

Priority 1 - Good Quality Jobs and the Skills to do them

<i>There aren't enough job opportunities within reach of many valleys, there are too many zero hour contracts and too much temporary and agency work.</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Explore all options to target investment and create new strategic hubs in specific areas.	<p>We are supportive of the priority being given by the Ministerial Task Force to creating jobs within the reach of valley communities.</p> <p>As this is a plan for valleys communities we believe that the proposals incorporated in the Plan should be specific to the valleys. For this reason we believe that strategic hubs to support economic growth within valley communities should be sited in the valleys, not in Neath.</p> <p>We consider that the A465 places Glynneath in a prime location for economic growth however, opportunities are impeded by the flood risk identified for the area. We would urge the Welsh Government to develop, with Natural Resources Wales, to develop a strategic solution to the flood risk that has been identified.</p>
2. Relocate more public sector jobs into the Valleys.	<p>We fully endorse this proposal. Local government has not been able to sustain jobs and services in some instances due to the difficult financial environment. We would welcome the relocation of public bodies from areas in South Wales where the economy is less reliant on public sector jobs.</p>
3. Make more publicly-owned land and property available in the Valleys for development – no comments	<p>We support this proposal but would also reiterate the point made above about the need to tackle flood risk in a strategic way that would make more land available in key locations.</p> <p>Examples would include: land adjacent to the A465 in Glynneath; Land at Cefn Coed Museum</p>
4. Maximise job opportunities in the local foundational economy.	<p>We believe that business support, possibly using a model along the lines of the Sandfields Young Business Centre would assist in developing existing businesses and in encouraging new businesses to grow within valley communities. It will be important that such support can be accessed by community based organisations, not only for-profit enterprises.</p> <p>Training provision, geared to the employment opportunities within valley communities is also an essential element to growing jobs within the</p>

	<p>valley communities eg care sector; retail etc Specific support for entrepreneurs is another element of support that should be included in the Plan. The Council would be open to trialling new models for incubating new enterprises for example models set out by James Earl in his recent paper.</p> <p>Existing employability scheme arrangements need to be simplified and rationalised. There are too many individual programmes, sometimes competing for the same customers. There needs to be more emphasis on job creation to better balance the support for people seeking employment with those creating employment.</p> <p>These elements lend themselves to development through community hubs within each valley area. Those hubs could either be developed from existing organisations or could complement those that already exist. A key requirement to sustain and develop a network of community hubs (we see these as distinct from public service hubs) would be the provision of adequate core funding which would allow the organisations to employ and retain competent business managers who have the time to develop their hub services including attracting in new sources of funding. It must be emphasised that in some of the valley communities, it is simply not currently possible to operate organisations of this type on a for – profit basis and therefore while the aim to be self sustaining might be achievable in some valleys, in other valleys this will not be so.</p>
<p>5. Support the creation of more digital jobs in the Valleys and develop two digital technology hubs.</p>	<p>Broadband and mobile infrastructure needs to be prioritised to ensure there is fit for purpose digital infrastructure in all valley communities.</p> <p>We would wish a digital/tech hub to be created in the western valley areas and see this as complementing other projects contained within the City Deal proposition.</p>
<p>6. Roll-out Better Jobs Closer to Home in the Valleys.</p>	<p>We support this aspiration however, we would like more detail of how this aspiration will be fulfilled. We have set out above some of the basic infrastructure needs that will need to be addressed: business support; employment support; connectivity. Transport is also a critical factor which will require detailed consideration for this area, as we are not within the Cardiff</p>

	<p>City Deal area which will benefit from the metro proposals.</p> <p>We also believe that there is a need to provide additional facilities for SMEs. Our occupancy rates of industrial units is consistently above 90% and there is a need to develop additional capacity to support existing businesses to grow and to encourage new businesses to establish themselves in the valley areas.</p> <p>There is an urgent need to consider how access to public procurement could be made easier particularly for SMEs operating in both the profit and not-for-profit sectors. As well helping to create jobs, this would also help deliver on the Welsh Government's carbon reduction agenda.</p>
7. Exploit the job creation potential from major infrastructure investment.	This proposal appears to be specifically linked to the Cardiff City Deal
8. Maximise the creation of green jobs and business opportunities from investment in energy efficiency.	We fully support this. A priority for us is the delivery of the homes as power station project within the City Deal. It has the potential to not only create employment, but to also address affordable housing objectives, carbon reduction objectives and contribute to the reduction in income inequalities recorded for the county borough.
<i>Businesses want more support to set up and grow their businesses</i>	
Action	
1. Better align business support for start-ups and existing businesses. Improve the conversion of initial enquiries.	<p>Please see the comments made earlier.</p> <p>Additionally, we would encourage a review of Business Wales activity to ensure that there is a more local, face to face, service available within valley communities.</p>
2. For 100 of the valleys businesses with the greatest growth potential.	See earlier comments
<i>Do more to help people get the jobs which are available.</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Provide targeted careers advice to help young people access jobs, particularly in new and growth sectors and also entrepreneurial opportunities.	We offer to pilot new approaches that can help identify entrepreneurs during full time education and to provide supportive environments within which they can experiment and develop business ideas.

2. Provide access to a bespoke package of skills support.	Please see earlier comments
3. Provide support and training for people who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive to gain skills to secure a job.	Please see earlier comments
4. Deliver a shared apprenticeship model to stimulate the market in STEM, health, tourism, hospitality, farming, woodland management and micro-hydro technology.	We support this proposal and look forward to having more information as to how this can be delivered in practice
5. Create more apprenticeship opportunities.	Please see earlier comments
6. Help students in college, work-based learning and university to maintain and develop their Welsh-language skills to meet demand in key sectors.	We fully support this. We would wish to reinforce the point made earlier about support to grow more jobs in the first instance as well as ensuring employment support is targeted towards those job opportunities that are available.
<i>Availability and the cost of childcare in some areas can act as a deterrent to returning to work.</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Start to deliver and test the Welsh Government's childcare offer in parts of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Caerphilly from September 2017. Pilot the offer throughout Blaenau Gwent.	<p>We agree that affordable childcare is an important factor to address in helping people into work.</p> <p>We believe that the approach has to be affordable in both policy terms and in relation to those who would wish to use such services. We also want to emphasise the importance of out of school places and do not want to see a policy approach that would undermine the viability of existing child care businesses.</p>
2. Work with the National Day Nurseries Association on a bid to the WCVA's active inclusion fund.	No comment on this proposal
<i>There is a lack of consistent, fully-informed careers advice for young people.</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Fast-track the introduction of Careers Wales' new education business exchange service in the Valleys in 2017.	<p>It is crucial that valley communities have fit for purpose connectivity so that young people based in valley communities are not disadvantaged.</p> <p>We believe that career advice needs to be significantly strengthened and look forward to seeing the detail of the Welsh Government's proposed approach.</p>
2. Strengthen industry-led engagement in schools and local communities to encourage young people to consider careers in digital industries.	We agree with this – however, what will be the means to deliver this aspiration?
3. Work with businesses to understand current	We would also encourage Welsh Government to

and future digital skills needs.

give a clear priority to digital which cross cuts the whole of Government. Detailed research into SME capability is critical as is investment in helping the existing SME sector to position itself to operate in a digital environment

Priority 2 – Better Public Services

<i>Public Services need to be better joined up</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Undertake ground breaking work in the three valleys.	We have fully supported the work in Banwen/Glynneath and will continue to support the initiative. We are also happy to facilitate dialogue with the valleys within the county borough that are not part of the pilots to tease out any further learning that may be beneficial to the Welsh Government.
2. Work with local councils to develop a joined-up, responsive early years system, which puts the unique needs of each child at its heart.	We are supportive of more joined up early years arrangements and would encourage the Welsh Government to review funding and other mechanisms to ensure that they facilitate better integration rather than impeding integration.
<i>Facilities and services for communities should be better used.</i>	
Action	Members Comments
1. Use existing, and create new, community hubs in which the NHS, social services, schools and job centres work together with the third sector to provide services for local communities	<p>There are a number of existing community hubs which have deep roots in their communities and clearly are providing services the communities want. That is the reason why they are viable. There is scope to strengthen these hubs and connect them firmly to the aspirations set out in the consultation paper. Sustainable core funding is a key requirement for achieving this as mentioned above. It must be recognised that these organisations create jobs in their own right and often provide services where others will not. They are critical to the foundational economy in valley communities. Where required the hubs should be able to access the business and entrepreneurship support referenced earlier to help build further capacity and capability.</p> <p>We would consider a public service hub to be materially different from a community hub. There are already examples where public service organisations share facilities. This can be built upon. Ensuring there is fit for purpose connectivity is a fundamental requirement for expanding on current arrangements.</p>
2. Build on the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools programme to focus on the co-location of services and the community use of school buildings	We are supportive of the concept of community schools which features within our existing Strategic School Improvement Programme
3. Expand the use of highly-skilled business managers to support and increase connections between local communities and schools.	We support this.
<i>Health services need to be better equipped to deal with an aging population. There should also be</i>	

better join-up between GPs and non-clinical services.

Actions	Members Comments
1. Test new approaches to improve access to mental health and personal wellbeing support.	<p>A pre-requisite to this is that people are properly paid and trained.</p> <p>Care services, whoever provides them, must be seen as an equal priority alongside health services and be funded appropriately.</p> <p>It is important that any new approaches are supported by primary care professionals, especially GPs.</p>
2. Develop training opportunities and career pathways for people living in the Valleys in a range of key health and social services roles	We would be prepared to work with Welsh Government to develop new models of service that suit valley communities. The idea of co-operatives being developed to provide quality, fairly priced care is something we would be interested in pursuing.
3. Develop a widening access programme for young people from the Valleys who want a career in health and social care.	We support this as an aspiration. There will be a need to consider the form of entry level jobs that could support young people entering care and health services which is currently restricted due to the way in which regulations apply.

People do not feel supported by mental health services.

Actions	Members Comments
1. Prioritise the Valleys for the roll-out of the wellbeing bond - a new initiative designed to help increase physical activity and mental wellbeing.	<p>We are supportive of this in principle, however, the funding model would need to be carefully developed to ensure the use of wellbeing bonds delivers the anticipated outcomes and financial results.</p> <p>This initiative must also be seen as inter-related to the other elements discussed in this consultation response.</p>
2. Promote social prescribing, including new ways to connect people with mental health support.	<p>In principle this is a good idea, however, capacity has to be created in the services that GPs would be referring people into. It must not be assumed that the existing capacity could support increased numbers of people diverted from health services. There will need to be a corresponding transfer of resources.</p> <p>Additionally, all GPs would need to be prepared to embrace this proposal.</p>

Poor quality housing and too many empty properties can have a detrimental impact on the wider community and can be the cause of anti-social behaviour.

Actions	Members Comments
1. Work with Valleys councils to improve public support for energy conservation and home improvement measures.	Reference there can't support that but we already have the city deal, whole house retro fit around properties and make that a link.

	LA used to run grant schemes to put a roof on, renovation grants discretionary. Don't do those grants anymore
<i>There continues to be a shortage of good-quality, affordable housing.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Use the opportunities provided by the South Wales Metro to reinvigorate housing in the Valleys.	This is specific to the Cardiff City Region
2. Widen housing choice by unlocking stalled housing sites through joint working with the city deal partnerships.	
3. Support local builders to build the homes people need through a new partnership between local Valleys councils and Finance Wales.	We consider that encouraging self-builds and creating the environment for cooperatives in the valleys would be viable proposals. This should include provision of adapted properties for older and disabled people.
4. Explore new housing options in the most disadvantaged communities through joint working between registered social landlords in the Valleys.	This could be facilitated through making available developable land as discussed earlier in this consultation response. Assistance in packaging land etc for housing and other developments would be beneficial. It is considered that there are gaps in this area following the demise of the former WDA
<i>Public transport is disjointed, expensive and prevents people accessing employment, education and training.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Ensure the proposed South Wales Metro hubs act as key community points, providing a focus for housing, health, education and other public service investments.	This relates to the Cardiff City Deal However, addressing transport between, within and from/to the valley communities in this county borough is a critical priority and is one that must be addressed in a satisfactory way if any of the other intended proposals and related outcomes are to be realised.
2. Work with rail and bus providers to ensure public transport throughout the Valleys is more frequent and affordable and that it links to active travel.	The western valleys will not be direct beneficiaries of the Cardiff Metro proposals. However, there are opportunities for developing existing mineral rail links in some of the western valleys which could provide part of the solution to addressing transport needs which are one of the most critical issues facing the valley communities in this county borough. We already have a strong community transport organisation and would look for support to help the organisation diversify its offer and extend that offer to the other valley communities. This development work could include incorporation of electric bikes, community car schemes etc. We would urge Welsh Government to strongly

	oppose the UK government's proposals to alter permitting arrangements for existing community transport organisations.
3. Improve public transport services to better reflect the needs of local communities and businesses.	See above
4. Explore the feasibility of expanding a young people's discounted fare scheme across public transport.	Encouraging more young people to use public transport through discounted travel schemes is an idea we would support. This would encourage active living and also contribute to carbon reduction targets.
5. Pilot new bus routes and expand the availability of community transport across the Valleys.	See above
6. Improve the availability of travel information using digital technology.	This would be a necessary support for all transport developments

Priority 3 – My Local Community

<i>We are not making the most of the rich natural resources and cultural heritage of the Valleys.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Explore the development of a Valleys Landscape Park.	<p>We believe there is enormous potential in this area related to this proposal.</p> <p>Some examples of areas that would benefit from such a proposition include: East Pit; Selar nature Reserve.</p> <p>We also believe that there is a need to secure commitment to the ongoing development of existing facilities, such as the bike park and walking trails in the Afan Valley so that the area can grow its market and be competitive and attractive compared with other areas offering similar products.</p>
<i>Town centres need to be refocused.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Ensure national and local government regeneration strategies challenge the traditional model of the town centre, based on what communities want and need.	This authority has resisted out of town developments and would welcome a stronger policy commitment to this end as local efforts to sustain towns particularly in valley communities are undermined by large scale out of town developments in neighbouring areas.
2. Explore the impact of free car parking on town centres in the Valleys.	We would question the evidence base for a blanket approach of this nature.
<i>Renewable energy provides real opportunities for local communities.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Support the development of locally-owned community renewable energy schemes in the Valleys.	We would welcome additional support for our Dulais Valley cluster project; our RDP community energy schemes and our homes as power station initiatives.
2. Develop new mechanisms for managing and using energy generated through renewable schemes with the ultimate aim of the Valleys powering its own communities.	As above
3. Work with local and national partners to tackle fuel poverty in the Valleys and meet decarbonisation targets.	As above
<i>There is a need to increase tourism in the area, focusing on the Valley's heritage and natural beauty.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Develop a new, positive narrative for tourism in the Valleys and identify projects to meet current and future tourism demand.	<p>We agree that there is an urgent need to change the narrative about the valleys and to exploit the tourism potential.</p> <p>We need a specific focus on promoting what the valleys can offer</p>

	<p>Some of the assets that would benefit from additional promotion and development include: cycleways; the cultural heritage in Cwmavon (birth place of Richard Burton, Ivor Emmanuel and Rebecca Evans); the potential of Cefn Coed; the waterfall and canal offer at Aberdulais; Afan Forest Park; the potential to develop the East Pit site</p> <p>These tourism products will in turn create other business opportunities and could link to a community hub network as discussed earlier in the paper.</p>
2. Identify opportunities to attract new events to the Valleys.	As well as identifying opportunities to attract new events, it is important that the support to do this in an effective and sustainable way in place.
<i>The physical environment needs to be better maintained and fly-tipping and littering must be tackled.</i>	
Actions	Members Comments
1. Improve the physical environment of communities by investing in green infrastructure.	This council has a strong record of maintaining its environment, however, this is being gradually eroded as budget cuts eat into maintenance programmes, enforcement capacity etc.
2. Co-ordinate action with local communities and businesses in areas affected by littering and fly-tipping.	There is already strong community involvement across valley communities to achieve this