

INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES CROSS PARTY GROUP

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday 5th February 2020 in the Media Briefing Room, The Senedd, Cardiff Bay

1. Present

Vikki Howells AM (Chair); Peter Slater ICA Wales; Steve Fothergill, Sheffield Hallam University and ICA; Lisa Jones, Bridgend CBC; Andrew Collins, Neath Port Talbot CBC; Cllr Gareth Jones, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Cllr Jayne Brencher, Rhondda Cynon Taf Robin Lewis, AMSS, Vikki Howells AM; Ioan Bellin, office of Helen Mary Jones AM; Wayne Thomas NUM; Mick Antoniw AM; Cllr Graham Thomas Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Michelle Rowson-Woods, Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Maureen Howell, Welsh Government, Valleys Taskforce; Cllr Phillip Edwards, Blaenau Gwent CBC; Cllr John Morgan, Blaenau Gwent CBC; Alun Taylor, Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Alex Still, Office of Hefin David AM; Lloyd Jones, Bevan Foundation.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr David White, Bridgend CBC; Kirsty Williams AM; Ieuan Sherwood, Bridgend CBC.

3. Welcome

The Chair, Vikki Howells AM welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that that the formal business associated with the AGM would be conducted prior to the main agenda.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the AGM held on the 19th February 2019 were confirmed.

5. Election of Chair

Vikki Howells AM was re-elected as Chair of the Industrial Communities Cross Party Group.

6. Election of Secretary

Peter Slater, Director, CA Wales, was elected as Secretary of the Industrial Communities Cross Party Group. The Chair thanked the previous Secretary, Ged Mchugh, for his contribution to the group during his tenure.

7. Financial Report

The Secretary reported that the Industrial Communities Alliance had incurred expenditure of £123.48 for catering services over the year. As with previous years, the secretarial costs of supporting the CPG were absorbed by the ICA as part of its routine activities.

8. Membership Update

It was noted that the present membership of the group comprised: Vikki Howells AM, Chair.; Dawn Bowden AM; Suzy Davies AM; Lynne Neagle AM; Huw Irranca-Davies AM; Cllr David White, Bridgend CBC and Chair, ICA Wales; Peter Slater, Secretary and ICA Wales.

9. The State of the Coalfields: Economic and Social Conditions in the Coalfields of England, Scotland and Wales; Presentation by Professor Steve Fothergill, Sheffield Hallam University.

Professor Fothergill began his presentation with a brief background to the report which began with a request from the Westminster Coalfield Communities APPG for evidence on the current state of the coalfields and, arising from this, a contemporary 'ask' for actions. The meeting was informed that the Coalfields Regeneration Trust subsequently commissioned an update of the 2014 State of the Coalfields Report from Sheffield Hallam University, which was launched in Westminster in October 2019 together with the '*Ten Priorities for the Former Coalfields*'.

Moving on to the report, Professor Fothergill emphasised that former coalfields accounted for nearly 10% (5.7m) of the GB population whilst in Wales the figure was nearer 25% (786,000). As such the scale of the coalfield populations is such that if taken together they would be equivalent to a region in their own right, and the statistics would probably show it to be the most deprived region of the UK.

The meeting was informed that the key points emerging from the analysis revealed the following trends in the South Wales Coalfield:

- The coalfield population is older than average and growing more slowly than elsewhere – 1.5% compared to 2.5% in other coalfields. There are also fewer people of working age born outside of the UK – 4% compared to 45% in London.
- Health problems continue to be widespread with 11.2% (86,000) of the population claiming Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independent Payment, which is nearly double the GB rate of 5.8%.
- Job growth in the coalfield has been just 0.2% compared to 6.6% for GB, and to raise the employment rate of the of the South Wales Coalfield to that of the SE of England would require an additional 38,000 people in work.

- Job density is also low at 42 jobs per 100 residents, which compares to 73 for the UK as whole and an average of 55 for coalfield areas.
- Employment in manufacturing is higher than average and whilst warehousing has been an important source of job growth in some areas, this is less so in S Wales.
- Self-employment is lower than average and earnings are also consistently below the national average.
- Whilst unemployment rate is relatively low, this does not reflect those on benefits, which account for 1 in 10 of the population. Furthermore, welfare reform is expected to result in the loss £770 per adult of working age.
- Overall, 42% of coalfield neighbourhoods are in the most deprived 30% in Britain, whilst the proportion in S Wales is 52%.

In conclusion, Professor Fothergill stressed that the research shows that the coalfields continue to lag badly behind national averages and behind other parts of the country when it comes to health, wealth and the weakness of their economies. Furthermore, whilst they have benefitted from the economic upturn, the rate of recovery has been slower. What is particularly noteworthy however is the unequivocal conclusion that South Wales has performed worse than other coalfields and is struggling on most indicators. Professor Fothergill suggested that possible explanations for this related to issues such as accessibility and the impact of valleys on labour markets.

Given the fact that many coalfield areas are continuing to lag behind, Professor Fothergill reiterated the case for prioritising spending on regeneration in these areas, outlining the ten priorities as follows: A replacement for EU funding; support for industry; higher quality jobs; investment in education, skills and health; growth beyond the big cities; investment in local connectivity; local authorities with the ability to deliver; support for community infrastructure; re-balance spending on culture, arts and sports; a better deal on miners' pension fund surpluses.

The Chair thanked Professor Fothergill for his presentation, and confirmed that as a result of being drawn for a short debate next month she would be making use of this latest report on the coalfields. There followed a wide ranging discussion which included references (Vikki Howells AM) to the proposed Cardiff congestion charge and its impact on commuters from the Valleys, and the nature of jobs in the future (Cllr Jayne Brencher) and the role of innovation. There was also a call for greater government intervention (Cllr Graham Thomas) on issues such as state aids and the redistribution of wealth, whilst issues relating to earnings were referred to in the context of the forthcoming Social Partnership Bill (Mick Antoniw AM). Other matters raised included the role of the foundation economy (Lloyd Jones, Bevan Foundation), public transport (Cllr Gareth Jones) and the role of the ONS in measuring regional inequalities (Vikki Howells AM).

Arising from the discussion and the presentation, it was agreed to seek a meeting with Lee Waters AM, Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport and Chair of the Valleys Taskforce, to consider the conclusions of the *State of the Coalfields* report.

10. Next Meeting

The Chair proposed that the next meeting should take place before the summer recess. Possible topics for discussion included the Shared Prosperity Fund and the regional distribution of R&D investment.

Peter Slater
Secretary & Director ICA Wales.