

To:
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration & Tourism

Please ask for:
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Overview & Scrutiny

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2nd February 2021

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Development and Regeneration Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism following the meeting of the Panel on 12th January 2021. It covers the report on the Swansea Rural Development Programme.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

The Development & Regeneration Panel met on 12th January 2021. The Panel were grateful for the presentation given by Vicki Thomson, External Funding Programme Officer. Clare James, Economic Development Manager, also attended for this item. During the discussion on the Swansea Rural Development Programme (RDP) Report, the following issues were highlighted which we would like to raise with you, for your consideration and response.

The Panel heard that Swansea Rural Development Partnership (RDP) is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) until 2023. It was pleasing to hear that the programme aims to promote strong, sustainable rural economic growth in Wales and encourage greater community-led local development. Members raised concerns over available funding now that the UK has left the European Union. Officers explained that the European funding already secured will be available to spend until 2023. Other funding streams are being explored, namely the 'Shared Prosperity Fund'.

The Panel heard that Swansea RDP's Local Action Group (LAG) administers the locally led 'LEADER' fund, being made up of private, third, and public sector

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representatives operating over eight rural wards. Members queried which organisations are represented within the LAG. Officers cited SCVS, Wales Cooperative and Coed Fach, who recently stepped down from the Partnership. An open call for membership is due to be confirmed at the next LAG meeting scheduled on 13th January; seeking expressions of interest from the third and private sector.

It was pleasing to hear about the continued success of the programme and example projects. The Panel heard about completed projects, such as the Killan Community project, under which a Solar Farm will progress to access further Government funding. The 'Market at the Mill' was another example of a successful project which now continues to trade selling local produce. The Panel heard that rural project outputs have exceeded targets thus far.

We also heard that current projects which are ongoing include - Community Supported Agriculture, Gower Off Road Cycle Routes and Big Meadow – Surf and Turf.

Members discussed how North Gower is also very important for linked cycle route access. Officers undertook to come back with more information on extending the cycle routes and associated bike hire.

Officers explained about the particular challenges faced by rural businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was concerning to hear about problems such as supply chain collapses and severe loss in trade resulting from the restrictions to tourism.

It was encouraging to hear that food retail has seen increased demand for locally produced foods. Those which have the capacity to deliver to customers have reported increases in sales but it is understood there are now concerns regarding customer retention once supermarkets make delivery slots more widely available.

Officers explained that the Swansea Food Partnership was set up as a direct response to discussions with rural food businesses in RDP areas, who expressed a need and interest in a coordinated approach for food and drink business support and networking. Currently, the Swansea Food Partnership has no funding and is seeking resources to achieve identified outcomes.

The Panel raised concerns over the historic Penclawdd cockle picking industry, and the effects suffered as a result of an estuary diesel spillage earlier this year. Officers undertook to liaise directly with that group once again.

We hope you find this letter useful and informative. We would welcome your comments on any of the issues raised, but in this instance, we require a formal written

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response by 23rd February, regarding more information on extending the cycle routes and associated bike hire.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jeff Jones', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Jeff Jones

Convener, Development and Regeneration Performance Panel

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