



City and County of Swansea

**Minutes of the Economy, Environment & Infrastructure Policy Development Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Thursday, 18 February 2021 at 2.00 pm

**Present:** Councillor C Anderson (Chair) Presided

**Councillor(s)**

J E Burtonshaw  
P K Jones  
P Lloyd

**Councillor(s)**

P Downing  
M A Langstone  
P M Matthews

**Councillor(s)**

P R Hood-Williams  
W G Lewis  
T M White

**Officer(s)**

Caritas Adere  
Phil Holmes  
Clare James  
Paul Relf  
Samantha Woon

Senior Lawyer  
Head of Planning & City Regeneration  
Economic Development Manager  
Economic Development & External Funding Manager  
Democratic Services Officer

**Apologies for Absence**

Martin Nicholls – Director of Place

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**22 To receive Disclosures of Personal & Prejudicial Interests from Members.**

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by the City and County of Swansea, the following interest was declared:

- 1) Councillor J E Burtonshaw declared a Personal Interest in Minute 24 “Economic Recovery Action Plan”.

**23 Minutes:**

**Resolved** that the Minutes of the Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Policy Development Committee on 21 January, 2021, be approved as a correct record.

**24 Economic Recovery Action Plan.**

The Head of Planning and City Regeneration, assisted by the Economic Development and External Funding Manager, provided an update on the Council’s Economic Recovery Action Plan.

Members’ noted the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and the economic recovery forecast, specifically the The UK Economy Beyond Coronavirus: UK Powerhouse report published by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economics and Business

Research at the end of November 2020, listed Swansea as the sixth placed UK City in terms of employment growth in 2021, with 8.1% year-on-year growth projected by the end of the year.

The major strategic projects such as the Copr Bay phases 1 and 2, 71-72 The Kingsway, the regeneration of the Hafod Copperworks and the restoration of the Palace theatre have progressed at pace despite the pandemic. They are providing a visible sign of confidence in the City, raising the profile of Swansea as a business location and when completed will create employment opportunities and economic growth.

Funding through the Welsh Government Transforming Towns initiative is enabling vacant buildings, such as the Kings Building in the City Centre and St Johns Church in Morriston, to be brought back into use to provide commercial floorspace and new homes, and the re-imaging Wind Street scheme will create a family friendly, high quality environment and make the street more attractive for businesses who wish to trade outdoors.

The Council is continuing to support rural communities and the local fishing industry through the Rural Development Programme and Swansea Bay Fisheries Local Action Group respectively. Through Crowdfund Swansea, community organisations can secure funding for new community projects, with 11 schemes already attaining their funding goal during rounds 1 and 2, resulting in £112,837 of projects underway. Community groups and local residents have now been invited to put their ideas forward for the 3<sup>rd</sup> funding round.

Local employability projects such as Workways+, Communities for Work, Swansea Short Term Unemployed project, Cam Nesa and Communities for Work Plus continue to support local people to overcome their barriers to employment and training. In addition, the Council's Beyond Bricks & Mortar initiative continues to generate employment and training opportunities for local people, with nearly 3,000 targeted recruitment and training weeks achieved since April 2020.

The Economic Recovery Action Plan specifically references the support for the Tourism, Leisure, Events and Hospitality sectors - sectors that have been hit the hardest, being the first businesses to close and definitely some of the last to open during the imposing and lifting of restrictions in 2020/21. The hospitality sector alone employs thousands locally - both directly and indirectly. A return to business as usual as soon as possible is vital for these sectors.

The Economic Recovery Action Plan sets out the additional actions the Regeneration Swansea Partnership has identified that are needed to take to support businesses, support individuals and improve resilience of the local economy in light of the pandemic. This Action plan complements the programmes and projects that were already underway pre-covid 19, and is drawing in funding and resources from Swansea Council, Welsh Government and other partners. The economic recovery action plan expands on the Council's wider Covid Recovery Plan.

The Economic Recovery Plan was last presented to the Policy Development Committee in November 2020 and delivery of the plan has continued since then. Progress includes:

- Over £1m of Welsh Government Transforming Towns grant funding allocated to local businesses through the Premises Outdoor Adaptions Grant, to support local businesses to adapt to social distancing requirements.
- Continuing to administer Welsh Government covid-19 financial support to local businesses through schemes such as the Firebreak discretionary grant, Restrictions grant, cultural freelancer grant and start up grant.
- Recruitment of new business development officers to deliver a new start up and enterprise service
- Launch of a county wide Shop Local Shop Swansea campaign in November, with further publicity planned once restrictions ease
- Kickstart bid approved by the Department of Work & Pensions. Internal and external work placements have been set up and the scheme is live.
- Initial budget confirmed for small start-up bursaries to support business starts/ self-employment
- Commissioning the preparation of new Regional Economic Delivery Plan for South West Wales, to complement the South West Wales Regional Economic Framework being produced by the Welsh Government.
- We continue to support the tourism and cultural sectors by engaging with our customers and supporting businesses. We will continue to liaise with other departments to assist with the dissemination of grants across all sectors.

Members' noted the Economic Recovery Action Plan continues to evolve to respond to changing economic circumstances. A full copy of the latest working document was included in Appendix A.

In response to Members questions, Officers stated that:

- 1) There is currently significant provision in place with initiatives such as Beyond Bricks and Mortar and the Kick Start Programme for apprenticeships and new job opportunities. The Kick Start Programme offered 100 placements across private sector with local employers and the initial bid had secured 69 placements. Bids for a further 22 placements will be made. Internal placements within the council targeted at 16-24 year olds are also being examined. Other initiatives include Communities for Work and Start up Bursaries. The creation of Business Development posts within the Council will serve to support this process. Discussions are taking place with the Welsh Government at regional level regarding alternative ways we can implement further approaches in the coming months to get more support into the start up.
- 2) Progress will be monitored in relation to regional working with partners with the development of a strategic vision and framework for the region. This will be underpinned by the delivery plan with a monitoring framework attached and performance measures. This will take the form of a strategic version of the action plan which will require flexibility to respond to challenges.

- 3) Transforming towns is now the banner for the Welsh Government Regeneration Programmes. Several initiatives encompass that, such as the Town Centre Loan Fund which is a zero interest loan. Other initiatives include the Property Enhancement Development Grant and Sustainable Living Grant, for new commercial space above shops to be utilized as accommodation. A separate pot of money had been added from regional underspends to help create the Outdoor Adaptions Grant within the Property Enhancements Grant. Both are separate grants with different budgets. A further £5m had been secured for the Town Centre Loan for the private sector, which is primarily City Centre based. However, permission was granted to go outside the City Centre with the Outdoor Adaption Grant which had benefitted approximately 230 businesses.
- 4) The Outdoor Adaptations Grant is now closed, however, the Council have pooled an average of £1.2 to £1.4m, approximately £600 per allocation. All award letters have been despatched and claims are coming in from businesses. It is anticipated that a new Scheme will be introduced from 1 April which will enable the Council to restart the Scheme in the financial year. Grants not taken up will go back into the Property Enhancement Grant. The Council always overcommit so that the grants are maximised try best to ensure funding is allocated. Community Councils are permitted to make applications on behalf of businesses.
- 5) The Kickstart initiative offers short term funding for a 6 month job placement. However, there are more opportunities to reapply.
- 6) The UK Powerhouse Report published by Irwin Mitchell and the Centre for Economics and Business Research forecast Swansea's economy at 8.1% growth in job growth and recovery in the latter part of 2021. This forecast placed Swansea as sixth placed UK City in terms of employment growth. Whilst this is a pleasing forecast, circumstances can change for better or worse. The analysis may have encompassed Swansea having a strong representation of 37% of the economy deriving from public sector, which has provided resilience during the COVID crisis. Furthermore, the service sector dominates the economy. Swansea's lower percentage of manufacturing jobs than other parts of UK can protect against the implications of Brexit in so far as difficulties with exports. There are a vast variety of issues that could have been measured when producing this forecast, not least Swansea's regeneration programme, specifically the investment in the City Deal. Additionally, Swansea is successful in both the University and IT sector, sustaining jobs via the Outdoor Grants Scheme has been paramount in ensuring business are able to retain staff.
- 7) Individuals on or returning from Furlow are still classed as employed.
- 8) Rural development is being examined.
- 9) With regard to the algorithm component of the Tourism Aims, Officers will gather further information and report back to the Committee.

- 10) Commercial shopping centres are being piloted (in Morriston and to a smaller degree in Clydach. Data gathered from the Morriston pilot will be used as a scoping project with a view to developing a broader action plan for other areas.
- 11) 'Allotments in Swansea' now have responsibility for the management of allotments in Swansea.
- 12) Officers will have due regard to the recommendations of the Tourism Scrutiny Panel (made some 18 months ago) regarding eco tourism in terms of developments within the Tourism Industry.

The Chair thanked Officers for their informative report. It was noted that the Economic Recovery Plan would be considered by Cabinet within the next month.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The report be noted.
- 2) A further update report be submitted to the Committee in May/June 2021. The report is to include details of number of organisations benefitting from finance raised from grants in respect of the Transforming Towns and PEDG and details of the tourism algorithm.

## **25 What can the Council do to encourage more shops and support High Street Regeneration?**

The Head of Planning and City Regeneration assisted by the Economic Development and External Funding Manager presented an update on actions being undertaken to encourage more shops and support High Street Regeneration.

The historic origin of Swansea High Street was detailed along with the changing business models which have had an impact on the area.

The Economic Recovery Plan sets out the range of initiatives that form the wider package of support needed for both the core retailing streets of the City Centre and the ancillary zones such as High Street. This applies equally to our district high streets. For High Street Swansea, a range of programmes are already being deployed through the Transforming Towns package of measures including property enhancement grant for new commercial space and 'homes above shops' funding to release vacant upper floors for market housing. The Palace Theatre, as per the existing Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework is the catalyst building for upper High Street, with the refurbishment works tender now out to advert. The range of measures in hand is extensive, and set out in detail with timescales in the Economic Recovery Plan. A selection of these relevant to the High Street question includes:

- Support businesses to adapt to outdoor trading/social distancing through delivery of Transforming Towns (TT) Premises Outdoor Adaption Grant (POAG) in city and district centres.

- Explore potential for pop up activity (food related, cinema, cultural events etc) in city and district centres and the beachfront.
- Explore potential for repurposing indoor vacant space (retail, leisure, commercial) for meanwhile uses to support growth and sustainability of new and existing business.
- Accelerate investment in private rented/ owned city centre living
- Administration of WG Covid-19 financial support grants for local businesses.
- Multi-hub start-up and enterprise service.
- Small scale business grants (capital and revenue) to support new business starts.
- Shop local Shop Swansea campaign to support local businesses.
- Provision of low cost, flexible business premises (office, retail, leisure) on easy access terms to make it easier to start up a new business.
- Continuing to provide modern, flexible floorspace and co-working space to accommodate new and growing businesses.
- Develop local hub concept.
- Increase support for business start-up and growth.
- Food incubator units for new start ups.
- Business pathway tool kit – online resources.
- Extend and adapt employability provision to continue supporting clients, including those who are newly unemployed.
- Utilise labour market and business intelligence gained through the delivery of programmes, networks and business development function to identify vacancy trends and skills needs to help shape service delivery and create career pathways.
- Dedicated resource to support self-employment/ entrepreneurship.
- Establish small start-up bursaries to support business starts/ self-employment.
- Promote green infrastructure investment through delivery of the pilot Green Infrastructure schemes.

The Recovery Plan actions are in progress and being delivered, adapting as more is learned about emerging trends and requirements. Key points particularly relevant of High Street regeneration includes:

- Grant funding allocated to local businesses through the Premises Outdoor Adaptions Grant, to support local businesses to adapt to social distancing requirements.
- Continuing to administer Welsh Government covid-19 financial support to local businesses through schemes such as the Firebreak discretionary grant, Restrictions grant, cultural freelancer grant and start up grant.
- Recruitment of new business development officers to deliver a new start up and enterprise service.
- Launch of a county wide Shop Local Shop Swansea campaign in November, with further publicity planned once restrictions ease.
- Kickstart bid approved by the Department of Work & Pensions. Internal and external work placements have been set up and the scheme is live.
- Initial budget confirmed for small start-up bursaries to support business starts/ self employment.

The Dyfatty Community Hub proposals around the vacant shop units presents a great opportunity to locate and test these approaches working closely with all relevant support services and providing a real opportunity to act as enablers in giving local people in particular the tools they need to strengthen the community and generate positive micro-business opportunities. The key is integration of these activities – no one sector or area of work has all the answers, but the opportunity to create a positive and cost-effective environment to enable people to realise their own futures is real, with a holistic package of support available at the same time at the right time.

As outlined above the report highlights positive progress as part of the overall recovery and how these actions can specifically assist in the regeneration of High Street.

In response to Member questions, the Officer stated that:

- 1) The regeneration of Upper High Street (especially Dyfatty) does include inputs from the Housing Department. Officers will include more detail of work development in a further update report to the Committee.
- 2) The Council can influence the programme by approaching businesses with poor shop frontages. The pilot being undertaken in Morryston gives an indication of costs, what materials are appropriate, how much they cost, value for money etc. It is acknowledged when funds are tight, businesses may not make shop frontages a top priority. However, property enhancement grants can be used alongside the town centre loan which is beneficial to businesses. It must be noted that each property is individual with a unique identity, however, the Council are focussing on quality of the materials, consistency and design standards.
- 3) Issues of owner engagement arise when the property is owned by a third party who does not have a relationship with Swansea. The Council does have the power of entry, however, this must be justified. The Council has previously worked with BID to get interaction with those owners who do not engage. Initiatives have included vinyls on windows and 'meanwhile' uses which will help with business rates. Welsh Government training has assisted in exploring options that may exist to try and force hand of owners using powers such as compulsory purchase orders (although this is used as a last resort) where the property is detrimental on street scene. The Council does need to examine these powers with a view to deploying them in the future. An analysis of ownership of High Street indicated that there are a small number of properties in this category. The majority have plans for refurbishment and re-use or demolition for development.

The Chair thanked Officers for their informative report.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The report be noted.
- 2) An update report be submitted to the Committee in May/June 2021 with the Economy Recovery Plan.

**26 Work Plan 2020 - 2022.**

The Democratic Services Officer presented the work plan.

**Resolved** that:

- 1) The work plan be noted.
- 2) More Homes Housing and De-carbonisation be considered at the meeting on 18 March, 2021.

The meeting ended at 2.49 pm

**Chair**