

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Chief Officer (Regulatory & Regeneration)****Infrastructure Regeneration and Economic Development Committee****6 November 2024**

Subject: Economic Development Strategy Annual Update**1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with the annual update of work undertaken during 2023/24 to deliver the West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027. The report also highlights more recent activity and project work, where appropriate.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The Committee is invited to:

- (i) Note the work activity undertaken during 2023/24 to deliver the West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027.

3. Background

- 3.1** The Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027 was developed to provide an economic vision and strategy for West Dunbartonshire Council for a five-year period and was approved by the Infrastructure, Regeneration and Economic Development Committee on 2 November 2022.
- 3.2** The Strategy aligns with the Council's Strategic Plan, the Glasgow City Regional Economic Strategy and the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, Delivering Economic Prosperity.
- 3.3** The economic climate continues to present many challenges; these include, fluctuating energy costs, cost of living and continuing high inflation.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** The vision in the Strategy is:

'By 2027, West Dunbartonshire will have an inclusive and vibrant economy through the creation of fairer jobs, a drive towards net Zero, and the development of prosperous places in partnership with our communities and businesses'.

4.2 The strategic priorities are:

- Stimulating economic investment and growing the business base;
- Establishing an inclusive economy by improving the skills of our people and supporting them into work;
- Creating a prosperous place where people choose to live, work, visit and invest;
- Addressing climate change and supporting a green recovery;
- Building stronger partnerships and new approaches to delivery.

4.3 Detail on the work activity undertaken to deliver the Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027 during 2023/24 under each of the priority themes is provided below.

Stimulating Economic Investment and Growing the Business Base

4.4 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 2023/24:

- 16 businesses have been supported with growth grant support to assist them to grow and create local jobs;
- 45 businesses have received a start-up grant to assist them to start-up their own business.

4.5 The Business Gateway service has been successfully delivered by the Council's Business Support team since 1 October 2015. The team provide an advisory service to our local start-up and growth businesses. In 2023/24 the Business Gateway service provided:

- Advice to 200 clients to help them to start up their own business;
- 35 start-ups with growth potential were given early-stage growth support;
- 30 businesses with action plans through growth advisory support service.

4.6 Business start-up numbers of 200 for 2023/24 slightly decreased from the previous year's figure of 205. 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 2023/24 shows that West Dunbartonshire supported 22.8 start-ups per 10,000 population which compares favourably with the figure of 13.6 start-ups per 10,000 population for the whole of Scotland.

4.7 A range of business support interventions have been funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which went live during April/May 2023. To date, the fund has supported:-

- 14 Recovery & Growth grants;
- 12 Early-Stage Growth grants;

- 2 Working Towards Net Zero grants;
- 2 Enhancing West Dunbartonshire's Tourism Events & Attractions grants and;
- 15 businesses have been provided with specialist expert help.

4.8 A group of local businesses have received consultancy support to help build their own website. The consultancy support funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund provided a mixture of group training and one-to-one support to ensure participants gained the knowledge required to build and maintain their own business website.

4.9 The Council are working in partnership with Glasgow City Region and Strathclyde University to provide businesses with green business advice through the development of carbon baseline assessments. This support is funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. To date, 6 businesses have been referred for a carbon baseline assessment.

4.10 A Green Skills Business Training Grant has been developed to assist local businesses to improve their green skills. This grant will provide a financial contribution of 75% of costs up to £3,000 to assist businesses to upskill their staff and/or diversify to provide additional services related to green technologies such as:-

- Solar Photovoltaic (PV)
- Electric Vehicle Charging
- Solar Thermal Systems
- Ground & Air Source Heat Pumps
- External Wall Insulation

Establishing an Inclusive Economy by Improving the Skills of Our People and supporting them into Work

4.11 Working4U is an integrated service that supports residents in West Dunbartonshire to improve their skills, learning and financial situations, assisting their progress into work and protecting their rights to welfare benefits.

4.12 The learning service covers a wide range of activity, such as employability skills, youth work, family and adult learning. Helping individuals facing barriers like long-term unemployment or health issues build skills, gain experience, and improve their employability, creating pathways to paid work and promoting broader community growth and inclusion. In 2023/24 Working4U supported:

- 1,064 people to enter education or training; and
- 867 people to secure a nationally recognised qualification.
- 60 people accessed volunteering placements as a first step to employment.

4.13 Information and Advice is designed to support the financial well-being of residents through the provision of debt counselling and welfare benefit advice. Our focus is on households facing substantial challenges and assisting them to stabilise difficult situations. During 2023/2024 we supported residents to:

- secure £8.23 million through benefit maximisation; and
- renegotiate and manage £1.27 million of debt.

4.14 Employability support in 23/24 has seen a substantial change with the transition from the European Structural funds to the 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund' (UKSPF). This fund goes beyond employability to incorporate additional priorities, across the following investment priorities:

- Communities and Place (community development);
- Supporting Local Business (local business support);
- People and Skills (employability skills); and
- Multiply (improving maths skills).

This is a major change in the employability landscape and Working4U manage the programme of interventions for West Dunbartonshire. We ensure UKSPF aligns with the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind policy framework by reinforcing our partnership approach through the Strategic Employability Group.

4.15 The Strategic Employability Group continues to co-ordinate employability provision in an effective way. The approach is based on the principles that underpin the partnership agreement for employability between the Scottish and Local Government. The partnership brings together all the main service providers in West Dunbartonshire and encourages input to the process. In 2023/24, Working4U supported 439 residents to secure employment.

4.16 In 2022 the Council agreed to set aside an Apprenticeship Investment Fund of £1million. The fund is to be used over four years to meet the salary costs for young people taking up apprenticeships in West Dunbartonshire Council. The Team has worked with 206 people through the Modern Apprenticeship programme. Of these,

- 138 were apprentices (16–24-year-olds);
- 68 were receiving support for in-work progression (25 years+);
- The Team also supported 141 Foundation Apprentices.

Creating a Prosperous Place where People Choose to Live, Work, Visit and Invest

4.17 The latest draft strategic housing investment programme 2022-27 (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. Ongoing high levels of housing need in West Dunbartonshire have led the Council to declare a

Housing Emergency emphasising the need to 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. We 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.

- 4.18** The Local Economic Development (LED) annual capital budget 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; LED has funded long term visioning for our towns and communities, as demonstrated in the Alexandria Masterplan and Clydebank Town Centre Development Framework and continues to fund town centre regeneration projects. Projects in the pipeline include Mitchell Way public realm improvements in support of the Mitchell Way developments, branding and signposting for the Arc of Attraction in Dumbarton and a masterplan for the Balloch Pier area, in cooperation with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. 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 further development of the District Heating Centre at Queens' Quay. Regeneration Fund will also part-fund the repurposing of Glencairn House as a library, museum and community space, Connecting Dumbarton, delivery of the remaining sections of the Dumbarton Waterfront Walkway and some infrastructure at the proposed Scottish Marine Technology Park at Carless.
- 4.19** Regular meetings take place with the owners and agent of the Queens' Quay site, and there has been some progress towards delivering the remainder of the 1,000 homes at Queens' Quay.
- 4.20** It is hoped that Clydebank will still benefit from £20M of UK Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns funding, following decisions made at the UK Government's Autumn Spending Review. A 10-year Long Term Plan and accompanying 3 Year Investment Plan were approved by the Town Board and submitted for review and approval to the UK Government. The Plans build upon the previously approved Clydebank Town Centre Development Framework and on feedback from the community engagement undertaken by the Town Board in June – August 2024. The priority interventions for the town to be delivered in the next 3 years include:
- Town centre walking and cycling trails
 - Improving Three Queens Square
 - Creating a new town centre greenspace

- Connecting communities & facilities

- 4.21** Good progress has been made towards delivering the Levelling Up Fund programme of works for Dumbarton town centre. Connecting Dumbarton project was completed in early 2024; works on Glencairn House project started on site in April 2024; and a main contractor for the Artizan redevelopment will be appointed in late 2024, with works expected to start on site in early 2025.
- 4.22** Shopfront improvement grants funded by the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund have been offered to all businesses within the Alexandria, Dumbarton and Clydebank town centres. So far, the funding has helped 24 business to improve their shop fronts, with at least another 8 likely to be completed by the end of March 2025.
- 4.23** Businesses in Alexandria have been working for the past year to develop a Business Improvement District (BID). A BID Proposal was approved by the Council on 5th September and a BID ballot is scheduled for 14th November. If successful, the BID will be formally established in Alexandria Town Centre from 1 April 2025. It is expected that the BID will help increase the footfall, improve viability and sustainability of the town centre and raise the profile of Alexandria as a destination for people to visit for leisure and shopping. The BID will also contribute to delivery of the Alexandria Town Centre Masterplan objective to make Alexandria the heart of the Vale.
- 4.24** During financial year 2023/24, Council and City Region Cabinet approved the Final Business Case for the infrastructure proposals for the Exxon site. Following commencement of the infrastructure construction contract which is anticipated later this year, the Exxon Project Board will consider how best to promote and deliver development on the site and make recommendations to Council.
- 4.25** Planning permission was approved for the Scottish Marine Technology Park on the former Carless site, and officers have been supporting the Malin Group in their delivery of the remainder of the remediation, the quay infrastructure, and in securing funding to address the funding gap.

Addressing Climate Change and Supporting a Green Recovery

- 4.26** The Queen's Quay District Heating Network continues to expand with work to update the phased connection plan ongoing. To date low carbon heat from the centre is being supplied to a leisure Centre, two office buildings, a town hall, a library, 145 Wheatley flats and most recently extension to 46 Clydebank Housing Association flats on Dumbarton Road. Future expansion plans extend to the West College Scotland, Health Centre and Golden Jubilee Hospital.

- 4.27** The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will continue to be reviewed by the Climate Change Action Group. Work is ongoing to provide carbon emissions data to the Scottish Government by November 2024. Internal carbon emission targets for future years will be reviewed in line with recent regulatory changes, following further update from Scottish Government.
- 4.28** The Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy and Outline Delivery Plan is due for final publication in October 2024. The draft document was issued for public consultation over Summer 2024. Work on a detailed delivery is currently underway which will provide a route map for delivery across West Dunbartonshire.

Building Stronger Partnerships and New Approaches to Delivery

- 4.29** West Dunbartonshire Council is one of eight Member Authorities in the Glasgow City Region. In addition to progressing the Exxon City Deal project, Council officers collaborate with the City Region Programme Management Office on a range of Region-wide policies and projects which have this year included an Electric Vehicle charging strategy; Climate Clyde Forest; Climate Ready Clyde and the Investment Zone.
- 4.30** The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is the UK Government's main funding to replace European Union Structural Funds. This fund has provided £3,895,815 to support Communities & Place, Local Business and People & Skills. The future of the Fund beyond this year is currently unknown.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no people implications related to this project.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1** The Council budget expenditure detailed in the action plan continues to be monitored and reported regularly to ensure that performance targets are achieved, maximising private sector leverage and external funding.
- 6.2** It is acknowledged that the achievement of the outcomes of this new Strategy Action Plan is reliant on the continued commitment and funding from both public and private sector partners.
- 6.3** There are no procurement issues in relation to the Strategy Action Plan contained within this paper; however, each project through its development will require an appropriate procurement process.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The consultation process with partners and key stakeholders ensured that the content of the strategy is appropriate and relevant to economic conditions and throughout the delivery process risk will be assessed and managed.

8. Environmental Sustainability

- 8.1** A pre-screening Strategic Environmental Assessment was completed for the Economic Development Strategy, which determined that although it was a key strategic document it wasn't expected that it would generate any environmental effects at this stage. Any specific plans and programmes which derive from the Strategy Action Plan are subjected to an environmental assessment as and when required.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1** The Strategy has been impact assessed and is relevant to the general equality duty. The Strategy will assist with reducing inequality and advancing equality and has potential to produce positive impacts.

10. Consultation

- 10.1** A Consultation process was previously undertaken to obtain feedback on the Economic Development Strategy which involved consultation with senior officers across Council services and with our partners through the Community Planning Partnership - Flourishing Delivery & Improvement Group and the Working4Business Partnership group.
- 10.2** A feedback survey for the Economic Development Strategy was also developed and was available on the Council website for individuals/organisations to provide their comments or feedback. The feedback received through the survey was very positive.

11. Strategic Assessment

- 11.1** The Economic Development Strategy Action Plan 2022 – 2027 provides a clear strategic approach to Economic Development for the local area and helps to determine how we allocate resources to improve our economic performance. It responds to various local, regional and national policies and strategies. These include:

- West Dunbartonshire Council Strategic Plan;
- West Dunbartonshire Plan for Place/Local Outcome Improvement Plan;
- Glasgow City Region Economic Strategy; and

- The Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, Delivering Economic Prosperity.

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: IRED Committee Report - Economic Development
Strategy Action Plan 2022-2027 1 November 2023
IRED Committee Report – New Economic Development
Strategy 2 November 2022
Strategic Environmental Assessment – New Economic
Development Strategy 2022-2027

Wards Affected: All Wards