

Visioning Workshop Discussion Group: Prosperity

Overview

A visioning workshop was held on Wednesday 30th April 10am – 2pm at Castle Green Hotel in Kendal to inform the development of the Westmorland and Furness Inclusive and Green Economic Growth Strategy. A series of thematic discussion groups – covering people, prosperity, place, green growth and inclusive growth - were ran as part of the session. This note captures the feedback gathered at the table focused on 'prosperity'.

Focus of Discussion

All workshop participants were asked to spend 10-15 minutes at each thematic table. At the 'prosperity' table they were asked to consider the following thematic opportunities and challenges which had been identified to date in the strategy's underpinning evidence base:

Table 1: Defining opportunities and challenges for the 'Prosperity' theme

Five Defining Opportunities...	Five Defining Challenges...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant and growing contributor to UK plc delivering £6bn in economic output in 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Productivity gap (87% of the England average) although this has narrowed over time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast growing and increasingly productive economy with a narrowing productivity gap with England, driven by contribution of the manufacturing sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Below average rate of employment growth relative to national rate and remains 1% below the 2019 peak
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High job density supporting self-containment and access to more employment opportunities for residents within the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Below average representation of the public sector, presenting challenges in access to public services and the ability to meet population need. This is further emphasised by significant employment losses in health and education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key sectors driving employment growth including manufacturing, visitor economy, professional, scientific and technical. The presence of dynamic sectors including net zero, life sciences, business support and digital and creative is also notable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presence of lower value sectors such as accommodation and food and agriculture, highlighting need for support to move up value chain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High number of businesses exhibiting a high growth score, indicating strong business growth potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declining business base, a below average business birth rate and declining 1-year survival rates

Participants were asked if there any key opportunities or challenges which are not currently captured.

They were also asked to:

- Use green sticky dots to identify opportunities and challenges which should be prioritised and captured within the strategic objectives for each theme
- Use red sticky dots to identify any opportunities and challenges which are less of a priority (or less relevant)

This note captures the findings of the discussions within the 'prosperity' group and begins to identify emerging priorities that should be captured in strategic objectives that will underpin the Strategy's strategic framework.

Table 2: Feedback on the Defining Opportunities for the Prosperity Theme

Defining Opportunities	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
A significant and growing contributor to UK plc delivering £6bn in economic output in 2022	1 x green	
Fast growing and increasingly productive economy with a narrowing productivity gap with England, driven by contribution of the manufacturing sector		This was recognised as important, however, participants questioned the extent to which increased manufacturing productivity could lead to benefits for W&F, with potential leakage to other areas (referring to the wide labour catchments and supply chains of key employers). This fed into discussions around wealth retention which are mentioned below.
High job density supporting self-containment and access to more employment opportunities for residents within the area		This was seen as important; however, participants were keen to emphasise significant labour market constraints around public transport, road infrastructure, housing supply (and suitability of housing for demographic cohorts needed) and digital connectivity.
Key sectors driving employment growth including manufacturing, visitor economy, professional, scientific and technical. The presence of dynamic sectors including net zero, life sciences, business support and digital and creative is also notable	1 x green	Participants suggested that the focus could be on key employers as well as sectors. Employers can more directly be agents of change rather than a more abstract concept of a sector. Suggested that foundational sectors should not be ignored as these play a role in supporting 'higher value' sectors and W&F would not be the place it is without its food and agriculture sector, for instance. Other important sectors mentioned were the creative sector and the outdoor activity / education sector.
High number of businesses exhibiting a high growth score, indicating strong business growth potential		De-prioritise or re-frame. Potentially viewing this the wrong way round, with the suggestion that the focus could be on efforts to support failing businesses or businesses with lower growth potential.
Additional Opportunities Identified in discussion		
N/A		

Table 3: Feedback on the Defining Challenges for the Prosperity Theme

Defining Opportunities	Level of Prioritisation	Notes
Productivity gap (87% of the England average) although this has narrowed over time	1 x green	
Below average rate of employment growth relative to national rate and remains 1% below the 2019 peak		
Below average representation of the public sector, presenting challenges in access to public services and the ability to meet population need. This is further emphasised by significant employment losses in health and education	1 x green	
Presence of lower value sectors such as accommodation and food and agriculture, highlighting need for support to move up value chain	1 x green 3 x red	Participants fed back strongly on the presentation of the phrase 'lower value' and the narrow lens of productivity which does not account for a wider definition of prosperity e.g. wellbeing. Consideration needs to be given to how do we amplify the value of 'low value' sectors?
Declining business base, a below average business birth rate and declining 1-year survival rates		
Additional Challenges Identified in discussion		
N/A		

Wider Considerations

- A significant focus of discussion was on labour supply and recognising that there are fundamental housing and transport challenges that need to be addressed to support growth. On the topic of housing, participants frequently noted the unsuitability of new housing products coming to market in certain areas for the demographic cohorts needed to support growth.
- Feedback on the opportunities and challenges presented often strayed into discussions around the meaning of the word 'prosperity' and how the statistics presented offer a narrow definition of the word. Whilst not downplaying the important economic and strategic contribution to the national economy, participants were keen to emphasise the wider meaning of the word, encompassing factors such as wellbeing, which arguably better reflects what the area has to offer.
- Emphasis was also placed on inclusive growth and ensuring that a priority should be to not widening the gap between those that prosper and those that do not. Hidden issues such as rural poverty and labour mobility should not be ignored.
- Participants also suggested the idea of prosperity as wealth retention, and how the Strategy could focus on how to retain and recirculate wealth that is already within W&F (as opposed to focusing only on attracting inward investment and labour to the area). Participants strongly emphasised the role of anchor institutions in supporting greater wealth retention by driving local procurement and social impact through their supply chains and potentially signing up to good employment charters (eg emerging Cumbria Commitment).
- The key sectors presented as opportunities to the participants prompted discussion as to what sectors are often hidden in such statistics. This led into frequent discussions around the linkages between economic development and community power. Participants highlighted that the area has a strong VCFSE sector – social enterprise is a burgeoning sector and W&F has a great opportunity to leverage this.

Emerging Priorities

- Solving key labour supply challenges around housing and transport (see linkages to 'Place' theme) to support growth
- Elevating the prominence of foundational sectors (health, education, food/agriculture and VCFSE), rather than focusing solely on the higher output sectors
- Supporting community wealth building and wealth retention, with a key role for anchor employers to drive social impact and wealth retention