

Consultation Response: Committee for Economic Development – Workplan 2026–2029

27 April 2026

Introduction

The Guernsey Chamber of Commerce welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee for Economic Development’s Workplan for 2026–2029. We represent a broad cross-section of the island’s business community, with particular strength in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that form the backbone of Guernsey’s real economy.

We recognise the significant effort that has gone into developing this plan and acknowledge a number of positive elements. However, as the voice of Guernsey’s business community, we have a responsibility to highlight areas where we believe the Workplan falls short, and where early action is needed to address the concerns of our membership.

Summary and Recommendations

The Chamber broadly supports the Committee’s ambition to grow Guernsey’s economy and improve its resilience. However, across the areas identified in this response, we believe the Workplan as currently framed has a fundamental strategic gap: it is built around activity rather than outcomes, and it serves the interests of Guernsey as a financial centre far more convincingly than it serves the interests of Guernsey as a community.

We would ask the Committee to address the following as a matter of priority:

- Develop a dedicated SME and real economy support package for delivery within this political term, not deferred to the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) process.
- Incorporate the Workforce Participation Report actions explicitly into this Workplan with clear timelines and accountability.
- Reframe the Registry objective away from revenue maximisation and toward competitive, efficient service delivery.
- Publish an economic baseline with quantitative targets for 2029 - the plan must show not just what it will do, but what will change as a result, and for whom.
- Develop a corporate inward investment strategy that goes beyond individual relocation and targets business establishment and expansion.
- Include retail and creative industries as named priority sectors within the EDS, in line with the Committee’s own mandate.
- Develop a Business Sustainability Support Framework to help businesses respond to growing ESG requirements and access green financing.
- Commit to meaningful consultation with the Chamber and the wider business community throughout the EDS development process and establish a regular structured dialogue on workforce, regulatory, and economic development matters.

Overarching Concern: Activity vs. Outcomes

Who is this plan really for?

Running through all of the specific concerns raised in this response is a deeper, structural problem that the Chamber feels compelled to name directly: this Workplan is built around what the Committee will do, not what will change as a result. And where outcomes are implied, they are almost exclusively framed around Guernsey's attractiveness to international investors, financial services, and high-net-worth individuals - not around what economic growth delivers for the people who live and work here.

The 2025 highlights section is illustrative. Fifty-five relocations - against what target, and to achieve what strategic purpose? A 69% increase in visitors from France - measuring visitor numbers is not itself a strategic outcome; the question is what value those visitors generate, and how that is being optimised. Growth in ferry passengers - a positive metric, but in service of what identified goal? These are operational data points presented as strategic wins. Without the strategic context that should frame them - a clear articulation of what Guernsey is trying to achieve and how progress will be measured - they are self-congratulatory rather than accountability-driven.

The same pattern continues into the 2026–2029 priorities. The finance sector piece references what the finance sector does globally - pooling assets, enabling wealth management, facilitating complex transactions - but says little about what it delivers locally: jobs, tax revenue, spending in the real economy, career pathways for young Guernsey people. The digital strategy leads with infrastructure achievements (5G, fibre rollout) and cites a potential £150m GVA uplift from a PwC study, but sets no targets for realising this, nor any plan for how productivity gains will flow through to businesses and residents. The regulation workstreams read as internally focused - about restructuring the GCRA and the electricity market - rather than about reducing the cost and friction of compliance for businesses operating here.

A more inclusive and strategically coherent Workplan would ask - and answer - a simple question: what does economic growth actually deliver for people who live in Guernsey? Lower cost of living? Better job prospects and career pathways for young people who want to stay? Housing that is affordable on a local salary? A high street worth shopping on? These are not secondary concerns - they are the point. If Guernsey's economy grows but fails to retain its own talent, it is a leaky ship.

Attracting high-net-worth relocators and growing financial services is worthwhile, but only if the benefits flow through to the broader community.

It is also worth noting that the plan reads more like a wish list than a prioritised strategy. Page 21, where the Economic Development Strategy framework finally begins to articulate economic objectives that benefit all sectors and all Islanders, is described as being in its "early design phase" - meaning the island must wait until at least 2027 before substantive action begins on what should be the foundation of the entire plan. The Chamber urges the Committee not to allow the perfect to become the enemy of the good: practical action for SMEs, retailers, the creative sector, and young workers is needed now, not after a two-year strategy development process.

The Chamber therefore poses a question we would ask the Committee to answer clearly in its response: **Who is this plan for?** If the answer is "Guernsey as a whole" - then the plan needs to demonstrate that, with evidence of how each priority benefits residents, local businesses, and the broader community. If the answer is "the finance and investment sector" - then it should say so honestly and explain the transmission mechanism by which that benefits everyone else. Right now, the Workplan implies the former but delivers the latter. Young workers, retailers, creative businesses etc - all absent. The Chamber believes Guernsey's economic strategy must include them all.

1. Insufficient Support for the Real Economy and SME Community

Our most significant concern with the Workplan as presented is the near-total absence of targeted support for Guernsey's real economy and its SME community. The Workplan is heavily weighted toward financial services, digital infrastructure and strategic frameworks, all of which are important, but the document gives little practical recognition to the thousands of businesses across retail, hospitality, construction, professional services, and the trades that employ the majority of Guernsey's workforce and sustain local economic activity day to day.

While we note that the Economic Development Strategy (EDS), to be developed by 2027, references "strengthening existing sectors including the real economy and construction," this is a statement of intent at a planning stage, not a commitment to action. Our members cannot wait until 2027 for a strategy to be designed that may or may not address their needs. The challenges facing SMEs are immediate: rising operating costs, difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, changing consumer patterns, and increasing regulatory burden.

The Chamber urges the Committee to:

- Establish a dedicated SME workstream with representation from the Chamber and other business representative bodies, with a clear mandate and measurable outcomes within this political term.
- Develop a near-term SME support package addressing practical barriers to growth such as business rates relief, access to finance, procurement opportunities with government, and planning delays.
- Ensure that the EDS development process involves meaningful consultation with real economy businesses from the outset, not just the financial services sector.
- Publish a clear commitment to how the Committee will measure the health of the real economy separately from the financial services sector, given their very different dynamics.

2. Welcome: Open Banking Plans

The Chamber welcomes the commitment to developing an open banking offering aligned with the Banking Review by Deloitte. This is a positive and forward-looking step that has the potential to benefit businesses of all sizes across the island.

Open banking can reduce transaction costs for SMEs, improve access to lending through richer financial data, and enable more competitive and innovative financial products tailored to local businesses. We are encouraged that this is identified as an immediate focus area and we look forward to engaging with the Committee and the banking sector as this work develops.

3. Absence of Workforce Participation Report Actions

The Chamber notes with concern that the Workplan makes no substantive reference to the actions arising from the Workforce Participation Report. This is a significant omission. Workforce availability, skills, and participation are consistently identified by our members as among the most pressing constraints on business growth. The inability to recruit appropriately skilled staff, combined with a declining working-age population and the complexities of the island's population management system, represents a structural challenge that underpins almost every other economic priority in this Workplan.

The Workplan references "labour skills necessary to sustain economic prosperity" as part of the Committee's mandate, and the EDS includes "future skills planning for a skilled workforce" as an objective, but these are framed at a high level without any specific commitments arising from the Workforce Participation Report's recommendations.

We call on the Committee to:

- Explicitly incorporate the key actions from the Workforce Participation Report into this Workplan, with owners, timelines and measurable outcomes.

4. Concern: The Guernsey Registry as a Revenue Source

The Chamber has long held concerns about the approach to the Guernsey Registry, and we note with some dismay that the Workplan now explicitly confirms what we have feared for some time: that the Registry is being positioned as a mechanism to maximise government revenues. The Workplan states clearly that a policy objective is to “maximise revenues through increasing its business development capabilities to support the public finances.”

We want to be clear: we support a modern, efficient, and well-governed Registry. We recognise its dual role in facilitating corporate services and maintaining compliance standards. However, we are firmly opposed to the Registry being used primarily as a revenue-raising vehicle for government. This approach carries significant risks:

- Fee increases imposed to generate revenue rather than to recover costs will make Guernsey less competitive as a place to incorporate, register, and do business, directly undermining the finance sector growth strategy the Committee is simultaneously pursuing.
- Local businesses are facing increased costs and this is yet another

The Chamber urges the Committee to reconsider the framing of this objective. We would be pleased to engage in detailed discussions about how the Registry can be modernised and made more efficient in ways that benefit businesses and the public finances, without compromising Guernsey’s competitive position or its reputation for regulatory integrity.

5. The Retail Sector

Retail is explicitly listed within the Committee’s own mandate - “the promotion and development of all sectors of business, including... retail” - yet it does not feature anywhere in the Workplan’s priorities.

Guernsey’s retail sector faces structural challenges that are intensifying: the ongoing shift to online purchasing, the cost pressures of operating physical premises, business rates that bear little relationship to commercial viability, and the difficulty of attracting and retaining staff at competitive wages. Town centre health is directly linked to Guernsey’s broader attractiveness as a place to live, work, visit and invest. A declining or hollowed-out high street is not just a commercial problem - it undermines the visitor experience, community cohesion and the island’s reputation.

The Chamber calls on the Committee to:

- Develop a Retail Strategy or include retail as a named priority sector within the EDS, with specific actions and support mechanisms.

6. Climate and Sustainability

The Workplan addresses the Electricity Strategy from a regulatory and market structure perspective, which is appropriate. However, it is entirely silent on the challenge facing businesses themselves in transitioning to more sustainable operations. This is an increasingly significant gap.

ESG expectations from customers, investors, and supply chain partners are growing rapidly. Policy levers that help businesses invest in energy efficiency, renewables, and low-carbon operations are not being used in Guernsey. This is not merely an environmental concern - it is a competitiveness issue that risks leaving Guernsey businesses behind as global markets shift.

The Chamber asks the Committee to:

- Develop a framework that helps Guernsey businesses - particularly SMEs - to understand and respond to ESG requirements, access green financing, and reduce their carbon footprint in a commercially viable way.
- Work with the Guernsey financial services sector to explore whether green lending products or sustainability-linked finance can be made available to local businesses.
- Ensure the Electricity Strategy's business-facing implications - particularly around energy costs and the transition to renewables - are communicated clearly to businesses with adequate lead time.

7. Inward Investment: Individuals Are Not Enough

The Workplan cites 55 relocations in 2025 as evidence of growing inward investment interest, and Locate Guernsey is referenced as a vehicle for this activity. The Chamber welcomes individual relocations, which do bring economic benefit. However, we must be clear: relocating individuals - however wealthy - is not the same as attracting businesses. The Workplan contains no strategy for corporate inward investment, and this is a significant gap.

Guernsey needs new businesses to establish or expand here. This stimulates local supply chains, diversifies the tax base, and reduces the economy's dependence on any single sector. The finance sector growth strategy rightly targets growth within financial services, but there is no equivalent proposition for attracting businesses in technology, professional services, data, or other sectors where Guernsey could credibly compete.

The Chamber recommends:

- A review of Locate Guernsey's mandate and capability to consider how it covers corporate attraction, or whether a separate mechanism is needed.
- Engagement with the Chamber and sector bodies to identify the practical barriers businesses face when considering establishing in Guernsey, and a commitment to addressing them.

8. Creative Industries

Like retail, the creative industries are explicitly named within the Committee's mandate, and like retail, they are entirely absent from the Workplan.

Guernsey has a genuinely distinctive creative and cultural offer - in the arts, design, media, heritage, and digital content. These sectors contribute to the island's identity and attractiveness, support tourism, and increasingly overlap with the digital and innovation agenda the Committee does prioritise. Creative businesses are often precisely the kind of small, entrepreneurial enterprises that the Chamber represents, and they face particular challenges around access to finance, market reach, and professional support.

9. Measurement and Baseline Data

The Workplan's monitoring section acknowledges that better economic data is needed, and commits to quarterly progress tracking and annual public reporting. The Chamber welcomes this commitment to transparency. However, there is a fundamental problem: the Workplan establishes no baseline figures and sets no quantitative targets.

Without agreed starting points, it is impossible to hold the Committee to account for economic outcomes. Reporting on activity - strategies developed, forums established, reviews completed - is not the same as reporting on results.

The Chamber calls for:

- A commitment that the EDS will be built on this improved data foundation, not developed in parallel with continued data gaps.

The Chamber of Commerce looks forward to working constructively with the Committee for Economic Development to ensure that Guernsey's economic strategy delivers for all businesses, not just the largest or most internationally focused sectors. We are available to discuss any aspect of this response at the Committee's convenience.

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