

**South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee - Economic Well Being
and Regional Economic Development Sub-Committee**

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

22 July 2024

Chairperson: Councillor R.Stewart

Councillors: R.Francis-Davies, H.Evans, J.Hurley and
P.Miller

**National Park
Representatives:** L.Bickerton

**Officers In
Attendance:** W.Walters, S.Walters, S.Davies, A.Williams,
S.Aldred-Jones, H.Morgan, S.Brennan,
M.Wade, P.Relf, K.Tillman and J.Woodman-
Ralph

1. **Welcome and Chairs Announcements**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests received.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2024, were approved as an accurate record.

4. **Delivery Update - Economic Wellbeing and Regional Economic Development**

Members received an update on the implementation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) in South West Wales, which was noted to be a key pillar of delivery for the Regional Economic Delivery Plan.

Officers explained that in previous updates the Committee had been informed of the timescales from UK Government and the creation of the Regional Investment Plan, detail of which was outlined in section one of the circulated report; and the steps that had been taken to proceed with implementation, which could be found in section two of the circulated report.

It was noted that the key difference with the programme in South West Wales, compared to some of the other regions, was that a series of anchor projects had been created in line with the overarching project. Officers highlighted that some of the anchor projects were deployed across all four Local Authorities, such as the business development theme, to ensure that there was regional consistency whilst also allowing each Local Authority area to adapt implementation of that programme to its own particular requirements. It was mentioned that this also applied to other themes such as rural, place making activity and supporting communities.

The Committee was informed that under 4% of the programme was being used for administration, which compared to previous programmes, was considerably cheaper; Officers confirmed that this was one of the positive elements of this programme.

Officers stated that during the early stages of this programme, they took a view there needed to be as much delegation and flexibility as possible, whilst maintaining a consistent approach; in some instances where Local Authorities had open call for standalone projects, they were also required to discuss what they were proposing with anchor leads, particularly around the business and employability themes. It was noted that this had resulted in very strong local networks operating at local level, which was equally as important as those partnerships at national level.

It was mentioned that there were good quantities of monitoring information now coming through, which Elected Members will be receiving at local level through extensive quarterly monitoring reports; these reports will summarise the information that every project was producing, including the spend data and good news stories highlighting businesses and communities that had received support.

Officers highlighted that they met with Welsh Government colleagues to ensure that officials were fully briefed on proposals in order to check that they didn't conflict with what Welsh Government were proposing from their level. For example, with business grants, any

referral must go through Business Wales as a requirement of receiving grant support in order to ensure that businesses received the full support available and that it linked in with Welsh Government priorities.

Members were informed that outcomes of projects were starting to come in; there was more than £1million being committed to just under 500 businesses across the region. In addition, Officers were seeing developments with job creation; including startup companies, some of which were taking space in the high streets which complemented the Transforming Towns Programme.

A discussion took place in regard to the spend figures. It was stated that the profiles of the original UK Government profiles, submitted with the Regional Investment Plan, have yet to be updated; therefore, whilst it does look as though there was a considerable lag against profile, it was commensurate with the general view that the programme was approximately two quarters behind. It was noted that this was due to the delays of the programme being approved in December 2022 and the consequence impact on Local Authorities having to mobilise with a level of uncertainty over whether the programme was going to be continuing; this lends to the case that Local Authorities would like to see the programme be extended by at least two quarters, preferably longer, to allow more time for the programme to fully realised its outcomes. It was added that this was reflected in the graphs contained in the circulated report.

The circulated report also contained some of the headline figures for the region, in terms of the space being created, people going into employment and the number of enterprises being supported; for example, £5.2 million worth of business grants had been awarded to date and this was still ongoing. Officers expressed their views on the how the region was working very cohesively together; Officer level relationships were strong and relationships with external partners were equally strong, and people were broadly content with the way in which the programme was operating as it was more flexible and less onerous than previous arrangements. It was added that the key element was tangibly making a difference in communities.

It was highlighted that the Chair of the Economic Wellbeing and Regional Economic Development Sub Committee had written to Government requesting additional time to ensure finalisation of the projects.

Members expressed that it had been demonstrated regionally how good this model was and its suitability for running schemes such as this; it had been made clear that they did not want to revert back to the previous model that was used. It was queried whether it would be useful to undertake a piece of work on lessons learnt and what future programmes could look like. Officers explained that the Regional Investment Framework team in Welsh Government would be issuing a survey over the next few weeks, and therefore Officers had already started compiling information and data in readiness for this; there was a lot of information about how this model was having a genuine impact for what was a relatively small sum of money compared to the sums that were available previously.

The Committee expressed thanks to the teams involved in progressing this programme of work.

5. **Forward Work Programme**

The Forward Work Programme was noted.

6. **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items received.

CHAIRPERSON