



Cross Party Group for North Wales Grŵp Trawsbleidiol Gogledd Cymru

Note of the Annual General Meeting of the Cross-Party Group for North Wales in the National Assembly for Wales, Tuesday 27th February 2018

Present

Assembly Members

Llyr Gruffydd AM (in the chair), Mark Isherwood, Jack Sargeant, Mandy Jones and Rhun ap Iorwerth

Apologies were received from: Ann Jones AM, Darren Millar AM, Hannah Blythyn AM and Sian Gwenllian AM

Research Assistants present from the offices of Jack Sargeant AM and Mandy Jones AM

Sponsor Attendance (WLGA)

Stephen Jones (WLGA Regional Co-ordinator for North Wales), Steve Thomas CBE, (CEO WLGA),

Guest Speakers

Councillors Aaron Shotton (Leader, Flintshire County Council) and Dyfrig Siencyn (Arweinydd, Cyngor Gwynedd) Chair and Vice Chair of the North Wales Growth Board respectively.

Ken Skates AM, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Welsh Government with Andrew Johnson and Gwenllian Roberts

Annual General Meeting

The meeting being quorate was opened by Llyr Gruffydd,.

1. Election of Officers

- Llyr Gruffydd was elected Chair.
- Mark Isherwood and Ann Jones were elected co-vice-chairs.
- Stephen Jones was elected Secretary to work under the supervision of the Chair and Vice Chairs.

2. Minutes of the Inaugural Annual General Meeting held on the 24th May 2017

- The Minutes were agreed as printed



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3. Constitution

- The revised constitution was agreed as printed.

Updates

4. The North Wales Growth Bid

Cllr. Shotton gave an overview of the North Wales Growth Bid as described in the recently published Growth Bid Brochure.

The Bid is organised into three themes, Smart Connected and Resilient with 12 interventions over the three themes. It seeks investment of around £380m which would generate a total investment spend of around £1.3m through leverage.

The Bid is being promoted by a united, cross party coalition of Councils supported by partners from Higher and Further Education and Business.

The Growth Board has enjoyed good engagement with the Wales Office and Members of Parliament. It wants to engage equally with Assembly Members and Welsh Government Ministers.

The region is seeking some devolved powers and functions as well as funding.

Smart includes: -

- Investment in energy connections to connect energy production sites to the National Grid
- Investment in Holyhead Port to support access to Wylfa Newydd and to promote trade more generally
- Support for a special purpose vehicle to develop employment and housing sites within Local Development Plans but where the market has failed to deliver development.
- A more regional approach to economic development underpinned by a regional growth fund. The new approach advocates closer working between local government and Welsh Government Economic Development Services with a greater regional focus.
- Development of innovative technology hubs across the region

Connected includes: -

- Investment in digital connectivity (Broadband and Wireless)
- A more regional approach to transport planning and delivery
- Schemes to promote integrated transport around transport hubs and connect transport hubs with employment centres.



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Resilient includes: -

- Improving skills
- Improving employability, enabling people on benefits to move into employment
- Training Centres of Excellence (Tourism, Rail and Rural Economy)

Councillor Siencyn emphasised that the Growth Bid had developed organically from work between the six councils.

The six Council Leaders, three of whom are new, have gelled together into a strong, united team. This has removed concerns that the Growth Bid was more about North East Wales than the region as a whole. There is a consensus that growth should be spread across North Wales.

The Growth Bid is more than parochial; it seeks a voice for North Wales with the opportunity to decide our own priorities through devolution of functions and powers. It is possible that councils will delegate upwards to the Growth Board to complement devolution from the Welsh and UK Governments.

There is more than the Growth Deal on the agenda: -

- A rural forum discussion to address rural disadvantage, where there is low economic activity in deep rural areas.
- The shared prosperity fund. The establishment of the Growth Board will enable the Region to address the shared prosperity fund priorities on a regional basis.
- A Mid Wales Partnership is of interest to South Gwynedd.

There is a need for a rural development strategy that goes beyond the A55 corridor. The Growth Bid cannot fully meet these rural needs.

A bid team led by Iwan Trefor Jones is looking at the detail of projects and the finances that may be required of Councils to support the Growth Bid.

Discussion

Mark Isherwood asked that: -

- The Growth Bid aligns with the priorities of the Enterprise Zones in North Wales
- The region capitalises on the agreement of both governments on the need to improve transport infrastructure
- The Growth Board addresses improving relative GVA and improves on the current situation of declining relative GVA as you go West from Manchester.
- The Bid seeks powers from both governments (e.g. Wales – Tax Increment Financing powers, UK - remove housing borrowing cap)

Llyr Gruffydd AM asked what the AMs could do to support the bid.



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Cllr. Shotton responded that the North Wales Growth Bid is about more than shiny new buildings. All of the region will benefit from: -

- Better skills
- Better transport to take people to where the jobs are
- Better digital connectivity

The Growth Board will engage regularly with the CPG and ask for help with lobbying when necessary.

5. Welsh Government Economic Action Plan

Ken Skates AM, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport gave an update on the Welsh Government Economic Action Plan.

The plan aims to ensure the sustainability of the economy by: -

- Improving delivery vehicles for support to the economy
- Improving physical and digital infrastructure
- Improving skills

There will be a new regional approach to economic development with Chief Regional Officers.

Support from the Welsh Government to business will be subject to a contractual approach where the recipient promotes: -

- Fair work
- Health and Well-being (especially good mental health)
- Decarbonisation/Energy Efficiency
- Ethical Procurement

There will be consolidation of funds to support business and reductions in sectors supported.

There will be 5-year transport budgets and disaggregation of contracts to enable Welsh SMEs to bid for work.

The Minister supports the North Wales Growth Bid and the 6 councils in their work. He will facilitate cross border working (the MDA area, Mid Wales and Ireland).

There will be a joint UKG and Welsh Government Task and Finish Group looking at the alignment of plans for North Wales and Cheshire and Warrington LEP.

The Minister touched on joint working on rail to lobby for a North Wales friendly solution for a HS2 Hub at Crewe and improving rail services into and out of North Wales via the new Wales and Borders Franchise.



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There have been investments in integrated transport in Deeside which can be rolled out across the region via the growth Bid. Through/Smart ticketing is another aspiration which the WG is working on in North Wales and is part of the Growth Bid.

Discussion

Jack Sargeant praised transport and digital being WG priorities. He is keen to see rail line fibre used to “open up” digital connectivity in rural areas.

He praised the aspiration to improve links with Ireland.

Mark Isherwood raised the issue of the right governance and delivery vehicles, questioning what Local Authorities might pool in terms of people and budgets. He commented positively on formalising structures that facilitate cross border working.

It is important that the structures can hold together councils and their partners as the NWEAB did.

Rhun ap Iorwerth asked what was being done to engage with Ireland.

The Minister responded that improvements to the A55/A494 and A483/A5 will facilitate trade with Ireland (TEN-T route). The Governments are in dialogue and are making links to transfer expertise in life sciences and academia.

The Chair summed up. The CPG: -

- Seeks ideas for its work programme
- Will support the Local Authorities (to the secure a growth bid and other initiatives (e.g. rural development, shared prosperity fund, cross border links)
- Is happy to work with the Westminster Group of MPs (APPG)
- Will meet next in North Wales

Cllr. Shotton gave an assurance that the Growth Board will provide regular information on the progress of its work programme, including the Growth Bid.