



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, Friday 15th February 2019

Present

Llyr Gruffydd AM (in the Chair), Darren Millar AM, Ann Jones AM and a representative of Rhun ap Iorwerth AM and Jason McLellan (Office of Ann Jones AM)

Stephen Jones (WLGA) Secretary and Sponsor representative in attendance.

Speakers: Councillor Aaron Shotton (Chair North Wales Economic Ambition Board and Leader Flintshire County Council) and Iwan Trefor Jones, Lead Director NWEAB and Corporate Director Gwynedd Council

Annual General Meeting

The meeting 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 Annual General Meeting held on the 27 February 2018

The Minutes of the Previous AGM held on the 27th February 2018 were agreed as printed. The Group's Constitution adopted at the last AGM was noted.

3. Future Meeting Topics

There was a brief discussion of future meeting topics. Suggestions included: -

- A strategic discussion of the economic future of North Wales in the context of the pausing of the Wylfa Newydd Project and the potential risks to nuclear energy. The meeting showed an interest in looking at tidal energy (lagoon and tidal stream) and seeking a more pro-active approach from the Crown Estates.
- A review of energy commitments in the region and discussion of influencing UKG/WG energy policy
- An update from the Chair and CEO of the BCUHB with regard to their progress and prospects of working their way out of special measures.

Previous meetings had raised: -

- A presentation from the North Wales Chief Regional Officer and
- A report back from the Business Council on its proposed Business Monitor.

4. The North Wales Growth Bid

Cllr. Shotton gave an update report on the growth deal being proposed by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB).

Currently the two governments have committed £120m each to a North Wales Growth Deal. This £240m allocation falls short of the Bid for funding of £340m made in autumn 2018.

There may be a reduction in the projects in the current (£340m) portfolio funded by the Growth Deal. However, there may be further opportunities to fund those projects that are not agreed with the UKG and WG via other funding streams: -

- Sector Deals
- Future Shared Prosperity Fund Arrangements
- UKG special funds for innovation etc. and
- Welsh Government capital programmes

The NWEAB has: -

- Secured UKG support for an LFFN Bid for North Wales (Local Full Fibre Network) which will upgrade the capacity and speed of broadband connections to public buildings with opportunities to improve residential and business connectivity off the back of the public infrastructure.
- Constituted itself as a formal Joint Committee, meeting a key requirement for governance set by the two governments as funders of a growth deal.
- Established a Business Leaders Group to advise on the Bid and its project portfolio as requested by governments as part of their requested governance framework.
- Identified a lead authority to act on behalf of the Joint Committee (Cyngor Gwynedd)
- Commenced the process of recruiting a “Chief Executive” for the Growth Deal who will be supported by a Programme Office.

The appointment of a new Wales Office Minister has led to a change in emphasis. Nigel Adams MP, the new Minister, has a background in a digital business environment. He has applied good challenge to the Board’s proposals, focussing on the quality and detail of outline business cases that will form the basis of a Heads of Terms agreement.

In terms of process the NWEAB needs to ensure a review of Outline business cases to demonstrate that projects: -

- Are deliverable
- Have economic benefits promoting innovation, jobs growth and leveraging private sector (and non-treasury) investment
- Align with UKJG and WG policy priorities and
- Have the support and involvement of the private sector in the region.

When business cases meet the standard required by governments, a Heads of Terms document will be agreed and the projects identified in that document will progress to the preparation of full five case model business cases. The sign off a project's full business case will trigger treasury borrowing approvals for that project and the project can proceed to procurement and construction.

The project portfolio has been re-organised into a programme that promotes the growth of three key sectors where the region has existing strengths and competitive advantage: -

- Low Carbon Energy Production
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Land Based Businesses (Tourism and Agriculture)

The key sector growth proposals are supported by enablers in: -

- Digital infrastructure
- Transport infrastructure
- Provision of sites and premises (where business have advised a shortage of land for development of employment and housing)
- Skills

In conclusion Cllr. Shotton asked the meeting to discuss where best to harness lobbying support.

Discussion

It was suggested that the Cross Party Group seek clarity on issues relating to WG policy: -

- Economic Plan proposals for a Chief Regional Officer and Plan
- Oversight of the work of Transport for Wales in North Wales (A local authority joint committee or a WG proposed Joint Transport authority)
- The role of the Minister's steering group for post Brexit funding
- The role of a North Wales Minister and standing committee

The NWEAB has concerns that these WG policy initiatives may duplicate or confuse the work of the NWEAB.

Issues raised by Assembly Members included: -

- Reducing benefit claimants and promoting healthier communities as a consequence
- Private sector investment in the Growth Deal – are we where we need to be on the level of private sector investment?
- Giving future support to the creative sector
- Addressing fuel poverty through smart energy programmes that include initiatives to improve insulation. This could involve the private sector and create jobs.
- Exercising caution in offering subsidy to developers.

- Aligning projects with UKG objectives to support projects with private sector investment, innovation, a contribution to improving exports and improving digital performance
- A second phase of growth deal investment allied to releasing the best projects in the current portfolio to progress quickly. This implies a second phase consisting of some projects in the current NWEAB portfolio and some new projects.
- North Wales has lost out to South Wales on transport investment by WG.

There was discussion of “side deals” to the Growth Deal where the NWEAB and Welsh Government work together more closely by agreeing roles, improving co-ordination and achieving a better focus on regional needs in the areas of skills, transport, development of sites and premises and the provision of business support. There may be joint, partnership arrangements developed in these areas.

Actions

- The papers circulated at the meeting be shared with AMs
- Cllr. Shotton to write to AMs with suggested “key asks”

5. Any Other Business

Mark Isherwood AM had written to the group raising the concerns of the Wrexham to Bidston Rail Users Group that works to the line and frequent cancellations (from shortages of stock and drivers) are undermining usage.

Darren Millar raised concerns regarding rail ticketing issues.

It was agreed that the Chair will write to the Minister of Economy and Transport passing on the concerns of the Rail User and Cross Party Groups that the Wrexham – Liverpool line’s viability is being undermined by engineering works and frequent service cancellations.