



Cross Party Group for North Wales Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Gogledd Cymru

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cross-Party Group for North Wales in the Welsh Senedd Thursday 19th May 2022

Present

Senedd Members:

Mark Isherwood MS, (**in the Chair**), Llyr Gruffydd MS, Ken Skates MS, Gareth Davies MS, Dan Rose (for Carolyn Thomas MS)

Members of Parliament:

Liz Savile-Roberts MP and Rob Roberts MP

Local Authority Leaders

Councillor Charlie McCoubrey

Officials

Stephen Jones (WLGA) Secretary and Chris Llewelyn (WLGA), Chief Executive and Sponsor Representative, Bryn Richards, Welsh Government and Lee Robinson, Transport for Wales.

Speaker:

Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales and Trefnydd

Chair's Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting which was convened to enable members to share common priorities with Lesley Griffiths MS, the Minister for North Wales.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on the 13th November 2021.

The Chair asked that the Minutes of the meeting be agreed, having been circulated previously, without dissent. The Chair asked the Secretary to circulate the minutes again to enable any group member not present to suggest amendments.

Remarks of the Minister for North Wales

Lesley Griffiths spoke briefly about the role of Minister for North Wales (MNW).

The role was created in the last Senedd Term and held by Ken Skates MS. The MNW can consider any matter relevant to North Wales, which results in frequent dialogue with other Ministers about specific issues in North Wales e.g., the BCUHB and the development of energy assets.

The MNW chairs regular meetings of a Welsh Government North Wales Cabinet Committee which has involved Council Leaders in its meetings.

The Cabinet Committee discusses specific issues, receives presentation e.g., North Wales Metro, BCUHB, Sport Wales and support for the food and drink sector. It enables Council Leaders to talk about pressing concerns in North Wales with all of the Cabinet. The meeting is well attended by WG officials and SPADs as well.

The Minister brings a wealth of previous ministerial experience to the role of Minister for North Wales. Current Priorities are to progress investments and growth in:

- Low Carbon Energy
- Food and Drink
- Tourism

The MNW has met the Mayors of Liverpool and Manchester City Regions to build up economic links of benefit to North Wales in energy (e.g., hydrogen, nuclear and offshore wind).

The MNW is exploring post-Brexit opportunities for the food and drink sector in North Wales as part of her Rural Affairs portfolio.

Discussion

Energy

The meeting discussed the importance of the energy sector to North Wales and identified energy projects everyone could get behind: -

Tidal Stream

- Morlais

Green Hydrogen

- Menter Mon/Holyhead Hydrogen Hub
- North Wales Hydrogen Hub (NE Wales)

Nuclear

- SMRs at Trawsfynydd
- Wylfa

Offshore Wind

- Extension of current capacity (Mona and Morgan Fields)
- Celtic Sea with the Irish Government – The Irish and Welsh Governments have agreed to pursue the development of floating wind turbines capacity.

Hydrogen/CCUS Industrial Clusters

- The Hynet Consortium with members/users in North Wales (e.g., Hanson Cement)

Interaction with Ministers

Llyr Gruffydd MS reported that he was initially sceptical of the proposed MNW role because all Ministers are “Ministers for North Wales” through their policy development and oversight of service delivery roles.

He asked how much the role sought to “lead” other Ministers and whether the role had made any difference?

The Minister responded that the MNW does not lead on policy formulation but is informed of developments relating to North Wales. This enables the MNW to advise and support on specific issues like the North Wales Metro and the BCUHB.

The MNW has many meetings with other Ministers to advise on how WG measures and proposals will be seen in North Wales, where there is a perception of being distant from Cardiff and North Wales not always receiving a fair share of investment in Wales. The MNW works to reduce that perception.

Council Leaders play a role in bringing North Wales and Cardiff closer together by attending the Cabinet Committee to make representations on behalf of their communities and seeking to influence WG policy for the benefit of North Wales.

The HQ of the Development Bank for Wales in Wrexham and the North Wales Metro are specific achievements where the Minister for North Wales has made a difference.

In this administration the role has helped the Minister of Health and Social Services deal with the recent pressures on the BCUHB.

Tourism

Liz Savile Roberts MP asked: -

- What is the Welsh Government doing to upgrade the electricity grid which will be required to make the best of the energy opportunities identified by the Minister? Tourism will require the expansion of EV charging infrastructure which will in turn require a higher capacity grid.
- What is the role of the recently established Welsh Government Companies to push forward the development of Trawsfynydd power station for SMRs?
- Will the Welsh Government help the Heritage Rail visitor economy attractions obtain access to coal?

The Heritage Railways in Wales are a substantial visitor economy asset, with two types of railways, narrow gauge (which were purpose built to transport slate and other rock minerals to ports and/or smelting plants) and standard gauge, like the Llangollen Railway which were formerly part of the passenger network prior to Beeching. The Ukraine war has caused shortage of coal for the steam railways as their supply came from the Donbas region. The coal for steam engines has special requirements. It has to have the right level of bitumen in it. There is a South Wales Colliery that can provide the coal required subject to help (from the Welsh Government) to invest in a piece of kit to process the coal to meet the specification required to power a steam train.

Will the Minister speak to the representatives of the Heritage Railways?

- What is happening with the development of Llanbedr Airfield? Will its development still be led by the Snowdonia Enterprise Zone?

The MNW responded that she will take up these issues with Vaughan Gething MS, the Economy Minister and either the MNW or the Minister for Economy will write to Liz Savile Roberts with a response

The meeting then discussed the importance of the North Wales Coast Mainline and its electrification. Ken Skates MS reported that: -

- The UCR is a hook to seek investment in the NWCML so that it can handle more passenger trains and freight trains to reduce traffic on the roads.
- TfW is the only TOC to fully restore its pre-Covid timetables.

There was a discussion of the slow pace of the restoration of Avanti Services (North Wales – Chester – Crewe – London Euston).

The meeting agreed that: -

- The Group should invite Peter Hendy to join the meeting at a future date to discuss the Union Connectivity Review.
- The MNW should write to Avanti supporting the early restoration of pre Covid service levels as a platform for future improvement.

The MNW reported that the next North Wales Cabinet Committee will take place on the 7th July 2022 and that Council Leaders will be asked to present the priorities of the new Council administrations.

Chris Llewelyn offered to facilitate that report and help the Leaders pull together that information into one presentation as he will be meeting the six Leaders shortly. The WLGA will continue to facilitate the six North Wales Leaders engaging with Senedd Members and the MNW/WG North Wales Cabinet Committee.

Lee Robinson reported that he would like to keep the Group updated on the progress of the NW Metro and the rail infrastructure investment required to improve North Wales's connectivity to the UK rail network.

Mabon ap Gwynfor reported that he would like the Group to discuss Housing including how to bring empty units back into use, homelessness and second homes.