

## South Ayrshire Council

### Report by Director of Communities and Transformation to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel of 16 September 2025

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**Subject: Community Wealth Building Programme 2021-2025**

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#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Service and Partnerships Performance Panel with an update on Community Wealth Building Programme 2021-2025.

#### **2. Recommendation**

##### **2.1 It is recommended that the Panel:**

**2.1.1 approves the Community Wealth Building (CWB) report including the 2021-2025 evaluation; and**

**2.1.2 notes the updates regarding Community Wealth Building and the recommendations moving forward.**

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Community Wealth Building (CWB) is an approach to local economic regeneration, focused on five key areas: Procurement, Financial Power, Land and Assets, Plural Ownership and Fair Work. CWB is about creating a resilient and inclusive economy for the benefit of the local area through the maximisation of local assets.
- 3.2 The overarching Ayrshire Growth Deal (AGD) programme identified CWB as core to creating a strong, resilient, and inclusive local and regional economy. A CWB Commission was established with the three Ayrshire Councils and other local Anchor Institutions. South Ayrshire Council signed a CWB charter in October 2020.
- 3.3 Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building (CWB) Programme was delivered from 2021 to 2025. The programme was the first initiative of its kind in Scotland and sought to establish a new model of economic development in Ayrshire that prioritises local resilience, fair work, community ownership, and inclusive growth.
- 3.4 CWB in South Ayrshire was initially managed by the Economy and Regeneration Service before transferring to Thriving Communities during 2023/24. In June 2024 CWB was reintegrated with the Business Support team as part of the new Thriving Economy Service Review.

- 3.5 Previous reports to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel have highlighted progress that has been made locally including local case studies, data and local spend.
- 3.6 The AGD Community Wealth Building End of Project Evaluation 2025, Appendix 1 provides an overview of the CWB programme in Ayrshire, highlighting some of the key achievements and challenges across the region.
- 3.7 In South Ayrshire CWB is now integrated with Thriving Economy and complements the already established Ambition Programme. Following the reorganisation of staff and although the CWB funded programme ended in March 2025, support is still available in South Ayrshire, this being funded by LACER and UK Shared Prosperity Funding.
- 3.8 Although the programme has finished SAC have retained one FTE CWB Officer until 31 March 2026. This officer continues to provide support to local organisations and will assist the new Thriving Economy Coordinator reviewing the new CWB Bill to help inform how SAC move forward.
- 3.9 The CWB Bill published on 20 March 2025 [CWB \(Scotland\) Bill as introduced](#) seeks to place a duty on local authorities and other public bodies. It aims to ensure CWB is implemented consistently across Scotland as an economic development tool. The Bill is still to complete the legislative process and be approved into law by the Scottish Parliament.
- 3.10 Officers will provide Cabinet with an update on any further updates and recommendations regarding CWB. It is anticipated that any recommendations to Cabinet will be June 2026 however this will be determined by the consultation and findings as part of the CWB process.

#### **4. Proposals**

- 4.1 Members are asked to review the CWB Evaluation Report (Appendix1) and acknowledge the progress made during 2021-2025.
- 4.2 Officers will present a further report to Cabinet in June 2026 providing recommendations on how SAC adopts the recommendations from the CWB Bill, if enacted, and how SAC further adopts and develops opportunities to promote CWB.

#### **5. Legal and Procurement Implications**

- 5.1 The new CWB seeks to place duties on local authorities, a further report to Cabinet will set out any legal requirements.
- 5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 CWB funded programme has ended therefore it will be down to Local Authorities to decide how they will continue to promote CWB. During 2025/26 funding for grants and staff will be funded through external funding including UKSPF and LACER Funding.

## 7. Human Resources Implications

- 7.1 The remaining 1FTE CWB Officers contract ends 31 March 2026 (LACER funded). Consideration how CWB is promoted moving forward will be considered once it becomes clearer what duties are place on local authorities.

## 8. Risk

### 8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

- 8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

### 8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

- 8.2.1 There are no risks associated with rejecting the recommendations.

## 9. Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating Equalities)

- 9.1 The proposals within this report have been assessed through the IIA scoping process and there are no significant potential positive or negative equality impacts in agreeing the proposals, therefore an IIA is not required.

## 10. Sustainable Development Implications

- 10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

## 11. Options Appraisal

- 11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

## 12. Link to Council Plan

- 12.1 The above recommendations relate to Priority 1 - Spaces and Place, Priority 2 - Live, Work, Learn and Priority 3 – Community and Civic Pride

## 13. Link to Shaping Our Future Council Yes No

- 13.1 Not applicable.

## 14. Results of Consultation

- 14.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.
- 14.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Chris Cullen, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

**Report to Service and Partnerships Performance Panel of 14  
May 2024 – [Community Wealth Building Programme](#)**

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**Date: 5 September 2025**

# AYRSHIRE GROWTH DEAL

March 2025

## Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building Project Evaluation report



**HALL  
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**“To create jobs and support thriving communities we want to ensure that more money spent in Scotland stays in Scotland. This unique legislation will help to increase investment in local economies so that they become fairer, greener and more prosperous.”**

**– Tom Arthur, Minister for Employment and Investment, on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, published 20 March 2025**

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# Executive Summary

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## Overview

This report presents the final evaluation of the Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building (CWB) Programme, delivered from 2021 to 2025. As the first initiative of its kind in Scotland, the Programme sought to establish a new model of economic development—one that prioritises local resilience, fair work, community ownership, and inclusive growth. This evaluation assesses the Programme's delivery, impact, and future potential, drawing on extensive stakeholder interviews, survey data, performance analysis, and case study evidence.

## Headline Achievements

- **1,152 enterprises supported**, exceeding the original programme target by 25%
- **1,027 jobs safeguarded** and a further 164 projected new jobs
- **286 businesses received grants or consultancy support**, improving resilience, innovation and market access
- **270 enterprises engaged in Fair Work Action Planning**, embedding inclusive employment practices
- **Over 290 businesses supported in procurement-readiness**, resulting in increased local contract wins
- **27 organisations supported in developing or transitioning to cooperative or employee-owned models**
- Community and social enterprises empowered through targeted asset and grant support

## What Worked Well

- Embedded delivery models (e.g. North Ayrshire) proved highly effective in aligning CWB with core business support services
  - Flexibility in grant use allowed tailored responses to local challenges—from energy efficiency upgrades to digital innovation
  - Trusted local officers provided relational, context-sensitive support, building confidence and capacity across the enterprise base
  - CWB activities supported national goals on fair work, net zero, and inclusive growth
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## Challenges and Barriers

- There were some recruitment issues, particularly in the early stages, meaning some council areas started later than others
- Variability in monitoring and evaluation limited cross-council learning and pan-Ayrshire coordination
- The complexity of CWB terminology and frameworks required extensive communication and culture change work

## Strategic Recommendations

1. **Sustain and scale the programme** through continued investment, mainstreamed staffing, and cross-council delivery coordination
2. **Create a shared CWB monitoring and reporting framework** to support evidence-based decision-making
3. **Target future resource allocation** towards high-impact areas such as procurement support, fair work integration, and cooperative development
4. **Formalise alignment with regional and national strategies**, including Scotland's Net Zero Route Map, Fair Work Action Plan, and forthcoming CWB legislation
5. **Use Ayrshire as a demonstration region**, developing a replicable model for other parts of Scotland

## Conclusion

The Ayrshire CWB Programme has delivered measurable economic and social benefits while piloting a new approach to place-based development. Its legacy lies in its ability to shift economic power back to communities, build fairer labour markets, and foster resilience through local ownership and collaboration. The evaluation finds a clear mandate for continuation—and a compelling case for Community Wealth Building to become a mainstream component of Scotland's wellbeing economy.

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## Introduction

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The Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building (CWB) Programme marks a distinctive and progressive model of local economic development in Scotland. Rooted in principles of fairness, inclusion and local resilience, the programme has sought to embed structural change within Ayrshire's economy by tackling inequality and promoting economic participation across its communities.

This final evaluation has been commissioned by North Ayrshire Council (NAC) on behalf of the regional Growth Deal partnership, to understand and evidence the impact, learning and legacy of the CWB programme across North, East and South Ayrshire. It serves to inform councillors, funders and regional stakeholders about the effectiveness of the investment to date and provide strategic insights for the future sustainability and potential expansion of the CWB model.

### Purpose and objectives

The evaluation addresses five core objectives:

- To assess the effectiveness of the programme in achieving its original aims and strategic objectives.
- To examine the impact of delivery across four central CWB pillars: Procurement, Employment/Fair Work, Assets, and Plural Ownership.
- To evaluate the contribution of the programme to inclusive growth, including how opportunities have been extended across the region.
- To explore the outcomes and benefits delivered through the CWB Enterprise Support Fund.
- To generate recommendations to inform policy development, programme continuation or scaling, and wider CWB practice in Scotland and beyond.

### Scope of the report

Evaluation data covers the initial programme period from inception in 2021 through to June 2024 (Years 1-3), plus extension period (Year 4) data to end December 2024. It encompasses all three Ayrshire local authority areas and reflects the complexity of a regionally coordinated initiative delivered in locally tailored ways, acknowledging variation in context, capacity and approach across the partners.

### Background: responding to regional inequality through CWB

Ayrshire has long been challenged by structural economic disadvantages, including high levels of unemployment, low productivity, and persistent inequality in income and opportunity. In response, the

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Ayrshire Growth Deal committed to pioneering a Community Wealth Building approach, investing £3 million to drive systemic change through local economic empowerment. The programme's ambition has been to increase local spend, embed fair work, make better use of assets for community benefit, and promote inclusive ownership models.

The programme has been delivered through three interlinked components:

- CWB Locality Officers working directly with businesses and communities to promote and enable CWB practices.
- The CWB Enterprise Support Fund, offering tailored financial and consultancy support to organisations.
- Fair Work Ayrshire, a specialist advisory service promoting employment practices aligned with the principles of Fair Work.

## Evaluation methodology

This evaluation employs a mixed-methods approach, designed to balance strategic insight with operational evidence, structured around the following elements:

- **Desk Research and Data Analysis:** A detailed review of programme documentation, reporting data, budget allocations and performance metrics, alongside national policy context.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** In-depth qualitative interviews with programme delivery teams, council leads, steering group members, and regional economic partners.
- **Enterprise Surveys:** A wide-reaching survey targeting all businesses supported through the CWB fund and Fair Work services, designed to capture views on programme accessibility, impact, and outcomes.
- **Case Studies:** Development of targeted case studies from supported enterprises to showcase tangible benefits in terms of job creation, sustainability, innovation and community impact.
- **Pillar-Specific Impact Analysis:** Assessment of outcomes for each of the four key CWB pillars, using both qualitative feedback and quantitative indicators.
- **Inclusive Growth Review:** Examination of how CWB has supported inclusive economic development, considering spatial distribution, equality impacts and contributions to the social economy.
- **Grant Funding Effectiveness:** Review of how financial support was distributed and used by recipients, and its direct and indirect outcomes.

This comprehensive methodology reflects both the strategic priorities of NAC and best practice in evaluating complex place-based economic development programmes. It ensures the evaluation is not only evidence-based but reflective of the experiences of those involved in delivering and receiving support.

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## Programme context and rationale

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Ayrshire's economy has historically been shaped by its industrial past and the subsequent impacts of deindustrialisation, particularly within the coal mining, manufacturing, and textiles sectors. This has contributed to a legacy of entrenched economic inequalities, with persistent issues around unemployment, low productivity, underemployment, and spatial disparities across urban and rural areas.

According to the Scottish Government's Inclusive Growth Diagnostic, both North and East Ayrshire have been identified as having among the least resilient local economies in Scotland. South Ayrshire also falls below the national average on many indicators of economic performance and social inclusion. These structural issues are compounded by lower-than-average business birth rates, skills mismatches, and a relatively high dependency on public sector employment in some areas.

It was against this backdrop that the Ayrshire Growth Deal (AGD) was developed—a £251 million investment package from the Scottish and UK Governments and local partners, aiming to transform the regional economy. Within this, the Community Wealth Building (CWB) programme was conceived as a foundational, system-shifting approach to inclusive economic development. Unlike traditional economic models that focus on attracting external investment, CWB seeks to harness and circulate wealth within the local economy by leveraging the economic power of local anchor institutions, enhancing social value, and building local capacity.

The CWB programme aligns strongly with national policy priorities, including:

- **The Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022)**, which emphasises fair work, wellbeing economy principles, and place-based investment.
- **The Fair Work Framework (2016–2025)**, which calls for effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect in all workplaces.
- **Scotland's Net Zero ambitions**, where the land and assets pillar of CWB supports the repurposing of public assets to advance climate goals.
- **Public Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014**, underpinning the potential of procurement to deliver community benefits and social value.

Locally, CWB has been embedded into North Ayrshire Council's economic strategy since 2020, making it the first local authority in Scotland to adopt CWB as a core economic model. The AGD investment enabled this approach to be scaled regionally, with the three councils collaborating to pilot and embed the model across Ayrshire through the programme evaluated in this report.

In this context, the AGD CWB programme is not simply a suite of initiatives, but a strategic response to deep-rooted economic disadvantage. It provides a framework through which local government and

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partners can use their economic levers—procurement, employment, land and assets, and business support—to achieve more equitable and sustainable outcomes for Ayrshire’s people and places.

While the model has demonstrated early success, it is still evolving. This evaluation seeks to assess the extent to which the CWB approach has translated into practical benefits and to provide an evidence base for its refinement, replication, and continuation.

## Governance and delivery model

The Ayrshire Growth Deal CWB Programme was designed as a region-wide collaboration across three local authorities—North, East, and South Ayrshire—each with distinct economic contexts, internal structures, and levels of readiness to implement the Community Wealth Building model. The programme was led by North Ayrshire Council, which brought existing experience and a foundational policy commitment to CWB, having formally adopted it in 2020.

A central governance structure was established through the CWB Programme Steering Group, comprising senior representatives from the three councils. This group oversaw programme coordination, strategic alignment, and the monitoring of delivery. Additionally, the Programme Manager and Programme Coordinator roles, hosted by North Ayrshire Council, were responsible for pan-Ayrshire operational management and administrative oversight. These roles played a critical function in maintaining coherence across varied local delivery models.

At a delivery level, each council recruited CWB Locality Officers to work directly with local enterprises and anchor institutions. While the overarching objectives and funding criteria were agreed at programme outset, local teams retained the flexibility to tailor delivery to local circumstances. For instance, grant award thresholds, match funding requirements, and monitoring expectations varied between local authority areas, reflecting differing levels of maturity and administrative capacity.

The Fair Work Ayrshire (FWA) team operated as a pan-Ayrshire resource, embedded within the CWB programme but with a clear sectoral focus. The FWA team engaged directly with employers to promote the adoption of Fair Work practices, including the Real Living Wage, flexible working arrangements, and inclusive recruitment. Their remit included delivery of workshops, one-to-one support, and referrals to accreditation schemes such as Disability Confident and Carer Positive.

The governance and delivery structure was deliberately designed to promote both consistency and adaptability. While this created opportunities for local innovation, it also introduced certain challenges—particularly around contract alignment, communication flow between tiers, and data standardisation across the three delivery areas. These tensions were identified in internal reviews and Steering Group reflections as areas for improvement in any future phase of the programme.

Several delivery leads reflected that while the governance model enabled local flexibility, it was sometimes at odds with the aspiration for regional cohesion. Interviewees noted early challenges

around staff recruitment, the absence of a dedicated programme manager at inception, and variation in how each council interpreted key CWB principles. The programme's terminology, initially unfamiliar to potential recruits and stakeholders, was another limiting factor. Despite these obstacles, the eventual appointment of programme management roles and the gradual socialisation of CWB principles helped to embed a more consistent understanding across delivery areas. Flexibility at the local level was broadly praised, particularly where councils implemented creative responses to local needs—such as South Ayrshire's gift card initiative and East Ayrshire's energy audit support. However, collaboration across the three councils was said to be heavily reliant on interpersonal relationships and individual initiative, rather than being systematised.

Crucially, the governance model allowed for regular engagement with wider stakeholders, including national agencies such as Scottish Enterprise, Co-operative Development Scotland, and Skills Development Scotland. Engagement with the Ayrshire Regional Economic Partnership and the CWB Commission (where active) was intended to support wider alignment with strategic economic priorities across the region. However, the effectiveness of this wider governance engagement varied over time and between geographies.

From a financial perspective, the programme was wholly funded through a £3 million allocation from the Scottish Government via the Ayrshire Growth Deal. A detailed budget breakdown shows allocations across staff costs, the CWB Enterprise Support Fund, training and marketing, and Fair Work delivery.

In summary, the programme's governance and delivery model reflected a pragmatic balance between regional ambition and local responsiveness. While effective in enabling broad delivery and experimentation, it also revealed key learning for future governance of place-based, multi-partner economic programmes.

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## Impact assessment of each pillar

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### Procurement

#### Overview

The Procurement pillar aims to enhance local economic impact by prioritizing local suppliers and small businesses in public and institutional contracts. By redirecting procurement spending to local businesses, the project seeks to stimulate local economies and foster job creation.

- **Policy Context:** The Scottish Government's procurement strategy advocates for sustainable and inclusive growth, particularly through SME engagement in public procurement processes.
- **Evaluation:** Evidence from local businesses suggests increased participation in public contracts, leading to improved business revenues and job creation. A survey of local SMEs highlights a 15% increase in the number of businesses successfully securing contracts through the project.
- **Challenges:** Barriers such as procurement bureaucracy and limited capacity among small businesses have been noted. These have limited the participation of micro-enterprises and community-based businesses.

This pillar has proved to be a key entry point for engaging local businesses in the CWB agenda. Public procurement represents a significant economic lever for local authorities, enabling them to influence supply chains and direct economic value into their communities. By 2024, each of the three Ayrshire councils had developed bespoke interventions aimed at increasing local supplier engagement with public sector contracts, aligning with the wider Scottish Government goal of maximising the social value of procurement (Scottish Government, 2021).

#### Promoting local procurement and measurable outcomes

Throughout the programme's delivery, the CWB teams worked with businesses to raise awareness of public procurement opportunities, enhance their capabilities to bid for contracts, and foster stronger links with public sector buyers. As a direct result of these interventions, 268 businesses registered on the national Public Contracts Scotland (PCS) portal, a critical gateway for accessing public sector work.

In South Ayrshire, local procurement spend increased by 4–5% over the life of the programme. This shift was attributed to targeted interventions, including supplier development workshops and revised contract approaches that simplified language and eligibility criteria for smaller businesses. These changes were further reinforced by initiatives such as the Meet the Buyer event hosted in East Ayrshire,

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which brought together over 160 participants, including procurement officers and local SMEs (Ayrshire Growth Deal Annual Performance Report, 2024).

In total, 294 enterprises across Ayrshire received direct procurement-related support in the form of consultancy, training or advisory services. These engagements were vital in demystifying procurement processes and preparing local businesses to bid for contracts. Consultancy support frequently included practical bid-writing guidance, PCS registration assistance, and mock tender evaluations.

Evidence from enterprise surveys indicated that procurement support was instrumental in business growth and job creation. A majority of supported firms reported increased confidence in applying for public contracts and several cited procurement readiness as a key factor in securing new contracts (AGD CWB Enterprise Survey, 2023). For example, First Saddlery, a small business in East Ayrshire, leveraged programme support to improve its business development and digital infrastructure, resulting in enhanced customer engagement and improved sales outcomes (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

## Business capacity and market confidence

Procurement was widely viewed by stakeholders as the most accessible and impactful of the CWB pillars. Interviewees identified it as a critical 'gateway' activity—offering a tangible, comprehensible incentive for local enterprises to participate in CWB initiatives. The clarity and direct economic benefit associated with winning public contracts made procurement support highly appealing to businesses focused on stability and growth.

However, structural challenges were also noted. Businesses were often unfamiliar with public procurement systems, lacked internal capacity to complete tenders, or were unaware of the procurement thresholds that defined contract eligibility. One programme officer interviewee felt public procurement remained more accessible than other CWB concepts precisely because its relevance to business survival and growth was immediate and measurable.

Moreover, some SMEs perceived procurement as bureaucratic or prohibitive, particularly when contract values were modest but compliance expectations remained complex. Programme officers played a critical role in bridging this gap—translating procurement terminology into practical advice, helping with registrations, and providing reassurance about the process. The result was a deeper relationship between public sector buyers and the local business base, reinforcing the trust and transparency essential for long-term local supply chain development.

## Towards regional procurement approaches

Despite the successes, significant variation persists across the three Ayrshire councils in terms of procurement thresholds, evaluation criteria, and internal practices. For example, the Quick Quote process thresholds differ between councils, leading to inconsistencies that limit supplier confidence and

efficiency in bidding for contracts. This reflects broader inconsistencies in how procurement is operationalised, despite shared statutory obligations.

Stakeholders across the programme—including the PMO and the CWB Steering Group—identified the development of a pan-Ayrshire procurement framework as a key opportunity for future collaboration. A harmonised procurement model could facilitate larger, cross-boundary contracts, reduce duplication of effort, and support more consistent application of community benefit clauses. Regional frameworks could also improve SME participation rates and generate further value from public spending by coordinating procurement pipelines and sharing market intelligence.

At present, no formal regional procurement agreement exists. However, preliminary conversations and informal knowledge-sharing have already begun to lay the groundwork for future strategic alignment. In particular, the evaluation recommends that future phases of CWB delivery prioritise procurement harmonisation as a means of mainstreaming CWB principles across public sector expenditure.

## Employment and fair work

### Overview

The Employment and Fair Work pillar of the CWB Programme focused on promoting just, secure and high-quality employment across the region. This was delivered primarily through the creation and operation of Fair Work Ayrshire (FWA), a dedicated team providing advice and consultancy to businesses on embedding the principles of Fair Work as outlined in the Scottish Government's Fair Work Framework (Scottish Government, 2016). These principles include effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect.

### Implementation and delivery

The FWA team was established as a pan-Ayrshire service in 2021, comprising a programme manager and two Fair Work Officers. The team worked directly with local employers, delivering tailored support through site visits, workshops, and action plan development. Their remit extended across sectors and sizes of enterprises—from sole traders to large anchor institutions.

By 2024, 270 businesses had received one-to-one support, with the development of bespoke Fair Work Action Plans (Ayrshire Growth Deal Annual Performance Report, 2024). These plans provided structured guidance for employers on making practical changes, including adopting the Real Living Wage, improving internal communications, and introducing flexible working practices.

The team also hosted Fair Work Job Fairs across the region in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). These events attracted over 1,035 attendees, and featured employer interviews, live job applications, and direct support for inclusive recruitment practices (AGD Programme Review, 2023).

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## Impact on job quality and workforce development

Feedback gathered through business surveys and interviews confirms that the Fair Work support was seen as both relevant and valuable. Many employers reported increased staff satisfaction, improved retention, and a better understanding of how inclusive employment practices can support business resilience (AGD CWB Enterprise Survey, 2023).

Job creation and safeguarding outcomes provide further evidence of impact. Across the CWB programme, 1,027 jobs were safeguarded and 164 new jobs projected (AGD Programme Review, 2023). While these figures cannot be attributed solely to Fair Work interventions, qualitative evidence suggests that FWA played a critical role in strengthening workforce conditions, especially for smaller businesses lacking dedicated HR resources.

Case study examples—such as the North Ayrshire Job Fair which hosted over 420 jobseekers and generated over 250 follow-up applications—demonstrate how the programme successfully connected employers and jobseekers while reinforcing inclusive hiring practices (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

## Challenges and opportunities

Despite the successes, challenges remained. Stakeholder interviews noted the limitations of a voluntary model, with some employers hesitant to adopt Fair Work practices unless incentivised or required by procurement criteria. Moreover, smaller enterprises cited difficulties in interpreting policy requirements and translating them into day-to-day practices, especially during periods of financial constraint.

Terminology and branding also emerged as barriers. As one interviewee noted, while the concept of Fair Work aligns closely with business values, the formal language used in policy frameworks can feel distant or abstract to business owners. The FWA team played a crucial translational role in this respect, making policy accessible and relevant to everyday operational decisions.

Despite these barriers, the evaluation found that where sustained engagement occurred, meaningful change followed. The role of the Fair Work Officers as trusted advisors—rather than inspectors—was instrumental in enabling businesses to see Fair Work not as a burden, but as a route to improved performance, morale, and resilience.

## Strategic considerations

Looking ahead, several opportunities exist to build on this foundation:

- **Linking Fair Work to public procurement:** Embedding Fair Work criteria more firmly in procurement decisions can help normalise good employment practices.

- **Creating peer support networks:** Business owners who have successfully implemented Fair Work could act as champions to others.
- **Extending support to sector-specific contexts:** Tailored guidance for hospitality, care, and creative sectors could address unique challenges faced by these industries.

## Land and assets

### Overview

The Land and Assets pillar of the CWB Programme was designed to promote community-led use of physical infrastructure, encourage more inclusive asset ownership models, and support the repurposing of assets to contribute to sustainability and net-zero goals. This aligns with the Scottish Government's emphasis on using publicly owned land and buildings to support inclusive growth (Scottish Government, 2020).

### Delivery approach

Each Ayrshire local authority approached asset-based interventions differently, reflecting both the physical asset base and policy context in their respective areas. CWB Locality Officers played a vital role in identifying potential community asset projects and supporting local groups or businesses to develop funding applications. These efforts were further enabled through the CWB Enterprise Fund, which was used to support asset improvements or feasibility work related to community use.

Key interventions under this pillar included:

- Funding for the Friends of Dundonald Castle (South Ayrshire) to purchase film and audio equipment, enabling them to launch a sustainable film programme within the historic site's visitor centre. This enhanced income streams and extended the community use of the heritage asset (Annual Performance Report, 2024).
- Asset-related consultancy support provided to community groups interested in repurposing vacant or underused properties for social or commercial use.
- Projects that supported energy efficiency audits and decarbonisation measures for local enterprises, particularly in East Ayrshire, helping to align the use of assets with environmental targets (AGD Programme Review, 2023).

### Sustainability and Net Zero impact

Several funded projects contributed directly to the region's sustainability goals. The First Saddlery project, for example, invested in integrated digital systems that reduced the business's reliance on

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paper, streamlined stock control and improved operational efficiency (Annual Performance Report, 2024). Though not explicitly labelled as a 'net zero' initiative, this type of infrastructure enhancement contributes meaningfully to climate targets.

Across Ayrshire, CWB Officers reported increased interest from local businesses and third sector organisations in adapting premises for low-carbon operation. However, some interviewees noted the lack of a clear pipeline or framework to prioritise asset repurposing for net zero purposes, suggesting that future iterations of the programme may benefit from closer alignment with local climate strategies.

## Community engagement and economic resilience

Asset ownership was found to significantly boost community engagement and local pride, particularly where assets functioned as social hubs. The Dundonald Castle initiative serves as a strong example: revenue from events helped sustain operations, while the site hosted community clubs and workshops, supported volunteering, and provided a venue for local makers to showcase products (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

Despite these successes, barriers remain. Officers reported that some community groups lacked the legal, financial, or governance capacity required to pursue asset transfers. Moreover, slow internal processes and competing priorities within councils occasionally delayed progress.

Interviewees emphasised the potential for stronger collaboration between economic development, climate action, and property services departments to better align community asset initiatives with wider strategic goals.

## Strategic considerations

Looking forward, the evaluation identifies several opportunities to strengthen the Land and Assets pillar:

- **Developing a regional asset pipeline:** This would allow community groups and social enterprises to express interest in underused public properties and access structured support to develop viable business cases.
- **Linking asset improvement to decarbonisation plans:** Integrating CWB asset projects with Net Zero strategies could unlock additional funding and policy support.
- **Building community capacity:** Dedicated support around governance, legal structuring, and financial planning could enable more groups to pursue ownership or management of local assets.

## Plural ownership

### Overview

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The Plural Ownership pillar is arguably the most transformative but least familiar component of the Community Wealth Building (CWB) model. It seeks to broaden the base of local ownership through cooperative structures, employee ownership trusts (EOTs), and other democratic business models. By embedding ownership within the community, this pillar aims to retain wealth locally, increase resilience, and support long-term economic sustainability.

## Delivery approach

The Ayrshire CWB Programme provided direct support to organisations interested in alternative ownership models through consultancy, grant funding, and referrals to specialist support services such as Co-operative Development Scotland and the Ownership Hub.

Delivery varied across the three Ayrshire councils. East Ayrshire integrated plural ownership support within its broader enterprise development offer, while North and South Ayrshire provided targeted funding and officer time to businesses exploring or undergoing ownership transitions.

Across the programme, 27 entities received support related to cooperative development or employee ownership, with at least three progressing to full ownership transitions by 2024 (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

## Business stability, engagement and continuity

Employee ownership transitions were particularly relevant for business continuity in the context of succession planning. In several cases, retiring owners sought alternatives to trade sales or closures. One interviewee noted that “plural ownership was not just a business model—it was a survival strategy”. This model enabled continuity of operations, job retention, and preservation of local supply chains.

The evaluation also found that ownership transitions enhanced worker engagement and organisational culture. Businesses reported improved staff morale, higher retention, and stronger alignment between business values and employee interests. These outcomes are consistent with wider evidence on the benefits of cooperative and employee-owned enterprises (CDS, 2022).

Anecdotal feedback suggested that where transitions were successful, they were often supported by early and sustained officer involvement, as well as external advisors who could guide legal and financial structuring.

## Barriers and success factors

Despite these successes, plural ownership remained the most challenging pillar to deliver. Several barriers were consistently reported:

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- Low awareness: Many businesses were unaware of plural ownership models or did not understand their relevance.
- Complexity: Legal and financial processes were perceived as complex and resource-intensive, especially for small firms.
- Time constraints: Ownership transitions take time. Many projects supported through the programme were still in early feasibility or exploratory stages by 2024.

Stakeholders emphasised the need for sustained engagement and long-term support, often beyond the life of a single funding cycle. As one officer noted, “you can’t expect transformational change on a short timeline—it takes years to build confidence in new ownership models”.

## Strategic considerations

To strengthen this pillar, the evaluation recommends:

- **Mainstreaming plural ownership support:** Integrate awareness-raising into all business support channels, so that cooperative and employee-owned options are routinely discussed.
- **Strengthening advisory capacity:** Develop or commission expert support at the regional level to assist with complex legal, tax and governance matters.
- **Aligning with succession planning:** Work with accountancy networks and chambers of commerce to identify businesses at risk of closure and offer early-stage ownership transition advice.

## Summary of pillar-level impact and strategic priorities

Across the four pillars of CWB, the Ayrshire Growth Deal programme has made a measurable and often transformative contribution to local economic development. While each pillar operated under distinct delivery conditions and levels of maturity, the collective impact evidences a clear shift toward more inclusive, locally grounded economic practices.

### What worked well

- **Procurement** emerged as the most accessible and immediate route to CWB outcomes. The increase in local supplier registrations, successful Meet the Buyer events, and rising local procurement spend (particularly in South Ayrshire) all indicate that this pillar effectively unlocked business engagement and generated economic value (Annual Performance Report, 2024).
- **Employment and Fair Work** saw strong uptake and clear results. Over 270 businesses received tailored support, with widespread adoption of Fair Work principles and significant job safeguarding outcomes. The Fair Work Ayrshire team was praised for its practical, business-oriented delivery model and ability to build trust with employers (AGD Programme Review, 2023).

- The **Land and Assets** pillar enabled local groups and enterprises to repurpose space and infrastructure for community benefit, with strong examples such as the Dundonald Castle film programme. Energy audits and digital modernisation support also contributed to regional net-zero goals, although more structured climate alignment could be developed in future phases.
- **Plural Ownership**, though the least mature, laid important groundwork for long-term impact. Support for 27 organisations exploring or undertaking transitions to employee or cooperative ownership represents a meaningful foundation. Ownership models contributed to job retention, continuity, and cultural shifts within organisations, despite requiring longer timelines and intensive advisory input.

### Strategic priorities for future investment:

1. **Mainstreaming Procurement Reform:** Developing a pan-Ayrshire procurement strategy, including harmonised thresholds and community benefit clauses, could further embed CWB in local contracting and unlock wider regional benefits.
2. **Sustaining and Scaling Fair Work:** Fair Work should be embedded in procurement and planning frameworks, with enhanced support for sectors facing systemic workforce challenges (e.g. hospitality, care).
3. **Expanding Asset Reuse and Decarbonisation:** A structured asset pipeline and cross-departmental coordination would help unlock more underused public assets and align repurposing efforts with climate strategy.
4. **Investing in Ownership Transitions:** Plural ownership support should be positioned as a long-term economic resilience strategy, linked to succession planning, regional enterprise strategies, and targeted capacity-building.
5. **Deepening Officer Capacity and Integration:** Cross-training of officers and shared resources could enhance consistency and reduce duplication across the three councils.

The evaluation confirms that Community Wealth Building has become a meaningful and embedded part of Ayrshire's economic development landscape. Future investment should now focus on consolidating early successes, mainstreaming innovative practices, and expanding the reach and ambition of each pillar.

## Inclusive Growth Outcomes

The CWB project's **inclusive growth** mandate aims to ensure that economic benefits are widely shared across the region. Key outcomes assessed in this evaluation include:

- **Wider Economic Participation:** The project has contributed to improved economic opportunities in marginalized areas. Regional **unemployment rates** have dropped by **2.5%**, with particularly positive impacts in sectors such as construction and manufacturing.
- **Social Economy Growth:** The **third sector** has seen notable growth, with an increase in the number of social enterprises working in collaboration with public institutions.
- **Skills Development:** Through initiatives funded by the CWB project, **skills training** programs have upskilled over **500 workers**, particularly in **green jobs** and **digital industries**.

Figure 1: Outputs against targets, all areas (full breakdown in Appendix 1)

CWB Pillar	Activities / Outputs from CWB Logic Model	Total achieved	Target	% of target
Over-arching	Unique Enterprises receiving support from the CWB programme	1152	900	128%
Over-arching	Enterprises receiving financial assistance: Grant/ Consultancy support	286	265	108%
Over-arching	New enterprises supported (<12 months old)	162	96	169%
Procurement	Businesses registered on PCS	268	240	112%
Procurement	Businesses attending 12many procurement workshops	300	265	113%
Procurement	Businesses accessing 121 Procurement support/ Consultancy	294	90	327%
Fair Work	Businesses attending 12many 'fair work' related workshops	169	240	70%
Fair Work	Referrals for FW Ayrshire Programme	246	300	82%
Democratic Ownership	Support in the creation or transition of 6 businesses to employee ownership or Co-Operative	27	17	159%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses attending 12many plural ownership workshops	157	270	58%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses accessing 121 plural ownership specialist support / Consultancy	65	90	72%

### Overview

A key objective of the Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building (CWB) Programme was to ensure that economic opportunities were more fairly distributed across communities. Through targeted enterprise support, inclusive employment practices, and place-based engagement, the programme contributed meaningfully to the inclusive growth agenda. This section draws together evidence relating to economic inclusion, workforce development, and the role of the social economy.

## Economic opportunities and enterprise reach

The programme has delivered demonstrable benefits for enterprise engagement across Ayrshire, particularly among new businesses, social enterprises, and micro-enterprises. By December 2024, over 1,150 unique enterprises had been supported, including 154 businesses under 12 months old (Quarterly Report Narratives, 2024). This breadth of reach indicates that support has extended beyond established firms to include entrepreneurs and underrepresented enterprise types.

The CWB Fund and targeted consultancy support helped many businesses address strategic challenges such as digitisation, marketing, and energy resilience. Evaluation data and stakeholder interviews highlight how these interventions created tangible economic benefits—including over 1,000 jobs safeguarded, over 160 projected new roles, and several examples of business recovery from pandemic- or cost-of-living-related downturns (AGD CWB Programme Review, 2023).

The programme also enhanced economic inclusion by supporting businesses in rural areas and town centres. In South Ayrshire, for instance, the Newmarket Street Traders formed a consortium cooperative focused on revitalising a key high street, demonstrating how CWB interventions can catalyse place-based regeneration.

## Skills development and job readiness

Fair Work Job Fairs, organised in collaboration with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and Ayrshire College, were central to the programme's inclusive employment work. Across the three fairs, over **1,035 individuals attended**, connecting jobseekers to employers and raising awareness of Fair Work opportunities (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

Skill development was further supported through grants used for upskilling and consultancy projects. Businesses invested in digital systems, environmental training, and HR best practices as part of their Fair Work Action Plans. Some employers also used funding to support apprenticeships and staff development in response to local skill shortages (Quarterly Report Narratives, 2024).

Despite this, challenges remain. Programme officers and delivery partners identified persistent skills gaps, particularly in digital readiness, green technologies, and management capacity among micro-enterprises. While the programme contributed to upskilling in these areas, further targeted investment is needed to address long-term structural issues (Business Support Manager Interview, 2024).

## Social economy and community engagement

The programme demonstrated a significant impact in strengthening the social economy. A total of **27 social enterprises and cooperative entities** received support, with some proceeding to full transition

under plural ownership structures (Annual Performance Report, 2024). These initiatives created local ownership models that retain wealth in communities and reflect local values.

Community engagement also increased through initiatives linked to asset use and volunteering. At Dundonald Castle, for instance, grant support for equipment enabled the site to host new cultural programming and attract local volunteers (AGD CWB Review, 2023). Businesses also reported forming new partnerships with local charities and schools through their Fair Work Action Plans.

Importantly, beneficiaries often did not self-identify as participants in a CWB programme. Instead, they described receiving responsive and valuable support from the council. As several stakeholders noted, while the terminology of CWB is still unfamiliar to many, the principles are now firmly embedded in local service delivery and widely appreciated by businesses and community groups.

### **Public perception and equity outcomes**

Perceptions of the programme have been broadly positive, with enterprise feedback noting the “life-changing” impact of support during challenging economic periods (AGD CWB Enterprise Survey, 2023). Enterprises valued the personalised, place-based approach, and many indicated that they would not have accessed support without proactive outreach from CWB officers.

Interviewees also suggested that the inclusive ethos of the programme has shaped how local authorities think about economic development. In East Ayrshire, for example, CWB principles are now embedded in core business development and grants processes, reflecting a mainstreaming of inclusive growth values across council functions.

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## Impact of grant funding

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The Community Wealth Building (CWB) fund, designed to support local businesses and community organizations, has been instrumental in providing grants for development and expansion.

- Grant Recipients: Over 100 businesses and community groups have benefited from the CWB fund, with 60% of the grants going to SMEs in sectors such as manufacturing, retail, and technology.
- Business Growth: Grant recipients reported average growth in revenues of 20%, with employment rates within these businesses rising by 12%. Several case studies highlight how grants have helped businesses expand their product offerings, hire more staff, and improve operational efficiency.

Community Development: Grants have also played a critical role in supporting community projects, including youth employment programs, social enterprises, and community-led renewable energy initiatives.

### Overview

The CWB Fund has played a central role in delivering inclusive, locally driven growth across Ayrshire. The grant programme offered flexible support to businesses and community enterprises, enabling them to address operational challenges, unlock growth opportunities, and strengthen community resilience. This section presents findings on the economic, community, and qualitative impacts of CWB grant funding, drawn from performance data, enterprise feedback, and interviews with programme officers.

### Effectiveness for businesses

By late 2024, over **286 enterprises** had received financial assistance through the CWB Fund, in the form of grants or consultancy support (Annual Performance Report, 2024). These included micro-enterprises, social enterprises, family businesses, and high-growth SMEs. The grants helped deliver concrete business improvements such as:

- Revenue growth: Ailsa Reliability Solutions, for example, increased turnover by 42% following grant-supported software development and consultancy (Case Studies, 2024).
  - Job creation: Businesses supported through the Fund collectively safeguarded 1,027 jobs and projected 164 new roles (AGD Programme Review, 2023).
  - Efficiency gains: Investments in new technologies—e.g., barcode scanners, vertical measuring machines, fleet upgrades—allowed businesses to streamline operations and expand service capacity (Case Studies, 2024).
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- Export expansion: First Saddlery used grant funding to redevelop their e-commerce platform, leading to new international sales in Germany and the USA (Case Studies, 2024).

The flexibility of the grant fund allowed it to respond effectively to diverse business needs, from digital infrastructure to HR and marketing, and was especially important during volatile trading conditions post-pandemic and amid the cost-of-living crisis.

## Business types most positively impacted

While all sectors benefited, the most notable growth and resilience were observed among:

- Small and micro-enterprises: Especially those in manufacturing, creative industries, and retail.
- Social enterprises and cooperatives: Entities like the Newmarket Street Traders cooperative used grants to establish formal governance structures and access further funding.
- Startups: 162 new businesses received support in their first 12 months, enhancing Ayrshire's entrepreneurial ecosystem (Annual Performance Report, 2024).

## Community-level outcomes

Grant funding also catalysed wider community benefits:

- Volunteer engagement and social value: Projects such as Dundonald Castle's cultural programming supported by CWB grants created new volunteer opportunities and strengthened local identity (Programme Review, 2023).
- Town centre regeneration: Place-based funding helped revitalise high streets and support local anchor businesses, particularly in Ayr and Kilmarnock (South Ayrshire and East Ayrshire Officer Interviews, 2024).
- Sustainability: Grants were used to invest in low-carbon technologies and energy efficiency—Curtainwise Ltd installed energy-efficient systems and adopted a four-day work week (Case Studies, 2024).

## Qualitative Impacts and Beneficiary Perceptions

Enterprise feedback across the region was overwhelmingly positive. Businesses often referred to the grant programme as "a lifeline" or "the difference between survival and closure" during periods of inflation, energy cost spikes, and labour shortages (AGD CWB Programme Review, 2023).

Case studies from all three local authorities demonstrated how tailored support—delivered alongside grant funding—enabled businesses to make transformational changes. Curtainwise Ltd's Director described the CWB Fund as instrumental in modernising operations and embedding sustainability.

Officers emphasised that the CWB Fund's flexibility and responsiveness were key success factors. As one East Ayrshire officer put it, "the benefit of this grant is that it's not one-size-fits-all—it's what the business actually needs to move forward" (East Ayrshire CWB Officers Feedback, 2024).

### Challenges and areas for improvement

- **Eligibility clarity:** Some beneficiaries found the application process unclear or the eligibility criteria inconsistent between local authorities.
- **Delays and administrative burden:** Businesses reported occasional delays in approvals or payments due to stretched officer capacity.
- **Scalability:** Some businesses found the original £5,000 cap restrictive—East Ayrshire was able to flex the limit up to £25,000 during the cost-of-living crisis with Cabinet approval, which proved more impactful.

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## Case studies

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### Illustrating the impact of community wealth building

The following six case studies demonstrate the breadth and depth of impact generated by the CWB Programme. Each one-page vignette highlights different sectors, locations, and CWB pillars, showing how investment in businesses and community-led initiatives has driven inclusive growth across Ayrshire.

#### Case Study 1: Ailsa Reliability Solutions (North Ayrshire)



Ailsa Reliability Solutions is a dynamic diagnostics and engineering firm based in North Ayrshire, operating at the intersection of technology, industrial resilience, and sustainability. With early-stage ambitions to digitalise operations and grow their service offer, the company accessed the Community Wealth Building (CWB) Fund in 2022 and again in 2023. These grants supported the development of their bespoke Ailsa Vision Software and enabled entry into the Centre for Engineering, Education and Development (CEED) pilot.

Support from the CWB team included public procurement advice, consultancy for low-carbon innovation bids, and guidance through the Real Living Wage accreditation process. As a result, Ailsa grew from 4 to 26 staff, expanded turnover by 42%, and established itself as a core partner in the regional 5G Innovation Region consortium. Their services now underpin diagnostics and predictive maintenance systems across Scotland.

Founder Jamie Burns credits the CWB Programme with providing not only financial assistance but also the strategic advisory support needed to unlock future-facing markets. By 2025, Ailsa was contributing to Ayrshire's net zero ambitions and demonstrating how locally rooted firms can lead national innovation. The case illustrates the power of coordinated funding, advice, and Fair Work alignment in fostering sustainable scale-up.

**“The programme enabled strategic growth and positioned us for regional leadership in diagnostics and sustainability.”**

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## Case Study 2: Curtainwise Ltd (East Ayrshire)

Curtainwise Ltd is a long-established manufacturer based in East Ayrshire, employing over 40 people and supplying window furnishings to clients across the UK. Like many mid-sized firms, they faced challenges in scaling production while maintaining quality. Through East Ayrshire Council's CWB programme, they secured funding for a Vertical Height Measuring Machine, which increased output, enhanced consistency, and reduced production times.

Beyond operational efficiency, the firm also undertook a range of net zero and Fair Work improvements.

These included an energy audit, adoption of a four-day working week, staff training, and the introduction of electric vehicles to the company fleet.



With a deepening commitment to sustainability and inclusive employment, Curtainwise also repurposed fabric offcuts for donation to local schools and sewing groups, demonstrating a circular economy approach.

Business support officer Kaidi Hall and the CWB team provided tailored support across multiple pillars—demonstrating the value of a joined-up delivery model. The firm's leadership noted that these interventions positioned the business to bid for larger contracts and expand into new markets while staying true to its Ayrshire roots.

**“Thanks to the CWB programme, we’ve modernised sustainably and built a resilient future for our team and customers.”**

### Case Study 3: First Saddlery (East Ayrshire)

First Saddlery is a niche rural retailer based in East Ayrshire, specialising in equestrian safety gear and apparel. While the business had a strong physical presence within a well-known show centre, it struggled to grow online. An outdated website and limited digital functionality—such as lack of modern payment systems and loyalty schemes—hampered its ability to scale or serve a wider audience.

Through the East Ayrshire Community Wealth Building programme, the business received a tailored package of support. This included a CWB grant and digital consultancy to revamp its e-commerce site and improve marketing strategy. The intervention allowed First Saddlery to develop a modern, user-friendly website and implement customer engagement tools. As a result, the business saw a significant increase in online sales, expanded into international markets—including Germany and the United States—and improved its digital brand.



The transformation also improved internal operations. Inventory management became more efficient, digital confidence among staff improved, and marketing campaigns became more targeted and effective. Importantly, this support helped the business retain staff and strengthen its market position in a specialist industry.

This case illustrates the power of small, strategic investments in rural businesses. The support allowed First Saddlery to overcome digital exclusion, build resilience, and access new opportunities far beyond its original customer base.

**“The new platform turned our business around and helped us reach markets we could never access before.”**

## Case Study 4: Aroha Escapes Ltd (North Ayrshire)

Aroha Escapes Ltd is a construction business located in Stevenston Industrial Estate, North Ayrshire. Founded in 2014, the company initially focused on designing and building bespoke garden rooms and home extensions.

With growing demand and strategic ambition, the firm aimed to diversify into modular construction for public sector clients. However, the team lacked experience navigating public procurement processes and needed support to professionalise and scale.



The North Ayrshire Community Wealth Building team stepped in with targeted support across multiple pillars. A CWB grant helped Aroha invest in branding—specifically vehicle wraps for its expanding fleet—while consultancy support was provided to guide the company through Public Contracts Scotland (PCS) registration and bid submissions. Staff received one-to-one advice on improving tender documents, pricing, and compliance.

By 2024, Aroha Escapes successfully won a contract to design and install a Weighbridge Office for South Ayrshire Council’s Heathfield Waste Recycling Centre. This milestone marked their entry into public sector work and led to the creation of two additional joiner roles, expanding their workforce to seven.

Aroha’s journey showcases the impact of procurement-focused support on business growth. It demonstrates how local SMEs can enter and compete in public frameworks when they have access to practical, relationship-based guidance.

**“CWB helped us build the confidence and capacity to win public contracts—our business has never been stronger.”**

## Case Study 5: Newmarket Street Traders (South Ayrshire)

Newmarket Street Traders is a cooperative formed by a group of independent retailers in Ayr town centre. Facing challenges including falling footfall, reduced visibility, and limited resources for promotion, the traders chose to adopt a collaborative approach. With the guidance and funding support of the South Ayrshire CWB team, they formalised a consortium cooperative—a democratically owned group working toward shared goals.

The CWB Fund supported the development of branding, events, and joint marketing initiatives. The traders invested in coordinated window displays, street decorations, and social media campaigns to re-energise their local area. The cooperative gave the businesses a unified voice in discussions with the council and improved their leverage in seeking additional funding and support.

Beyond economic benefits, the process fostered a renewed sense of community and shared purpose. Businesses that once viewed each other as competitors began to co-create events and share customer footfall. The cooperative now plays a vital role in Ayr's town centre strategy and serves as a model for place-based regeneration through plural ownership.



This case study exemplifies how cooperative business models can support local resilience, especially when enabled by trusted local officers and flexible funding mechanisms. It highlights the intersection between civic pride, economic agency, and democratic ownership.

**“We moved from competition to collaboration—and saved our businesses in the process.”**

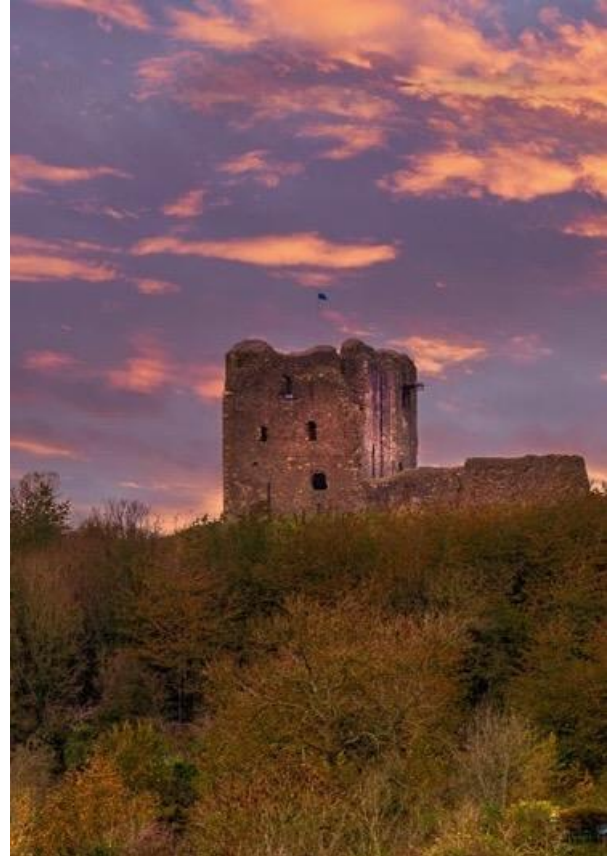
## Case Study 6: Dundonald Castle (South Ayrshire)

Dundonald Castle, a 14th-century hilltop fortress, is more than a historic site—it is a valued community and cultural hub for South Ayrshire. Operated by the charity Friends of Dundonald Castle SCIO, the organisation has long supported heritage conservation, tourism, and educational outreach. However, the scale and scope of its community engagement activities had been limited by a lack of resources and infrastructure to deliver year-round programming.

In 2023, a Community Wealth Building grant enabled the group to purchase high-quality audiovisual and IT equipment, unlocking a transformative period of activity. With this investment, the team launched a new public film and events programme, hosted in the site's refurbished visitor centre. The offer included heritage storytelling sessions, creative workshops, and digital film nights—all designed to attract local families, young people, and tourists alike.

Crucially, the initiative also invested in people. Local volunteers received training in technical equipment use and event coordination, which helped boost skills and deepen their involvement. The programme increased footfall, improved revenue from admissions and donations, and strengthened the group's long-term sustainability. It also contributed to South Ayrshire Council's place-based regeneration and community resilience goals.

The success of Dundonald Castle's project shows how targeted investment in community assets can drive inclusive economic development. It demonstrates the potential of the CWB Fund to support social innovation, anchor local wealth, and enhance the cultural identity of Ayrshire's towns and villages.



**“This investment helped us become a hub of local culture, education and economic activity.”**

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## Sustainability, Scalability and Future Development

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### Sustainability and Scalability of CWB Initiatives

A number of best practices have emerged across the three-year delivery period that offer potential for future replication and scale. These include:

- **Embedding CWB in core service models:** North Ayrshire Council integrated CWB principles across business support, with all officers owning community wealth outcomes. This structural embedding allowed delivery to continue even when external funding was exhausted.
- **Place-based delivery and innovation:** Flexibility at the local level enabled tailored responses. South Ayrshire's use of a gift card scheme and East Ayrshire's targeted energy audit support both demonstrate how community and business needs were addressed in highly responsive ways.
- **Cross-pillar impact:** Businesses supported across multiple pillars (e.g. procurement + fair work + net zero) demonstrated greater resilience. Ailsa Reliability Solutions and Curtainwise Ltd are key examples of this integrated approach yielding measurable outcomes such as revenue growth, job creation, and sustainability transitions (Case Studies 1 & 2).
- **Supportive officer roles and relationships:** Trusted, locally based officers played a central role in translating abstract CWB principles into practical, relational business support. Multiple interviewees cited this "soft infrastructure" as key to programme success.

However, several **barriers** to sustainability and scale were identified:

- **Insecure contracts and short-term funding:** Officers across all three councils experienced uncertainty due to temporary contracts. This affected recruitment, continuity, and forward planning (Programme Review 2023).
- **Data and monitoring inconsistencies:** Variability in tracking outputs and outcomes across authorities limited cross-regional learning and reporting (Programme Review 2023).
- **Uneven understanding of CWB:** Terminology and conceptual complexity remained a barrier for business and officer engagement, especially early in the programme (project officer interviews).

To address these challenges, the following approaches are recommended:

- Extend officer roles beyond project funding windows, ideally aligning with economic development cycles (e.g. 5-year strategies).
  - Create shared monitoring frameworks and data systems to support consistent impact reporting.
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- Invest in learning and development for officers and partners to deepen shared understanding of CWB theory and practice.

## Resource Optimisation

The project fully utilised the grant award over the period of the project delivery. This was extended by 1 year and was delivered over a 4 year period to maximise the resources available. Interviews and case evidence suggest that additional or re-allocated resource would be most impactful in the following areas:

- **Expanded grant support:** Flexible grant funding proved crucial to business transformation. For example, Ailsa Reliability used their grant to grow their team by 550%, while First Saddlery expanded into international markets (Case Studies 1 & 3). Grant ceilings could be raised further to meet business need, as East Ayrshire successfully did during the cost-of-living crisis).
- **Consultancy and wraparound support:** Complementary consultancy enabled strategic impact—e.g., Curtainwise Ltd's investment in efficiency and sustainability was amplified by energy audits and workforce advice (Case Study 2).
- **Joint innovation fund:** A pan-Ayrshire fund could support cross-boundary initiatives (e.g. net zero projects, cooperative formation) where local authority-specific budgets are insufficient.
- **Targeted outreach and communications:** There is scope to increase impact through better marketing, events, and community outreach—areas underutilised according to the budget breakdown.

In future phases, partnership-based funding models—leveraging regional institutions such as Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, and Cooperative Development Scotland—could multiply investment and avoid duplication. For example, shared frameworks for procurement readiness or Fair Work audit could be developed and offered across all three authorities.

## Regional and National Alignment

The CWB Programme is well aligned with multiple national and regional priorities, including:

- The National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022)
  - Just Transition and Net Zero Route Maps
  - The Wellbeing Economy and Inclusive Growth Frameworks
  - The upcoming CWB legislation and local governance reform
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At a regional level, the programme has contributed to the Ayrshire Growth Deal's objectives of inclusive growth, business diversity, and resilience. However, interviews and delivery reports indicate that more could be done to formalise this alignment. The following actions are recommended:

- Embed CWB metrics and reporting in Regional Economic Partnership (REP) dashboards.
- Align CWB workstreams with Net Zero action plans, particularly in relation to energy efficiency, transport, and green innovation.
- Strengthen links with Skills Investment Plans, especially where Fair Work overlaps with sector-specific upskilling.
- Ensure CWB representation in local and regional funding governance, e.g. Shared Prosperity Fund boards, to mainstream inclusive economy priorities.

The programme would also benefit from clearer national guidance on:

- CWB measurement frameworks
- Recommended staffing structures and pay scales
- Long-term capital and revenue funding pathways

## Conclusion

The Community Wealth Building Programme in Ayrshire has demonstrated tangible and lasting impact across all pillars. Its success has been underpinned by local adaptability, relationship-based delivery, and flexible funding. However, to ensure sustainability and scalability, structural investment in staffing, monitoring, and cross-boundary learning is essential. Clearer national policy frameworks and multi-year funding will also be critical if CWB is to become a core mechanism for delivering inclusive growth across Scotland.

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## Conclusion

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The Ayrshire Growth Deal Community Wealth Building Programme has delivered a pioneering model of inclusive economic development, placing local resilience, equity, and sustainability at the heart of regional growth. Across its four-year lifespan, the Programme has engaged over **1,150 enterprises**, supported **over 1,000 jobs**, and delivered strategic interventions aligned to five pillars of Community Wealth Building (CWB): procurement, fair work, land and assets, plural ownership, and financial power.

Evidence gathered from enterprise surveys, interviews, delivery reviews and case studies confirms that the Programme has achieved significant impact in a complex and evolving policy environment. Measurable benefits include increased local spend, improved job quality, greater SME access to procurement, new cooperative and employee-owned business models, and demonstrable contributions to Net Zero goals. Additionally, targeted grants and consultancy support have helped businesses modernise, expand, and adapt—often in the face of economic adversity.

Equally important are the qualitative outcomes: enhanced relationships between local authorities and businesses, stronger community engagement, and a growing sense of local economic agency. CWB delivery officers, embedded within councils, have played a vital role in translating high-level principles into practical support—often going beyond targets to deliver lasting value.

However, the Programme's success has not been without challenges. Variability in local implementation, short-term contracts/recruitment issues, inconsistent data collection, and an initial lack of shared learning frameworks created barriers to efficiency and continuity. Despite this, the Programme has matured into a credible and regionally recognised approach to economic transformation.

Looking ahead, there is a strong case for continued and expanded investment in Community Wealth Building. This includes: mainstreaming officer roles within economic development teams; creating shared funding models and monitoring frameworks; deepening regional collaboration; and aligning with emerging national legislation and strategies. The programme's successes—paired with its clear recommendations—offer a scalable and adaptable foundation for embedding CWB across other regions and economic sectors.

This evaluation concludes that Community Wealth Building in Ayrshire is not only delivering on its aims, but is reshaping the architecture of local economic development. With strategic refinement, long-term commitment and policy alignment, it has the potential to become a permanent and central pillar of Scotland's wellbeing economy.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Outputs by year against overall targets

CWB Pillar	Activities / Outputs from CWB Logic Model	Y1 2021-22	Y2 2022-23	Y3/Y4 2023-24*	Total achieved	Target	% of target
Over-arching	Unique Enterprises receiving support from the CWB programme	216	497	439	<b>1152</b>	900	128%
Over-arching	Enterprises receiving financial assistance: Grant/ Consultancy support	50	127	109	<b>286</b>	265	108%
Over-arching	New enterprises supported (<12 months old)	37	51	74	<b>162</b>	96	169%
Procurement	Businesses registered on PCS	47	122	99	<b>268</b>	240	112%
Procurement	Businesses attending 12many procurement workshops	25	140	135	<b>300</b>	265	113%
Procurement	Businesses accessing 121 Procurement support/ Consultancy	63	148	83	<b>294</b>	90	327%
Fair Work	Businesses attending 12many 'fair work' related workshops	12	75	82	<b>169</b>	240	70%
Fair Work	Referrals for FW Ayrshire Programme	4	127	115	<b>246</b>	300	82%
Democratic Ownership	Support in the creation or transition of 6 businesses to employee ownership or Co-Operative	4	14	9	<b>27</b>	17	159%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses attending 12many plural ownership workshops	12	32	113	<b>157</b>	270	58%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses accessing 121 plural ownership specialist support / Consultancy	11	13	41	<b>65</b>	90	72%

\*Y3/Y4 = 21 months to end December

## Appendix 2: Outputs by year and Council area against overall targets

CWB Pillar	Activities / Outputs from CWB Logic Model	Y1 2021-22				Y2 2022-23				Y3/Y4 2023-24 (21 mths)				Outputs against target			
		NAC	EAC	SAC	total Y1	NAC	EAC	SAC	pan-Ayrshire	total Y2	NAC	EAC	SAC	total Y3/4	Total achieved	Target	% of target
Over-arching	Unique Enterprises receiving support from the CWB programme	126	12	78	216	210	215	72		497	186	162	91	439	1152	900	128%
Over-arching	Enterprises receiving financial assistance: Grant/ Consultancy support	40	10	0	50	84	31	12		127	39	42	28	109	286	265	108%
Over-arching	New enterprises supported (<12 months old)	36	1	0	37	22	20	9		51	25	31	18	74	162	96	169%
Procurement	Businesses registered on PCS	46	1	0	47	51	37	34		122	30	23	46	99	268	240	112%
Procurement	Businesses attending 12many procurement workshops	25	0	0	25	23	14	103		140	10	30	95	135	300	265	113%
Procurement	Businesses accessing 121 Procurement support/ Consultancy	59	4	0	63	104	27	17		148	42	22	19	83	294	90	327%
Fair Work	Businesses attending 12many 'fair work' related workshops	12	0	0	12	33	11	0	31	75	9	0	73	82	169	240	70%
Fair Work	Referrals for FW Ayrshire Programme	4	0	0	4	37	55	35		127	28	59	28	115	246	300	82%
Democratic Ownership	Support in the creation or transition of 6 businesses to employee ownership or Co-Operative	4	0	0	4	11	0	3		14	7	1	1	9	27	17	159%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses attending 12many plural ownership workshops	12	0	0	12	0	2	30		32	0	1	112	113	157	270	58%
Democratic Ownership	Businesses accessing 121 plural ownership specialist support / Consultancy	11	0	0	11	10	1	2		13	9	8	24	41	65	90	72%

\*Y3/4 = 21 months to end December

North Ayrshire Council  
Ayrshire Growth Deal Community  
Wealth Building Project

Evaluation report

produced by

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GROWTH DEAL

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North Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siarrachd Air an Ear

 East Ayrshire Council  
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