

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 27 July 2022

LOCATION: Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron /
remotely via video conference

TITLE: Progress on delivering the Economic Strategy

In March 2021, following consultation with key stakeholders, including a number of sessions with a sub-group of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and with the committee itself, the Cabinet of Ceredigion county Council formally adopted an Economic Strategy for Ceredigion.

This document is a Framework Economic Strategy for Ceredigion to shape Ceredigion county Council's approach and action to achieve economic growth to 2035.

The strategy is focused on the areas of influence where Ceredigion CC can make a difference to the economy – i.e. how it uses its capital, human and revenue assets to positively impact the economy in Ceredigion over that timeframe.

It focuses on four main priority areas – People, Enterprise, Place and Connectivity, with each section outlining some of the early interventions considered, how impact be measured along with who needs to be involved and a suggested timeframe for operation.

The strategy represents a framework for action, rather than a comprehensive list of actions covering the period to 2035.

This report outlines the actions that have been undertaken since its launch in March 2021.

Implementing actions within the Strategy

Many initiatives have already been developed and implemented under the strategic direction set by the Economic Strategy. A significant amount of external funding has been secured from a range of key stakeholder organisations, which will enable the building blocks for further economic growth to be put in place.

Some brief highlights are included below:

Priority 1: People

- £2.8m worth of investment has been secured from the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund, and is currently being delivered via 12 projects involving stakeholders supporting individuals and businesses directly linked to actions identified in the Economic Strategy.

- One project, led by Antur Cymru addresses increased numbers of people considering necessity-based entrepreneurship who face barriers to engaging with established business support services, such as Business Wales. The project is empowering individuals to acquire transferrable skills through participation in a project delivering basic business skills. Included in the project are two start-up hubs in Aberystwyth and Lampeter where emerging entrepreneurs can test trade and establish outlets for their goods and services.

Priority 2:Place:

Action has focused on continuing the development of the place plans, and their implementation by accessing funding from various sources to address the priorities identified.

To date, the investments secured include the following:

- £10.8m of Levelling Up Funding from UK Government for three projects to support the regeneration and development of the Harbour to Old College area of Aberystwyth
- £379k of funding from Welsh Government to support a range of projects to bring town centre assets into economic use and to enhance green infrastructure in town centres, Investment include the purchase of 10/11 Harford Square in Lampeter, and the development of a Green Infrastructure project in Market Street, Lampeter. Investments are discussed and informed by the Asset Development Panel and Development Group, and they are aligned with and Asset Development Programme agreed through the above structure and amended annually.
- A number of Welsh Government Transforming Towns Place making grants and Strategic projects have been secured for a range of partners in Ceredigion. Canolfan Creuddyn, a Barcud Housing Association project in Lampeter was completed during the summer of 2021. Funding has also been secured for the project to renovate the historic market hall in Cardigan, and work is now in progress on that ambitious and important project.
- Over £250,000 has been secured to improve access to Ceredigion's natural assets through Access Improvement Grants and the Local Places for Nature programme.
- Work continues on the detailed development of projects to secure part of the Mid Wales Growth Deal funding negotiated by the Growing Mid Wales partnership between Ceredigion and Powys County Councils. The Full Deal Agreement for a £110m capital investment programme was signed by both Welsh and UK Governments in January 2022, paving the way for projects to be developed and delivered across the region. In Ceredigion, Strategic Outline Cases have been submitted for investments in the Harbour in Aberaeron and a Food Manufacturing Innovation Centre at Food Centre Wales, Horeb.
- With the support of Leader funding through the Cynnal y Cardi programme, a Towns Development officer has been employed to engage with town representatives to help facilitate and support ideas to reinvigorate Ceredigion's rural towns.

Priority 3 –Enterprise

Work has commenced on a number of initiatives targeted at supporting the growth of new and existing businesses in Ceredigion.

- A Welsh Government funded Small Capital Grant scheme delivered in early 2021 led to almost £500,000 of grant investment in Ceredigion businesses, attracting a further £631,000 of Private sector funding. The support led to the creation of 146 new jobs in Ceredigion, and a further 408 jobs were safeguarded in 81 businesses through the investments. A further funding package worth £173,000 was secured at the start of 2022, leading to the leverage of £250,000 worth of private sector match funding across 10 businesses in Ceredigion, creating 35 new jobs and safeguarding 86.
- This scheme closely followed a 2-year programme of investments worth £500,000 as part of the Arfor programme to support and strengthen the links between economic growth and the Welsh language. The details of a further £11m Arfor programme across 4 counties that form part of the Arfor area (Ynys Môn, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire) is currently being agreed with the Welsh Government.
- Cynnal y Cardi continues to support bottom up, rural community regeneration activity through pilot projects, feasibility studies, facilitation, networking activities and training and mentoring. Since the beginning of the scheme, approximately 70 activities have been supported. Examples of some, which are currently underway include:
 - “Ceredigion360,” a feasibility to discover whether there is a desire to create and maintain lively, sustainable local area websites across areas of Ceredigion;
 - Feasibility work into the opportunities for developing “Canolfan Tir Glas Centre” on the Lampeter UWTSD campus;
 - Piloting a community fridge scheme in Aberporth;
 - Piloting bilingual, digitised learning in the outdoor environment through developing woodland-based courses;
 - Supporting with engagement activities and exploring the feasibility of the Vale of Aeron Community Pub community venture.
- Food Centre Wales’ Helix programme continues to support food business in Ceredigion and further afield with technical knowledge to enable new businesses to establish and existing ones to grow.

Priority 4 – Connectivity

- **Digital connectivity**

Current digital connectivity situation

Fibre to the premises (FTTP) – 28.3%

Superfast broadband (>30Mbps) – 86.3%

Pre February 2020, when a digital officer was employed by Ceredigion County Council, the connectivity rates were:

Fibre to the premises (FTTP) – 20%

Superfast broadband (>30Mbps) – 80.6%

Following the completion of the Superfast Cymru Programme it is expected that 90% of Ceredigion will be able to receive +30Mbps

Investment is taking place within the County with 4 differing alternative network providers proposing fibre projects across the County, with currently over 20 project areas being proposed and to be initiated in 2022 and 2023.

The Digital Programme as part of the Mid Wales Growth Deal will also have an impact on accelerating the deployment of fibre across the region through several infrastructure projects.

- **LoRaWAN**

During 2021 Ceredigion County Council have completed a project to install 40 LoRaWAN Gateways upon several Council assets in order to create a County wide LoRaWAN network. This being the most extensive network across any other Local Authority in Wales and the first Local Authority to have coverage across much of the County. As well as the Council having access, the network will also be available and accessible to all businesses, organisations and residents, with the freedom for the network to be used in the manner in which they feel most effective.

Collaborations with public sector bodies are currently being established to enable access to gateways which these organisations can make use of to develop their own projects and use cases. By doing so it will be possible to diversify the use of the network that the Council have put in place and drive innovation.

- **Ceredigion SMART Towns**

Ceredigion County Council have been successful in receiving funding to progress a project to enable 'SMART Towns' in Ceredigion. The project will initially involve the installation of wi-fi access points in Aberaeron, Llandysul, Lampeter, New Quay and Tregaron, with Aberystwyth and Cardigan already having systems in place.

As well as providing 'Town wi-fi' across each of the Towns, the equipment will provide the ability to collect anonymised data upon footfall, space usage and dwell time, and will enable Town Councils and the County Council to conduct analysis to assist towns and businesses to identify which approaches are best to improve efficiencies and the effectiveness of their business. A contractor has been appointed and are currently in discussions with Town Councils regarding appropriate installation locations.

The Economic Strategy sets out the ambition to develop and maintain a strong collaborative approach to economic growth. Ceredigion County Council officers and members have engaged with Welsh Government to help develop the **Regional Economic Framework for Mid Wales**, which sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to developing the distinctive strengths of Mid Wales, supporting sustainable economic growth and addressing regional and local

inequalities, contributing to the Well-being goals for Wales.

Future areas of focus:

The team at Ceredigion county Council, working with stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors will continue to build on the work already started summarized in the preceding section.

Within each of the 4 areas of interventions in the Economic Strategy, there remain significant challenges to tackle:

- i. **People:** Although unemployment has dropped in the county following a high during the Covid 19 pandemic, levels still remain higher than they were prior to March 2020, and of specific concern is the level of economic inactivity.
- ii. **Places:** Our town centres have faced a challenging set of circumstances since March 2020. Although town Carolyn retail vacancies are lower than they were prior to March 2020, many national chains stores have closed their operations, particularly in Aberystwyth. The team will focus efforts and investments on supporting the re-purposing of town centres, working with stakeholders in each of the towns.
- iii. **Enterprise:** In common with most of Wales, there was a spike in the number of enterprises in Ceredigion in 2020, and whilst the numbers have fallen slightly in 2021, the number of active enterprises remains higher than in 2019. However, the number of enterprises that are Mid-sized enterprises (employing between 50 people) remains low at 0.61% of total enterprises employing 7.9% of the working population employed in Ceredigion enterprises (compared with 0.83% and 12.7% for Wales). Over 72% of the working population are employed in micro and small enterprises. This has an impact on productivity and career progression opportunities.
- iv. **Connectivity:** Challenges remain in ensuring that businesses and residents in Ceredigion have access to the highest and most reliable speeds of connection to the internet.

The service regularly reviews opportunities to attract further funding to enable the implementation of aspects of the economic strategy and its component parts. One such current example is the co-ordinated work being undertaken to maximise the effectiveness of the Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver CCC's Corporate priorities for economic growth.

PURPOSE OF REPORT : **To share progress on the work being undertaken to deliver the Economic Strategy**

REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION: The Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee was consulted, and contributed fully to the process of developing the Economic Strategy prior to its publication in 2021. This is an opportunity to update members on progress one year on from its publication.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why

N/A – A Full IAA was produced to support the publication of the Economic Strategy in 2021

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Summary:

Long term:

Integration:

Collaboration:

Involvement:

Prevention:

RECOMMENDATION (S): That the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the report and provides feedback on the issues raised within it.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

To help ensure that the appropriate actions are being undertaken to support the growth of the economy in Ceredigion.

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Date of Report: 6 July 2022

Acronyms:

Appendices: