

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **11th March 2020**
Report Subject: **Tech Valleys**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D. Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by: **Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration and Community Services**

| Reporting Pathway | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Executive Committee | Council | Other (please state) |
| 17.12.19 | 07.01.20 | 26.02.20 | | | 23.01.20 | 11.03.20 | | |

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide background, context and an overview of the progress of the Tech Valleys programme.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The Welsh Government announced the Tech Valleys programme in the summer of 2017 and the Tech Valleys is a £100 million WG commitment over ten years to create 1,500 sustainable jobs focused on Blaenau Gwent and hinterland by capitalising on opportunities arising from the fourth industrial revolution, encouraging the adoption of digital technologies and developing high value advanced technologies that support cutting edge industries. The programme will be delivered through a portfolio of related and complementary projects together with support for inward investment propositions.

In 2027 the South Wales Valleys, and Blaenau Gwent in particular, will be a globally recognised centre for the development of new technologies, to support cutting edge industry.

- 2.2 As part of the wider review of the governance of the Enterprise Zone programme in Wales, Welsh Government decided to wind up the Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone Board and in respect of Blaenau Gwent they introduced the Tech Valleys Advisory Group with the following role.
- 2.3 The role of the Tech Valleys Strategic Advisory Group is to provide coordinated advice to the Welsh Government on:
- strategic objectives, priorities and delivery related to Tech Valleys;
 - best practice and learning in other regions of the UK and internationally;

- deployment and roll out of the investment in Tech Valleys to encourage maximum positive impact across Blaenau Gwent in particular and the wider economy of Wales; and
- activity and progress to date in relation to Tech Valleys, which may include strategic advice towards investment opportunities, encouraging supply chain development, identifying property and infrastructure needs, business support, international export, R&D, marketing and promotion of the wider Heads of the Valleys area.

2.4 The current members of the Advisory Group are:

- Mark Langshaw MBE, Managing Director Continental Teeves Ebbw Vale (Chair)
- Katy Chamberlain. Chief Executive of Business in Focus and Deputy Chair of the ICAEW Strategy Board for Wales
- Richard Crook, Corporate Director Regeneration & Community Services, Blaenau Gwent CBC
- James Davies, Chair of Industry Wales and Council members at HEFCW
- Stephen Doran, CEO Compound Semiconductor Applications Catapult
- Julian Morris, Director Cisco Services
- Prof Rossi Setchi Leader of high Value Manufacturing Group, Cardiff University
- David Warrender, Chief Executive Innovation Point, Newport
- Tim Williams, Chief Welsh Automotive Forum

Current Position

2.5 Over the last six months good progress has been made establishing the programme management for Tech Valleys and there has been significant work to build the relationships with companies and other organisations across the region, and to develop ideas that can be translated into robust business cases that can be considered for funding from the Tech Valleys programme.

Final business case stage: 6
 Early business case stage: 6
 Ideas in development: 9

2.6 The following projects totalling in the region of £18.5M have been included as part of the programme:

- National Digital Exploitation Centre – This facility which is delivered by Thales provides 4 core activities, a test facility for the protection of critical infrastructure such as energy, a test facility to test new products from a Cyber Security perspective, Schools and wider educational activity and a base for Phd's in the Cyber Security area.
- The refurbishment of the former Tech Board Building (220,000 sq ft).
- The construction of the 50000sqft building at Rhyd y Blew.
- The provision of composite centre at the Learning Zone.
- Lime Avenue Business Units as part of a Joint Venture with the Council.
- In addition, match funding towards a bid for the development of a 5G testbed in Blaenau Gwent has been agreed as part of a £30m project which would have Welsh Government, DCMS and £15m of private sector funding. The test bed would allow the application of future technology to be tested in a range of conditions across public and private platforms.
- Roseheyworth Constrained Units refurbishment.
- Box works, Lime Avenue – 21 start units on the Works site.
- Potential support for the Rassau and Tafarnaubach Business improvement district.

2.7 The TV Advisory Group has also supported the development of 2 further business cases:

(i) Industry in Schools

The project will establish a co-ordinated programme of support, centred on “industry in schools (STEM) facilitation” within Blaenau Gwent, raising aspiration and preparing pupils for their journey into the world of work; and complimentary to the current and emerging school curriculum.

The project will:

- Establish an initial pilot project area, within the Ebbw Fawr Cluster.
- Establish a STEM baseline within schools to enable, targeted intervention, tracking of progress and associated outcomes;
- Consider a seamless and quality STEM provision as part of the transition between primary and secondary;
- Utilise key initiatives to drive change and increase uptake and attainment in STEM;
- Engage positively with stakeholders including children, teachers, parents, partners and business; and
- Engage with business and industry to proactively support schools and establish a business offer.

(ii) Future Skills Academy

The project will:

- be an industry led centre of excellence supporting existing and future business to meet current and long term skills requirements;

- provide capacity for higher level training delivery from HE and FE for Business in existing and future/emerging technologies;
- provide a 'maker space' to support inward investment and business start-ups by offering companies access to latest technologies;
- have an apprenticeship programme that will generate engineers and technicians for the future;
- provide a "first level or back to work" employment experience; and
- support the culture of enterprise through the establishment of a Tech Lab.

2.8 The proposal under consideration will require capital and revenue investment from Tech Valleys and it is envisaged that this will be phased over the length of the programme. The contribution will be detailed within a business plan and demonstrate the commitment over a period of time.

2.9 There has already been a financial commitment made by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council with the purchase of premises for the proposed academy, the former Monwel Hankinson Building on Letchworth Rd in Ebbw Vale. The projects identified to date in the report will form part of a longer term investment pipeline of activity in line with the vision.

Options for Recommendation

3.1 The report was considered by the Regeneration Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23rd January 2020. The committee supported Option 1.

3.2 Option 1

To note and endorse the work of the Tech Valleys Programme

Option 2

To note but not endorse the work of the Tech Valleys Programme

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

The work of the Tech Valleys is informed by key WG documents; Prosperity for All, Employability Delivery Plan, Apprenticeships Skills Policy Plan, Economic Action Plan and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The work of Tech Valleys provides a regional and strategic context that support local priorities and associated work including;

- Corporate Plan - Economic Development and Regeneration
- Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan; Forge new pathways to prosperity
- Regeneration Priorities; employment & skills and enterprise & innovation.
- Blaenau Gwent Employment and Skills Plan (Approval Mar 2020).

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

There is no immediate impact on budget associated with the report, aside from the Council's financial commitment in relation to the former Monwel Hankinson building. However, future projects may require the use of the match funding identified in the Council Capital programme.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

Endorsing the work of the Tech Valleys Programme will assist the delivery of the programme and the ability to secure longer term economic benefits from the programme. CCR Skills Partnership and being an engaged and proactive stakeholder.

5.3 *Legal*

There are no legal implications associated with the report

5.4 *Human Resources*

There are no immediate resource implications associated with the report.

There is representation from BGCBC on the Advisory Board and in regular dialogue with Welsh Government

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 *Performance Information and Data*

Performance of the Tech Valleys Programme

6.2 *Expected outcome for the public*

- Appropriate skills provision and offer available, aligned to key sectors
- Opportunity to secure further Investment into Blaenau Gwent to secure the vision of Tech Valleys
- Increased number of employment opportunities available
- Increased range of employment opportunities available

6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*

The Tech Valleys programme is developed through a collaborative approach involving representation from key business sectors, education, universities and WG.

Continued engagement with and the involvement of all key stakeholders is an ongoing priority for Tech Valleys.

6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*

The Tech Valleys programme plan has been developed as a proactive approach to ensure that the long term Vision for Tech Valleys can be delivered with the economic benefits addressing the long term challenges faced by the Authority.

6.5 *Preventative focus*

6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working*

Collaboration and partnership working is at the centre of the Tech Valleys programme

6.7 *Integration(across service areas)*

Integration across WG, Further Education, Higher Education, Public Sector, Business etc. is a key component of the plan in delivering successful actions and outcomes.

6.8 *EqlA(screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*

7. Monitoring Arrangements

7.1 Any regional reviews will be reported for information to BGCBC Scrutiny and Executive.

Background Documents /Electronic Links