-Coed Pitches in Penclawdd with £23,800 awarded.

- Within the previous 2007 to 2013 RDP round, Village and Small Town Renewal and Development in rural Swansea was a component part of the overall programme. There were numerous refurbishment projects in line with the availability of approx. £5M Capital funds to allocate within Swansea.

WAO Recommendation 4.6

Improving community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering.

Swansea LEADER 4.6

- The Swansea RDP LEADER funded project “Gower Community Tourism Ambassador Pilot and Feasibility Study” was aimed at coordinating, delivering and managing a pilot community tourism ambassador scheme. This was achieved by training and coaching volunteers over an intensive two-day period and subsequent adoption of the produced tool kit. In total 55 people took part representing: Local residents, Community Councils, Local tourism businesses, Local community organisations, Voluntary organisations & charities, Public sector organisations.
- The SRCV project is establishing Community Organisers who can then provide a source of encouragement and advice for volunteers and community engagement in rural areas. This leads to ideas coming from residents in an ongoing conversation.
- The previous round of EU funding via the 2017 – 2013 Swansea RDP provided a number of very successful projects, including the Gower Crafts and Artisans network as well as the Crefftau y Bont Craft shop based in Canolfan y Bont in Pontarddulais. The Rural Swansea Action Group includes some 300 producers and groups active in the rural wards

3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 3.1 The Swansea Rural Development Partnership (SRDP) LEADER programme aims to bring far reaching and sustainable benefits to Swansea’s rural wards. The vision is to create vibrant and distinct communities that are well connected and easily accessible and which provide high quality products, services and facilities within a resilient local economy supported by a strong, year-round tourism industry. The LEADER programme provides an invaluable link between the rural economy in Swansea and development actions to meet these objectives.

4. Legal implications – None

5. Finance (if required) – None

Glossary of terms: None

Background papers: None

Appendices:

APPENDIX A:- What is the Swansea Rural Development Partnership (SRDP) LEADER programme?

LEADER is a French acronym, standing for 'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale', meaning 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'. LEADER is included in the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

LEADER is a form of community-led local development. Through a process of stakeholder engagement, building the capacity of target groups and co-operation, the problems faced and opportunities available to an area are recognised and potential solutions are piloted.

There are 8 eligible rural wards in Swansea which are:-

- Bishopston;
- Fairwood;
- Gower;
- Llangyfelach;
- Mawr;
- Penclawdd;
- Pennard;
- Pontarddulais

The LEADER approach is associated with local empowerment through a [Local Development Strategy](#) resource allocation. The main tool for the application of this approach to area development and involving local representatives in decision-making is the Swansea RDP LEADER Local Action Group (LAG).

The Local Action Group designs and implements a Local Development Strategy for their area, developing a partnership approach to effect social and economic development. The Local Action Group has set up 3 sub-groups to assist them in managing the programme and the groups mirror the Rural Strategic Aims and Objectives. These are:-

Strategic Aim 1: Develop rural transport and infrastructure

Objective 1: Support an integrated and diverse transport network

Objective 2: Support and develop accessible, fit for purpose services

Strategic Aim 2: Enhance tourism offer

Objective 3: Enhance quality of local offer and improve marketing

Objective 4: Encourage development of year round sustainable tourism offer across the rural area (especially food, crafts and recreation)

Strategic Aim 3: Deliver a strong economy and vibrant communities

Objective 5: Support development of a self-sufficient rural economy

Objective 6: Support and develop cohesive, resilient and engaged communities

Objective 7: Enable digital connectivity

There are a number of cross cutting themes which are intended to add value, raise awareness and understanding while ensuring maximum participation and mitigating adverse impacts. This should help operations move beyond compliance and develop systems which support best practice. These cross cutting themes are:-

- Equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming
- Sustainable development
- Tackling poverty and social inclusion
- Conserving our natural environment, cultural and built heritage

Swansea RDP LEADER Implementation is the main funding pot for specific and focussed initiatives to be developed and delivered that will meet the objectives of the LDS. ***The Swansea RDP LEADER Fund is a Revenue only scheme.*** There is an overall funding of £440K until December 2021 for innovative projects that meet the LEADER aims and objectives. As at June 2019, £202K (46%) of these funds have been allocated to projects. The [RDP webpage](#) provides more information.

The previous RDP for Wales 2007-2013 had the availability of approx. £5M Capital funds to allocate within Swansea.