

# The North Wales and Mersey Dee Cross Party Group in the National Assembly for Wales

## Note of the Inaugural Meeting held on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2017

### Attendance

It was reported that attendance of Assembly Members was affected by the general election and Assembly Business and that of Local Authority Leaders by the proximity of the meeting date to the local authority elections, whereby the Councils are still in the process of forming administrations.

### Members of the National Assembly for Wales

Hannah Blythyn (in the Chair, Mark Isherwood, Ann Jones, Llyr Griffith

### Assembly Members Support Staff

Josh Bell (Office of Hannah Blythyn)

### Partners

Councillor Derek Butler, (Flintshire County Council) Chair of the Mersey Dee Alliance, Iwan Trefor Jones, Deputy Chief Executive of Gwynedd Council and Chief Officer for the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Mark Livesey, Deputy Chief Executive of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Group.

Steve Thomas (Chief Executive, WLGA), Stephen Jones (North Wales Regional Co-ordinator)

### Speakers

Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, accompanied by his officials Rhodri Griffiths and Andrew Johnson

### Chair and Purpose of the Meeting

Hannah Blythyn AM took the chair, sought introductions from those present and explained the purpose of the meeting.

The meeting will establish a cross party group to give North Wales a strong voice in the National Assembly for Wales. It is essential that the Assembly Members for North Wales develop a shared purpose and work together in a strong, cohesive vehicle to support the proposed North Wales Growth Deal and the cross border working that will deliver economic growth.

## Keynote Address

There was a short pause to remember the dead and injured of the attack on the Manchester Arena. The Cabinet Secretary, Ken Skates AM, reported that the First Minister had written to the Mayor of Greater Manchester offering the people of Manchester the condolences and good wishes of the Welsh People.

Ken Skates AM, Cabinet Secretary for the Economy and Infrastructure then gave the keynote address:

North Wales is a success story for the Welsh economy. Closer partnership in and around the region to develop the economy allied to better interventions will deliver greater improvement in economic growth.

North Wales now has higher economic activity and household income levels than the Welsh average. There are 1m cross border journeys a month for employment in the Mersey Dee cross border geography. North Wales is part of the wider Northern Powerhouse and will be a crucial part of plans to rebalance the economy of the UK.

The Welsh Government is developing a strategy for a secure and prosperous Wales which will seek to share the benefits of growth and address poverty. As context to frame action to grow the economy in North Wales Welsh Government policy for Wales will seek to: -

- Deliver prosperity for all and address the problem of stubborn pockets of deprivation.
- Maximise the significant opportunities for economic growth from the three, cross border, East -West, axes in Wales: -
  - The Holyhead to Manchester A55/M56 corridor
  - Mid and West Wales into the Midlands Engine and the Birmingham conurbation
  - The Swansea, Cardiff and Bristol M4 Corridor
- Take advantage of UK growth deals, both geographic and sector based. Sector Deals will enable North Wales to link to the Warrington nuclear cluster for Wylfa Newydd and the Sheffield AMRC for the complementary AMRCs in Birkenhead and Deeside.
- Develop the links between North West England and North Wales for tourism via the concept of the Culture Corridor which includes Chester.

There is complementarity of key sectors between North Wales, the Mersey Dee Cross Border geography and the Northern Powerhouse: -

- Finance and Professional Services which have grown out from Chester into Wrexham
- Advanced Manufacturing (Focus on NE Wales with relevance for the whole region)
- Energy (whole region)

The proposed Advanced Manufacturing Centre for Deeside will have a federal structure. It will support: -

- Airbus
- The Northern Gateway (DEZ)
- Wrexham and
- St. Asaph

Research and Development and Innovation must be a high priority for a strategy to deliver a secure and prosperous North Wales.

There will be a move towards a place based approach to developing the economy and making it prosperous and secure. The place based approach will replace the 9 priority sectors.

The Welsh Government will seek to promote and develop regional capabilities and work more closely with Local Government. There will be consideration of co-location of economic development teams if supported by local government.

Each region will be offered 3 or 4 priority sectors, e.g. in North Wales: - finance and professional services, energy/nuclear, advanced materials/optics and adventure tourism could be the regional priority sectors.

Transport infrastructure, skills, sites and premises availability and business support need to support the aspirations of the region.

A lot of people in North Wales are unable to access employment due to poor transport. The proposals in Moving North Wales, Our Vision for North Wales and the North East Wales Metro are designed to address such problems.

Improvements to the bus network are particularly important to helping people in deprived areas reach good jobs.

The Cabinet Secretary recommended the following work programme to the Cross Party Group: -

- A review of the benefits of HS2 to North Wales and the need for a HS2 Crewe Super Hub with Growth Track 360
- A joint meeting of the CPG with the promoters of the North Wales Growth Deal and Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Deal

For the Growth Bid it is essential that North Wales builds on its key strategic strengths and avoids parochial placatory strategies for investment, investment should be prioritised for where there will be most impact.

In conclusion the Cabinet Secretary expressed his desire to be a regular attender of the meetings of the North Wales and Mersey Dee Cross Party Group.

## Discussion

Llyr Griffith sought assurance from the Cabinet Secretary that Welsh Government has a voice in the development of the North Wales Growth Bid and its proposed governance.

The Cabinet Secretary responded that the UK Government rules look to the Local Partners to form the governance body for the formulation and delivery a Growth Deal. He reported awareness that Business, HE and FE are concerned at the potential dilution of their voice in the landscape of a local authority joint committee.

The key role of the Joint Committee will be to develop a regional strategic approach to priorities to maximise the impact of scarce investment monies and supported schemes on economic growth. A focus on prioritising impact should prevent the fragmentation of investment into small parochial projects.

The Welsh Government is seeking to support the bid on a “respond to request” basis and is helping with the development of cross border relationships. The bid will need to fit in with Welsh Government policy to be acceptable to the UK Government.

Mark Isherwood raised the issues of: -

- HS2 and the need to lobby for a Crewe hub that will enable the growth of fast and frequent rail services to North Wales in the future
- The North Wales Growth Bid’s purpose being defined by the UK Government to deliver close links between North Wales and the Northern Powerhouse and to enable devolution of powers to the region from the Welsh Government as well as the UK Government.

The Cabinet Secretary responded that there must be a clear purpose for the devolution of powers. The components of the deal should drive the devolution requested by North Wales and responded to Welsh Government. He reported that he supported the principle of more regional autonomy for North Wales in promoting economic development. He would be open to the creation of a joint local authority and Welsh Government economic development unit co-located in North Wales.

Steve Thomas welcomed the principles of (1) place based shaping of economic development and (2) inclusive growth articulated by the Cabinet Secretary. There needs to be a shift in philosophy from headline jobs created and GVA growth to a more rounded approach that seeks to improve the quality of jobs and income levels.

The Cabinet Secretary responded that he wanted to see a new economic contract between the government and agencies supporting economic development that focuses on: -

- Quality of jobs (we have got more people into jobs and the labour market; we now need to make the jobs we have “better jobs”)
- Productivity
- Future proofing, anticipating automation e.g. additive manufacturing
- Creating wealth and opportunities in deprived, “left behind” areas.

We need to tackle low pay and unfair labour practices, address structural problems in the economy, reduce gaps in inequality and increase well-being - “prosperity for all”.

Structural intervention in the economy will be place based in the future.

We need to expand our performance indicators from jobs and GVA. Disposable household income is a key new indicator favoured by the government.

## [North Wales Economic Ambition Board Update, Iwan Trefor Jones](#)

The North Wales Economic Ambition (NWEAB) and the local authorities in North Wales are really pleased to see the formation of a group of assembly members to promote the economic interests of North Wales in the National Assembly.

The NWEAB and the Councils will co-operate and work closely with the Cross Party Group.

The NWEAB was formed to address concerns that the region's economy was not performing strongly enough, falling behind the UK generally in terms of: -

- Productivity, income and living standards
- Investment in North Wales compared to other regions of Wales and the UK

The Board has enabled the region to work as Team North Wales, working together in a more systematic way and developing a sense of shared purpose and priorities.

The aims of the Board have fed through into the Growth Bid which aims to play to the strengths of the region whilst aligning with UK and Welsh Government industrial/economic strategies. The Growth Bid will also address the issue of inclusive growth and seek to ensure that benefits of growth are spread across the whole region.

The North Wales Growth Vision articulates a broad based, holistic approach to economic development. It proposes interventions in transport, skills, support for business and innovation and integration of housing, transport and employment planning.

North Wales is working with cross border partners to connect the region to the Northern Powerhouse and to co-ordinate the bids from North Wales and LEPs in the cross border area, principally the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Ambition Board welcomes the idea of more place based leadership and delivery of economic development.

The region is looking outwards and is united for a clear purpose, developing innovative businesses in high value sectors: -

- Energy: nuclear, wind, tidal etc.
- Advanced Manufacturing: Aerospace, Automotive and Optics
- Digital and Creative

Adventure/Adrenalin Tourism is enabling tourism to develop a "high value" sector.

The proposed North Wales Growth Deal will improve: -

- Transport, infrastructure and services
- Skills
- Support for Business Growth and Innovation
- The availability of sites and premises for businesses in high value sectors.

The Growth Deal will be a key tool in implementing the North Wales Growth Vision and increasing productivity measured by GVA.

There will be clear asks from North Wales to the Welsh and UK Governments in the Growth Bid.

The Governance body for the Growth Bid will be a Local Authority led Joint Committee in line with UK Government requirements. The Joint Committee will seek the support of the Cross Party Group for its proposals.

Councillor Derek Butler, Chair of the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) reported that North Wales and the MDA had received strong support from the Westminster based Mersey Dee and North Wales All Party Group (APPG). He hoped that the Assembly Cross Party Group would work with the Westminster Group in the future and asked that Cross Party Group would invite APPG members to their public launch.

## Business Meeting

It was moved, seconded and approved unanimously that the Chair will be Hannah Blythyn AM and that the Secretarial Function, under the supervision of the Chair, will be provided by Stephen Jones, the North Wales Regional Co-ordinator of the Welsh Local Government Association.

It was agreed that there will be two vice chairs of the Cross Party Group to support the Chair in the management of the Cross Party Group.

It was moved, seconded and approved unanimously that Mark Isherwood will be a Vice Chair of the Group.

It was moved, seconded and approved unanimously that the Plaid Cymru Group will nominate one of its North Wales Assembly Members to serve as a Vice Chair of the Cross Party Group. Llyr Griffith AM, agreed to take that action to the Plaid Cymru Group and report the nominee to the Chair in due course.

The next meeting of the North Wales and Mersey Dee Cross Party Group in the National Assembly for Wales will be held in North Wales to publicly launch the Group and its aims to the public, preferably prior to August 2017. The date and “central” location of the proposed public launch will be decided by an e-mail consultation exercise.