

## Economic Development and Transport Committee

### Minutes

**Date** 13 October 2004  
**Time** 9.00 to 12.30  
**Venue** National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

### Attendance

#### EDT Members

Christine Chapman  
Andrew Davies (Minister for Economic  
Development and Transport)  
Brian Gibbons  
Christine Gwyther (Chair)  
Lisa Francis  
Elin Jones  
Alun Cairns  
Janet Davies  
Lynne Neagle  
Jenny Randerson

#### Constituency

Cynon Valley  
Swansea West  
  
Aberavon  
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire  
Mid and West Wales  
Ceredigion  
South Wales West  
South Wales West  
Torfaen  
Cardiff Central

#### Officials

David Pritchard  
David Hobbs  
Denzil Jones  
Gerry Quarrell  
John Abraham  
Tony Parker

Director, Economic Development and Transport  
Department  
EDT Business Unit  
Head of Transport Policy Division  
Countryside and Coastal Policy Branch  
Child and Family Programmes Team  
Chief Highway Engineer

#### In attendance

Dr Victoria Winckler Director, Bevan Foundation  
Carwyn Jones AM Minister, Environment, Planning and Countryside

## Secretariat

Sian Wilkins  
Lynsey Edwards

Clerk  
Deputy Clerk

## Item 1: Introduction, apologies and substitutions

1.1 There were no apologies or substitutionsuw Lew.

## Item 2: EDT Minister's Report EDT2 14-04 (p1)

1. Members questioned the reasons behind the Minister's recent statement concerning the delay in the handing back of the LG site in Newport. The Minister explained that the engineering work to prepare the site for an alternative use had taken longer than envisaged. He added that finding new occupants for the site was a priority. In respect of the RSA grant to LG, he confirmed that, as he had said before, the correct procedures had been followed and a large repayment of the RSA funding had now been received.
2. On the withdrawal of DARA from the St Athan site the Minister said that he had asked the WDA to come forward with plans for alternative occupation at the site. The Minister agreed to circulate a copy of a recent Written Assembly Question on meetings that had been held between Ministers the MOD and DARA. [Action: EDT Minister]
3. Members were concerned that hazardous waste from Wales was currently being transported to Peterborough following the refusal to accept waste from Wales by sites in Swindon. The Minister agreed to discuss the matter with the Minister for Environment Planning and Countryside and report back to the Committee. He also agreed to provide further information on what developments had been made for suitable sites in Wales. [Action: EDT Minister]
4. On the merger of the WDA and WTB into the Welsh Assembly Government, he confirmed that separate budget lines for both would remain in his MEG until decisions had been taken about the post merger structure. Members questioned how clear accountability would be shown during the merger. There was a danger that budget lines would be split, making any ongoing scrutiny of the budget very difficult. The Minister said that there would be greater scrutiny once the merger had been completed as Members would have the opportunity to scrutinise performance of ASPBs, directly through him and, more frequently than at present. The Minister also confirmed that there was no suggestion that any functions of the WDA or WTB would be transferred to Local Authorities.
5. A paper proposing options for the merger was due to be published in November for consultation. The Chair confirmed that she had requested a meeting with the Minister and party spokespeople to discuss how the Committee could scrutinise the merger process.

6. The Minister confirmed that he was due to launch the findings of the Review of the Creative Industries in November. He agreed to bring his proposals to the Committee. [Action: EDT Minister]
7. A Member raised the issue of the levies being placed by Local Authorities on holiday accommodation under the Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) legislation. The Minister agreed that currently HMOs were too broadly defined. New legislation currently passing through the House of Commons would tighten up the definition of holiday accommodation.
8. Bus fares on services operated by Arriva in Mid and North Wales had recently increased by 44%. There was a perception that this had arisen because of the free Welsh bus pass initiative for senior citizens. The Minister said that fare pricing was not a matter that the Company would have discussed with the Government. This was purely a commercial decision. Members questioned whether the current system of counting usage under the bus pass initiative was effective. The Minister would be reviewing the costs of the free bus pass initiative in the New Year, when local authorities submitted details of payments made to bus operators and the review would take account of fare increases and usage.
9. The Minister agreed to provide further information on what measures had been taken to protect jobs and relocate workers at the Enterprise Agency in Gwynedd. [Action: EDT Minister]
10. A Member questioned whether the SA1 Development in Swansea was running to time. The Minister was unaware of any delays but asked that the Member let him have details of any specific issues.
11. On the recent Anti-Drink Drive campaign the Deputy Minister said that the 17-25 age group remained the most vulnerable to drink related accidents. The Welsh Police Forces ran specifically targeted campaigns for this age group. There was no evidence that the lack of legal competency for Wales on drink driving affected the Police Forces' ability to run successful campaigns.
12. Recent employment statistics indicated that the rate of economically inactive women in Wales had increased. The Minister said that officials were looking at what might lie behind these changes and he would report back to the committee with any relevant findings. [Action: EDT Minister]

### **Item 3: Bevan Foundation Report**

#### **EDT2 14-04 (p2)**

1. Christine Chapman and Brian Gibbons declared an interest. They were both members of the Bevan Foundation.
2. Dr Winckler outlined the main findings of the report. She said that although the road dualling was a significant infrastructure investment, the development alone would not be sufficient to regenerate the area. The views people held about the area needed to be transformed, and tourism, housing development, improved environmental quality of the area and town centre regeneration had all to be considered as equally important. The dualling of the road also carried risks. Evidence elsewhere suggested that development such as this could lead to leakage of investment from an area. Members welcomed the Minister's announcement that he was setting up a Task Force to look at the measures needed to maximise the impact of the investment in the road infrastructure.

3. On skill levels, Dr Winckler said not much was known about the population's qualifications and salaries at present. If the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) only responded to the need for low level jobs then the area would only ever attract 'more of the same'. In response to specific concerns for funding for Coleg Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil College, the Minister said that the Education Minister had announced an increase in the education budget to focus more on skills.
4. Some Members expressed concern that the dualling would lead to the A465 becoming a through corridor to the Midlands replicating the problem that the A55 had caused in isolating communities in North Wales. Dr Winckler said that whilst general lessons from the A55 development had been taken on board, experiences had not been drawn directly from this project, because the Heads of the Valleys did not rely on tourism in the same way as Anglesey.
5. Members questioned whether specific targets should be set for economic growth in the area and if so what they should be. Dr Winckler said that any targets set would need to recognise that any recovery package must look to the long-term to overcome over half a century of economic decline in the area.
6. On travel times, Dr Winckler said that even a small reduction resulting from the dualling would be crucial to businesses who worked to strict distribution deadlines. Improved reliability was also an issue for businesses to consider.
7. Members were concerned that low rental for industrial property in the area meant that there was no capital for improvements to industrial property which would attract outside investors. Dr Winckler said that this would seem to be a justification for public intervention. The Minister said that he had recently signed off a WDA property strategy and would ensure that it reflected the needs of deprived areas, although areas like Ebbw Vale and Merthyr Tydfil might still need some public sector funding.
8. In response to a question on Objective One funding, the Minister said that while he did not know the level of structural funds that would be available post 2006, WEFO were looking at best practice and the lessons learned from the current programme. This would mean that the Welsh Assembly Government would be in a better position for the next round.
9. Members said that the importance of both the natural and built environment could not be underestimated. Comparisons were made with projects in Ireland, where an urban renewal scheme and tax break scheme had been very successful in certain deprived areas.
10. On disruption to the business community of the dualling project, Officials said that WAG had engaged with the business community and held public exhibitions prior to work beginning. Once construction began, WAG engaged with both the public and businesses to listen to their concerns.
11. In response to a question on targeting funding to local authorities, Dr Winckler said that she did not think it appropriate for local authorities to be given blank cheques. Further it would be good to see proper monitoring and evaluation of data.

#### **Item 4: National Parks Review and Draft Action Plan EDT2 14-04 (p3)**

1. The Minister for Environment Planning and Countryside introduced the paper and asked for the Committee's views on how National Park Authorities (NPAs) could add further value to the economic aspects of the Parks as well as take further action on sustainable development.

2. A discussion on the report followed, during which the following points were made:
  - There was a need for greater partnership working within the tourism sector and the role of the WTB should be set out clearly.
  - Concerns were expressed about the perceived "draconian" nature of planning processes in relation to the National Parks. Better public relations were required at the outset of the process. The Minister agreed that this was a perception, but said that it was not borne out by the facts.
  - Better understanding of the economic and community role of the national parks was needed. It was important that economic activity took place in the parks but it needed to sit comfortably with sustainability issues.
  - In relation to the recommendations in the review report about economic development, the Minister said that he had not been persuaded that economic development powers should be given to the NPAs. Members agreed that they would not want to see any funding or responsibility 'creep' from local authorities to NPAs. In addition ASPB budgets in this area should be integrated back into the WAG main budget and should not be transferred to local authorities.
  - Members felt that there was a need for NPAs to reach out to communities both inside and outside the national parks so as to enable them to reap both the economic benefits of the Parks as well as enjoying the natural resource. There were some good examples of the knock on effects for tourism for villages just outside the Parks. Glyncorrwg was advocated as an example of this practice in operation.
3. There was a discussion on whether any members of the NPAs should be selected via direct elections (as the report recommended). The EPC Minister said that appointing members by a variety of means could lead to potential tension between members. Members generally agreed that some elected members were preferable to an 'appointment only' system. Election of some members made the board more representative while retaining some 'expert' knowledge. There was no agreement on the level of elected membership that was most appropriate.
4. While not directly relevant to the review it was recognised that exclusion of National Parks from the strategic search areas identified in the draft TAN 8 scheme could place additional pressure, in particular, on other rural areas in Wales for wind farm developments. There was a need to look proactively at other forms of renewable energy within the Parks. A lack of renewable energy sources ran contrary to the principles of sustainable development. Some Members suggested that National Parks be re-examined as potential sites for alternative renewable energy operations such as biomass or tidal power. Recent research suggested that tourists were not put off by wind farms being sited in tourist areas.
5. The Chair agreed to write to the Minister for Environment Planning and Countryside on the discussion. [Action: Clerk]

## **Item 5: Childcare Working Group – Interim Report EDT2 14-04 (p4)**

1. Brian Gibbons introduced the paper highlighting the work of the working group that had prepared the consultation document. He referred to the wide-ranging stakeholders involved and the breadth

of expertise they had encompassed. He said the paper outlined the issues identified and referred to the symposium held on 23 September, which had brought together a wide range of UK expertise. It was expected that the group would prepare its final report by the end of 2004 with a view to a Plenary debate in February.

2. Members noted that childcare was not the same as any other kind of service because it involved handing one's children over to the care of someone else. How the children and the carers related was important. Good childcare could be a positive benefit to a child but conversely bad childcare could have a very negative effect.
3. The key to good childcare was the skills of the people providing it and, in turn, the training they received. The need for high quality training was absolutely essential and the aim should be to increase the status and parity of esteem of carers to that of teachers. There was also a need to provide particular training for people to care for children who were disabled or had special needs and to endeavour to mainstream this. One approach might be to incorporate such training as a module of more general training for carers.
4. The report illustrated the need for choice and diversity and that this varied from location to location. It was noticeable that provision was weaker in socially deprived areas and there was a need for action to direct resources to remedy this.
5. Childcare should not be seen in isolation and should be integrated with child healthcare and other support services, such as healthcare. This did not necessarily depend upon 'bricks and mortar' and could be delivered in all areas through the appropriate co-ordination of services.
6. Members stressed the importance of good information being available to, and used by, parents in their choice of childcare. They stressed the statutory duty on local authorities to provide this information.
7. Members noted that there was a particular need for childcare in centres such as Cardiff and Newport to which there was a high level of commuting. Some parents preferred to use childcare facilities close to their place of work in order to reduce the time they were apart from their child and so that they were near to them if they were needed during the day.
8. Concern was expressed about the level of regulation required to establish childcare facilities. While there could be no dilution of standards for ensuring staff suitability and training, there were concerns that some of the requirements were overly bureaucratic. Members were concerned about the burdens imposed by bodies such as the CSIW which, while based on sound principles, presented a genuine barrier to the provision of childcare. The Deputy Minister said that there was evidence from childcare providers that things had more recently improved in this regard and that these requirements no longer presented such a barrier. Members commented that the situation could be improved if bodies such as the WDA and the CSIW provided assistance to child carers in practical issues related to their requirements such as the establishment of a complaints procedure. The WDA was currently funding the National Childminding Association to provide mentoring for prospective childminders through the registration process.
9. Where there was a shortage of provision there was a greater risk of parents resorting to informal forms of child-minding which could be unsafe and sometimes illegal. It was suggested that this type of care was more prevalent in poorer communities but it was important not to overstate the problem. Members noted that modern technology could make a useful contribution to ensuring standard of childcare through, perhaps, closed circuit television, which would provide

incontrovertible evidence of how the care was provided. While there might be a capital cost associated with this, it might be offset by savings elsewhere.

10. There was a need for better business support for people wishing to become child minders and it was noted that the report indicated childcare was not a specific priority for the WDA. Members wondered whether the Agency had ever looked to support childcare businesses located close to commercial or industrial employers.
11. Members noted the value of childcare provided by employers but also that this was predominantly in the public sector. There was evidence that provision of such services was significant in retaining high quality staff within a business and there was evidence that such investment was generally cost effective.

## **Item 6: EDT Policy Review – Economic Inactivity**

### **EDT2 14-04 (p5)**

1. Because of emerging recommendations, Members agreed to defer this discussion until the next meeting. The Chair asked members to forward any initial comments they had on the draft report, to the Clerk, by e-mail.

## **Item 7: EU Legislation**

### **EDT2 14-04 (p6)**

1. It was agreed that the Committee would continue to follow progress on the Working Time Directive.
2. Members also requested further information on the Euratom directives relating to nuclear installations and waste management. The Chair reminded members that in their recent meeting with EPC Committee they agreed that EPC should take the lead but she would arrange for EDT to consider any relevant papers on this directive.

## **Item 8: Minutes of previous meetings**

### **EDT2 13-04 Minutes of the meeting on 22 September 2004**

### **EDT2 14-04 Action Outstanding**

1. The minutes were agreed as a true record.

## **Committee Service October 2004**