

Third Sector Ministerial Meeting Economy and Infrastructure

Note of meeting held at 2:00 pm on Monday 2nd October 2017 in Conference Room, 2nd Floor Ty Hywel, Cardiff.

Ministers in Attendance

Name	Organisation
Ken Skates AM	Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure

Stakeholders in Attendance

Matthew Brown	WCVA
Gareth Coles	Voluntary Arts Wales
Derek Walker	Wales Co-Operative Centre
Gareth Hughes	Race Equality First
Matt Appleby	BiTC Cymru
Peter Williams	DTA Wales
Peter Jones	Guide Dogs Cymru
David Williams	Social Firms Wales
Anne Meikle	Wales Environment Link
Cath Lewis	Children in Wales
Christine Boston	CTA Wales

Apologies

Dilys Jackson	Welsh Assembly of Women
Lynne Hill	Children in Wales
Gethin Rhys	Interfaith Council for Wales
Sara Mackay	Disability Arts Cymru
San Leonard	Social Firms Wales
David Smith	Co-op and Mutuals Wales

Welsh Government Officials

Stephen Layne	Economic Policy & Strategy
Derek Goode	Economic Policy & Strategy (note taker)
Rhodri Griffiths	Transport Policy, Planning and Partnerships

1. Introductions & Opening Remarks

- 1.1 The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure welcomed members to the second Third Sector Ministerial Meeting of 2017. He commented upon the constructive, open and honest discussion at the last meeting and the value placed upon input from the third sector.
- 1.2 Before moving onto the main agenda items, the Cabinet Secretary highlighted the forthcoming consultation for transport policy in Wales. The consultations would relate to the current mandatory concessionary fares scheme and the potential expansion of concessionary bus fares for young people
- 1.3 The Cabinet Secretary introduced the meeting agenda explaining there were two key items to discuss. The first being the Third Sector paper relating to the consultation on 'Taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licencing in Wales'. The second paper being the Third Sector response to the Prosperity for All National Strategy launched on 19th September 2017.

2. Response to the consultation on 'Taxi and private hire vehicle licencing in Wales'

- 2.1 The Cabinet Secretary explained that a quality taxi/PHV service is an essential part of the transport network in Wales. Improving taxi provision and other areas of public transport is crucial to enable the development of a seamless integrated multi-modal transport across Wales.
- 2.2 This is why the Welsh Government has taken the first step, in developing proposals by undertaking a public consultation. This is being done to seek views on how taxi/PHV licensing arrangements could be improved.
- 2.3 The Cabinet Secretary explained that it is his intention to develop more detailed proposals that will be subject to further consultation starting in spring 2018.
- 2.4 The Cabinet Secretary invited Peter Jones to introduce the Third Sector Paper.
- 2.5 Peter Jones of Guide Dogs Cymru said that the paper set out the main issues impacting the people he represented. He pointed out that in Wales there were currently 100,000 people with sight issues and this number was set to double in future. He also said that the issues raised also impacted other disabled people not just those he represented.
- 2.6 The biggest issue for people is the refusal of taxi drivers to take them in their vehicle. Often this is because they refuse to take an assistance dog and it can happen despite the taxi firm having been told about the dog at the time the taxi was booked. This can be a traumatic experience for assistance dog owners, which has a knock on effect on their confidence and independence
- 2.7 Law Commission research has proven that in many cases refusal is simply because drivers are unaware of their legal obligations.

- 2.8 Peter Jones said the solution has to be mandatory training as part of the licensing process. The rights of disabled people are not new and Disability Wales has already provided training like this to organisations such as the Police and Fire Services.
- 2.9 The Law Commission has undertaken research which has proven that this type of training works and the cost is small.
- 2.10 Peter Jones highlighted that there would need to be medical exemptions for some taxi drivers in some circumstances. However for the majority of drivers this would not be necessary.
- 2.11 Driver training of this type is being implemented in Scotland and Northern Ireland and Peter Jones asked the Welsh Government to take the opportunity offered by this consultation to move the vehicle licencing in Wales in this direction.
- 2.12 Cath Lewis pointed out that young wheelchair users have these issues as well and that equality and disability training for drivers is essential. The training should include practical skills in how to use ramps but as important is also driver's attitude to disabled passengers.
- 2.13 The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged this issue and said that the evidence provided to committee by Whizz Kidz has been very compelling.
- 2.14 Gareth Hughes of Race Equality First explained that ethnic taxi drivers experience significant levels of hate crime and there needs to be a system of reporting this. Unfortunately drivers receive little support from the owners of taxi firms.
- 2.15 Christine Boston said on many occasions the wrong vehicles are sent out to disabled passengers by taxi firms despite the passenger having informed the firm of their requirements. This is unacceptable as it shouldn't happen and can mean missing critical medical appointments, social support and can undermine confidence and independence.
- 2.16 David Williams suggested that not all taxi drivers have the right skills or training or equipment in their taxi to help all disabled people. A huge step forward would be to set up a network of drivers and cars so that disabled people could be confident that their taxi is willing and able to take them every time.
- 2.17 Rhodri Griffiths asked if there was a perception that the problem was worse for either the private hire or hackney carriage sector.
- 2.18 Peter said that he had no detailed analysis of the complaints broken down in this way but his feeling was that more complaints would relate to private hire taxis.
- 2.19 Chris Lewis stated that Whizz Kidz feedback has suggested that taxi drivers charge disabled passenger's more than standard fares because they are disabled.

- 2.20 Peter Jones stated that this was in breach of the Equality Act 2010 and should not happen.
- 2.21 The Cabinet Secretary thanked participants for all the points raised and acknowledged that there was work needed to ensure the dignity and independence of all people using taxis. Training of taxi and other professional drivers remains one of the key obstacles to delivering an accessible public transport network. He stated that he would:
- put together detailed proposals on how best we tackle these issues in Wales
 - incorporate the comments and feedback from members of this group that will ultimately lead to the new licencing arrangements and legislation

Action 1 – Cabinet Secretary agreed that WG will flag up the consultation to all members of this group when it commences by the end of 2017

- 2.22 Cath Lewis said that it was important to remember that independence for all people was good for the economy.
- 2.23 Peter Jones said that the Welsh Government Transport Group was already working well and he now looked forward positively to working with the Welsh Government to develop these new taxi and private vehicle licencing regulations.

3. A response to the Prosperity for all Welsh Government Strategy

- 3.1 The Cabinet Secretary explained the “Prosperity for All” National Strategy identifies a number of priority cross cutting themes.
- 3.2 He explained Prosperity for All will be supported by a limited number of more detailed action plans, including an Economic Action Plan.
- 3.3 The Cabinet Secretary outlined that work on the Action Plan is underway and signalled a number of important changes including:
- A shift towards targeting a smaller number of national sectors
 - A new focus on the Foundation Economy
 - An Economic Contract seeking to drive public investment with a social purpose
 - A regionally focussed approach to economic development
- 3.4 The Cabinet Secretary highlighted how Prosperity for All is the beginning of a new approach and sought the views of this group. He invited Derek Walker to introduce the Third Sector paper.
- 3.5 Derek Walker thanked the Cabinet Secretary for his introduction and the opportunity to respond. He emphasised the role of social businesses in helping to deliver the Prosperity for All agenda and sought assurance that the Welsh Government shared that view.

- 3.6 Derek Walker also asked about the timetable for the Action Plan and the scope for further engagement and consultation. He also noted the absence of a Social Enterprise Plan since 2009 and asked whether there would be opportunity to co-produce a Social Enterprise Plan. Finally, Derek sought assurances that the Programme for Government commitment relating to support for mutual and co-operatives remained an action the Government was committed to honour.
- 3.7 Peter Williams felt the references to the voluntary sector in Government discourse were too often out of date and not representative of what the Third Sector was today. He pointed out how modern social businesses play a significant role within communities, creating their own employment opportunities. He explained how in some parts of Wales, the Social Economy forms the bulk of the economy.
- 3.8 Peter Williams also indicated that sustainable growth should be a consistent theme running through the Action Plan and suggested that a specific reference be made to the Third Sector to ensure it was not forgotten and remained a priority.
- 3.9 Gareth Coles referred to the Vision for Culture in Wales published last year and sought assurance that the economic role of Arts, Heritage and Culture would not be underplayed.
- 3.10 Cath Lewis emphasised the importance of the care sector and social services as part of a cross cutting agenda.
- 3.11 Matt Appleby welcomed the Economic Contract proposal and looked forward to seeing the detail. In particular, he was keen to understand how the Contract might bind business into delivering the social and environmental aims of Prosperity for All and how procurement might be aligned to the new Economic Contract.
- 3.12 Anne Meikle asked how the approach set out in Prosperity for All would enable the sustainable management of natural resources. Ann highlighted how the Future Generations Commissioner had challenged Government policy in areas like the M4 and City Deals. Ann felt that Prosperity for All was light in explaining how sustainability would be ensured. She highlighted that WWF was keen to get involved to help the Welsh Government with this.
- 3.13 The Cabinet Secretary outlined the proposed timetable for the Economic Action Plan. The Cabinet will be asked to approve the document in November for it to be published prior to the Christmas recess. The Cabinet Secretary indicated there would be further opportunities to engage, both prior to and following publication.
- 3.14 In reply to the questions raised, the Cabinet Secretary emphasised that:
- The Programme for Government remains the Government's programme for this term. The Prosperity for All strategy supports delivery of that Programme.

- The alignment that will take place with wider Welsh Government objectives, with social care an example of this.
- The importance of the Well Being and Future Generations Act in helping to frame the approach, and the learning that is taking place from good practice.
- The significant role that social enterprise has to play in helping Government achieve the objectives set out in Prosperity for All and that there would be specific references to this in the Economic Action Plan.

Action 2 –The Cabinet Secretary agreed the Economic Action Plan should reference the role of the social economy.

- 3.15 Anne Meikle asked if Welsh Government were going to use tools like impact assessments to ensure all future activity was environmentally sustainable.
- 3.16 The Cabinet Secretary highlighted improvements made in this regard and the importance of new ways of working that were strengthening this agenda.

4.0 Any Other Business

- 4.1 The Cabinet Secretary asked if there was any other business.
- 4.2 Christine Boston asked about the non devolved issue of Community Transport in rural Wales. The Welsh Transport Select Committee is currently carrying out a enquiry on in to the licencing of community transport and the sustainability of the sector. Christine said that her members in rural areas were concerned by the potential impact of the enquiry. Dft will be undertaking a consultation on the permitting arrangements for community transport in the autumn. The Cabinet Secretary offered to provide the Welsh Government response to that consultation when it was available after the Dft consultation.

Action 3 – The Cabinet Secretary agreed to share the response and for officials to take comments from Christine on this specific issue.

- 4.3 Mathew Brown asked if the next Third Sector meeting could be scheduled to coincide with the engagement process outlined by the Cabinet Secretary. In response, the Cabinet Secretary asked officials to look at timings.

Action 4 – Officials to consider timings of the next Third Sector Group meeting, and if appropriate consider arranging a separate meeting with officials prior to the Christmas recess.

- 4.4 The Cabinet Secretary closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their time and input. He said officials would canvass for dates for the next meeting in due course taking into account the timetable for the engagement process.

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