

# Cross-Party Group Minutes

## Cross Party Group Details

**Cross Party Group Title:**

**Senedd Cross Party Group for Europe**

**Date and time of meeting:**

Tuesday 1st July 2025 12.30 to 1.20pm

**Location and state of holding (in-person/ remote/ hybrid):**

Seminar Rooms 1 & 2, Pierhead – in-person and hybrid

**Was the meeting an Annual General Meeting:**

Yes

No

**Name of Group Chair:**

Mick Antoniw, Senedd Member

**Name of Secretary and Organisation:**

Dr Caroline Turner & Elizabeth Lendering, Wales for EuropeIn attendance:

**Name/title/organisation:**

Mick Antoniw MS

Alun Davies MS

Prof Kevin Morgan (hybrid)

Charles Smith, Chair Wales for Europe

Dr Caroline Turner, Wales for Europe

Elizabeth Lendering, Wales for Europe

Derek Vaughan (hybrid) Welsh Government Representative for Europe

Adam Price MS

Hannah Blythen MS

David Rees MS

### **Apologies**

Peredur Owen Griffiths, MS

Sian Gwenllian MS

Anthony Slaughter, Leader Wales Green Party and President Wales for Europe

### **Summary of meeting:**

**2. Minutes** – Minutes of the meeting 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

All actions completed.

### **Matters Arising**

Follow up with Eluned Morgan's office, seeking her commitment to attend a future meeting, preferably September or October; noted that we will have to work around the First Minister's availability.

### **3. Recent Developments:**

- Pride Events Colwyn Bay and Cardiff- both events were attended by Wales for Europe
- Wales for Europe's Erasmus+ Petition is live on social media.
- Delegation, comprising Culture Committee (Mick Antoniw, Alun Davies, Hannah Blythen and others) visited Brussels recently. Positive discussions with organisations and representatives, including the Danish Mission who are taking over the Presidency from Poland. Danish Mission commented on loss of the UK steel industry. Met the proactive Scottish Mission delegation.

People the delegation met were positive on Erasmus. However, Creative Europe and issues raised by the Musicians' Union are not currently high on the agenda, though there may be ongoing in the background.

Alun Davies gave an update on some of his activities and conversation during the visit to Brussels, which were more positive than a year ago; he reported that he was invited to speak at the European Parliament Hemicycle. Alun met with Karl Vanlouwe, who is Chair of The European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) Contact Group. Alun also visited the Flanders coalfields area to investigate ways Flanders and Wales could work together. It was emphasised to the mission that the Scottish Parliament needs to take up its places on the Contact Group to ensure representation for devolved nations. The Committee of the Regions' Contact Group have already established Heads of Agreement for key areas, and the mandate will be in place by September; they need to advance negotiations during the autumn/ winter to enable sign off of Action Plans in Spring.

It was of concern that the UK's Deputy Ambassador to the EU did not make clear what next steps for the UK are to be. There is concern that work on Border Controls is paused, which means that the infrastructure won't be in place.

The priority for this Group is to ascertain Welsh Government involvement and clarify what Wales wants from current and future negotiations between the UK and the EU on the Trade and Co-operation Agreement; it's vital that Wales' voice is heard in these discussions.

Alun Davies noted that there will be 5 months after summer recess to complete the Senedd Cross Party Group's Work Programme. He emphasised the importance of the Group establishing a deliverable work programme and to oversee that it is delivered at pace. Alun will be attending the Council of the Region's Contact Group again in September and November, and EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA) will be meeting in November.

**Action Point:** include Creative Europe on a future agenda

#### 4. Wales and the EU - Derek Vaughan, Welsh Government Representative on Europe

Derek Vaughan congratulated the Senedd Members and Wales for Europe on the timely establishment of this Group.

Derek Vaughan outlined his role as Welsh Government Representative on Europe:

- He attends regular meetings in Brussels or at the Senedd for one week each month; he uses his contacts and networks to provide opportunities for Welsh Government Ministers with the European Commission and European Parliament.
- He also gains intelligence about forthcoming EU legislation and obtains updates about EU-UK relations.
- He promotes Welsh Government policies and initiatives, such as Taith which has gained a lot of interest in the EU. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act has also generated interest, particularly as the EU is setting up an intergenerational initiative. There is also an interest in the Welsh Government's pilot scheme of providing a Universal Basic Income, and a lot of interest in language policy and the way that Welsh Government has supported the Welsh Language
- He meets with Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive representatives in Brussels to gain an insight and share intelligence, and explained that they are valuable contacts for Wales
- Derek explained that others from Wales attend a range of partnership, such as the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR), and also language networks
- Partnership Agreements are in place between Welsh Government and Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders, Silesia and Brittany. Derek meets regularly with their representatives in Brussels, and also with Ireland's Mission to the EU
- Derek will be speaking on behalf of the Welsh Government at an Economic Conference in Poland in the Autumn.

Benefits achieved for Wales:

- Gaining intelligence on legislation, which will have an impacting Wales due to Dynamic Alignment e.g. on the environment and agriculture
- Timely information on views within the EU about EU-UK relations. Brussels is much more open to sharing information, in contrast to the UK Government. The Commission keeps Member States and the European Parliament in the loop, so key individuals know what's going on, and it's therefore important to maintain these contacts

- By keeping links with EU Institutions and other countries and regions, Wales can share information about its progressive policies and learn from others. We are still European, and it's important to demonstrate that these links are important to Wales. It's therefore important to maintain links, and regional partnerships, networks and Memorandum of Understanding are good ways of doing this eg on the environment, culture, tourism and heritage, research and development
- Source of Funding –
  - Wales is part of an initiative which has secured €800,000 of funding from CPMR to create links for Wales and Quebec to explore establishing a trans-Atlantic macro region
  - Funds for cross-border projects have also been obtained through the EU's Northern Ireland Peace Programme, which provides access to Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland
  - There are opportunities for funding from the Vanguard Initiative, which Wales has Chaired.
- Future opportunities - an active network of contacts will enable Wales to take advantage of new opportunities arising from change. Soft influence is important, and is currently the main opportunity for Wales to maintain its place in Europe.

#### What's next?

- Senedd elections 2026 – actively maintain links and promote benefits to Wales of maintaining links to EU
- Monitor new Strategic Partnerships between the EU and UK. No milestones have been set, difficult negotiations will be held over the next few months. The impact of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement on Wales, what are the views of farmers and those in the agri-food sector (farmers may want exclusions, we need to reduce checks at borders to promote trade)? What are the benefits and potential downside to Wales from Erasmus and the Youth Experience Scheme and what it means for Taith (for example, will it lead to EU students paying Home Student Fees at Universities?)? Fisheries and Energy are also important topics.
- The May EU-UK Summit has been welcomed in Brussels – it's seen as a step forward, and there is a positive mood change since the 2024 elections in the UK. However, we must understand that UK relations are not the top priority for the EU - relations and a trade agreement with USA (and concern about the growth of the far-right), energy and defence policies and Ukraine are taking priority over UK relations; however, links between the EU and the UK are important for some, and the support is there in Brussels, if the UK wants it.

- Although happy with the outcome of the recent Summit the Devolved Governments expressed frustration at the lack of consultation by the UK government on the detail of the summit text. Going forward the UK must fully consult Devolved Governments, especially when devolved areas are being negotiated.

## Discussion

Prof. Kevin Morgan said that Derek Vaughan had outlined the tangible benefits to Wales of maintaining good links and a presence in Brussels, such as Horizon, SPF, Erasmus+. With the anticipated outcome of next year's elections in Wales, it will be important to show tangible benefits rather than seeing this as an abstract constitutional issue, and demonstrate that devolution and the EU both benefit people in Wales.

Adam Price discussed the importance of the UK being added to list of 68 countries that could participate in the European Investment Bank's programmes, or have a separate agreement, as it is currently not possible for the EIB to invest in Wales, despite this being discussed six years ago. EIB funding could be used to invest in transnational infrastructure projects e.g. transport and energy projects with Ireland. This had been discussed during the Senedd Members' visit to Brussels recently, and all agreed that the benefits are significant. Derek agreed that access to EIB funds is important and gave numerous examples of projects in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea that had benefitted in the past; he said that the EU was open for discussions about access with the UK Government. Derek said that there would be a cost since the UK would have to contribute to gain access, but that the potential for Wales was huge.

Hannah Blythen stated that we need to ensure that Wales' voice is heard in Brussels. She had recently attended a Parliamentary Partnership Assembly meeting, and Members of the PPA were surprised that the devolved nations only have observer status and can only speak for one minute. Derek said that the UK government needs to be persuaded to allow Wales to have the right to speak on devolved matters, and that this would be acceptable to the European Commission and European Parliament.

Dai Rees asked about the Welsh Government's relationship with various EU Institutions. Derek said that there are many Memoranda of Understanding with other countries and regions currently in place and some are being refreshed; he emphasised that Welsh Government wish to focus on a small number of agreements, and develop Actions Plans that can be quickly progressed within available resources. He explained that the Irish Government had been a great help to Wales in previous years when UK Government links with the EU had been difficult and asked whether the Welsh Government has maintained good links with them.

Alun Davies had spoken to Karl Vanlouwe of the Committee of the Regions the previous week about Regional Policy and the multi-annual framework; this will

dominate discussions in Brussels for next few months. The Welsh Government has set up a group on investment in Wales, using post-EU funds; this group needs to work alongside EU friends to learn from them

Mick Antoniw spoke about significant EU funds that are available for technology for defence. He had met companies that wish to bid for these funds which would manufacture in Wales

Dr Caroline Turner raised the restrictions on travelling musicians and access to the Creative Europe programme. Derek agreed that there was not much discussion about this at the May EU-UK Summit, with this placed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> tiers of priorities for the UK Government. The Chair agreed that this should be a theme for a future meeting of this Group.

Derek Vaughan emphasised the importance of Wales prioritising a few topics to progress quickly and ensure that the UK Government involves the devolved nations much earlier in future preparations for EU-UK Summits, as well as in the negotiations that follow this.

## **5. Forward Work Programme –**

**Action** – follow-up on recent letter to First Minister Eluned Morgan to attend a meeting of the Group during the Autumn

**Action** – Confirm date of EU Ambassador to UK's visit to Wales Spring 2026

Possible Themes for future meetings:

- Creative Europe – need to put further pressure on UK Government to seek access to the programme
- Impact of Brexit on various sectors in Wales e.g. Travelling Musicians, Third Sector, Local Authorities, Business, Universities
- Settled UK – on-going impact of Brexit on EU citizens; also update on current position of Ukrainian citizens in the UK
- Manifestos for 2026– January discussion

## **6. Future Meetings – themes and speakers –**

- Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2025- First Minister? (will have to work around First Minister availability); Creative Industries
- November 2025 (date to be arranged) Settled UK
- January 2026 – influencing Manifestos for the 2026 Senedd Elections
- Spring 2026 – Ambassador Pedro Serrano, EU Ambassador to the UK (likely to be in February)

It was noted that the Senedd term will end on 27 March 2026, before the Senedd Elections May 2026.

## **Action Points:**

- Nick Wall to follow up with the First Minister's office about her attendance during the Autumn (Nick Wall)
- Include Creative Europe on a future agenda (Caroline Turner)
- Discuss future item with Settled UK (Caroline Turner)
- Confirm date of EU Ambassador to UK's visit to Wales Spring 2026 (Charles Smith)