

# REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

## REPORT CARD

April - December 2015 (cumulative) 2015-2016

### Brief description of the service

The Regeneration and Economic Development team delivers a wide range of services such as leading on the delivery of major construction, development and regeneration projects and public realm enhancements; supporting the local economy through activities which assist in the development and growth of sustainable new and existing businesses and promoting and maintaining a healthy and inclusive labour market through the delivery of projects such as Workways Plus.

**Regeneration:** There are currently 6 people working within this part of the team delivering services that help to secure funding from external sources such as Convergence, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Regeneration Investment Fund for Wales (RIFW), Heritage Lottery, Vibrant & Viable Places and Regional Property Development Fund to assist in the delivery and preparation of industrial, commercial and retail development schemes and public realm improvements. They also have the lead role in taking forward the housing-led Vibrant & Viable Places programme in Port Talbot; the regeneration of Aberavon Seafront; the re-development of Neath Town Centre as well as various environmental and heritage improvement schemes throughout the County Borough.

**Economic Development:** This part of the team has 7.5 FTE people involved in delivering business support services to meet the needs of individual local businesses. The service involves administering the Council's loan and grant schemes, delivering specialist business advice in areas such as business planning, website development, marketing and tendering and providing a comprehensive signposting facility to other business support organisations such as Business Wales. Work is also undertaken in partnership with other Councils, national and local organisations, community bodies and businesses within the region on delivering business support programmes as part of the Swansea Bay City Region.

**Employment Support:** Following the success of the Workways project, a new application has been developed and submitted to WEFO for European Social Fund (ESF) funding to deliver a further employment support project. Approval of funding for the new Workways Plus project is imminent, and once given the ahead, the new project will employ 15 FTE staff supporting people across the region to overcome barriers which prevent them from finding work.

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### Service Performance (April – December 2015)

During the first ten months of 2015/16, the team have made excellent progress in delivering their key actions:

- Secured £10.1m from the Welsh Government's Vibrant & Viable Places regeneration programme to deliver a £30m regeneration programme in Port Talbot in partnership with the public, private and third sector. Projects include Green Park Redevelopment; Housing Renewal works; Former Fire Station Employability Centre; Glanafan School; Port Talbot Police Station; Plaza Cultural Centre and the Integrated Transport Hub.
- Developed pedestrian links and brown field land at Harbourside to bring forward further commercial development opportunities helping maintain and attract investment into the local economy.
- Attracted high quality business investment to purpose built accommodation such as the Research and Development Village in Port Talbot Harbourside and Baglan Bay Innovation Centre.
- Delivered the first phase of Neath Town Centre redevelopment including a new 600 space multi-storey car park and 23,000 square foot of new retail space.
- Established a Business Improvement District for Neath to make improvements in the trading environment of Neath Town Centre.
- Secured funding for Neath Food and Drink Festival helping to attract visitors to Neath Town Centre as well as showcase local food and drink producers.
- Secured Rural Development Plan funding to employ a Business Development Officer to work with tourism businesses within rural communities to enhance investment in tourism infrastructure and help bring forward business development projects.

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- Maximised community benefit clauses in key construction contracts and encouraged supply chain development by introducing local businesses to main contractors on key regeneration projects and helping them tender more effectively.

To date this year, the team have completed 5 projects helping 75 local residents get back into work, more than 270 apprenticeships; traineeships & work experience opportunities and over 90 local businesses securing new contracts.

- Developed the business plan for Workways+ to apply for approx. £7.5m of funding to support people into work across the region. Staff structures and offices are in place and final approval for the project is imminent.
- Supported economic growth across the County Borough by providing support to help local businesses create new employment opportunities and safeguard existing jobs.

To date this year, helped 73 local businesses create nearly 160 new employment opportunities and safeguard a further 125 jobs. When compared to the same period for 2014/15, there is a slight increase and the team are on track to achieve the Corporate Improvement Plan target.

- Promoted self-employment to over 80 local people through Enterprise Clubs and the facilities available at Sandfields Business Centre.
- Help new businesses start-up through the Council's Innov8 programme of support.

To date this year, helped 27 new businesses start-up which is slightly down on the same period in 2014/15, but is progressing well to achieving the Corporate Improvement Plan target.

- Dealt with over 450 business requests for advice, information or financial support from existing companies as well as over 180 enquiries for business start-up information and support. Both are slightly down on the same period in 2014/15, but it is

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anticipated that Corporate Improvement Plan targets will be achieved.

### Key Priorities for 2015/16

- Secure both public and private sector external funding to bring forward industrial, commercial, retail and housing-led regeneration programmes to create a business environment that attracts investment opportunities.
- Support economic growth by providing support to help local businesses create new employment opportunities, safeguard existing jobs and attract new high quality business investment.
- Secure funding to support the development and investment in tourism infrastructure and business development projects.
- Promote self-employment to local people and the facilities available at Sandfields Business Centre.
- Maximise community benefit clauses to encourage local employment, training and work experience opportunities.
- Encourage the development of supply chains by working with local businesses to help them tender more effectively.
- Work with partners to deliver the Workways+ project supporting people into work across the region.

### Financial

- FFP savings being delivered - 1 member of staff has recently retired via the Council's ER/VR policy. Additional income is being raised via rent and service charge at Sandfields Business Centre.
- As at end of December 2016, the service is operating within budget. However, regeneration has been successful in securing a significant amount of external funding which has enabled the Council to take forward key regenerations projects.

### Employee/Staffing

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- 169 days sick from 01/04/2015 – 31/12/2015 which is an average of 10.2 days per employee. This is just above the council average of 9.4 days but was due to 3 members undergoing routine operations.
- Staff Morale - staff survey developed by Corporate Strategy to be completed in 2016. In the present climate of uncertainty, pay cuts, pay freezes, ER/VR, LA re-organisation and the possibility of job losses, this will be a useful exercise to help staff morale and general feeling amongst staff.
- Staff PDR's to be completed by end of March 2016.
- Staff Training is an on-going process and the next round of PDR's will highlight any training needs going forward.
- To date, there have been no unplanned employee departures but two secondment opportunities have been agreed:
  - Assistant Business Development Officer has taken up the post of Senior Communications Officer within the Corporate Strategy & Democratic Services department on a 12 month contract.
  - Neath Town Centre Manager taken up the post of Marketing Officer for Swansea Bay City Region on an 18 month contract.
- Recruitment of 15 posts for the new Workways+ project completed - start dates pending European funding approval.

### Customers

The Regeneration & Economic Development service has received one complaint this year from an applicant that was not awarded business start-up funding. Feedback was provided to the individual and there has been no further correspondence.

On a more positive note, the service receives many compliments from local businesses on their support and assistance provided by the team.

A Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire has also been developed to capture feedback on business support service and this will be used to improve the loan and grant application process going forward.

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