

**WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL****Report by Chief Officer (Regulatory & Regeneration)****Infrastructure Regeneration and Economic Development Committee:  
17 November 2021**

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**Subject: West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy Update**

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with an update of progress made in delivering the West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy 2015-20 and its associated action plan.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1** The Committee is invited to note the final progress made in delivering the West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy Action Plan 2015-20.

**3. Background**

- 3.1** This report provides committee with a final update on the progress made in delivering the Economic Development Strategy 2015-20 action plan which was approved by the Infrastructure, Regeneration & Economic Development Committee in September 2015.
- 3.2** In the last two years COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the economic climate and as a result the policy context at national and local level has had to change in order to address the economic downturn. This has led to an increased requirement for the development of an updated Economic Development Strategy for the local area.
- 3.3** A new Economic Development Strategy is being developed which will provide an updated economic vision and strategic priorities for West Dunbartonshire for a further five year period from 2022-2027. This will align with the anticipated Scottish Government National Strategy for Economic Transformation due later this year, the recently approved Glasgow City Regional Economic Strategy, and will also better align with the new Council administration period.

**4. Main Issues**

- 4.1** A final progress report on the implementation and delivery of the Economic Development Strategy Action Plan 2015-2020 is detailed in Appendix 1. A number of key highlights for each of the priority themes are detailed in sections 5-9 of this report.

**4.2** A number of key performance targets have been achieved through our strategic approach around the four key themes listed below:

- Stimulating economic investment and growing the business base;
- Improving the skills of all our people and supporting them into work;
- Creating an inclusive and prosperous place where people choose to live, work and invest; and
- Building stronger partnerships and innovative approaches to delivery.

## **5. Stimulating economic investment and growing the business base**

**5.1** Since March 2020, the Business Support team have successfully administered a range of Coronavirus Business Support Grant funds on behalf of the Scottish Government. To date, the team have provided **4,179** grants totalling **over £31 million** to local businesses/individuals to provide them with critical financial support throughout the pandemic.

**5.2** A Business Recovery programme has been developed and promoted to local businesses to assist them to recover after the lockdown period. The Business Recovery programme includes a range of free webinars, 1-2-1 expert help and grant support to assist businesses to adapt their properties, purchase capital equipment and to encourage them to review their business strategies and improve their on-line presence.

**5.3** The Council's Business Support team provides a range of discretionary business grants to local businesses to assist them to grow and create local jobs. During 2020/21 the team supported:

- 81 businesses have been supported with grant support to assist them to grow and create local jobs
- 33 business employees have been supported with a training grant to assist with training costs
- 42 businesses have received a start-up grant to assist them to start-up their own business

**5.4** The Business Gateway service has been successfully delivered by the Council's Business Support team since 1 October 2015. Although the team's main focus over the last year has been to administer and deliver essential COVID grant support to local businesses, the team have also continued to provide an advisory service to our local start-up and growth businesses. In 2020/21 the Business Gateway service provided:

- 200 businesses with start-up assistance
- 3 start-ups with growth potential were given early stage growth support
- 10 businesses provided with growth advisory service support

**5.5** Business start-up numbers of 200 for 2020/21 have remained broadly consistent with the previous year's figure of 206. The Scottish Local Government Benchmarking website provides information on the number of

Business Gateway start-ups per 10,000 populations for each Local Authority area. The most recent data from 2019/20 shows West Dunbartonshire are ranked 4th out of the 32 Local Authorities. During 2019/20, West Dunbartonshire supported 23.1 start-ups per 10,000 population which compares favourably with the figure of 16.4 start-ups per 10,000 populations for the whole of Scotland.

- 5.6** Last year the Business Gateway service assisted 42 businesses with ‘expert help’ support. This element of the Business Gateway service is part funded through the European Regional Development Fund and provides one-to-one support to provide advice in areas that require a high level of expertise such as Intellectual Property advice or Business Strategy Workshops.
- 5.7** The Business Gateway service also delivers a variety of free business workshops to provide advice to start-ups and established businesses. These workshops include areas such as business planning, marketing and financial planning. During 2020/21, **92** workshops were held with **528** clients attending. Since March 2020, Business Gateway workshops have been delivered through webinars to ensure clients remain safe.
- 5.8** The Business Support team are responsible for the management and delivery of the Digital Boost Programme which aims to deliver Information and Communications Technology (ICT) advice to businesses in the form of workshops and one-to-one expert advice. This is a Scottish Government Nationally funded project which from July 2017 has been managed and procured by West Dunbartonshire Council for both West and East Dunbartonshire Council areas. During 2020/21, there were 5 workshops, 2 on-line tutorials and 9 one-to-one specialist sessions delivered in the WDC area. Further funding for Phase 6 has been secured from Scottish Government to deliver similar activity for the year 2021/22.
- 5.9** During 2020/21, the Business Support team have continued to work in partnership with other local Authorities to promote the Business Loans Scotland fund which has been set up to provide loan finance to small and medium sized local businesses. Business Loans Scotland secured a contract to deliver a new Phase 2 Debt Fund, from the Scottish Government with effect from January 2019. Phase 2 is fully funded by the Scottish Growth Scheme and the European Regional Development Fund and therefore did not require any match funding contribution from the Member Authorities. During 2020/21, the fund was promoted to the local business community which has resulted in an increased number of loan enquiries.
- 5.10** The Business Support team have been assisting with the Shop Local campaign which has been developed in partnership with Regeneration team and Dunbartonshire Chamber. The business support being offered and promoted to Town Centre businesses includes:
- General advice and support
  - A range of free webinars

- Digital one-to-one surgeries - a private one hour session with a digital expert
- Free market research and market reports
- Specialist Expert Help

A Town Centre COVID Adaption Grant is also available to retail and service businesses which are located within West Dunbartonshire town centre areas to assist with the costs of adapting their premises in order to meet the Government requirements for Covid-19 physical distancing and safety. This is a discretionary funding programme which provides 50% of the business's expenditure up to a maximum grant of £1,000.

**5.11** The Business Support team are working in partnership with Firstport to support the growth of local Social Enterprises. A new Social Enterprise Challenge Fund is being developed which will provide a grant of up to £5,000 through a competitive process to ambitious social enterprises to help them to implement their growth plans and create local jobs.

## **6. Improving the skills of all our people and supporting them into work**

**6.1** Working4U is an integrated service that supports clients and communities in West Dunbartonshire to improve their skills, learning and financial situations, assisting all on their progress into work and protecting the rights of our citizens. With the onset of COVID-19 our service was reduced nevertheless we established 'Virtual Hubs' to maintain services for those that required them. Our activities continued to centre on:

- the provision of information, guidance, and support to help residents to make informed choices about debt and money, learning and employment opportunities and enjoy improved life chances;
- the provision of good quality advice and learning assisting them to make positive and sustained contributions to their community, and
- improving the employability and resilience of local residents and making a positive contribution towards increasing employment rates within our community to close the gap with Scotland employment rates.

**6.2** The specialist components of Working4U's services include the learning service which primarily supports disadvantaged or vulnerable groups and individuals of all ages to engage in learning. Our aim is to bring about positive change in their lives and communities. The learning and employability service are key components of the Employability Pathway. This covers a wide range of activity, such as employability skills, youth work, family and adult learning. It also includes adult literacy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as well as individual capacity building to develop confidence and self-esteem. Despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions in 2020/21 the Council supported:

- 454 people to enter education or training, and
- 318 people to secure a nationally recognised qualification.

**6.3** Information and Advice is set within the policy context that is designed to support a flourishing Scottish economy. Working4U contributes to this aim through the provision of debt counselling and welfare benefit advice. During 2020/2021 the Council:

- supported local residents to secure £7.8million benefit maximisation through advice and support, and
- supported residents to renegotiate and manage £1.36million of debt.

**6.4** Employability encompasses aspects that enable people to increase their chances of getting a job, staying in a job, and progressing further in work. The Council is responsive to those people in our communities with the greatest need and our drive to real jobs is pursued in partnership with organisations, agencies and employers that share our values. In 2020/21, despite the constraints placed on us by COVID-19 health controls, Working4U supported 216 residents to secure employment.

**6.5** West Dunbartonshire Council has created a £1m Apprenticeship Investment Fund to support apprenticeships over a four years period from 2018 to 2022. The fund will see £0.250m spent in each of the four years to recruit apprentices across a range of Council services and positions within the Private sector. In addition to traditional apprenticeships, we will contribute to workforce development in West Dunbartonshire Council. In 2020/21:

- 57 Apprenticeship opportunities has been supported;
- 10 opportunities within the Construction sector, and
- we supported 20 people to achieve in-work progression in the health and social care sector.

## **7. Creating an inclusive and prosperous place where people choose to live, work and invest**

**7.1** Availability of good quality homes and a choice of tenures is a fundamental component of placemaking. The latest draft strategic housing investment programme 2022-27 (SHIP) identifies 755 homes to be developed by the Council and our Registered Social Landlord partners leveraging an estimated £55.8million of grant funding from the Scottish Government over the five years of the plan. The Council has high levels of housing need in West Dunbartonshire and therefore officers will work closely with colleagues in other teams to deliver more housing of all tenures and ensure that our housing is the best it can be across the council area.

**7.2** Officers will continue to work with our colleagues to review the private housing market and ensure there is an adequate supply of private housing sites. Any investment in housing reaps rewards beyond the home itself and in addition to this our procurement processes include significant community benefits including apprenticeships, school engagement and investment in community spaces such as gardens, and to improve the resilience of town centres and to create 20 minute neighbourhoods.

- 7.3** The Local Economic Development (LED) annual Capital Budget of £1m plays an important role in developing shovel ready projects that can attract external funding as those opportunities arise. The budget is also used as match funding to lever in external funding; recent examples of which include the Green Infrastructure funded Melford Park at the former St Eunan's primary school site; RCGF-funded Clydebank Can on the Canal Activities Centre and Viresco Studios; and Sustrans funded Connecting Dumbarton. LED has funded long term visioning for our towns and communities, as demonstrated in the Alexandria Masterplan and Clydebank Town Centre Development Framework. The Regeneration Fund of £12.4m was agreed at Council on 28 October 2015 to support development and regeneration projects where a return would be achieved, whether in terms of wider economic growth or financial returns. To date, Regeneration Fund has been invested in several initiatives including the proposed Scottish Marine Technology Park at Carless; further development of the innovative District Heating Centre at Queens Quay. Regeneration Fund will also part-fund the repurposing of Glencairn House as a library, museum and community space and contribute to the acquisition of the Artizan centre.
- 7.3** The Council's investment of £15.62m in Queens Quay over the past five years has helped fund the infrastructure needed to prepare the site for redevelopment. In collaboration with the development partners, good progress has been made on key developments, including the completion of the energy centre, new Care home, Wheatley developed flats and the new NHS Clydebank health centre. Housing development plots are being marketed to fulfil the ambition of delivering 1,000 new homes on Queens Quay. The redevelopment of this site will be transformational for all our communities in Clydebank and through implementation of Clydebank Town Centre Development Framework stronger links with the town centre and public transport will follow.
- 7.4** The West Dunbartonshire Energy centre started delivering heat in November 2020. The Leisure centre, Care Home, Titan Enterprise, and Aurora House were the initial four customers connected. The District Heating network is performing well and the newly established West Dunbartonshire Energy LLP is overseeing its growth. The 147 Wheatley flatted units on Titan Boulevard are current connected as the development nears its completion and we are progressing with Clydebank Housing Association for flats on Dumbarton road seeking to connect. Plans continue to secure funding to connect West College Scotland, the Golden Jubilee Hospital, and agreement to connect the Clydebank Health centre. The Council are also pursuing funding from the Scottish Government Green Growth Accelerator fund to enable expansion and connection to the Dalmuir flats and officers continue to work with the Queens Quay landowners to bring in 1,000 new homes. The Energy centre has recently won a European Heat Pump award and many more awards of recognition are anticipated in the next year as the facility is showcased globally during COP26.

- 7.5** Good placemaking will continue to underpin the regeneration, development and improvement work in the town centres as we aim to align funding and resources, both Council and external funding, to achieve our ambitions. Building on the successes of previous charrettes in Clydebank and Dumbarton, our collaboration with local community groups, citizens and stakeholders has been instrumental in the production of Alexandria Masterplan and Clydebank Town Centre Framework. The improvements we have delivered in the town centres over the past five years have been guided by placemaking and more recently, the move to creating 20 minute neighbourhoods - where people have their day to day needs provided within easy walking or cycling distance. For environmental and health & wellbeing reasons active and sustainable transport is now one of the regeneration priorities; Connecting Clydebank, Connecting Dumbarton and the proposed Green Corridors project in Alexandria Masterplan will contribute to this ambition.
- 7.6** Scottish Government Town Centre Fund and Regeneration Capital Grant have funded a range of exciting projects including Dumbarton Waterfront Path Gateway, Sylvania Way public realm, Enhancements to Smollett Fountain, a new community-led Activities Centre in Clydebank town centre and Viresco Studios in Alexandria. The new Place Based Investment Fund, and recently announced successful £20m UK Levelling Up Fund, will provide more opportunity to deliver on our vision for the town centres in partnership with community organisations, other public sector bodies, landowners and developers.
- 7.7** As the trend in online shopping continues, town centres everywhere are having to change and adapt to a much reduced demand for high street shopping. Alternative scenarios for town centre property and land include housing development, more restaurant and food outlets that help create a night-time economy and encouraging community uses for vacant property. Earlier this year, the Council agreed to purchase the Artizan Centre in Dumbarton to facilitate redevelopment of the parts of the Centre where vacancy rates are high. In Clydebank, the focus is create the heart of the town by taking a proactive approach to the future uses of land and buildings south of the Canal. Post-COVID, officers continue to work with town centres businesses to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on our already struggling high streets. In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce funding has been secured to promote and support Loves Local, a Shop Local and Think Local First to drive footfall safely into our town centres. Covid-19 has had an impact on the value and marketability of town centre premises, and so we continue to maintain a dialogue with town centre property owners to discuss their future plans
- 7.8** The Council has agreed terms to acquire the City Deal funded redevelopment of the former Esso site at Bowling. A development partner has been appointed and progress is being made with the delivery of the infrastructure. These are significant milestones in the future re-use of the site for employment generating uses. The site forms part of a much larger

regeneration opportunity along North Clyde Riverbank, and improved connections as well re-use of riverfront vacant and derelict land will be a priority for the Council in the coming years to create an attractive and vibrant riverfront.

**7.9** Many of the projects are delivered in partnership with other organisations. The Council continues to support Scottish Canals in their transformation of Bowling, more recently in the creation of the Bowline, an elevated walkway/linear park on the former swing bridge at Bowling Basin, to create an important new connection for pedestrians and cyclists. Scottish Canals have refurbished the B listed Custom House to provide boutique self-catering accommodation. An operator is currently being sought for this and a new restaurant opportunity at the Bowling Arches. Together these improvements have transformed the offer at Bowling and consolidated its role as a compelling destination. The Council will continue to work with Scottish Canals, other nearby landowners and Clyde Mission on a vision for North Clyde Riverbank that will regenerate the river frontage and improve connections between Bowling and the former Esso site.

**7.10** In partnership with Historic Environment Scotland and Scottish Maritime Museum, the Council is delivering the vision set out in Dumbarton Visitor Gateway Study. With the partially complete Waterfront Path being a key connection between the Dumbarton town centre and the Rock and Castle, the partnership is implementing an action plan that will strengthen the combined offer of the Arc of Attraction incorporating the Rock and Castle, Denny Tank Museum and Glencairn House when it is repurposed and open to the public. The first phases of Dumbarton Waterfront Path are finished and open, and talks continue with the landowners of the later phases, Turnberry Homes and Dumbarton FC, to determine their timescales for delivering their sections of the Path

## **8. Building stronger partnerships and innovative approaches to delivery.**

**8.1** The Council continues to work in partnership with the Glasgow City Region to implement the new Regional Economic Strategy which outlines the vision and three grand challenges for the City Region until 2030.

- Creating an Inclusive Economy
- Enhancing Productivity
- Addressing the Climate Emergency

**8.2** Officers continue to work in partnership to explore opportunities for external funding and have a strong track record of attracting external funding for Economic Development, Regeneration, Infrastructure and Employability projects. Recent examples include £2m of funding from the Scottish Government's Clyde Mission Fund to enable construction of the Scottish Marine Technology Park, successful £20m from the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund for our Town Centres regeneration projects and various grants from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund.

We are a part of the Glasgow City Region and are developing a multi-million pound project to create new industrial premises and associated infrastructure at the former Exxon site near Dumbarton.

**8.3** The 'Working4business' group continues to provide a partnership approach to supporting our local businesses. The priority over the last year for partners and the Council in relation to supporting our local business during 2020/21 has very much been related to the Pandemic and supporting business as they recovery.

**8.4** The Council's Regeneration Team has established strong partnerships with Strathleven Regeneration Cic, Scottish Government, Scottish Canals, Historic Environment Scotland, Sustrans, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority, Event Scotland, Dumbarton Castle Society, Community Links, Peel Land and Properties, Network Rail, Dumbarton Stations Improvement Trust, Dunbartonshire Chamber of Commerce and Vale of Leven Industrial Estate Improvement Trust. Regular Town Centre Forum meetings have taken place in Dumbarton and Alexandria.

## **10. People Implications**

**10.1** There are no people implications related to this project.

## **11. Financial and Procurement Implications**

**11.1** The Council budget expenditure detailed within the action plan continues to be monitored and reported regularly to ensure that performance targets are achieved, maximising private sector leverage and attracting external funding.

**11.2** It is acknowledged that the achievement of the outcomes of the Strategy and Action Plan is reliant on the continued commitment and funding from both public and private sector partners.

**11.3** Procurement plays an important role in Economic Development primarily ensuring best value is secured for projects and encouraging local businesses to secure public sector contracts.

## **12. Risk Analysis**

**12.1** The on-going consultation process with partners and key stakeholders will ensure that the content of the Strategy and Action Plan is appropriate to assist with the economic prosperity for the local area and that risks are assessed. The Strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that any local and national economic changes are integrated where appropriate.

## **13. Environmental Sustainability**

**13.1** A strategic environmental assessment is not necessary for this report. Strategic Environmental Assessments will be undertaken as necessary for any projects which develop from the strategy and action plan.

## **14 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)**

**14.1** The strategy was screened as part of the EIA process and found to have relevance to Social Economic Impacts. A full EIA was carried out which found no negative impacts but various potential positive impacts for the economy of West Dunbartonshire

## **15. Consultation**

**15.1** The process for the development of the new strategy will include consultation with senior officers across Council services and also with partners through the Community Planning Partnership, Employability and Economic Growth Delivery and Improvement Group which continues to be an important consultative group of public sector partners.

**15.2** Wider partner and community consultation will also been undertaken to ensure that the content of the new Economic Development Strategy is aligned with and reflects local priorities. The final version of the new Economic Development Strategy 2022-27 along with the associated action plan will be brought to a future Committee meeting for final approval.

## **16. Strategic Assessment**

**16.1** The new updated Economic Development Strategy will contribute to the Council's Strategic Plan Priorities which are:

- A strong local economy and improved job opportunities
- Supported individuals, families and carers living independently and with dignity
- Meaningful engagement with active empowered and informed citizens who feel safe and engaged
- Open, accountable and accessible local government
- Efficient and effective frontline services that improve the everyday lives of residents.

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**Date: 27 October 2021**

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**Appendices:** Economic Development Strategy Actions- 2015-20

**Background Papers:** Economic Development Strategy 2015-20

**Wards Affected:** All Wards