



**To/
Councillor Robert Francis-Davies
Cabinet Member for Investment,
Regeneration, Events & Tourism**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2023-24/9

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 19 December 2023. It is about Support for Business. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor Francis-Davies,

Scrutiny of Support for Business

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session, which focussed on a specific aspect of your Cabinet portfolio responsibilities, namely Support for Business. We thank you for attending the meeting and providing a written report covering this. We thank officers, in particular Matt Callaghan, Economic Regeneration Manager, for his contributions, taking us through the detail, as well as the input of other officers in attendance.

Your report provided an overview on the Council's work in relation to support for business and highlighted the work of 'Business Swansea,' launched in April 2021, which is a dedicated support service delivered by the Council's Economic Regeneration Team, with the objective of improving the quality and uptake of business support in Swansea.

The Scrutiny session enabled the Committee to consider the Council's responsibilities, priorities, activities, achievements, impact, and improvement, and provide challenge on actions and performance, as well as helping to inform future thinking.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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You highlighted to the Committee:

- the importance given to supporting business in Swansea, and its relationship with the delivery of Council priorities for the economy and tackling poverty.
- the difficulties experienced by businesses during the pandemic, and the Council's proactive recovery efforts, as well as current challenges including the cost-of-living crisis.
- the focus on both sustaining existing business and attracting new business
- the impact on city centres with a number of major retailer chains folding, though footfall in Swansea City Centre is on the rise.
- the Council's regeneration plans for the City Centre, benefitting from private sector investment, to establish Swansea as a strong mixed-use city and regional hub for business.
- praise for the team of officers providing support for business, particularly in making effective use of grant funding opportunities and getting money out quickly, often working under pressure to meet timescales set out by Welsh Government.

It was a very helpful and useful session, and this letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues are summarised below.

Business Swansea

We asked about the biggest difference that the new 'Business Swansea' support service has made almost three years on, and some of the successes in terms of the number of people helped and the value of the service to the local economy.

We noted the overarching objectives of a business support service:

- To improve the number of, but more importantly the survival rates of new businesses, previously amongst the lowest in South Wales
- Growth of the indigenous business base
- Improved resilience of local business
- Attracting Inward Investment into the local economy
- Upskilling local businesses and their workforce

You reported that 'Business Swansea' delivers a combination of 'in-house' support as well as promoting the offer of partner organisations. We heard that the main focus has been on addressing the issues of:

- Businesses being confused/overwhelmed by the changing programmes of business support available from a variety of sources
- An assumption that business support was not available to them and/or was not appropriate to their needs

- Businesses and business owners having insufficient resource available to research support available meaning often freely available support was bypassed.

The Committee noted that a broad range of activities that support local business have been introduced to address these issues. Key areas of activity included work on communication, events, grant support, and partner engagement and we heard about the impact this has made, as well as future plans.

We were told that the new support service has been successful in creating a simplified single point of contact for businesses and communication and engagement had improved. There are dedicated Council web pages on [business advice](#), and an annually published [Business Guide](#). Fortnightly business eNewsletters have been successful in raising awareness of support available locally, with distribution now close to 4000 local business contacts, with significant numbers viewing the Business Swansea YouTube channel, which contain recordings of some of the Business Events that have been organised. There are also regular networking events. It is anticipated that throughout 2024 and beyond, there will be an increased proportion of in-person events enabling improved interaction and networking opportunities.

We noted that the majority of activity currently being undertaken is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund through the Business Swansea Anchor project. Whilst work is ongoing, it was pleasing to hear that the following outcomes were projected to be delivered by December 2024:

- 65 new enterprises created (Pre-start Grant Support)
- 65 enterprises adopting new technologies (Website Development Fund)
- 95 jobs created; 95 jobs safeguarded (Business Growth Grant)
- 92 tonnes of CO2 reduction (Carbon Reduction Grant)
- 30 individuals receiving assistance to be enterprise ready (Introduction to Self-employment Workshop Events)
- 258 enterprises receiving non-financial assistance. Including access to training, business to business networking etc.

You reported that across the Community Renewal Fund and Shared Prosperity Grant Funds alone, 82 business grants have been issued to date across all funding programmes, with the number anticipated to increase substantially throughout 2024.

Business Grants

The Committee was interested in the impact and success of business grants, particularly in terms of new business startup in Swansea, which we discussed.

As an example, we asked whether there has been any specific impact on Swansea Market in terms of raised occupancy levels. We noted there is currently a high level of occupancy (94%) within Swansea Market, with a number of businesses that have accessed advice and support from 'Business Swansea'. We noted that footfall is increasing, alongside efforts to promote the Market to the younger population. Details of current initiatives were highlighted (e.g. the market garden project featuring new seating, which has helped to increase well time in the Market), and Swansea Market's success in winning Britain's Best Indoor Market. Congratulations to everyone behind this success.

Parc Felindre

Whilst not directly related to the work of 'Business Swansea' the Committee took the opportunity to ask about the current situation with the Parc Felindre site and what the Council have been doing to attract interest. Officers informed the Committee that work was ongoing in proactively marketing the site. Regular meetings take place to monitor enquiries. Officers confirmed that there were no impediments to any prospective developer (e.g., around utility services on site) and the site was being marketed intensively. The Committee hopes for positive news.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within; however, we do not expect you to provide a formal response.

The Committee appreciated the information provided and welcomed the plan to deliver a Councillor Briefing regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund Business Grants currently available in Swansea – which took place on 24 January.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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