

Developing Opportunities, Creating Confidence

Denbighshire's Economic & Community Ambition Strategy 2013 – 2023

Working together to make Denbighshire a place where:

- ***Businesses, established and new, grow and flourish***
- ***Our towns and communities are vibrant and prosper***
- ***All residents enjoy a good quality of life and can participate in the local economy***

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce Denbighshire County Council's Economic & Community Ambition Strategy, *Developing Opportunities, Creating Confidence*.

Economic development has been highlighted as one of Denbighshire's top priorities in our corporate plan for the term of this council. We have worked hard over the last 12 months to develop the Strategy and I am confident that the emerging priorities are the right ones for Denbighshire.

As we all know the economy, both nationally and internationally, is in difficulty and this Strategy highlights our intentions to play our part locally with clarity and conviction, where I firmly believe we have a significant role in enabling growth and developing opportunities by working closely with our partners.

Our ambition is that Denbighshire is a county with high levels of employment and good levels of income for residents in all of its towns and communities. In order to achieve this we recognise the work that is happening at a regional and national level and will embrace this agenda as part of our Strategy.

We undertook a consultation exercise over the summer. It was both intensive and extensive. I am heartened that the response was positive and confirmed to me that we are on the right track with our vision and our priorities. The feedback we received has also helped flesh out the detail of our actions in a number of areas and I am looking forward now to getting things moving and starting to deliver against our Economic & Community Ambition.

We sincerely hope that we can develop opportunities and create confidence for the residents of this county and I would like to thank all those that have made a contribution to developing the Strategy, and to those who will work with us to make it a reality.

**Cllr Hugh Evans, Leader and Lead Member for Economic Development,
Denbighshire County Council**

INTRODUCTION

Denbighshire County Council has identified ‘Developing the Local Economy’ as one of its 7 Corporate Priorities. In common with communities across Wales, Denbighshire residents and businesses have stressed the importance of reviving the local economy to provide a sound base for all other development. This Economic & Community Ambition Strategy has been developed to explain how the Council will achieve its corporate objective.

By and large, it is businesses that deliver economic growth. As a local authority, however, there is much that Denbighshire County Council can do – on its own and with its partners - to create and support the conditions that can allow those businesses to be successful and flourish.

This is in line with Welsh Government policy on Growth and Sustainable Jobs which seeks to “strengthen the conditions that will enable business to create jobs and sustainable economic growth”. Our Economic & Community Ambition Strategy, therefore, focuses on what we can do ourselves and with our partners to support those conditions for growth.

Business success on its own, however, is not enough. Our intention is that economic growth will result in improved outcomes for Denbighshire residents. Our ambition is that Denbighshire is a county with high levels of employment and good levels of income for residents in all its towns and communities.

Welsh Government’s recent regeneration strategy, “Vibrant & Viable Places” supports this aspiration with a vision that everybody in Wales should live in well-connected vibrant, viable and sustainable communities with a strong local economy and good quality of life.

This Strategy sets out our ambitions for Denbighshire’s local economy and the benefits that we expect economic growth to achieve for our residents. The accompanying Delivery Plan describes the actions we will take, together with other partners across Denbighshire and North Wales, to realise our ambitions.

It is a long term Strategy and not one that will be delivered overnight. We hope, however, that our actions will have impact and we have identified measures against which we can judge our success. The Strategy does not stand on its own. It complements and is supported by a range of other key strategies, including the recently approved Local Development Plan, the Denbighshire Big Plan, the Rhyl Going Forward Regeneration Strategy and the Modernising Education programme to name but a few.

Ultimately, we intend that our actions under the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy and our other key policy programmes will see Denbighshire’s businesses go from strength to strength, offering good quality, well paid and rewarding jobs for our residents and providing them with the means to enjoy a good quality of life in our towns and communities. If we are successful we should expect to see reductions in unemployment, increases in household incomes, improved birth and sustainability rates for businesses, and increased economic activity and participation generally across the county.

OUR AMBITION

Our expectation that local economic growth can lead to improved outcomes for our residents is based on an economic model that links business success with increased opportunities for work, leading to higher levels of income and increased spending power that in turn help to sustain vibrant towns and communities. Vibrant towns and communities themselves encourage consumer demand, leading to more successful businesses and increased opportunities for employment.



We recognise that this is a simplistic view of the economy; nevertheless we believe it is sound. We acknowledge, however, that to have the most positive impact we will have to work hard to encourage as much of that growth and wealth as possible to recirculate within Denbighshire's economy, businesses and communities.

We also recognise that we cannot look to Denbighshire alone for economic growth. The economy does not recognise organisational boundaries. If we are to achieve the outcomes we desire for Denbighshire residents, we will need to look further afield - to neighbouring economies in North Wales and beyond – to ensure we harness the best opportunities available for our residents and our businesses.

The Strategy, therefore, looks both at what we can do within Denbighshire to stimulate and support economic growth and the creation of jobs, and also how we can help to connect Denbighshire residents and businesses to opportunities outside the county.

The Strategy also recognises that Denbighshire is a bilingual community. This brings with it many benefits, not least in terms of a distinct culture and identity. The latest census, however, suggests there is a need to reverse the decline in the number of residents speaking and using Welsh fluently. The Economic & Community Ambition Strategy seeks to play its part in this - both by promoting the benefits of bilingualism within the business community and more broadly within society generally, and also by creating the conditions to grow more, higher value jobs locally for residents in the county.

Our Strategy has been developed to align with both Welsh Government's overall approach to sustainable economic growth and also the priorities of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board as it works to transform the economy of North Wales, improving productivity, competitiveness and growth, leading to more prosperous communities for all.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Our location

Denbighshire covers an area of 844 km² and has a population of around 94,000.

The economy of Denbighshire is diverse. In the more urban north of the county, the seaside towns of Rhyl and Prestatyn dominate and the retail, leisure and tourism sectors remain major employers. Also in the north, however, is St Asaph Business Park - home to a growing opto-electronics cluster and a strategically important business park within the region, with good prospects for growth.

Further south, Denbighshire is predominantly rural in nature, characterised by a network of small towns and villages situated within a high quality landscape environment. Tourism and agriculture are key sectors. Smaller industrial and business parks provide space for light industry and businesses across the county. Denbighshire's natural environment is an important economic strength and asset for the county.

The recently approved Local Development Plan allocates a further 50 hectares of employment land, including a Key Strategic Site for mixed use development at Bodelwyddan in the north of the county, close to the existing St Asaph Business Park, as well as extensions to St Asaph Business Park itself and other sites in Denbigh, Ruthin and Corwen. It is anticipated that these allocations have the potential to support 8,000 new jobs in the county, not including construction.

North Denbighshire is served by the arterial transport corridors of the North Wales rail line and the A55 trunk road. Transport links within the remainder of the county are less strong and there are weaknesses in the arterial routes themselves that also need to be addressed. Connectivity across the county as a whole could be improved. High levels of both inward and outward commuting are key features of Denbighshire's local economy. There is easy access from Denbighshire to 2 international airports (Manchester and Liverpool) and 2 international ports (Holyhead and Liverpool/Birkenhead).

Denbighshire has connections to neighbouring authorities and economies. As well as being an integral part of the North Wales economy with the five other local Councils, Denbighshire is also closely linked to the Mersey Dee/ Cheshire Warrington economies. Many communities and businesses in Denbighshire are within easy travel distance of opportunities in the strongly competitive economies of Liverpool and Manchester city regions. Further opportunities are presented within the 7 Enterprise Zones that are within broadly 60 - 90 minutes travel distance from Denbighshire.

Our workforce

Economic activity in Denbighshire generally is slightly above the North Wales level but below that of the UK as a whole. This masks pockets of significant economic inactivity and deprivation however, with areas of Rhyl and Upper

Denbigh among the 10% most deprived in Wales. Unemployment is most pronounced for younger residents, with 16 to 24 year olds worst affected.

The recession has seen total numbers of jobs in Denbighshire fall sharply since 2008. The rate of decline has been steeper than the rest of North Wales.

Denbighshire has proved to be a popular retirement area and its population has an older than average age profile. This is predicted to continue to rise. Young people, particularly between 18 and 35 years old, tend to leave Denbighshire, often for employment or further/higher education. A thriving economy needs sufficient people of working age with the right skills for its labour market to function effectively. Access to work, suitable learning and training opportunities and affordable housing opportunities are key factors in attracting and retaining a younger working age population.

Qualification rates within the working age population are similar to those in the rest of the UK, although fewer residents tend to be educated to degree level. Pockets of lower achievement exist, however these are being addressed with significant improvements in the quality of learning and teaching. Denbighshire is a high performing education authority and schools support young people to achieve good qualifications, however the small numbers of young people leaving school without a formal qualification has been identified as an area for improvement by the Council.

Just under a quarter (24.6%) of Denbighshire's population identify themselves as Welsh speaking, the 6th highest rate in Wales. A greater percentage of these Welsh speakers live in the south of the county compared with the north. A sizeable and growing proportion of Denbighshire's school students receive their education bilingually or through the medium of Welsh. The Council's education policy aims to ensure that all children and young people leave full time education being competent and confident using both Welsh and English. Creation of more and higher value jobs locally will help to retain this talent in the county.

Denbighshire's Welsh identity and culture present strong assets to be built on, particularly but not exclusively within our tourism sector. We are keen to harness this for the benefit of Denbighshire's economy as well as its culture and community.

The majority of the population lives in the urban north of the county. Transport and accessibility can present issues for residents and businesses in some of the more rural areas of Denbighshire, and connectivity across the county remains a concern.

Our businesses

The leading seven sectors in terms of employment in Denbighshire comprise health, retail, education, public administration, food and beverage services, social work and residential care. Together these seven sectors account for two thirds of the workforce.

The public sector, particularly health and social care, is the dominant source of employment in Denbighshire. The proportion of jobs in the public sector is the highest for any local authority area in the UK. The continuing constraints on public sector funding present a risk for Denbighshire's economy as a result.

Equally, however, public sector investment, particularly in construction projects, continues to offer significant economic opportunities. The North Wales Construction Procurement Framework is intended to help the six North Wales Councils balance the need to ensure best value construction contracts with maximising the impact of the anticipated £200M spend on the local economy.

The high proportion of public sector employment also offers an opportunity to safeguard and promote bilingual language skills in the workplace.

Jobs in the private sector in Denbighshire tend to be in retail, tourism or leisure, of which many are seasonal and lower paid. There is, however, a growing advanced manufacturing base in the opto-electronics sector and a strong construction and related trades presence in the county as well.

Agriculture also represents an important source of employment in the county. Many of the farms in Denbighshire, however, depend on the EU Common Agricultural Policy for a significant proportion of their income, which will be affected by the changes taking effect from 2014. Our engagement with the Agricultural sector in Denbighshire has been limited to date.

There has been a drop in the number of active businesses in Denbighshire since the start of the recession, but the county still has more active businesses by population than Wales as a whole. Significant numbers of these are small and very small businesses (fewer than 50 employees), with correspondingly lower numbers of medium and large businesses. Rates of self employment are in line with the rest of the UK, although higher than in Wales more generally.

There is more that we need to do to understand the business make up of Denbighshire and the needs of its businesses. This will be a focus for us throughout the life of this Strategy.

Our partners

Along with the other five Councils in North Wales, Denbighshire is a member of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. The Board is committed to working together to transform and grow the economy in North Wales. It has identified three priority areas for focus – the Advanced Manufacturing sector, the Energy and Environment sector, and promoting North Wales for inward investment. The Board has also identified Infrastructure and Connections, Skills and Employment, and Local Procurement as important areas for attention. Many of the actions in this Strategy will complement and contribute to these regional priorities.

Looking further afield, the Mersey Dee Alliance seeks to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the economic area that spans North East Wales, West Cheshire and the Wirral. Manufacturing, particularly automotive and aerospace, chemical industries, financial services and food industries are the main components of this economic area, much of which is within easy reach and can present employment and commercial opportunities for Denbighshire's residents and businesses. We anticipate that Cheshire and Warrington LEP will also become an increasingly important partner.

Further and Higher Education opportunities are available locally through Grwp Coleg Llandrillo Menai, Coleg Cambria, and Glyndwr, Bangor and Chester Universities. Our work on Skilled Workforce will be delivered largely in partnership with these partners, both locally and through the Skills & Employment project of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

The Local Service Board for Conwy & Denbighshire has identified a thriving and sustainable economy and skilled workforce as one its priority outcomes. The Local Service Board pulls together key public and third sector partners to work collaboratively for the benefit of local residents. The economy is likely to remain a topic of interest for all partners over the coming years.

Within rural Denbighshire, an active Rural Development Plan partnership has developed to target opportunities arising from rural European Union funds. Wide ranging rural development programmes are already being implemented. Engagement of communities in developing and implementing their own projects is and will continue to be crucial. It is intended that this Strategy will help sharpen focus for the next round of EU funding and provide the strategic framework within which a robust range of local initiatives can be based.

The voluntary and third sector in Denbighshire is strong and makes a positive contribution to community life in the county, supported by Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council. We see the voluntary and third sector in Denbighshire making an increasingly important contribution to its economy over the coming years.

Our partners, Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych and Popeth Cymraeg, have a strong contribution to make towards supporting local businesses and communities to harness the potential of the Welsh language, culture and identity for the local economy. We look forward to working with them on this challenge.

Whilst there are local networks of businesses across Denbighshire, our engagement with the business community as a whole needs more attention. Our engagement with local business groups is patchy and could be improved. While we are developing a good working relationship with the local FSB Wales, our engagement with other representative organisation such as CBI and Chamber of Commerce is under developed. The newly formed North Wales Business Council offers a further opportunity for strategic engagement. Improving links with the business community will remain a focus for us throughout the life of this Strategy.

The performance of our economy

- We have a lower Gross Value Added (GVA) than the rest of the UK, a trend that has widened since the recession. Levels are also lower than neighbouring economies to the east (Flintshire/Wrexham).
- Business birth, death and survival rates have worsened since the start of the recession with a widening of the gap between Denbighshire and the rest of the UK. We no longer outperform the rest of North Wales on this measure.
- Our unemployment rate is similar to UK average levels, however the numbers of people who are economically inactive due to ill health or retirement are higher.
- Our overall average performance masks pockets of significant deprivation in Rhyl and Upper Denbigh
- Median household incomes are lower in Denbighshire than most other Welsh authorities. The gap between income levels across the county is widening.
- Employment in Denbighshire is dominated by the public sector, with private sector employment dominated by often seasonal and lower paid jobs in the tourism, retail and leisure sector.
- There has been a sharp decline in the number of jobs in Denbighshire since the start of the recession. The decline has been steeper than in the rest of North Wales.
- The sectors providing the majority of employment in Denbighshire are generally not those with strong prospects for growth.
- Areas of strong economic growth within easy reach offer commercial and supply chain opportunities for Denbighshire businesses and employment opportunities for Denbighshire residents. High levels of both inward and outward commuting are a feature of Denbighshire's economy.
- The recently approved Local Development Plan has allocated an additional 50 hectares of employment land, estimated to be capable of supporting 8,000 new jobs. The allocation of 7,500 housing units will provide additional homes to attract and retain working age population in the county.
- The North Wales economy as a whole is estimated to be worth around £10bn per year and to represent around 25% of the economy of Wales as a whole. North Wales companies account for almost 30% of the manufacturing output of Wales.
- More broadly, the scale of the economy running along the M56/A55 corridor from Manchester to Holyhead is estimated to generate an output of £31bn per year. The economy around Merseyside is also growing and will offer additional opportunities.
- Denbighshire is well placed geographically to take advantage of these areas of economic growth, both through jobs for its residents and commercial opportunities for its businesses.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Our ambition is not a quick fix. It is a long term vision that will take time and effort to deliver. We recognise it is aspirational and we may not be able to achieve it all in the lifetime of this strategy. We also understand that it is an ambition we can only make progress towards by working closely with our partners. We intend that this Strategy provides the clear vision and leadership at local level to allow our respective priorities to be aligned for the benefit of the county's economy and ultimately its residents.

If we are to make progress towards achieving the vision set out in our Economic & Community Ambition Strategy, we need to ensure a range of core interconnected factors are addressed. These have been identified as priority areas for action and are the **Themes** around which the Strategy and Delivery Plan are structured.

We believe that Denbighshire will be better placed to achieve its vision for Economic & Community Ambition if we concentrate our efforts, and those of our partners, into working to deliver:

- *The right **Infrastructure for Growth***
- *Businesses that are **Supported and Connected***
- *Maximised **Economic Strengths/Opportunities***
- *A **High Quality Skilled Workforce***
- ***Vibrant Towns and Communities***
- *A **Well Promoted Denbighshire***

We do not have the resources to do everything. The **Delivery Plan** accompanying this Strategy describes in more detail the actions we will focus on over the next 4 years to move us towards our longer term vision.

In developing the Delivery Plan, we have worked hard to identify and prioritise those actions we believe will have most impact in addressing the issues and challenges facing Denbighshire's economy, and are most likely to deliver the benefits we seek for our businesses and residents. We have also tried to be realistic about what can be delivered within the limited resources we and our partners have. The ambition, however, remains deliberately stretching.

In developing and delivering against our priorities, we will be guided by the following underlying **principles**:

- **Inclusive.** The strategy is intended to have impact county wide and to deliver economic and community ambition across Denbighshire's many communities.
- **Differentiated.** At the same time, differing needs across the county (for example, urban and rural) will be recognised and addressed.
- **Holistic.** The strategy aims to deliver jobs/opportunities at all levels – from entry level to advanced - and across economic sectors. We will work to avoid over-reliance on any one sector.

- **Balanced.** The strategy is intended to support new and established businesses, and businesses of varying sizes. Options for economic growth will be explored both through indigenous business growth and inward investment.
- **Sustainable.** The strategy aims to deliver a local economy that is sustainable and resilient to change in the long term, that promotes social, economic and environmental well being for people and communities, and which does not damage the important strength presented by Denbighshire’s high quality natural environment.
- **Welsh Language and Culture¹.** The Strategy is intended to build on the economic strengths provided by Denbighshire’s strong Welsh identity and culture, and to actively promote use of the Welsh language by businesses, residents and visitors.
- **Outcome focused.** We will focus our efforts on actions that we assess will have the biggest impact on the issues we consider to be the most important to address. We will prioritise accordingly.

¹ With regard to Welsh Language and Culture, we are aware that the Welsh Language Commissioner aims to set appropriate Standards for every Council in Wales to adhere to over a period of time. We will review the contribution of this Strategy to the promotion of Welsh Language and Culture in the light of the forthcoming assessment by the Commissioner in early 2014.

THEME 1: INFRASTRUCTURE FOR GROWTH

Outcomes:

1. We have effective transport connections that enable people to access jobs, and businesses to access markets/customers
2. We have modern digital and voice communication networks that meet the needs of businesses, residents and visitors
3. We have a good and readily available supply of appropriate business premises and land that supports established businesses to grow and new businesses to start up

Having the right infrastructure in place is critical to ensuring that businesses can locate in the right place, with easy access to a relevant workforce and the ability to deliver goods and services to relevant customers and markets. For residents, the right infrastructure can help with connections to employment, learning and services. Infrastructure can take many forms; for the purposes of this strategy, we have focused on transport, communication networks and business land and premises.

Infrastructure planning, particularly for transport, takes place largely at regional level. Denbighshire County Council is an active participant in the TAIITH regional transport consortium and has recently contributed to the North East Wales Integrated Transport study. The North Wales Regional Transport Plan is due for renewal in 2014 and presents an opportunity for us to promote the need for investment in key transport infrastructure to support the county's economic growth. We will ensure Denbighshire's priorities are reflected in the new Plan.

We are encouraged by the improvements in digital infrastructure to be delivered through Welsh Government's Superfast Cymru project, particularly in our rural communities. We will work alongside this initiative to ensure its potential for Denbighshire is maximised.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure we have the right infrastructure for growth:

Transport

1. Transport infrastructure network has significant weaknesses, particularly for North-South road connections. Mainline rail services are restricted to the coastal North and are limited in frequency. The A55 trunk road provides good East-West connections but also risks by-passing Denbighshire's towns and communities. Congestion is an increasing problem. Significant investment in the strategic road network in and around Denbighshire does not currently appear as a priority in regional or national investment plans.

2. Public transport services are limited in more rural areas and fragmented across the county as a whole. Public transport does not currently represent a realistic choice for many residents as a means of travel to and for work. Journey times, particularly to destinations outside the County, can be long with only very limited direct services available to key employment locations.
3. Transport costs are increasingly expensive. Bus and rail fares are expected to rise faster than general inflation and fuel costs will continue to be affected by the volatile petroleum market. Changes to the subsidies available to bus operators risk both prices and coverage of bus services. Anecdotally, difficulty with travel arrangements is limiting the ability of businesses to recruit and residents to find suitable employment. Travel for work is also impacted adversely.

Communications

4. Mobile and broadband performance and availability lags behind other areas of the UK. Our overall rating for broadband coverage is 4 (with 5 being the worst score) and while the Superfast Cymru Fibre Broadband roll out will improve performance overall, it is possible that some of our most rural communities will remain poorly served. Equally, as a rural county, Denbighshire experiences significant problems with mobile coverage in a number of communities.
5. A strategic vision for digital needs and opportunities in Denbighshire is lacking. Compared with other areas, Denbighshire's vision for how digital technology can benefit both its businesses and its residents is underdeveloped.

Business Land & Premises

6. The current financial climate is limiting developer interest in creating new commercial and business space. The days in which investors could support speculative development schemes have gone. In addition, lack of key infrastructure to allow development to start – access, utilities etc – can affect timing and ultimately viability of site development.
7. There is low availability of serviced business land and premises in many areas across the county. The Local Development Plan analysis identified a land supply need of 50 ha up to 2021. The need is spread across the county but with stronger demand along the A55 corridor. The allocations included in the Local Development Plan will assist but only if sites are capable of being activated quickly.
8. Allocated employment sites are at risk from 'mixed use' developments. Understandably, developers are seeking to maximise their returns from any site development. As a result there has been a trend towards more mixed use development on sites officially reserved for employment use only. While the Council will continue to have a policy of protecting employment sites, balancing loss of employment land with the risk of no development at all is a significant challenge.
9. Competition for investment from Enterprise Zones and business parks in counties along the A55 and in North West England may reduce Denbighshire's attractiveness as a business location.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards our strategic outcomes for Infrastructure by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 1.1: Transport

- a) Working through TAITH, identify the elements of the local transport infrastructure and network that risk limiting local economic development and ensure these are reflected in a revised Regional Transport Plan and other investment plans as appropriate
- b) Lead development of the economic growth case for modernisation/ electrification of rail services in North Wales on behalf of North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- c) Improve integration of local public transport services and information to make them a more easily accessible, realistic option for travel to work

Workstream 1.2: Digital & Mobile

- a) Develop a 'Digital Denbighshire' Plan, including:
 - i. Comprehensive mapping of broadband and mobile communications provision across the county, including not spots
 - ii. Targeted infrastructure improvements as required to complement the Superfast Cymru project
 - iii. Skills development for individuals and businesses
 - iv. Stimulation of use and uptake, including across Council services
 - v. Identification of Digital Champions to celebrate success, share good practice and promote Denbighshire to digital businesses

Workstream 1.3: Land & Premises

- a) Create a single online access point that collates and promotes available business land and premises across all sectors
- b) Identify the constraints and opportunities, and develop a route map to encourage development of strategic development sites across Denbighshire, including agreeing Development Briefs as appropriate.
- c) Undertake a review of the industrial and commercial property portfolios of public agencies locally (DCC, WG, BCUHB etc) leading to creation of a strategic investment and development plan, including potential for incubator and 'move on' business units

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to deliver the right infrastructure for growth in Denbighshire, we should expect to see:

- Fewer reports of travel difficulties presenting a barrier to employment
- More businesses selling goods and services to a wider area
- An improvement in overall broadband performance
- Good mobile network coverage – both 3G and 4G – with more premises able to receive signals from a range of network providers
- Fewer broadband and mobile 'not spot' locations across the county
- Increased access to WiFi across Denbighshire
- More businesses active in e-commerce
- Key strategic employment sites either in use or ready to be developed
- Better range and availability of business premises across Denbighshire

THEME 2: SUPPORTED & CONNECTED BUSINESSES

Outcomes

1. We have easy to understand, accessible and high quality business support services available for established and new businesses
2. We have a strong local business community that benefits from being well connected, both with each other and with opportunities outside the county
3. Denbighshire County Council's procurement activity benefits local businesses and residents

Businesses, particularly small and medium sized businesses, have been significantly affected by the current global financial situation. The Voice of Small Business Index from Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Wales continues to report that small and medium sized businesses in Wales are significantly less optimistic about their business prospects than their counterparts in the rest of the UK. Business birth and survival rates in Denbighshire have both been adversely affected by the current global financial situation. We wish to reverse this trend.

By and large, it is businesses that deliver economic growth. As a rural area, Denbighshire has a greater proportion of small and very small businesses than more urban economies. Anything which constrains the ability of our local businesses to be successful will have a significant impact on our local economy. We want Denbighshire to be seen as a place where doing business is easy.

As a bilingual county, we also recognise that businesses may require assistance and support with the use of Welsh in their business operations. We are committed to communicating with businesses in their language of choice and to supporting businesses to increase the use of Welsh in their operations. The support from Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych for local businesses during the National Eisteddfod this summer is a good example.

Other sections of this Strategy address some of the factors that can affect the success of a business – availability of a suitable workforce, infrastructure to support business operations, and activities to stimulate demand. This section focuses on support to businesses themselves, as well as on ways that businesses can connect better with each other – to buy and sell, but also to learn from and support each other. We are keen to see the business to business supply chain in Denbighshire strengthened.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure we provide the right support for businesses and enable them to be better connected – to each other and to opportunities for growth:

1. Business support and advice services are seen as complex, confusing and hard to access with a wide range of competing providers. There is a complex landscape of agencies offering support and advice to businesses and many different initiatives and programmes in which businesses would participate. Businesses have told us that navigating this maze is extremely difficult and that the system rarely seems to be working together.
2. Access to business finance and credit continues to be problematic. The FSB continues to find poor access to finance operating as a barrier to growth for its members. Cost of finance has also proved problematic for many small businesses. Cash flow continues to be challenging for businesses, particularly small and very small businesses.
3. Many businesses find business rates both expensive and confusing. The Council has very little influence over business rate policy with Welsh & UK Government setting the agenda. We do, however, have the opportunity to make representations and will continue to lobby for greater flexibility and a greater say in the local determination of business rates.
4. Business engagement and networking across Denbighshire is patchy and fragmented. We have a large number of local and regional networks to which Denbighshire businesses can belong but we have no obvious central point of contact or umbrella body. As a result we do not know how comprehensive the coverage of existing networks is or how many of our businesses are participating. We believe effective business networks offer a distinct advantage to a local economy.
5. Council regulatory services are seen by many businesses as complex and overly bureaucratic, and a barrier to growth. A UK Taskforce identified complex regulation and ‘red tape’ as an unnecessary burden on businesses and the economy. Since then administrations across the UK have sought to introduce a more streamlined approach based on the principles of proportionality, accountability, consistency, transparency and targeted action.
6. The Council’s ability to direct its procurement activity to local businesses is constrained by procurement regulations and the need to deliver value for money from cheaper contracts. Council procurement activity is not only driven by a desire to support the local economy, but also by the need to achieve value for money from public spend. Balancing these potentially competing priorities can be challenging.
7. Levels of local procurement are also constrained by the ability of local businesses to meet the Council’s supply needs. Smaller businesses in particular often find it difficult to understand and comply with the requirements of public procurement processes adopted by the Council.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards achieving our strategic outcome for Supported & Connected Businesses by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 2.1: Business Support

- a) Encourage and support Rhyl City Strategy to extend its current Advice Network initiative into a multi-agency Business Advice and Support Partnership all existing agencies and providers, creating a One Stop Shop approach for businesses seeking advice and support
- b) Ensure Council regulatory services adopt a more business friendly approach to their operations ensuring that as far as possible, regulation is proportionate, consistent, accountable, transparent and targeted.
- c) Develop a 'Business Friendly' culture across all Council Services.

Workstream 2.2: Local Business Connections

- a) Support and facilitate effective business networking and business to business mentoring across Denbighshire
- b) Consider establishing Denbighshire Business Week and Denbighshire Business Awards scheme
- c) Undertake analysis of local supply chain/business to business purchasing within Denbighshire to identify areas for further action
- d) Consider how to achieve effective strategic engagement with Denbighshire's Business community

Workstream 2.3: DCC Procurement

- a) Ensure DCC's revised procurement strategy incorporates effective Local Procurement and Community Benefits approaches that support local businesses and provide employment opportunities for local residents
- b) Undertake effective Supplier Development and Engagement activity to improve the ability of local businesses to participate effectively in public procurement opportunities

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to enable better supported and connected businesses in Denbighshire, we should expect to see:

- More businesses finding it easier to get Business advice & support, and benefiting from the advice and support received
- More effective business networks across the county, delivering quantifiable benefit to their members
- Local businesses winning more business from Denbighshire County Council and other public procurement contracts
- More businesses and residents benefiting as a result of Community Benefit clauses in Denbighshire County Council contracts

THEME 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Outcomes

1. We build on the strengths of our tourism and agricultural sectors and encourage them to make an increasingly strong contributions to Denbighshire's economy
2. We exploit new opportunities for growth, with an initial focus on the Manufacturing, Energy & Environmental Technologies and Creative Industries sectors
3. We encourage growth in the Social Enterprise sector to deliver alternative and complementary opportunities for services and jobs

As well as working to support businesses generally, we believe it is important to understand our economy's strengths, in order to build on them, and our areas for potential new growth, in order to support diversification. We are concerned that Denbighshire's economy is currently heavily dependent on one or two key sectors and lacks resilience as a result.

This section of our Strategy focuses on understanding our existing strengths and how they can be made to work harder, our potential strengths and what sectors we might be well placed to attract growth in.

The economy does not recognise organisational or political boundaries. Economic growth is dependent on businesses being able to connect with and grasp economic opportunity wherever it is located – within their existing markets but with a wider geographic reach, and also through diversification into new market/product areas.

Denbighshire is geographically well positioned to take advantage of economic growth opportunities in neighbouring economies, and also to act as a location for new business growth itself.

Whilst we will look to neighbouring economies for opportunities, our recently approved Local Development Plan makes important allocations of both employment and housing land in the county itself that will support economic growth, providing much needed land for business growth and housing for local workers. We recognise that attracting businesses and residents from outside the county, and potentially Wales, presents risks for Denbighshire's Welsh identity. We are alert to these risks, however, and will ensure our actions are taken forward so as to minimise them.

It is also worth highlighting, the considerable commercial opportunities for the local construction sector from physical development. Evidence suggests that every construction job supports a further 2.6 jobs elsewhere in the local economy. We are therefore keen that Denbighshire's construction businesses are well placed to take advantage of new construction opportunities in Denbighshire and further afield.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure we maximise the opportunities for growth for Denbighshire's economy:

1. Denbighshire's economy is currently heavily reliant on the public sector for employment, accounting for much of the county's employment and is one of the highest rates in the UK. There is a risk that this high level of public sector employment reduces the workforce available for the private sector. Also, with reductions in public finances likely to continue, the high risk of job losses in the sector cannot be ignored. The skilled workforce associated with the mainly professional public sector services is, however, an asset that could be exploited further.
2. Tourism accounts for 10% of employment in Denbighshire. Generally jobs in this sector tend to be seasonal and lower paid. Diversification into higher value parts of the sector may help to increase the value of employment and stimulate formation of new businesses.
3. Agriculture represents a strong influence on Denbighshire – both its economy and its landscape. Pressures facing our agricultural and associated businesses are many. The Council has not previously devoted much energy to exploring and understanding them, or to supporting diversification or other growth strategies for the sector. We recognise that we need to strengthen our partnership with this sector, and support existing and seek new programmes to add value to agricultural produce and address agri-environmental issues.
4. Other sectors are under-represented in Denbighshire's employment and business base; however the demographics of a growing elderly population suggest that the Health and Care sector may become increasingly important in future.
5. The value derived from Denbighshire's tourism offer is lower than neighbouring areas. For Denbighshire as a whole, the revenue from tourism continues to show a small increasing trend, although with revenues from coastal tourism less buoyant than those from rural tourism. Overall revenue generated from tourism for Denbighshire in 2011 was £304.2M, compared with £623.2M for our neighbour, Conwy.
6. There are currently poor connections with supply chain and employment opportunities in neighbouring economies with the potential for significant economic growth. The economy running along the M56/A55 corridor from Manchester to Anglesey has been calculated to generate an output of £31bn. A significant element of this is based around Manufacturing. There are 6 Enterprise Zones and 2 City Regions within easy reach of Denbighshire. Better connections to these opportunities have the potential to offer benefits to both businesses and residents.
7. North Wales Economic Ambition Board has identified Advanced Manufacturing and Energy & Environmental Technologies as realistic sectors for growth in North Wales as a whole. Work is already underway to realise those growth opportunities. Denbighshire County Council is actively participating in that work. Separately, we also believe Creative Industries may offer potential for the county.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards achieving our strategic outcomes for maximising Opportunities for Growth by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 3.1A: Developing our Strengths: Tourism

- a) Explore and promote opportunities for growth/diversification, with a particular focus on:
 - i. Outdoor and activity tourism
 - ii. Food and drink tourism
 - iii. Welsh language, culture and heritage
- b) Work with accommodation providers to improve the quality and quantity of visitor accommodation across the county
- c) Work with tourism businesses generally, with a particular focus on tourism skills development
- d) Complete the Coastal Facilities business case and strategy
- e) Develop a Denbighshire Events strategy, integrating both major and local events

Workstream 3.1B: Developing our Strengths: Agriculture

- a) Establish a strategic relationship with the agricultural sector in Denbighshire
- b) Explore and promote opportunities for sustainable growth and jobs within the agricultural sector, in particular measures that support farmers and land managers improve competitiveness, reduce grant dependency and improve resilience.

Workstream 3.2: Growth Opportunities

- a) Explore the local growth potential from new sectors, with an initial focus on Advanced Manufacturing, Energy & Environmental Technologies, Health & Care and Creative Industries.
- b) Through the North Wales Economic Ambition projects, maximise the potential for local supply chain connections into the Manufacturing and Energy & Environmental Technologies sectors
- c) Work with Glyndwr University to further exploit the potential of OpTiC as a high tech incubator hub and promote St Asaph Business Park generally as a location for Advanced Manufacturing (Opto Electronics)
- d) Map regional growth locations (Deeside & Anglesey Enterprise Zones, Energy Island developments, new Prison, 21st Century Schools programmes, etc) to identify supply chain and job opportunities

Workstream 3.3: Social Enterprise

- a) Work with DVSC to develop a local Social Enterprise Network that can offer tailored support and advice to Social Enterprises and enable them to provide a realistic alternative economic growth and jobs creation option
- b) Explore opportunities for delivering services through social enterprise/mutual/co-operative business models

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to maximise opportunities for economic growth in Denbighshire, we should expect to see:

- More revenue generated from Tourism
- More businesses and more jobs in the tourism and agriculture sectors
- More local rural products developed and produced
- More Denbighshire businesses operating and more Denbighshire residents employed in the Manufacturing and Energy & Environmental Technologies sectors
- Diversification of the business base in Denbighshire
- More successful social enterprises offering more job opportunities

THEME 4: HIGH QUALITY SKILLED WORKFORCE

Outcomes

1. Denbighshire's residents are well skilled, and equipped to benefit from jobs and opportunities that arise
2. Employment rates across Denbighshire are improved, with significant reductions in youth unemployment in particular
3. Denbighshire's businesses have easy access to a workforce with the skills needed for businesses to be successful and grow
4. Denbighshire has a strong culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship

Ready access to a high quality and appropriately skilled workforce is an important factor for businesses. It can help existing businesses to be more successful and grow, and can be a key factor in attracting a new business to locate in an area.

Equally, for residents having the right skills and experience can leave them better positioned to take advantage of opportunities for employment that arise, both locally within Denbighshire and in neighbouring economies. The North Wales Economic Ambition Board has identified skills development as a key priority and is currently working to establish a regional Skills Development Plan.

The Working Futures Database demonstrates a growing trend of increasing demand for higher level qualifications and a declining demand for lower level qualifications. The two identified potential growth sectors for North Wales and Denbighshire (Advanced Manufacturing and Energy & Environmental Technologies) are heavily dependent on higher skilled occupations. These present both a challenge and an opportunity for Denbighshire.

Understanding the demand for employees and the demand for skills at all levels will be important in enabling us to work with partners to improve skills development and improve access to employment for all, including those who are furthest from the workplace. Understanding barriers to employment will also be critical. There remains a significant pool of unemployed residents within Denbighshire, for whom outcomes could be improved and who may represent a pool to meet the needs of expanding businesses across Denbighshire and beyond.

As an education authority, there is much that the Council can do to enhance bilingualism among our young people and ultimately for our workforce. Increased confidence and fluency in the use of Welsh in the workplace will help support businesses across the county deliver their services bilingually. As a major local employer, the Council is also committed to enhancing the bilingual competence of its own workforce.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure we have a high quality and highly skilled workforce available for employers in Denbighshire and beyond:

1. Denbighshire's education service has secured a trend of improvement at the end of secondary phase and post 16 education since 2010. The Authority performs well against performance measures contextually and in comparison with the position of a number of other Councils. Although this trend of improvement has been secured there remain inconsistencies in performance against specific indicators and there is room for improvement. For example, our results at A level are above the cohort median, but we have the highest proportion of students who leave education, training or work based learning without an approved qualification. Also, performance compares less well with other neighbouring economies in North West England.
2. There are pockets of significant deprivation with high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, high proportions of low or no qualifications and low participation in education or training. Parts of West and South West Rhyl and Upper Denbigh experience levels of deprivation among the most extreme 10% in Wales. There is evidence of extremely low levels of basic literacy and numeracy skills in these areas. A focus on addressing barriers to work, including skills development, in these communities will improve outcomes for individual residents and households, and will also improve the vibrancy of Denbighshire's economy as a whole as income levels rise.
3. Demands for higher levels of qualification across occupations and industry are not matched by qualification levels. The most recent census suggests that Denbighshire occupies the middle ground in terms of how many residents have qualifications of level 4 and above in comparison with neighbouring economies. Demand for higher level qualifications in potential growth sectors is expected to increase, with 28% of those in the manufacturing sector and 26% in the construction sector expected to require qualifications of level 5 or above.
4. As yet, we have an incomplete understanding of employer needs with much information either anecdotal or inferred from surveys for other purposes. A closer engagement would help Denbighshire understand its skills demand for businesses locally and tailor support accordingly.
5. There is a complex landscape of support organisations, programmes and projects available to get people into work, education or training with significant potential for duplication, fragmentation and conflict
6. Youth unemployment rates across Denbighshire remain stubbornly high, with significant concentrations in the more deprived communities in the county.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards achieving our strategic outcomes for ensuring a high quality skilled workforce in Denbighshire by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 4.1: Skills for Work & Life

- a) Review current programmes to support skills development, particularly in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT within the context of the requirement to adhere to national frameworks such as the Literacy & Numeracy Framework, as well as changes arising from the 14-19 Curriculum Review Task and Finish Group.
- b) Develop a clear definition and shared understanding of ‘soft’ skills and identify which skills within this context fall in to the scope of responsibility of the different sectors.
- c) Contribute to the North Wales Economic Ambition Board project on Skills & Employment, ensuring Denbighshire’s priorities and needs are reflected in the emerging North Wales Skills Development Plan.

Workstream 4.2: Connecting People with Jobs

- a) Support and challenge Careers Wales to improve the Careers advice available to young people in schools
- b) Improve the range, quality and availability of work experience opportunities
- c) Improve the availability and quality of apprenticeship opportunities
- d) Explore how to build stronger links between schools, colleges & employers
- e) Work with Rhyl City Strategy to develop a county wide Job Brokerage scheme to connect people with employment opportunities, and businesses with employees
- f) Assess the factors that present barriers to work for Denbighshire residents, particularly young people, and identify priority areas for action and where the accountability for taking forward this action lies.
- g) Consider whether creation of an Employability Partnership would help to achieve better co-ordination and integration of activities and programmes

Workstream 4.3: Advanced Skills for Growth

- a) Identify and promote career pathways in growth sectors, with particular focus on Manufacturing and Energy & Environmental Technologies
- b) Explore how to achieve better engagement with employers to understand skills needs/gaps
- c) Ensure the advanced skills needed for growth sectors are addressed effectively through school/college curriculum

Workstream 4.4: Enterprise & Entrepreneurship

- a) Review and evaluate how enterprise and entrepreneurship are promoted, both in schools and community settings and identify priority areas for action. These may include:
 - i. Further development of Enterprise Hubs/Clubs/Resource Centres
 - ii. Enterprise/Entrepreneur mentoring scheme
 - iii. Enterprise/Entrepreneur incentive/bursary scheme

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to develop a high quality skilled workforce in Denbighshire, we should expect to see:

- Fewer people with no qualifications
- More people with higher levels of qualifications
- Reduced numbers of 16 – 24 year olds Not in Employment, Education or Training
- Fewer unemployed people, with a significant reduction in youth unemployment
- Fewer vacancies left unfilled due to lack of suitable applicants
- An increase in enterprise and entrepreneurship, with more people setting up their own businesses

THEME 5: VIBRANT TOWNS & COMMUNITIES

Outcomes

1. Denbighshire's towns are vibrant and prosperous, and ready to meet the challenges of the future
2. Denbighshire's rural communities are economically sustainable, now and in the future
3. The number of communities and households in Denbighshire experiencing deprivation are reduced

Vibrant and healthy towns and communities are important for a number of reasons. They are likely to be more attractive places to live with pleasant environments and access to a range of services and facilities therefore delivering a higher quality of life for the people who live there. More attractive places to live can help to reduce outward migration, particularly of young people. It is also recognised that places that are good to live are often also the places that are good to visit.

Successful towns and communities are likely to offer access to employment in the services and facilities they support, and to provide opportunities to retain residents' and visitor spend in the local economy. We see recirculation of spend within the local Denbighshire economy as important to achieve – both between residents and local businesses and among businesses themselves.

Many of our communities are already prosperous and we are keen to help them remain so. Unfortunately, some of our communities are faring less well and we recognise that focused action will be needed to support them, and the residents living in them, to achieve similar economic success.

As a Council, we have made a commitment to be 'Closer to our Communities'. Our new Town Plans, currently being expanded into Area Plans, are one means of achieving this, by allowing communities to prioritise the issues important to them and what they want to see done to address them. We intend that Town & Area Plans will become the vehicle for bringing this Economic & Community Ambition Strategy to life at local level.

Many of the issues facing our towns and communities are also addressed by actions elsewhere in this Strategy. This section focuses on delivery of our aspirations at local level for individual communities. In delivering our aspirations, we would wish to foster an approach that encourages Community led local Economic Development. Cadwyn Clwyd will be an increasingly important partner in relation to our aspirations for Denbighshire's rural communities.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure our Towns and Communities are vibrant and have the best chance of being resilient to changes in the future:

1. Traditional Town Centres are at risk from changes in consumer habits. The trend across the UK is a decline in town centre retail, largely due to out of town and online retail opportunities. Lower access to personal credit also impacts as incomes have been squeezed in the current financial circumstances. Town Centres increasingly need to become multi-purpose - more than merely retail areas, offering opportunities for leisure and entertainment, as well as for living and working.
2. Business rates in some towns are seen as too high, overly complex and a pressure on businesses. This is a concern common to towns and town centre businesses across the UK. Business rates are a significant source of income to Governments, in Wales accounting for £1billion of revenue. At the same time, however, they can be a significant cost to individual businesses. Local options for reducing this impact within the current regulatory framework are extremely limited.
3. A number of recent national reports have highlighted the need for a more coordinated policy approach to managing Town Centres. Varying operational services need to be encouraged to work together and to see the Town Centre as a cohesive functioning area rather than separate areas of traffic, parking, shops, businesses, open space etc.
4. Weaknesses in infrastructure and services in some rural communities can risk future sustainability. Poor transport and ICT infrastructure, coupled with availability of affordable housing and lower access to services and jobs in rural communities can contribute to making them less attractive as places to live for some residents and consequently for businesses to invest.
5. At the same time, balancing development with protection of the natural environment and rural context is challenging. Many people choose more rural locations precisely for the quieter, less busy pace of life.
6. Pockets of significant deprivation in Rhyl & Upper Denbigh remain key issues, impacting on outcomes for individual residents and the overall success of Denbighshire's economy as a whole
7. Levels of rural deprivation may be masked and poorly understood. There is a growing understanding that some of the more standard measures of deprivation can underestimate levels in more rural areas. There is also evidence that some issues can disproportionately affect people in rural areas – income and housing, access to services, and poor transport connections – risking a 'spiral of rural disadvantage'.
8. Outward migration of younger population risks future sustainability of Denbighshire's communities.
9. The forthcoming new EU Common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Plan offers significant funding opportunities to address issues in rural Denbighshire. We see significant alignment between our aspirations and the emerging priorities published by Welsh Government in January 2013.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards achieving our strategic outcomes for ensuring vibrant Towns and communities across Denbighshire by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 5.1: Town Centres & High Streets of the Future

- a) Develop initiatives for empty shops – including visual improvements, temporary uses and securing permanent new tenants
- b) Develop initiatives to promote and assist independent retailers
- c) Promote diversification and introduce new, non-retail uses which will help support the future vitality and viability of town centres and improve the evening economy
- d) Review parking/traffic management in all towns and consider changes that will promote economic sustainability or growth

Workstream 5.2: Rural Denbighshire

- a) Explore and promote opportunities for diversification to support growth in rural areas across all sectors in line with Welsh Government's Green Growth rural strategy.
- b) Develop initiatives to promote local food production/selling - including consideration of supply chain issues to local shops, markets, cafes, restaurants and hotels.
- c) Assess accessibility of goods and services in rural areas

Workstream 5.3: Tackling Deprivation & Poverty

- a) Deliver the priority projects within the Rhyl Going Forward programme workstreams
 - i. Coastal Tourism
 - ii. Town Centre
 - iii. West Rhyl Housing/Neighbourhood Improvement
 - iv. Live & Work in Rhyl
- b) Work with and support North Denbighshire Communities First Cluster to address the causes of deprivation and improve outcomes for residents in Rhyl & Upper Denbigh
- c) Develop a county wide approach to understanding and tackling deprivation and poverty

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to ensure vibrant and resilient Towns and communities across Denbighshire, we should expect to see:

- Fewer vacant units and increased footfall in our town centres
- More residents happier with their town centre
- More residents in rural areas happier with where they live
- More town centre & rural businesses feeling confident about the future
- Reduced deprivation, lower unemployment rates and higher levels of average income across Denbighshire

THEME 6: WELL PROMOTED DENBIGHSHIRE

Outcomes

1. Denbighshire is recognised as a great place to live and is successful in attracting people to move to or remain living in its towns and communities
2. Denbighshire is recognised as a great place to visit and plays a key role in making North Wales a top 5 UK visitor destination
3. Denbighshire is recognised as an attractive place for businesses to be located and is successful in attracting new and retaining existing growing businesses

Throughout our early consultations on what was needed to develop the economy in Denbighshire, one of the most common comments was that Denbighshire did not do enough to promote and market its many assets as effectively as it could.

Traditionally, most effort has been put into promotion of Denbighshire's offer for visitors, but even then there are concerns that key opportunities and emerging new markets are being missed. Little, if any, attention has been given to promotion of Denbighshire as a location for business/inward investment or as a great place to choose to live.

For marketing and promotion to be effective, a number of things need to be in place. We need to understand clearly who we are marketing to and why. We then need to tailor our message to make it as effective as possible and ensure we use the right methods, channels and media to get our message across. Quantity of promotion is secondary to its quality.

We also need to understand what to promote and market, and how our target audiences will identify us, rather than how we identify ourselves. Sometimes it may be appropriate to market Denbighshire as a whole, but often we will need to be more specific, promoting individual elements and assets. There are already a number of brands in use across the county. We do not intend there to be only a single Denbighshire brand, but instead to use whichever brand or identity is most appropriate in the circumstances. It will be important, however, to ensure that individual brands and messages are clear, well understood and do not conflict or compete unnecessarily with each other.

As well as ensuring our promotional activity is effective, however, we also need to make sure that the reality of our product (Denbighshire) matches up to our promise. Some of the activity to ensure this will take place outside the scope of this Strategy, in particular through the other priorities within Denbighshire County Council's Corporate Plan. Other aspects have already been highlighted in other sections of this Strategy – for example, infrastructure for business growth under Theme 1 and action to support the vibrancy of our towns and communities as places to live and visit under Theme 5.

Issues & Challenges

Our analysis has identified the following key challenges we believe need to be addressed to ensure Denbighshire is well promoted to all target audiences:

1. We need to agree target audiences/markets and tailor our promotion activity accordingly. It is not clear that we understand this currently and our messages, therefore, can be confused and ineffective.
2. Denbighshire's bilingual nature is a key attribute that should be promoted more in its marketing messages – in particular for visitors, creating a distinct sense of place and identity and a rich cultural and heritage offering
3. Messages for inward investment/business relocation (high tech, vibrant environment) may conflict with those for visitors (natural environment, peaceful surroundings). Both are and can be right. We need to understand how to manage these multiple messages without contradicting or causing confusion.
4. Denbighshire's brand may not be enough on its own. Integration with broader promotional campaigns is essential, together with an understanding of which brand to use when and how.
5. Destination (product) management is as important as effective promotion to ensure the experience meets expectations. Destination Management is already a concept well understood in the visitor/tourism sector, however it applies equally to fulfilling the 'promise' behind inward investment promotional activity. Further consideration of this will be needed if our activity is to be successful.
6. Methods of promotion are changing and multi channel approaches will need to be adopted. In particular, we will probably need to place less reliance on traditional print based media, and make more – and more effective – use of social media channels and PR opportunities. Forms of 'word of mouth' promotion are also known to be effective and will need to be explored.

Headline Actions

We aim to address the issues and challenges, and make progress towards achieving our strategic outcomes for effective promotion and marketing of Denbighshire by focusing on the following areas:

Workstream 6.1: Effective Marketing

- a) Undertake market research to better understand our target markets and audiences, our customers' needs and preferences, and our competitors, allowing us to tailor our promotional activity for greatest impact.
- b) Identify and exploit opportunities for collaborating with others on the marketing of Denbighshire through strengthened links with national and regional marketing campaigns
- c) Develop effective promotion of Denbighshire, incorporating both traditional and newer modes of communication, in particular social media and PR
- d) Understand and exploit better the significance of Wales as a market for visitors to Denbighshire.

- e) Encourage local residents to see Denbighshire as a place to ‘visit’ as well as live in.
- f) Work with local businesses and community representatives to establish ‘champions’ for Denbighshire, who will promote the county as a great place to live, work, operate a business and visit.
- g) Work with estate agents and housing developers to strengthen promotion of Denbighshire’s towns and communities as desirable places to live.
- h) Together with our partners, target appropriate industry events to promote Denbighshire to visitors and potential businesses, using a shared overall message to maximise the impact of our combined marketing activity.

Workstream 6.2: Destination Management

- a) Complete a Destination Management Plan for Denbighshire & consolidate the Destination Denbighshire Partnership
- b) Establish a co-ordinated approach to ensure a professional and seamless response to Inward Investment enquiries
- c) Continue to develop and embed Town & Area Plans, across Council Services and priorities, with partners and within communities themselves.
- d) Develop and implement a co-ordinated approach to tackling identified eyesore sites across the county

Indicators of Success

If we are successful in our work to ensure effective promotion and marketing of Denbighshire and its assets, we should expect to see:

- A healthy level of house sales and new house build completions
- More people moving into the area to live and work
- Increased visitor numbers and spend
- More businesses seeking to locate in Denbighshire
- More residents happier with where they live

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Taking Action

The vision contained in this Strategy is a long term, and we recognise also an ambitious one. We are committed to making progress towards achieving it, however. Accompanying this Strategy is a Delivery Plan. It sets out the actions the Council intends to take over the next 4 years to start realising our Economic & Community Ambition for Denbighshire.

At this stage, much of the activity is focused in the first 2 years, with many of the early actions aimed at better understanding the challenges and opportunities facing Denbighshire's economy and how they can be best addressed. As the Delivery Plan is implemented, actions will be added, amended or removed as circumstances change and initiatives are delivered.

Alongside the Council's actions will sit numerous significant contributions from our various partners. Some of these are reflected in the Delivery Plan. We are committed to working with our partners and recognise that without their assistance, the impact on the local economy will be less powerful. We hope that the vision we have set out will help partners be clear about their contributions and will help them shape their priorities for a successful Denbighshire.

Resourcing the Actions

In common with most other public sector organisations, Denbighshire County Council and its partners will face a tough financial position over the coming years. Despite this difficult situation, the Council has set out its aspirations and ambitions in its Corporate Plan and has included within the Plan a financial strategy to support its implementation.

Overall, the Corporate Plan estimates that £134M investment will be required to realise the ambitions of the Corporate Plan as a whole, of which £2M has been allocated to developing the local economy. The Corporate Plan recognises, however, that this funding cannot be guaranteed and should the Council's financial position change over the next 5 years, then we may need to adjust our forecasts and investment plans.

The 2013/14 budget allocated an additional £160K for delivery of the economic development priority within the Corporate Plan. This was in addition to extra funding provided in 2011/12 and 2012/13 to support implementation of the Council's regeneration activities and its new Town & Area Plans.

Together with existing service budgets and opportunities for external grant funding from the EU, Welsh Government and other sources, this additional funding will go a long way towards delivering the Council's Economic & Community Ambition as set out in this Strategy. As individual projects and activities are developed, it will be clear if additional funding will be required and this can then be taken into account in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

A key resource available to the Council will be the time and work of its employees. The Economic & Community Ambition Strategy and its Delivery Plan is not the preserve of any one Council service and will require contributions from all teams and departments if we are to be successful in realising our aspirations. The Delivery Plan attached to this Strategy identifies the teams we believe need to lead individual pieces of work.

An important commitment of this Strategy is that all Council Services will understand their contribution to developing the local economy and will organise their day to day operations to support our overall ambitions. Creation of a culture in which the issues facing businesses are understood by all services and delivery of business friendly responses become routine has been identified as a priority action.

Whilst delivery of the Strategy does not belong to just one part of the Council, some teams will be more heavily involved than others. This year, the Council has undertaken a root and branch review of its support to business and economic development. The review found that while officers worked hard to support economic growth, organisational structures got in the way and were often difficult to understand, particularly for businesses the teams were trying to support. Feedback from a selection of local businesses described the Council as complex, bureaucratic and reactive to deal with.

As a result, a new service has been developed with a single Economic & Business Development Manager leading 3 geographically focused teams (Coastal, North & South) and supported by a specialist External Funding Team. The new structure is intended to achieve better flexibility in the deployment of staff resources and enable greater capacity and capability at the front line to deliver key projects and priorities. It is also aimed at bringing the Council closer to the business community. Staff will be deployed within the teams to deliver localised support to businesses and take forward actions identified within this Strategy.

At the same time, Tourism support has been incorporated into the Council's wider Marketing and Events activity through a new Tourism, Marketing and Events Team. This will allow a more proactive and co-ordinated approach to promoting Denbighshire and its opportunities.

The Service Plans for both teams will reflect the priority actions agreed through the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy.

Monitoring Progress

A robust monitoring and evaluation regime will underpin the Strategy and Delivery Plan. A suite of indicators have been identified and are published alongside this Strategy. The indicators will be used to measure the impact of our actions. During the first year of the Strategy, a full baseline of the outcome indicators will be collated to allow progress to be assessed as the actions are implemented.

Monitoring and evaluation will not just be a process of reflection at the end of the Strategy implementation. It will be a live activity that provides information to inform decisions and allow changes to be made as required. Throughout its life, an annual review of the Strategy, its implementation and its impact will be produced to assess progress and identify any changes that may be required to ensure the overall Ambition is realised.

Implementation of the Strategy actions will be monitored through the Council's project and programme management system, with delivery confidence for individual elements of the Delivery Plan reviewed formally every 6 months within the Council's overall performance reporting system.

Governance and Accountability

The Economic & Community Ambition Strategy is a comprehensive and wide reaching document, with implications across many Council services and portfolios and beyond. It is cross cutting in its implementation and impact.

Within the Council, the Lead Member for Economic Development has overall political responsibility at Cabinet level for development and delivery of the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy. The Lead Members for Tourism, Youth & Leisure, Public Realm, Education and Customers & Communities also have political responsibility for important components of the overall Strategy. The Corporate Director, Economic & Community Ambition is responsible for ensuring overall co-ordination and delivery of the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy and its implementation.

To assist with governance, an Economic & Community Ambition Programme Board has been established. Its role is to develop, organise, direct and oversee implementation of the range of projects and activities set out in the Strategy Delivery Plan. It will monitor progress and impact, help to resolve problems/barriers to delivery, and will recommend changes as required during the lifetime of the Strategy. A key role for the Programme Board will be to ensure that the projects and activities deliver their intended benefits.

The Programme Board will also be responsible for identifying risks that may impact on successful delivery of the Strategy. During the first year of the Strategy, a Risk Register will be developed to enable the Programme Board to undertake this task effectively.

Initial membership of the Programme Board will be:

- Corporate Director, Economic & Community Ambition
- Lead Member, Economic Development
- Lead Member, Tourism, Youth & Leisure (also for Welsh Language)
- Lead Member, Public Realm
- A representative from each of the 3 Scrutiny Committees
- Head of Service, Housing & Community Development
- Head of Service, Education
- Head of Service, Communications, Marketing & Leisure
- Head of Service, Finance & Assets

Membership will be reviewed as the suite of projects comprising the overall Economic & Community Ambition Programme develops.

Scrutiny will take place both through the Council's regular performance reports that cover implementation of the Corporate Plan, and through the opportunity for review by Scrutiny on individual projects or activities as appropriate.

During development of and consultation on the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy, many comments were made about the number of partners who are actively engaged in supporting Denbighshire's local economy. A suggestion was also made that a county wide Economic Partnership may be worth establishing to provide a forum for ongoing review, monitoring and prioritisation. This is an idea we are currently giving active consideration and, if established, could form an important part of both the delivery and monitoring arrangements for the Strategy.

Glossary

BCUHB - Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.

Business Improvement Districts - Business led / funded schemes to improve a defined commercial area, such as a town centre or industrial estate through additional services or new initiatives.

Careers Wales – National provider of careers advice and guidance.

Cheshire and Warrington LEP - a voluntary Local Enterprise Partnership between local authorities and businesses formed to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth in its local area.

City Region – an economic and political area involving cross-boundary co-operation of local authorities on strategic policy areas such as economic growth, transport, tourism, culture, housing and infrastructure.

DCC – Denbighshire County Council.

Delivery Plan – a plan outlining the main actions, timescales and lead responsibility for making them happen.

Denbighshire Big Plan – Brings together the long term strategic vision for the county with a strategy to improve the health, social care & wellbeing of people in the county, a strategic plan for everything to do with children and young people, and a multiagency plan for tackling crime and disorder in the county.

Enterprise Zones - Areas around the country that support both new and expanding businesses by offering incentives.

EU Common Agricultural Policy - The agricultural policy of the European Union, which aims to ensure a fair standard of living for farmers, provide a stable and safe food supply at affordable prices for consumers, and balanced development of rural areas.

Federation of Small Businesses

(FSB) - UK's largest campaigning pressure group promoting and protecting the interests of the self-employed and owners of small firms.

Gross Value Added (GVA) - A measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.

ICT – Information and Communications Technology.

Indicators of Success – statistics collected to help measure progress towards achieving an outcome.

Job Brokerage – the process of giving practical help to enable people to access training and qualifications linked to real job opportunities.

Local Development Plan – A set of documents containing local authority policies / proposals for development and use of land in their area. It guides and informs day-to-day decisions on requests for planning permission.

Local Service Board (LSB) - Accountable for The Big Plan, it brings together the leaders of Denbighshire's public and voluntary services to work together in making services more effective.

Median household incomes - Used to generate data about geographic areas, dividing households into two equal segments earning less/more than the median.

Mersey Dee Alliance - A partnership that supports strategic economic activity spanning North East Wales, West Cheshire and Wirral.

Modernising Education programme – DCC led programme of physical improvements to provide the right number of school places, of the right type, in the right locations.

North Wales Construction

Procurement Framework - Designed to create significant cost and time savings for starting major construction works across North Wales.

North Wales Economic Ambition

Board – Partnership of all 6 North Wales Councils together with Education partners, Welsh Government and the local private sector. Established to promote economic development collaboration in North Wales with a focus on energy and environment, advanced materials and manufacturing and promoting inward investment.

OpTiC - Opto-electronics Technology and Incubation Centre, based at St Asaph Business Park.

Outcomes – End results / observable changes.

Rhyl Going Forward programme – A regeneration programme that integrates physical, economic and social regeneration in Rhyl.

Social Enterprise – A business trading for social / environmental purposes.

‘Soft’ employment skills - Personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that make someone a good employee.

Superfast Cymru – Welsh Government and British Telecom programme to bring superfast broadband to areas which are outside the plans of the private sector.

TAITH - Joint board of the six Councils in North Wales working together to deliver improvements to transport infrastructure and services across the region.

WG – Welsh Government.

Working Futures Database - Contains detailed projections of employment, productivity, labour supply and skills information.