



## People Scrutiny Committee – 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

### Regeneration Scrutiny Group

**Purpose of Report:** Progress report

Meeting of the Working Group held on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2016.

The Working Group discussed with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and officers the emerging regeneration strategy arising from the recent Economic Development Workshop held on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

There is a need for a more hard edged strategy including growing and increasing the numbers of businesses. Powys is a low wage economy and the Council does not have any funding to do this. The Council has also appointed 2 officers whose role includes visiting businesses and to see what barriers there are to their growth and what the Council can do to assist. The strategy is about maintaining businesses and maintaining dialogue. The Council is also working with Mid Wales Manufacturing.

The Portfolio Holder has met the inward investment team at Welsh Government to find out how they promote Wales. Promotion is undertaken by sectors and the Council is looking as to how this could benefit Powys. The Council is in addition looking at the branding of Powys. In order to increase the numbers of visitors in Powys the Council is working with key festivals. With an aim of increasing the working population in Powys European officers are looking at opportunities for European funding, apprenticeships etc.

The Plus programme is looking at potential funding to get people back into employment (50+ as well as young people). The Council is trying to fill identified gaps.

The Workshop identified 11 priorities from 4 objectives including identifying sectors; skilful workforce; exploiting long borders; lobbying for funds; champions network to raise the profile of Powys; digitally enabled Powys; marketing and promoting Powys;

Other issues being considered included the Circuit of Wales and the lack of housing in the Newtown and the Welshpool area.

The timescale for the strategy was discussed. The draft strategy would be discussed at the Cabinet on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2016. If this is approved the Regeneration team would need to work up the projects to achieve the strategy. The Asset Management Plan will have an explicit connection to regeneration. There will also be a strategy for developing the workshop units, with some being sold and others being developed. In relation to Workshops, businesses are paying commercial rates, and the workshops are now full with everyone on the same lease. The finances of workshops is also improving. Workshops deemed to be in the wrong places will be sold and the focus

will be on those where there is a demand for them. There also needs to be an investment in the portfolio as well.

The Council has “cheap and cheerful” units but do not have any larger units. The Council is also trying to develop flexible units. The whole sector is currently making about 1% to 2% return. The Powys workshops were losing about £125,000 per year. They are now expected to show a surplus. The Council is only seeking to buy workshops where there is a demand and the Council needs to be seen as the “place to go” for business. Welsh Government policy is to build premises to the requirement of the client, but this may make not these premises sufficiently flexible for alternative use.

Some work will be undertaken with communities, but there needs to be a focus on regeneration. There needs to be reinvestment in the county farms estate and the Cabinet has agreed to this. There is also recognition that the county farms estate needs to pay for itself. Condition surveys are being undertaken on farms and it is anticipated that it will take 5 to 7 years to bring the estate up to a standard.

**Next Steps:**

- **County Farms Estate – the Portfolio Holders for Regeneration and Property to be invited to the next meeting to discuss the regeneration value / opportunities of the estate with the Working Group.**
- **Once the Cabinet has agreed the strategy the Working Group at the next meeting to scrutinise the workstreams established to deliver the strategy.**

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**Sources/background papers:**

**Membership:**

County Councillors: G.W. Ratcliffe, G.G. Hopkins, D. R. Jones, H. Lewis, K.S. Silk, G.M. Jones.