

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

17 NOVEMBER 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

VALLEYS REGIONAL PARK FUTURE FUNDING

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Valleys Regional Park (VRP) scheme and the request from the VRP board that BCBC continue in its role as host. The report also seeks approval to accept grant offers, subject to their full approval, from the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) and Welsh Government for future funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Rural Development Programme (RDP) respectively to fund the continued development of the Valleys Regional Park to June 2023.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:-

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focussed on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Valleys Regional Park (VRP) has been developed through the Welsh Government Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys in partnership with the Valleys local authorities (Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and Carmarthenshire), Natural Resources Wales, Visit Wales and Welsh Government officials in Health and Environment Divisions. It reflects the views of stakeholders from Valleys communities, the Third Sector, Public Health Wales and feedback received through a series of engagement events. The VRP prospectus was published on 18th October 2018 and plans have

been further developed through the partnership led by the VRP team, hosted by Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC).

3.2. The VRP aims to connect people and place, bringing together the health of the land, people and the economy. The ambition is that:

- The Valleys landscape is recognised for its quality through a regional commitment to coordinated promotion and management
- People are re-connected to the Valleys landscape for their wellbeing, so that it becomes a place for exercise, work, relaxation and nature, as well as for arts and heritage, and for education
- The Valleys landscape underpins a resilient local economy, supporting businesses, community enterprise and the development of skills and learning

3.3. The VRP has three interlinked delivery themes:

- Landscape, Culture and Identity
- Recreation and Wellbeing
- Communities and Enterprise

3.4. In April 2019 discussions took place between the partner local authorities and the Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport. The Deputy Minister expressed a desire for a local authority to act as host for the delivery team element of the next stage of the VRP – to March 2021. BCBC was invited to be the host authority.

3.5. In July 2019 BCBC accepted the invitation from Welsh Government to be the host organisation for the initial phase for a period from August 2019 to March 2021. A funding agreement was established between BCBC and Welsh Government and a legal agreement was developed, which is to be agreed and signed by all Local Authorities forming the VRP area.

3.6. In the autumn of 2019, Welsh Government and WEFO indicated that funding opportunities existed through RDP and ESF resources to potentially support the continuation of the VRP delivery from March 2021 to June 2023. At its meeting in March 2020 the VRP Board invited BCBC to apply for funding through ESF and RDP in its role as host. This invitation was subsequently supported by the VRP Forum.

4. Current situation/proposal

4.1 In June 2020 BCBC officers under delegated authority submitted two full business cases to Welsh Government and WEFO.

4.2 The proposal to Welsh Government was submitted under the RDP Co-operation and Supply Chain Development Scheme to support the continued development of the VRP Guardians Scheme. The current work will provide an evaluation of the development phase which is funded by Welsh Government and is currently being delivered through a contract with Groundwork Wales working to the VRP team. This proposal would deliver the ongoing Guardian Scheme that will utilise the facilities being delivered through the Discovery Gateway capital investments that have been made directly by Welsh Government. The proposal would enable a procurement process to be undertaken that would seek to take forward the current approach and enable funding to be in place to June 2023 for the Guardians element of the VRP.

- 4.3 The second was a proposal submitted to WEFO for ESF Priority 5, Specific Objective 5: Public Services Reform. This proposal was based on an approach to regional working that would strengthen sustainable management of natural resources through strategic regional collaboration to establish and enable the long-term vision and aims of the VRP to provide significant social, economic and environmental benefits. This proposal would support the VRP team and the development of the partnership with funding in place to June 2023. The proposal supports the development of proposals for the long term governance, operating model and funding mechanism for the VRP. Welsh Government and WEFO have agreed to allow the current funding for VRP to be used as retrospective match for the ESF proposal and attract the grant offer.
- 4.4 Based on the request of the VRP forum to do so, these proposals outline that BCBC will continue to act as host for the programme team and to extend the appropriate financial and legal agreements with Welsh Government and the Local Authorities that form the VRP. The VRP Strategic and Operational lead would remain as a Welsh Government employee but be hosted by BCBC via an extension of the terms and conditions of the existing hosting agreement.
- 4.5 BCBC has been working with public, private and third sector organisations involved across the 10 Local Authority areas of the Cardiff Capital Region along with Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Carmarthenshire to develop and deliver the Valleys Regional Park as set out in the Valleys Regional Park Prospectus. The ESF and RDP funding would enable that to continue to develop the regional partnership, piloting new ways of working and to develop options for the long term governance, operating model and funding mechanism for the VRP.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

- 5.1 There is no direct impact on the Council's policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 An initial assessment has identified that there are no equality issues related to this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is below:
- Long-term: The activities that form part of the scheme have been identified by the partners that will take part and are closely aligned with the long-term ambitions set out in the VRP prospectus. A regional collaborative approach, linked to regional working as part of the Cardiff Capital Region area works towards long-term delivery.
 - Prevention: On their own none of the partners or participating areas would be able to achieve the scale of impact that such a partnership approach offers. Therefore delivering in this way offers the opportunity to build on success to date and prevent a deterioration of the value that the development of the VRP brings to the region.

- Integration: The scheme will achieve this way of working by recognising the approaches that are proposed for support are those that have been identified by partner organisations due to their synergy with local, regional and national priorities.
- Collaboration: The proposals have been developed and will be delivered through a strong partnership between BCBC and those partners that will form part of the delivery.
- Involvement: The scheme will be delivered in close partnership with a range of local stakeholders in each area. Discussions and development with neighboring Counties has taken place through BCBC's Economy, Natural Resources and Sustainability team and relevant officers from neighbouring Councils as well as representatives from a range of private and third sector partners.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 Welsh Government made available funding of up to £342,000 for 2019/20 and £571,000 for 2020/21 to be allocated to the current phase of the VRP and the work involved to be paid via a grant to BCBC. Any costs incurred by BCBC through hosting the VRP will be covered by the grant funding available.
- 8.2. The RDP funding package through the Co-operation and Supply Chain Development Scheme is for a proposed value of £866,321. This will be 100% grant funded and does not require any match funding from BCBC or its partners. Delivery would be managed via a procurement exercise complying with BCBC Contract Procedure Rules. The project is proposed to complete in June 2023.
- 8.3. The ESF funding package is for a proposed value of £1,602,990. It is anticipated that this will be made up of £981,655 grant funding and £621,335 match funding. WEFO have agreed that the current Welsh Government funding provided to BCBC to act as host for the current phase can be used as retrospective match funding.
- 8.4. There may be minor amendments to these proposed scheme values to reflect existing project costs as actual expenditure replaces projections. Welsh Government and WEFO have confirmed their agreement for this to be the case and all final values will be subject to approval from the Section 151 Officer.
- 8.5 The funding agreement with WEFO currently requires Welsh Government to become a joint beneficiary and in doing so they will receive funding to continue to directly employ and then host with BCBC the role of VRP Strategic and Operational Lead.
- 8.6. The Section 151 Officer will ensure that the grant funding provided is used solely for the purposes outlined in the respective grant offer letters. Expenditure of the grant will comply with all statutory requirements for accounting and internal audit (including supporting records and all systems of internal checks and control), and will be included with any internal or external audit of the Council's funding.

9. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 9.1 Note progress to date in developing the VRP.

- 9.2 Note the request from the VRP board that BCBC continue in its role as host of the VRP
- 9.3 Approve the proposal for BCBC to extend its role as host of the VRP delivery team to June 2023 and delegate authority to the Corporate Director Communities, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Chief Officer of Legal, HR & Regulatory Services, to:
- (i) approve the final terms of the grant offers and accept the offers of funding from Welsh Government and WEFO for RDP and ESF resources upon their receipt; and
 - (ii) enter into any appropriate funding and legal agreements necessary to fulfil its role as host the VRP delivery team and its obligations in relation to RDP and ESF funding.

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Background documents:
None