

Welsh Ministers' Business Scheme

Environment and Rural Affairs - Annual Update report on implementation of Business Scheme

Introduction

The Welsh Ministers' Business Scheme is a statutory scheme under section 75 of GOWA 2006 and outlines how the Welsh Government will engage proactively with social partners in developing policy and legislation. 'Social partners' are defined in the Welsh Ministers Business Scheme as 'business and employer representative organisations, trade unions and the members they represent'. The First Minister chairs the Council for Economic Renewal which steers this work and also funds a Welsh Social Partners Unit, which supports social partner engagement activity.

This annual update report provides the First Minister and Council for Economic Development with a detailed return of relevant activity that the Environment and Rural Affairs portfolio has undertaken related to the requirements of the Welsh Minister's Business Scheme over the period October 2015 to end December 2016.

Activity/Engagement

Future Landscapes Wales Working Group

The Working Group, set up in 2016, contributed to and co-authored the Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales report, published in May 2017. Engagement was primarily through the Working Group meetings and sharing of drafts of the report to agree the scope and content. The use of external facilitators was a key part of the process.

Social partners include: Country Land and Business Association, Federation of Small Businesses, National Farmers Union Cymru and Renewable UK Cymru. Social partners were included from the outset and throughout the process and the Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales report is owned by all the contributors, including the social partners.

The process was chaired by Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM with the support of Welsh Government officials.

The social partners saw the benefit of contributing and proactively engaged in the process and voiced support for the inclusive and collaborative approach taken by the Working Group

All social partners were given an equal input into the working group and agreed the content of the subsequent report as an accurate representation of the working group discussions.

Farming Connect – Knowledge Transfer, Innovation and Advisory Services 2014-2020

The new Farming Connect contracts started in autumn 2015. As of December 2016, 5,883 businesses and 11,583 individuals had registered for the new programme.

Activity is targeted at those businesses engaged in the farming and forestry sectors to improve environmental performance, sustainability, competitiveness and resource efficiency. It promotes the economic growth and development of rural areas with the aim to meet the challenges ahead and safeguard the future of the Welsh Agriculture industry.

Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group (WMSAG)

The Group is a biannual high level stakeholder meeting and is chaired by Peter Davies, an independent consultant chosen by members of the group to steer the events. Members participate on task and finish groups, fora, and individual meetings.

The forum allows stakeholders across all marine sectors to discuss matters that affect the marine world. Consultations are shared with the group at the earliest opportunity.

The Welsh National Marine Plan

Drop-in sessions were used to gather views on the Wales National Marine Plan at an early stage in its development, allowing social partners to comment on the Wales Marine Plan before formal consultation was sought.

Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (PCF) were contracted to facilitate the Drop-in Sessions.

Due to the nature of the sessions, the degree to which business or social partners were willing and able to engage varied. PCF staff engaged in the process fully. Stakeholders whom had attended the Drop-in Sessions with the aim to share their views on the Marine Plan were able to do so effectively. Views captured are reflected in PCF's report on the events.

Fisheries Management Board

The Board met quarterly. The board included the Welsh Fisherman's Association (WFA). During these meetings WFA were given the opportunity to shape policy, they contributed views on fishing policy and the priorities of the Better Fisheries Project.

Re:fit Cymru – meet the supplier events and communication of economic opportunities

Welsh businesses were invited to attend two meet the buyer events, in November and December 2016.

These events were arranged to communicate the Re:fit Cymru programme which is assisting Welsh public bodies deliver estate-wide energy efficiency schemes.

The programme uses a UK framework of suppliers. The two events introduced the framework suppliers to the Welsh supply chain and enabled the Welsh supply chain to understand the route to becoming approved providers for the suppliers.

Subsequently, as projects have come forward, speculative notices have been posted on Sell 2 Wales and the names of interested companies are passed to suppliers for consideration.

The engagement used a contract the Welsh Government had with the Energy Saving Trust, to engage the Welsh supply chain on development in the environmental goods and services sector. There was strong participation in south Wales but less in the north, however positive feedback has been received and the process is ongoing.

Decarbonisation Programme

Welsh Government officials met with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to discuss the need for Industry to be more engaged with the decarbonisation programme. During this meeting CBI agreed to provide a response to the Welsh Carbon Budgets - Call for Evidence. The Director of CBI has since written a news article on the importance of businesses adapting to a low carbon economy.

Implementation of sustainable drainage for new developments

The Welsh Government established a stakeholder advisory group to test how Sustainable Drainage Scheme (SuDS) policy might be implemented and seek advice on practical implications. This group first met in October 2016; it shaped the work required by consultants to understand impacts of implementation and provided valuable insight.

We worked closely with the advisory group at each stage. However, it is important to note that this early engagement will not always deliver a consensus.

All sectors have been keen to engage, including Homebuilders and local authorities because of the impacts (beneficial or not) on their business.

Consultation

Legislative consultation on the Planning (Wales) Act 2015

The Welsh Government provided CBI, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and farmer's unions with an opportunity to input into a direct formal written consultation on the subordinate legislation used to implement the provisions of the Planning (Wales) Act 2015. Stakeholder representatives were also invited to sit on advisory groups and panels where their specialist subject knowledge informed legislative development

Responses provided related to those areas of legislation which the stakeholders felt directly impinged on business.

All Planning consultations are subject to a consultation report feeding back on the comments received and our considerations of the points raised.

Call for Evidence on the Net Welsh emissions account

All stakeholders, including businesses, were invited to respond to a Call for Evidence on the Net Welsh emissions account. The documents were available on both the Welsh Government and UK Committee on Climate Change (UKCCC) website. We sent newsletters and emails were sent to

stakeholders before, during and after the consultation period, to encourage engagement.

Stakeholders were invited to an event held in Cardiff with the Welsh Government and UKCCC to gain a better understanding of the process. A number of businesses attended events and responded to the Call for Evidence.

Call for Evidence on Welsh Carbon Budgets

All stakeholders, including businesses, were invited to respond to the Welsh Carbon Budgets Call for Evidence. The consultation is currently available and is due to close on the 11th September. Engagement events have been held with stakeholders in Cardiff and North Wales.

Future Activity

Strategic Initiatives for Agriculture – Agri SI

The Wales Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 is a key enabler to help the agricultural sectors of Wales to become more productive, profitable and progressive, supporting it through a period of significant change so that it is better placed to thrive in an increasingly market orientated environment.

Current support mechanisms across the sector offer a relatively broad brush approach, often providing generic activity to meet the needs of individual farmers. The review into the resilience of Welsh Farming by Kevin Roberts (Chair of Amaeth Cymru) recognised the clear need for a new approach that prioritises activities and brings together targeted interventions into a single programme that will engage with the whole supply chain

Amaeth Cymru is supportive of the development of a strategic initiative for agriculture as it is seen as a key mechanism to achieve their vision of “a prosperous, resilient agriculture industry promoting Wales’ present and future well-being”.

The aim is to have sufficient critical mass to facilitate change at an industry level, so aims to support a minimum of 4,000 businesses with an upper target of 7,000 over a 5 year period (set based on the rate of participation by the end of year one of the new Farming Connect programme).

Participation in the strategic initiative would be voluntary, ideally with the participant remaining for the full period of the programme.

With support from Farming Connect, data gathered at farm level using the Agricultural Holdings Development Board (AHDB) benchmarking system Farmbench, individual farm/forestry businesses will be provided with a SWOT analysis of their business.

An action plan developed using this analysis will signpost to interventions available through the existing Farming Connect offer or where applicable to bespoke support packages currently being developed.

Farm Business Grant

Farming Connect is supporting the development of the new Farm Business Grant (FBG), which will be available to farmers across Wales in 2017.

Farm Business Grant (FBG) is an important element of the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. It is designed to help farmers in Wales to improve the economic and environmental performance of their agricultural holdings. The objectives are to increase on-farm investment, technical performance, and on-farm production and resource efficiencies.

Businesses will be expected to consider their current position/situation and viability, whilst also considering the future direction and potential challenges facing their particular sector following that Brexit.

Planning

Future engagement will involve work on the National Development Framework, review of Planning Policy Wales, review of Use Classes Order and the Consultation on future of energy consenting in Wales

Sustainable drainage for new developments (SuDS)

We will be holding a post-consultation workshop sponsored by professional institutions to provide a further opportunity for stakeholder response.

There will also be a post-consultation meeting of the SuDS Advisory Groups

Publication of consultation responses and the government response are due in September.