

Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys

This is a working strategy, which outlines the main aims of the taskforce. It is supported by more detailed work plans for each of the priority areas and will be refined as the results of the engagement exercise undertaken in the first six months of 2017 are known.

Vision – What do we want to achieve by 2021?

The Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys was set up by the Welsh Government in July 2016 following the National Assembly elections and the EU referendum.

The South Wales Valleys have been the focus of numerous government-initiatives, programmes and projects since devolution and, together with West Wales, have qualified for tens of millions of pounds European structural funding as a result of the high levels of deprivation. But despite these initiatives and EU investment targeted in particular post-industrial communities, the EU referendum, in particular, highlighted a population in valleys communities which feels disenfranchised; left behind and left out from investment in Wales and on the losing end of public service reconfiguration.

The South Wales Valleys contain some of the most socially and economically deprived communities in Wales, however there are many economically-thriving towns and villages in each valley; successful and growing businesses and public services employing many tens of thousands of people locally.

By 2021, the taskforce will have brought a share of the growth seen south of the M4 corridor into the valleys and created good-quality jobs, with fair terms and conditions for employees. The taskforce will have enabled people living in the valleys to access the rights skills training to gain work and will have supported businesses to grow and thrive across the South Wales Valleys.

People living in South Wales Valleys communities will no longer feel disenfranchised and remote from the work of the Welsh Government or its priorities. They will feel as though the Welsh Government and local government have invested in and care about their communities and future.

The taskforce will have worked with the health service and with local government to improve access to local services, which respond to people's needs.

By 2021, the valleys will no longer be regarded as a place of deprivation but will be recognised as a tourist destination, attracting visitors from across the UK and beyond.

Local and community engagement

This high-level strategy and its priorities have been shaped by the work of the taskforce since its establishment in July 2016. However, it is important this is further refined by the feedback from the intensive programme of local and community engagement which will be undertaken by the taskforce during the first half of 2017.

The taskforce cannot adopt a top-down approach – it must listen to and be guided by what valleys communities feel are priorities for action. This must be built into the priorities for action and into the work plans which will support this high-level strategy.

Community engagement must be ongoing – the taskforce must be able to demonstrate how it is acting on the feedback it receives.

The taskforce must also work closely with its statutory partners in the South Wales Valleys, particularly with local authorities, which will play a key role in helping to deliver its aims. Alignment with the work of the Cardiff Capital City Deal is also vital, and with the partners involved in the Swansea Bay City Deal bid.

A detailed engagement plan supports the taskforce.

Priorities

Jobs and skills

A focus on jobs, and the skills people need to access those jobs, has been identified by the taskforce as an early priority for action. A jobs plan is being developed, which will ensure we maximise the benefits of infrastructure investment either planned or already underway, including the South Wales Metro development, broadband, housing and other transport investment. A comprehensive infrastructure plan for the valleys will also be developed.

Central to the focus on jobs and skills will be the Welsh Government's commitment to a hard target of new jobs created within the valleys and the development of all-age apprenticeships.

The taskforce will identify the factors that will support businesses to grow – this includes making business support more coherent; incentivising entrepreneurship and ensuring businesses have access to the right premises where they can grow.

The employability strategy, which is being developed by the Welsh Government, will play a key role in ensuring access to the right skills for people living in the valleys. The valleys will be used as a test bed to develop new and imaginative ways of widening opportunities involving a range of potential partners. This is another area of activity where there is scope for closer integration with emerging city deal priorities.

Other priorities for maximising jobs and skills will include:

- The future of high streets – what do we want them to look like?
- Better Jobs Closer to Home
- Challenging Welsh public services to locate posts within the valleys.

Integrated and improved public services

Three pilot programmes, based in three valleys communities, will be run by the taskforce to look at how services and local delivery can be better integrated. The aim

of the pilots is to develop a model for change which can be scaled up and delivered in other across Wales.

The pilots will be designed to address problems associated with the lack of join up at both policy and funding levels and a top-down programme approaches. They will drive change within government and benefit local communities through the provision of improved public services, particularly those which can make the biggest difference to the life chances of individuals living in the most disadvantaged communities.

A detailed prospectus for the three pilots is currently being developed.

Environment

Work in this area is at an early stage but includes the following priorities:

- Maximising the tourist potential of the South Wales Valleys – building on the region's industrial heritage and potential for outdoor activities;
- Using the valleys' natural environment to improve people's health and wellbeing – encouraging more people to be active and take advantage of the countryside on their doorstep;
- Improving the physical environment of communities – instilling a sense of pride in the valleys by tackling persistent issues of litter and fly-tipping;
- Energy generation, in partnership with local communities.

Wellbeing

The taskforce's early work has highlighted the importance of addressing the wider range of factors which affect the wellbeing of people living in some of the most deprived valleys communities, in particular those which impact on quality of life.

This work is also at an early stage but some areas of work could include:

- New forms of community engagement to impact on loneliness and isolation;
- The role of arts and culture organisations;
- The role of the NHS and social care and a new relationship with individuals based on the principles of prudent healthcare;
- Housing – the condition of existing housing stock in local communities and opportunities for new building, particularly in relation to the South Wales Metro;
- Social housing – the condition of existing housing stock and whether tenants have a strong stake in communities;
- Regeneration – more than bricks and mortar.