

## **INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITIES CROSS PARTY GROUP**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019 in the Media Briefing Room, Senedd, Cardiff Bay**

#### **1. Present**

Vikki Howells AM (Chair); Cllr David White, Bridgend CBC; Gerard McHugh, ICA Wales; Sarah King, Welsh Government; Cllr Gareth Jones, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Alun Taylor, Coalfield Regeneration Trust; Robin Lewis, Office of Vikki Howells AM; Dawn Bowden AM; Aled Morris, Office of Leanne Wood AM; Victoria Winckler, Bevan Foundation; Lee Waters AM; Andrew Collins, Neath Port Talbot CBC

#### **2. Apologies**

Llyr Gruffydd AM; Cllr Graham Thomas, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Cllr Dai Davies, Blaenau Gwent CBC; Antony Bolter, Caerphilly CBC; Cllr Annette Wingrave, Neath Port Talbot CBC; Cllr Jayne Brencher, Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC; Helen Cunningham, Bevan Foundation; John Griffiths AM; Kirsty Williams AM; Ioan Bellin, Office of Helen Mary Jones AM

#### **3. Minutes of the Meeting held 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019**

The minutes were agreed and there were no matters arising

#### **4. Lee Waters AM**

Vikki Howells AM welcomed Lee Waters AM to the meeting, to talk about the Valleys Taskforce and the Tech Valleys Initiative, for which he is responsible as Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport. He pointed to the importance of the Foundation Economy, the everyday economy that has been ignored in policy making. He pointed to the trebling of funding for the new grant regime for this sector (from £1.5M to £4.5M). 3 projects have been announced , with more to follow. This new emphasis has been led by civil society, housing associations, etc. It's one response to the brexit vote, ' a cry of pain'. There are 3 strands:

- (a) An experimental element concerned with the fair work agenda e.g. Better Jobs Closer to Home;
- (b) Spreading and scaling up good practice. Wales has 'leaders and laggards'. The Public Sector Boards have been asked and agreed to get their teeth into this in relation to procurement. He is looking for quick wins, 6 to 8 in the next year (using the CLES model); and
- (c) Helping 'grounded' (local firms) such as social enterprises by aggregating demand from the public sector e.g. Transport for Wales to be supplied by Paper Solutions. Another example is an Ebbw Vale firm supplying uniforms to TFW and hospitals, creating 50 jobs. Medium sized firms will also be helped through the Economic Action Plan (EAP).

There was a question and answer session:

Gareth Jones (RCT) pointed to a need for additional public transport to link communities along the A465 corridor. Lee Waters AM pointed to the two sub groups of the Valleys Taskforce working on transport and maximising the benefits of the A465 investment. He pointed to the problems of bus industry regulation and subsidy with £250M per annum which he did not consider value for money. He pointed to the difficult Welsh Government financial position going forward, but gave 2 examples of pilot projects being developed by the Valleys taskforce: an uber type public transport system in Ebbw Vale and a community transport solution to link people to industrial estates from the Rhondda Fach.

Victoria Winckler (Bevan Foundation) emphasised the strategic significance of the A465 Investment for both goods movement and travel to work, yet there was no mention of this in The Welsh Government's Transport Priority Areas; 'not all roads lead to Cardiff'

Gerard McHugh (ICA) asked whether the Tech Valleys Initiative (TVI) related purely to Blaenau Gwent or also included adjacent local authorities. Lee Waters AM pointed to the appointment of a Chief Regional Officer to coordinate initiatives. Whilst the boundary of TVI was intentionally fuzzy, the Welsh Government did feel a moral duty to focus on Blaenau Gwent given it's particular problems. The focus of TVI is now wider technology than just automotive. The Thales cyber security in Ebbw Vale is a major plus, helped by Welsh Government funding. A potential public sector digital centre is being looked at. The role of the Colleges is vital in equipping people for the skills of the future. He mentioned the various business property projects being developed in Ebbw Vale. In relation to the foundation economy he pointed to the need to improve resilience of firms in relation to AI, with 6 being identified for detailed support.

Ioan Bellin (for Helen Mary Jones AM) pointed to the 10 Towns Initiative in Carmarthenshire and asked how much liaison there has been with The Welsh Government. Lee Waters AM pointed to the extension of the Taskforce area to the Gwendreath Valley and Ammanford but he has resisted the creation of more hubs which would dilute the impact by spreading funding more thinly. With the northern valleys seen as particularly problematic, the social capital lying with a diaspora is being explored with the aim of helping every school in the Valleys to develop this. Vikki Howells (AM) pointed out that the GDP impact of this type of approach has been calculated in New Zealand.

Gareth Jones (RCT) asked what the Welsh Government was doing to provide charging points for electric vehicles. Lee Waters AM indicated that it didn't have the resources to do it and expected the market to provide, but with some pump priming and some planning requirements.

Vikki Howells AM asked about the more economic spin that is being taken on the Valleys Regional Park (VRP). Lee Waters AM

said that there was more to City Regions than just City Deals, pointing to the inspiration provided by the Stuttgart Region. The aim is to get the City Region to own it and develop it long term, not just relying on grants to do so (£7M in grants has already been spent).

## **5 Any Other Business**

Discussion on topics for the next meeting included suggestions from Alun Taylor (CRT) on a potential major funding source for communities from dormant assets, currently in the early stages of development. He also pointed to the lack of a fair share of lottery funds secured by industrial communities and to bring The Lottery to account on this. He mentioned the launch of a second State of the Coalfields report which will be launched on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2019. This highlighted the fact that the Welsh Coalfield has done particularly badly in recent years. CRT is looking to fund a fresh piece of more detailed work on this. It was decided to make this the topic for the next Cross Party meeting, which is likely to be in February 2020 (and also the AGM).

Gerard McHugh

11/10/19