

Council for Economic Development

Summary

To provide an update regarding the Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys' delivery plan – 'Our Valleys, Our Future'.

Background

1. The taskforce was set up by the Welsh Government in July 2016 after the National Assembly for Wales election and the EU referendum. It is chaired by Alun Davies, the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services. Ken Skates, the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport; Julie James, the Leader of the House and Chief Whip; and Eluned Morgan, the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning; also sit on the taskforce.

The other taskforce members are:

- Ann Beynon, chair of the Cardiff Capital Region Board
 - Andrew Diplock, entrepreneur, business advisor and Angel Investor
 - Judith Evans, principal of Coleg Y Cymoedd
 - Dr Chris Jones, Interim Chair of Health Education and Improvement Wales
 - Martin Mansfield, general secretary, Wales TUC
 - Cllr Andrew Morgan, leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council
 - Professor Brian Morgan, Cardiff University
 - Jocelyn Davies, former Plaid Cymru Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration
 - Fiona Jones, director of work services Wales and national employer and partnership team, Department for Work and Pensions
 - Gaynor Richards, director, Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service
2. The taskforce was established to build on the strengths and assets of the Valleys communities to develop a new approach to investing in the future of the most economically deprived areas of the South Wales Valleys, ensuring every individual has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The purpose of the taskforce is to shape and to bring the full weight of Welsh Government resources to bear on the issues facing the Valleys.
 3. On 20 July 2017 Our Valleys, Our Future, the high-level plan for the Valleys was launched. This plan outlined three priorities: good-quality jobs and the right skills to do them; better public services and local communities. The plan was developed following feedback from people living and working in the Valleys. It set out a range of aims and actions in each of the three priority areas, including:
 - closing the employment gap between the South Wales Valleys and the rest of Wales by getting an additional 7,000 people into work by 2021 and creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs;

- launching three pathfinder projects to look at how services and local delivery can be better joined-up in Llanhilleth, Ferndale and in Glynneath / Banwen;
 - exploring the development of a Valleys Landscape Park, which has the potential to help local communities use their natural and environmental resources for tourism, energy generation and health and wellbeing purposes.
4. A delivery plan, which sits alongside Our Valleys, Our Future, was published on 7 November 2017. In collaboration with key stakeholders, the action needed to make each commitment a reality was identified. There are more than 60 actions detailed in this delivery plan, together with their expected outcomes, how they will be delivered and the stakeholders involved in delivery.
 5. The Valleys plan is not a plan for the Valleys, but a plan from the Valleys. It was designed and published as a consequence of conversations that the taskforce had with people across the whole of the Valleys region. The taskforce has invested time in listening to and working together with people from across the Valleys and will continue to work in this way.
 6. The taskforce is supported by the Valleys Taskforce Board, consisting of senior officials from across all Government departments and external representatives from health, education, housing and city deals. Its purpose is to:
 - provide clear, realistic, evidence-based advice and recommendations to inform and steer the work of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys to help achieve the ambition and vision set out in “Our Valleys, Our Future”;
 - lead and take overall responsibility for the successful delivery of the key actions and activities set out in “Our Valleys, Our Future”.

Collaboration and engagement

7. Working with people living and working in the South Wales Valleys, the Ministerial Taskforce is key to shaping the work of the Welsh Government, particularly in changing and setting government policy in relation to the Valleys. The purpose of the taskforce isn't to establish new bureaucracies, or to establish new forms of delivery, but to bring people together, acting as a catalyst for change, to look for solutions to questions that have been facing us for some generations.
8. To succeed, the taskforce will bring all the resources of the Welsh Government and its many partners together to support the Valleys. A wide number of public sector organisations (including the Welsh Government; local authorities; the two city deals; the NHS; schools and universities), third sector partners and private businesses will need to work together to deliver the actions outlined in “Our Valleys, Our Future”. As work on the delivery plan is taken forward, engagement with the public and businesses across the Valleys will continue. They hold the key to success of the plan; they have shaped the plan and their ongoing support is essential to deliver the ambitions set out within it. This work will complement, and align with, the work Public Services Boards are undertaking in their areas.

Good quality jobs and the skills to do them

9. The plan sets an ambitious target of helping 7,000 unemployed or economically-inactive people living in the Valleys into fair work through creating thousands of new, fair, secure and sustainable jobs in the Valleys by 2021.
10. As part of achieving this stretching target seven locations for strategic hubs across the South Wales Valleys have been identified in the delivery plan: Caerphilly/Ystrad Mynach, Neath, Northern Bridgend, Ebbw Vale, Pontypridd/Treforest, Merthyr Tydfil and Cwmbran). These will be areas where public investment will be focussed to provide opportunities for private sector investment and the creation of new jobs and opportunities. Since November a series of seminars have been held in these hub areas, working with Local Authorities and stakeholders to identify projects which can be funded and delivered in the first phase of development in each of the strategic hub sites by 2021. The last of these seminars was held in Ebbw Vale on 29 January 2018. Project proposals will be considered and an initial costed investment programme for each of the hubs announced in April 2018.
11. There is an opportunity through the energy and investment being planned for new initiatives, such the Cardiff Capital City Region City Deal (which includes the South Wales Metro) and Swansea Bay City Region City Deal, aligned to our wider regional working approach, to bring together existing businesses, local government, third sector, civic organisations into developing a cohesive plan to promote the region for investment as well as to co-ordinate existing investment in a smarter way.
12. Another significant area for action in “Our Valleys, Our Future” is the foundational economy. This is a really important part of the economy for the Valleys and creating and taking advantage of new opportunities across a range of sectors, including childcare, where the Welsh Government is in the process of developing the UK’s most generous offer for working parents of three and four-year-olds and social care will be key.
13. A bespoke, integrated package of support is being made available to those Valleys businesses with the greatest growth potential. It is essential to ensure that businesses, employers and entrepreneurs are aware of the different types of support available to help them to create new jobs and boost their local economy. As part of the new economic development strategy Welsh Government has introduced a new economic contract. Any business or employer benefitting in some way from Welsh Government support will be expected to commit to or support the fair work agenda.

Better public services

14. Through our discussions with communities and other stakeholders it was noted that there are some good public services in the Valleys but they're not always as joined-up as they could be. Three senior government officials have been appointed as Valleys Pathfinders to three communities - Llanhilleth, Glynneath/Banwen and Ferndale. They are looking at how services and local delivery can be better integrated and identifying any barriers preventing communities from reaching their full potential. These pathfinder projects will drive change within Welsh Government as well as help improve local services in each of the three communities.
15. Work is also underway to explore the role of community hubs in providing integrated public services. Mapping work is underway to determine:
- where are the community hubs in Valleys local authorities;
 - what services do they offer;
 - are there any identified gaps;
 - are there opportunities for improvements.
- A similar exercise has mapped all the contributions from Welsh Government departments which could support community hubs.
16. One of the points raised time and time again in meetings right across the Valleys has been the need for access to high-quality, affordable local transport. In addition to ensuring Valleys communities benefit from the South Wales Metro the taskforce recognise the need to work with bus and rail providers to ensure services better reflect the needs of local communities and also expanding the role of community transport and links to active travel

My local community

17. A fundamental part of "Our Valleys, Our Future" is to explore the development of a Valleys Landscape Park, which is about strengthening the Valleys as a place people are proud to call home; a place where businesses choose to invest and operate; where communities are empowered and show pride in their environment and the environment and its industrial heritage itself is an integral part of people's lifestyles.
18. Work is underway to provide a support team to lead on the development of the landscape park, which will work with communities to help them to get the most out of the natural environment and support them to overcome barriers such as access to funding and public land access.
19. Officials from the Natural Resources Policy team have been involved in a cross - organisational delivery group who are working on a more detailed description of how the landscape park will operate and the intended outcomes. This will be tested through engagement events in each of the Valleys local authority areas. This group also involves officials from the Valleys Taskforce, Visit Wales and Natural Resources Wales as well as Andrew Osborne of Torfaen CBC and David Llewellyn, Director, Blaengad CYF.

Governance

20. To understand how progress is being made over the lifespan of “Our Valleys, Our Future” progress will be monitored against the national wellbeing indicators in the South Wales Valleys.
21. As the national indicators will not always allow the measurement of progress over the short-term, an annual report will be published on the progress made each year. This will be against key targets in the plan, such as the aim of getting 7,000 economically-inactive and unemployed people into fair work.
22. The delivery plan will be updated annually as actions are taken forward in collaboration with people living in the Valleys.
23. Members of the taskforce will oversee and challenge the ongoing progress of delivery against the plan. Working groups have been set up to look at specific areas of the plan and each is led / chaired by a member of the taskforce.
24. As well as progress continually being challenged by the taskforce, the programme board is accountable for overseeing, monitoring and challenging the progress made against each of the actions in the delivery plan.
25. An engagement plan will be published in the coming months which will set out how the taskforce will engage and empower people in communities throughout the South Wales Valleys to ensure these plans meet people’s needs and expectations.
26. Improving prosperity, tackling poverty and the regeneration of the South Wales Valleys is the responsibility of all Welsh Cabinet members and Ministers. A coordinated approach across government and collaboration with delivery partners is essential for success.

Recommendation

That Council members note and provide any comment on Our Valleys, Our Future.