

CROSS PARTY GROUP ON INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES

NOTE OF THE MEETING HELD AT 12.30 ON TUESDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2016 IN THE MEDIA BRIEFING ROOM, THE SENEDD, CARDIFF BAY

1. Present

Vikki Howells AM, Cynon Valley; Suzy Davies AM, South Wales West; John Griffiths AM, Newport East; Steffan Lewis AM, South Wales East; Cllr Jane Ward, Chair, ICA Wales & Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Cllr Graham Thomas; Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Peter Slater, ICA Wales; David Parry, ICA National Secretariat; Debbie Pike, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Alex Bevan, TUC Wales; Joshua Bell (representing Hannah Blythyn AM); Bridie Sedgebeer representing Lynne Neagle AM); Robin Lewis (Vikki Howells AM office).

2. Welcome

Vikki Howells AM welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the newly constituted Cross Party Group for Industrial Communities. As a representative of a community undergoing industrial change, she referred to the on-going issues and problems faced by successive generations in adapting to the decline of traditional industries, and the role of the group in helping to promote these concerns. She also thanked the ICA for its contribution to the debate through the previous CPG.

3. Election of Chair

Vikki Howells AM, Cynon Valley, was elected as Chair of the Cross Party Group

4. Election of Secretary

Peter Slater, Director, ICA was elected as Secretary of the Cross Party Group.

5. Terms of Reference

It was agreed that the terms of reference of the group would be as follows:

The Cross-Party Group on Industrial Communities will act as a forum for solutions that will improve economic and social well-being in the industrial and former industrial areas of Wales. Through vehicles such as open meetings, briefings and media work, the group will highlight the range of socio-economic challenges affecting these areas and examine a range of levers which can help overcome these challenges.

As such, the Cross-Party Group will: Aim to influence the policy decisions of the Welsh Government and other agencies to ensure that appropriate resources are deployed to assist the economic and social regeneration of industrial communities in Wales; and develop links with colleagues at a UK level, as well as with those in the other devolved nations, to share research and best practice in helping to improve our industrial and former industrial communities

6. Industrial Strategy for a More Prosperous, Fairer Britain: David Parry, ICA

David Parry opened his presentation with a reference to the imbalances within the British economy where manufacturing had still not recovered to its pre-2008 recession level, and where high levels of household debt and significant budget and trade deficits were still very much in evidence. He went on to explain that despite the neglect of Britain's industrial base, manufacturing was still a significant source of employment in the Valleys, accounting for a higher than average proportion of the total number of jobs. Adding that a revival of industry would benefit the regions as well as the nation, he also referred to signs of a possible 'mood swing' within the Westminster Government towards a more proactive industrial strategy.

Turning to the ICA's views on what should constitute an effective industrial strategy, he outlined several key themes, which included: using public procurement as a tool to support British industry; ensuring that banks provide long-term finance to industry; maximizing the impact of regional aid incentives to support industry; targeting resources on the development of high level technical skills and apprenticeships; investing in infrastructure that matters to industry, such as energy, sites and premises and transport; and harnessing Britain's innovative strengths through effective research and development initiatives. As an example of what government could be doing if an effective industrial policy was in place, reference was made to the Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon Project and its potential to support significant employment through its associated local and regional supply chains.

There followed a wide-ranging discussion on the need for industrial policy to have a strong spatial dimension with direct interventions from government to support foundation industries and measures to address wider issues such as food, energy and industrial security. The need to deliver a programme of high quality apprenticeships as a prerequisite to industrial expansion was raised, as was the role of the proposed Metro network in connecting sub-regional growth points to provide access to higher quality, local jobs. Regarding the latter, the TUC's 'Better Jobs Closer to Home' initiative, which amongst other matters calls for a radical use of public procurement provisions and reserve contracts, was quoted as an example of the types of measures which could be used in support of an industrial strategy.

7. Next Meeting

At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed that topics for the next meeting(s) would be the City Region initiative and how the benefits of economic growth can be shared between all communities and, secondly, how the economic impact of the £800m investment in the A465 Heads of Valleys Road can be maximized.

Peter Slater

15/11/2016