



Report of the Director of Place

Economy & Infrastructure Service Transformation Committee - 10 April 2025

Economy & Infrastructure Service Transformation Committee Annual Report 2024/2025

Purpose:	To summarise the progress made in relation to the work programme for 2024/2025.
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For Information	

1. Introduction.

This report sets out the progress made on the work programme during the 2024/2025 municipal year.

2. Work programme 2023/2024.

The Committee discussed proposed topics for the Work Plan 2024-2025. The Chair stated that he would discuss the options with the Cabinet Members and report the preferred topics to the next scheduled meeting. The potential topics included the following: -

- Review Swansea Bay Strategy (including Quarry Car Park, Mumbles).
- Tawe Riverside Corridor – Next Steps.
- Commitment to invest in our towns and villages.
- Placemaking Strategy.
- Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Review of the Disabled Bays Parking Policy.
- Hotel Accommodation in Swansea.
- Improving Public Toilets.
- New Ferry Service Link Between Swansea and the South of England.

- Swansea Bay Sports Park.
- St Helen's Road Improvement Scheme.
- Regional Working Hubs (Shared Workspaces).

Resolved that: -

- 1) The Chair discussed the potential items list with the relevant Cabinet Members.
- 2) Placemaking Strategy be discussed at the next scheduled meeting.

The Placemaking strategy was the subject of a member workshop session on **25th July 2024 at 2pm.**

2.1 Thursday, 12th September 2024 at 2.00 pm

Shared Prosperity Fund Update.

The Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager presented an update on the Shared Prosperity Fund. The Shared Prosperity Fund formed part of the response of the previous UK Government administration to partial replacement of European Structural Funds following the exit of the UK from the European Union. Each local authority in the UK received a fixed allocation of funding under the Programme, for Swansea this equated to £40m over a 3-year period.

In Wales, the additional requirement for regional co-ordination was added. Swansea Council had acted as the 'lead authority' and banker for the South West Wales region. Whilst regionally administered, allocations remained local and no virement of funds between local authority allocations was possible. The Programme had been regionally planned by the four constituent local authorities, with delivery and decision making delegated to local level. Funding for the region equated to £138m over a 3-year period.

The Programme had been designed to align with certain core areas of delivery in local authority partners through a series of 'anchor' projects, with the headline menu agreed in principle at regional level in the context of the South West Regional Economic Delivery Plan adopted by all four LAs, but also the Regional Investment Plan prepared for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which used the REDP as its base.

A further factor influencing the menu of anchor projects was the known pressures needing support in the region. Anchor provision also took account of relevant Welsh Government Programmes and was designed to wrap around and enhance delivery:

- Business development and funding
- Employability from pre-16 to adult
- Supporting Communities
- Placemaking investments

- Culture and Tourism
- Rural development

Each of these anchor projects contained a mixture of staff delivery of support and activities, along with tailored grant routes for businesses and other organization to access a wide range of support.

Skills development sits in the context of the Regional Learning & Skills Partnership and the regular Skills Needs Assessments, so the funds available under this theme were offered via open call to Further Education and its partners to come forward with local consortia to deliver a package of activities based on the recently published Skills Needs Assessment. A separate allocation of 'Multiply' funding focused on numeracy skills was offered on a similar basis.

Finally a broader open call was made at the start of the Programme inviting third parties to bid for funding to deliver activities to complement and not duplicate the anchor project provision.

Evaluation of the Programme had been emphasised as a keenness to test and understand delivery approaches to local economic and community development to enable investment in 'what works' going forward. Local economic development was a challenging area of work with a balance to be struck between ensuring 'depth' versus 'breadth' of investment. Fewer larger strategic investments can result in ripple effects, whereas a larger number of smaller investments are felt more readily by a larger number of businesses and communities receiving direct support. In practice, a balance of these investments was required. Smaller scale investment had been limited for a considerable time, so the ability to invest using sustainable support measures had been a welcome change from previous funding arrangements.

The SPF Programme arrangements had been swift into implementation when compared with previous programme arrangements such as those under EU funding which have often taken 2-3 years to bed in. Feedback on SPF Programme arrangements to-date had been very positive across the region and more widely across the UK, but concern was now mounting about what future funding arrangements may look like, if there was any funding forthcoming following the next UK Government spending review.

The most recent Swansea Quarterly Monitoring Report was attached for information to reflect the breadth of Programme delivery and progress to date.

The Programme had achieved good results despite a very short timescale from announcement by Government to designing a complete governance and administration framework from scratch. The Programme design did however draw on approaches and learning from previous programmes, with the key design principle being regional planning with local delivery, maximizing delegation and flexibility whilst ensuring regional consistency.

The Programme had generated a range of qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Some key headline achievements to-date were highlighted below.

£1.3m invested in 132 small businesses, £800k paid out to date, with £1m match funding levered from the private sector businesses supported.

£1m invested in securing the future of a range of heritage structures across the county.

£3.6m invested in skills development.

£3m invested in a range of third sector/community organisations and activities.

Over 2000 people have received employability support via the Pathways to work partnership, with 195 going into work, 304 achieving qualifications/training and 115 going into education.

Over £4m invested in a Skills consortium led by Gower College Swansea

The current direction of travel was a timely official end to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with any successor arrangement to be determined through the next Comprehensive Spending Review. Indications suggested that any such arrangement will filter via the Welsh Government or Growth Deal (City Deal) structures, not directly to local government as with the current Programme. Such arrangements are unlikely to offer the flexible approach and level of delegated decision-making that has been possible with UK SPF. Indications are that there will be some form of announcement in the October Budget Statement.

In response to a Member question, the Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager stated that projects were progressing at pace, £13m had already been paid and all money was fully allocated. Whilst money could not be carried forward, Officers were confident there were ways to extend part of the program and reallocate spending pressures. Furthermore, a budget statement was due in October 2024 and whilst there had been a change in UK government, it was anticipated that there would be a successor fund.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager for his informative report.

Resolved that a further update report be submitted to the Committee on 12 December, 2024.

Work Plan.

The Chair stated presented the Draft Committee Work Plan 2024/25 and referred to the items contained within the Draft Plan.

Resolved that: -

- 1) the Work Plan 2024/25 be approved.
- 2) An update on the Shared Prosperity Fund be scheduled for the meeting on 12 December 2024.

2.2 Thursday, 24th October 2024 at 2.00 pm

Active Travel Maintenance.

The Cabinet Members for Environment & Infrastructure and Regeneration, Investment, Events & Tourism introduced the report.

The Active Travel Officer assisted by the Group Leader, Highways & Transportation stated that the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 (ATA) introduced a legislative requirement on local authorities to plan for, improve, and promote routes for walking and cycling for everyday journeys. Local authorities must report to the Welsh Government on their progress each year.

The Council had implemented an ambitious active travel programme, successfully securing significant funding from the Welsh Government's Active Travel Fund (ATF) to enhance walking and cycling routes.

The Council currently managed over 147 kilometres of routes and had received funding to improve approximately 6 kilometres in the last financial year. The Core Allocation funding, which was determined by population size and designated settlement areas, was projected to be £712,000 for the financial year 2025/26.

However, the ATF does not cover maintenance costs, placing additional strain on the Council's Highways Maintenance and Cleansing Department. The Council receives numerous public reports regarding issues along active travel routes, including overgrowth, poor surfaces and accidental damage. Currently, only formally adopted routes are routinely inspected leading to maintenance challenges for non-adopted routes.

The existing maintenance budget had not increased since the ATF's introduction and the costs associated with maintaining active travel routes were rising therefore raising concerns about the potential for third party claims and the adequacy of resources for winter maintenance.

There was a pressing need for clear mapping and categorisation of active travel routes to facilitate effective maintenance. New routes must be adopted to ensure proper upkeep and all routes should be accessible to necessary maintenance vehicles.

The Council was required to continuously improve active travel provisions. However, the expansion of the network was straining existing departmental budgets. It was recommended that future funding applications consider the long

term maintenance costs associated with new infrastructure to ensure sustainable development.

The Cabinet Members for Environment & Infrastructure and Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism highlighted the challenges associated with maintaining Active Travel Routes. It was noted that other authorities faced the same issues in regard to lack of maintenance funds. The Cabinet Members thanked Officers for their ongoing work.

Members discussed the impact of the lack of maintenance budgets, the importance of undertaking a mapping exercise, the variety of users of the active travel routes, the societal benefits of active travel routes, potentially generating income from businesses who benefit from active travel routes, funding of smaller projects as part of the active travel funding, un-adopted routes and the annual bidding process for funding minor works.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure, the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism and Officers for their informative report.

Resolved that:-

- 1) The outcome of the mapping exercise be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

2.3 Thursday, 12th December 2024 at 2.00 pm

Highways Asset Management Plan.

Councillor A Stevens, Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure introduced the Highways Asset Management Plan 2024-2035 and expressed his gratitude to Officers for their hard work in the preparation of the report.

The Group Leader Highways Maintenance, assisted by the Head of Highways & Transportation detailed the report.

It was noted that the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) recommends that all Welsh authorities prepare a Highways Asset Management Plan (HAMP). The plan sets out the Council's plans for the future management of the Council's highway asset.

The Plan details the approach for the management of the Council's highway assets for the period 2025 to 2035 and how the network will be managed to ensure corporate priorities are followed, taking into account finance and the current asset condition, differing stakeholder needs, localised priorities and the benefits they provide over the medium to long term in terms of defined outcomes. The plan recognised the views of both road users and residents.

It had been produced in accordance with national guidance and recommended good practice developed through the “All Wales” Road/Highway Asset Management Project - CSSW Highway Asset Management Project.

It was widely recognised that the application of modern asset management practices could enable improved value for money. Where resources are limited, it is essential that the Council embraces these methods and strives to ensure that every penny spent, is invested as wisely as possible. This plan forms an important part of the Council’s commitment to apply good asset management to its Highway network.

The Council has an ageing road network with a large backlog of work required. Increasing demand on resources means it has never been more essential that effective asset management is put in place. It is derived from a process of planning and analysis of short and longer-term needs.

The local highway network is Swansea’s largest, most visible and most valuable publicly owned asset with a replacement value in excess of £2,000,000,000. The network is used 24hrs a day 365 days of the year by residents, businesses and visitors and is vital to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the County.

The Highway Authority has a statutory duty to maintain the highway safely, an effective management plan helps to justify spending and defend the councils choices in terms of maintenance.

This document was not intended to be a static document. It was an overarching document and will be reviewed and updated regularly and is supported by a number of other policies, guidance notes and plans.

The Group Leader provided a comprehensive overview of the following:

- Management of the Highway for 2025-2035.
- Customer Expectations and External Demands.
- Service Standards.
- Highways Asset – Carriageways.
- Highways Asset – Footways.
- Highways Asset – Street Lighting.
- Highways Asset – Structures.
- Highways Asset – Traffic Signals.
- Asset Investment Strategies.
- Risks to the Plan.

Members discussed the following issues:

- Prosecutions arising from damage to the Highway.
- Customer Consultation Contacts.
- Developer highway adoptions.
- Matrix/RAG system.

- Public Lighting.
- EV charging.
- Welsh Government funding/additional grant funding.
- Alternative materials for resurfacing the highways.
- Updating the Highways Management Asset Plan.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure and Officers for the informative and comprehensive report. Furthermore, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the Highways Team for their outstanding efforts during the recent inclement weather.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The report be noted.

2.4 Thursday, 16th January 2025 at 2.00 pm

Update UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager presented an update on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund was one of the partial replacements for the European funding that used to be received when we were members of the European Union.

The Shared Prosperity Fund was one of the levelling up funds under the previous UK government. Welsh local authorities had been required to work regionally, with a regional level allocation which was further specified down to local level, with each local authority having a certain amount to work with.

In terms of implementation, the Authority chose to operate a strategic approach with anchor projects with certain key themes/projects around business, employability, communities, place making investments, cultural, tourism and rural development. These previously identified as manifesto commitments for the Authority to ensure that there were a number of tailored access routes to the program for businesses and communities, as well as an opportunity for third party organisations to bid for funding.

The partner local authorities in South West Wales adopted a similar approach adapting to existing partnership and governance structures. Each of those schemes included a balance of staff to run and administer the program and provide services.

In addition to the money allocated for organisations to access, the flexibility of the programme had enabled funding delivery to a huge range of activities from very large capital projects to very small Community activities.

The Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager referred to the Swansea Quarterly Monitoring Report Q2 2024 which was included within the report and detailed the significant results.

Confirmation had been received that £900m has been allocated across the UK, which represented approximately a 42% reduction over the existing year. Swansea would receive £10m of revenue and £4m of capital funding which had to be utilized by the 31st March 2026 at which point the program will cease completely.

The months leading up to March 2026 will be significant in determining what future funding arrangements will be and who administers them. The UK Government are in discussions with the Welsh Government regarding future format, partnership arrangements and delivery of the funds.

The manner in which the current programme operated provided the local authority with a great level of flexibility to design funding opportunities that enable ongoing access for the private and 3rd sector organisations at varying scales which created job creation in the economy during the program which was quite rare. The measurable outcomes were detailed in the monitoring report.

The real debate focussed around what would happen with funding post March 2026. Local authorities would need to feed back on how this program has gone and what expectations are from all partners as to the next stages.

The Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism thanked the Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager and his team for the tremendous work that they have done, not just for Swansea, but the entire Swansea City region which equates to £158m being processed. He referred to the expertise that has grown within that workforce and expressed his concerns for the future should it revert back to money going from Central Government to Welsh Government which could delay funding for schemes. The Scheme had been successful because it had been administered locally which had been greatly beneficial to communities.

In response to Member questions, the Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager stated that:

- Timescales for spending on current/new projects prior to the Programme concluding in March 2026 - Swansea and South West Wales were well placed due to the current structure and the Programme could be quickly adapted to absorb the extra money. A report would be submitted to Cabinet within the next few weeks recommending the existing structure, with some modest refinements to keep various grant programmes alive, particularly for the private and third sectors and the services that the teams are providing across the Council. As well potentially extending some of the third party projects, where appropriate, there were certain examples where projects were already strategically aligned and it would make more sense to be able to extend those programmes using the extra money rather than inviting new

projects that would only have a very short timescale to operate, but with caveat that all the grant schemes will be available for smaller projects to access. There are some capital schemes that the Council could look to support with the approval of Cabinet. There were significant staffing implications connected to the program with a large number of jobs across the region that are tied up in delivery. However, less than 4% of funding is allocated to administration. The uncertainty of knowing if there is a direct successor Scheme will result in staff retention becoming an issue which will be a matter for ongoing discussion.

- Penalties for extending projects – funds could not be carried over from this financial year. The majority of projects were on track to spend so any underspend would be quite small. Furthermore, there is potential to reallocate to existing projects. The option exists, subject to Cabinet approval, for extending anchor projects, in particular the ability to extend commitments into the following year. However, these commitments would have to come out of the following years' money.

The Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration, Events & Tourism confirmed that representations had been made to Welsh Government regarding the future administration of the Programme.

The Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager stated that he would contact the Chair directly regarding a query in relation to a community meeting held in March and October 2024. The Chair thanked the Strategic Economic Regeneration Manager for his informative report.

Resolved that:-

- 1) The report be noted.

2.5 Thursday, 27th February 2025 at 2.00 pm

Improving Public Toilets.

The Head of Property Services presented a 'for information' report informing Members on the improvements to the Council's Public Toilet provision.

It was reported that the Council has 23 standalone public toilet units, as well those that are available for public use within its buildings and day to day management is undertaken by the Cleansing Team within Cultural Services.

The strategic development of Public Toilet provision, in Swansea, was set out in Swansea's Public Toilet Strategy. The most recent version was approved by Cabinet, in March 2023.

The strategy's governance was overseen by a Working Group made up of Swansea Council officers; the work of this group was informed by a wider Stakeholder Group, made up of representatives of different bodies representing the people of Swansea.

Since 2021, Swansea Council has spent almost £1 million on improvements to its stock of public toilets and the general improvements were identified through condition surveys that were carried out on all sites, in 2020-21.

The improvements to the toilet stock had gone hand-in-hand with improvements in their cleansing regime. This has been delivered through the improved training of operatives and an investment in the frequency of cleansing visits, to match the times of year when they are most used.

The remodelling of Rhossili's public toilets was in response to the level of demand identified at a key visitor location which often resulted in queues extending up towards the hotel. The Council was in the process of transferring the responsibility for these toilets over to the National Trust who manage both the car park and the area surrounding the toilets. This will produce future savings in maintenance and cleansing.

The installation of the Changing Place units, in Knab Rock and Rhossili, was driven by the Public Toilet Strategy's priority to "Focus on identifying and improving areas where there are people disadvantaged by the lack of toilet provision." The improvements had been funded through the combining of revenue budget allocations within Corporate Building Services and Parks & Cleansing. The installation of the Changing Places and the remodelling of Rhossili's toilets were also supported by successful grant applications for Visit Wales Brilliant Basics funding, totalling £276,000.

In 2025-26, the allocated maintenance budget was £130,000.

Committee questioning and discussion focussed on:

- Transfer of the management of toilets at Rhossili to the National Trust – the Officer stated that negotiations were progressing and with arrangements being finalised as soon as possible.
- Budget – the Officer confirmed that the budget was part of the core budget.
- Consultation Period – the Officer stated that he would report back to the Committee regarding timelines.
- Public Toilet Strategy Action Plan (March 2023 – March 2025) – the Officer confirmed that he would report back to the Committee regarding timelines.
- Incentives for transferring the management of toilets at Southgate – the Officer stated that whilst he was uncertain on the nature of the leasehold, there was an element of additional land with the proviso that the toilet are maintained.
- Radar Key – Members noted that Radar keys were widely available and this created challenges.
- Cabinet Member awareness - the Officer confirmed that the Cabinet Member was a regular attendee of the quarterly meetings and was fully briefed.

The Chair thanked the Head of Property Services for his informative report.

Swansea Local Development Plan 2023-2038 (LDP2) Pre-Deposit Plan (Preferred Strategy).

The Placemaking and Strategic Planning Manager presented a 'for information' report informing Members of progress on the LDP2 and the next steps in the process, including a comprehensive public consultation and stakeholder engagement process to be undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements.

The Officer provided a presentation and comprehensive overview of the following areas:

- LDP2 Council Resolutions.
- What is a Pre-Deposit Plan?
- Supporting Documents.
- Consultation.
- Economy & Infrastructure Key Themes.
- Next Steps.
- Virtual Consultation.

Committee questioning and discussion focussed on consultation and the Officer stated the variety of different forms of consultation were available including a cross party member engagement group.

The Chair referred to the importance of the references to economy and transformation and Tourism, leisure and culture within the LDP2.

The Chair thanked the Placemaking and Strategic Planning Manager for his informative presentation

Work Plan.

The Chair presented the Committee Work Plan 2024/25.

Resolved that the items for discussion at the meeting on 10 April 2025 include:

- 1) Review of Swansea Bay Strategy.
- 2) Tawe Riverside Strategy Update (including Musgrave)
- 3) Annual Report 2024-2025.

3. Financial Implications.

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Any subsequent implications would be set out in individual reports to Cabinet.

4. Legal Implications.

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report. Any subsequent implications would be set out in individual reports to Cabinet.

5. Integrated Assessment Implications.

5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

5.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

5.4 This is a for information report. As such an IIA screening is not required.

Background Papers: None

Appendices: None