

South Wales Valleys Taskforce

Meeting Note

Date: 22 and 23 September 2016

Location: Rhondda Heritage Park Hotel

Attendees

Taskforce members
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies AM (chair)
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure, Ken Skates AM
Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James AM
Ann Beynon, chair, Cardiff City Region Board
Andrew Diplock, Director of Strategy and Governance, Inprova Energy
Judith Evans, Principal, Coleg Y Cymoedd
Dr Chris Jones, Chair of the Cwm Taf University Health Board
Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC
Councillor Andrew Morgan, Leader, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council
Professor Brian Morgan, Cardiff University
Board members
Madeleine Brindley, Special Advisor, Welsh Government
Tracey Burke, Director, Economy, Science and Transport Strategy, Welsh Government
Jo-Anne Daniels, Director, Communities and Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government
Simon Dean, Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Wales
Owen Evans, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Education and Public Services, Welsh Government
Duncan Forbes, Chief Executive, Bron Afon Community Housing Association
Maureen Howell, Deputy Director, Equality and Prosperity, Welsh Government
John Howells, Director, Housing and Regeneration, Welsh Government
Marcella Maxwell, Deputy Director Organisational Design and Change, Welsh Government
Ruth Meadows, Deputy Director, Digital and Strategic Comms, Welsh Government
Huw Morris, Director, Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Government
Dr Gill Richardson, Executive Director of Public Health, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
Jo Salway, Head of Cabinet Office, Welsh Government
Hannah Woodhouse, Managing Director, Central South Wales Education Consortium
Presenters
Kirsty Davies-Warner, Head of Oxfam Cymru
Chris McDonald, Policy Analyst, OECD
Gareth Morgan, Transport for Wales
Dr Mark Lang, Honorary Associate Sustainable Places Research Institute, Cardiff University
Jonathan Price, Chief Economist and Head of Government Economic Service, Welsh Government
Dawn Snape, What Works Centre for Wellbeing
Professor David Snowden, School of Psychology, Bangor University
Dr Victoria Winkler, Bevan Foundation
Taskforce secretariat
Nathan Cook, Welsh Government
Laura Evans, Welsh Government
Lucy Hoddinot, Welsh Government
Beverley Morgan, Welsh Government

Day 1

1. Welcome and introductions

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language welcomed taskforce members to the inaugural meeting. The Minister set out the need for the taskforce to be rooted in valleys communities and to focus on what can be achieved.

He felt the taskforce should aim to focus on three areas: eradicating poverty, creating work and improving quality of life. It should be looking to the future and creating a sense of aspiration, vibrancy and confidence in the future. Strides need to be taken to enhance economic and business growth. The Minister wanted the taskforce to be innovative and he emphasised the need to challenge any preconceptions or assumptions to create fresh and vibrant ideas to move forwards.

2. Economic overview of the South Wales Valleys

Jonathan Price, Chief Economist, Welsh Government gave a presentation about the economic overview of the South Wales Valleys. Key discussion points included:

- Important to look at a range of measures in assessing progressing and not just Gross Value Added (GVA). Key to look at employment.
- The need to look specifically at why the valleys are doing less well than other de-industrialised areas, which have recovered more quickly.
- Prohibitive factors to the growth of the regional economy discussed were low paid employment, entry level jobs and zero-hour contracts
- The importance of understanding the differences in economic growth across the region and between the valleys and reasons for their poorer outcomes.
- The importance of proximity to places of critical economic mass – some valleys benefitting from being closer to Cardiff, whereas Gwent valleys are not benefitting from a weaker performance in Newport.
- The potential benefits of towns such as Merthyr Tydfil acting as a critical economic mass for the Heads of the Valleys.
- The impacts of welfare reform were also highlighted and how this significantly affects families and communities across the valleys.

3. What works in promoting regeneration and economic growth

Chris McDonald, policy analyst for OECD gave a presentation about promoting growth in all regions. Key discussion points included:

- Evidence suggests there is no single pathway for growth and that economic development outside major cities is just as important.
- Growth should not be focused in one place or one sector or be dependant on public finance. However, critical mass is important.
- There are a set of factors which are significant for growth, including skills, local leadership, innovation, engagement with business, technology and clear decision-making structures.
- Growth and regeneration is not about one single issue, it is about how policies can work together with better planning.
- Skills are key, particularly in terms of enhancing under-performing economies.
- A focus on local assets and strengths is key and building on what the valleys have to offer, such as culture, landscape, low-cost land and tourism.

- Leadership and good governance is fundamental. Important to set goals, be clear about outcomes, have an appropriate set of indicators to measure progress at a population level and a sustainable and long-term approach.
- Should there be a senior person responsible for overall delivery and the consideration of pooling innovative and flexible approaches around funding?
- Changing culture and the importance of government “letting go” and sometimes taking risks is a factor in developing an innovative environment.

4. ‘Deep Place’ approach

Dr Mark Lang, honorary associate, Sustainable Places Research Institute, Cardiff University, gave a presentation about the deep place approach for sustainable communities. Key discussion points included:

- Previous place-based attempts at regeneration have not always been successful, it is important to draw upon lessons, including from the Deep Place study in Tredegar.
- Co-production and community engagement are critical to aid empowerment.
- Economic growth has led to greater inequality and there is a significant cost to public services.
- City regions and the South Wales Metro could act as a key contributor but these will not achieve successful outcomes in isolation.
- There needs to be a substantial amount of new jobs created in Cardiff for people in the valleys to access, which would be unrealistic; there should be a focus on better jobs which are closer to home.
- The foundational economy is essential to take a “whole place planning approach”.
- The importance of the links to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act around sustainability and work in Torfaen was highlighted around the development of wellbeing plans utilising the deep place approach.
- There is forthcoming research focusing on a deep place study of Pontypool and wider findings from across the local authority area.

5. What is already happening in the valleys?

Ann Beynon, chair of the Cardiff City Region Board and Councillor Andrew Morgan, leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council gave a presentation about the Cardiff Capital City Region and City Deal.

Gareth Morgan, from Transport for Wales gave a presentation about the South Wales Metro.

There were closing remarks about the need to ensure people in the South Wales Valleys gain maximum benefits from forthcoming schemes.

6. What works in improving local services

Hannah Woodhouse, managing director of the Central South Wales Education Consortium; Andrew Llewelyn, headteacher of Glenboi Primary school, in the Cynon Valley and Heather Nicholas, headteacher of Ferndale School gave a presentation about education. Key discussion points included:

- A team around the family model is important to assess the needs, strengths and assets of the whole family.
- Getting the best teachers working in the most deprived areas and an environment where teachers feel they can work to the best of their abilities were felt to be key.

- Strong leadership arrangements to create an environment where there are high expectations and standards are needed.
- A whole school approach and a specific strategy to focus on improving outcomes and supporting pupils' wellbeing is needed.
- Access to higher and further education opportunities are important to develop aspirations and pupils need to be encouraged to achieve and have confidence.
- Concerns were expressed about negative connotations around apprenticeships in comparison to academic routes.

Duncan Forbes, chief executive of Bron Afon Community Housing Association gave a presentation about housing. Key discussion points included:

- Recognition that housing associations play a vital role to help mitigate the impacts of welfare reform and support moving forwards will be critical to prevent homelessness.
- Housing should not simply be viewed as just putting a roof over somebody's head – there needs to be continued tenancy support and links across agencies.
- A proactive approach should be developed to challenge and change attitudes by celebrating the past but also looking to the future, building on a sense of pride in local communities.

Dr Gill Richardson, executive director of public health at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board gave a presentation about health. Key discussion points included:

- Public health issues are vital to challenge behaviours around lifestyle choices.
- Positive work around the integration of services was raised, for example the community centre in Llanhilleth, which is considered a community asset and a model which is used positively to focus local services working together.
- Retention of GPs and nurses in the valleys was felt to be a critical issue.
- Using opportunities around the care sector and the foundation economy were felt to present good opportunities.

7. Wellbeing

Dawn Snape from the What Works Centre for Wellbeing gave a presentation about wellbeing. Key discussion points included:

- The importance of wellbeing was significant and personal wellbeing maps have been produced by the Office for National Statistics.
- The *National Conversation - the Wales We Want* through the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act could provide useful information about wellbeing.
- Links to the Social Services and Wellbeing Act were felt to be important.
- There is a need to give careful consideration to people's thinking and emotions and how this affects behaviour and wellbeing.
- The impacts and increase of hate crime against migrant communities was felt to be stark, following the EU referendum. It was felt that the positive contribution immigration makes in terms of employment is vital and there is a need for positive narratives.

Day two

8. Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA)

Kirsty Davies-Warner, head of Oxfam Cymru gave a presentation about the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). Key discussion points included:

- Flexibility around funding for people to identify solutions, including training needs to support access to employment.
- The importance of focusing on a gender and equality analysis to look at differing needs.
- People face multiple barriers when it comes to entering and then sustaining employment, some of these are unpredictable; some are easily addressed; some are not.
- Approaches need to be flexible to respond to these varying needs and provide a bottom up solution.
- Access to transportation and childcare were significant issues.
- SLA principles could be integrated into existing Welsh Government programmes through adaption of the SLA toolkit.
- Training across frontline staff Wales will encourage sustainability.

9. Use of narrative as a research method

Professor David Snowden, from the School of Psychology, Bangor University gave a presentation about the use of distributed ethnography and engagement method pioneered by the Cynefin Centre at Bangor University. Key discussion points included:

- The need to consider engagement approaches outside of usual approaches around questionnaires and focus groups.
- The need to explore and use real time data on a broad range of issues affecting communities.
- Methods should aim to allow an approach to see what is working and where, but should be able to assess how to move people to a desired outcome.
- Focusing on local understanding and knowledge to influence change, by giving people control was felt to be a powerful tool.
- Commissioning research, which can have predefined boundaries, could lead to bias, in terms of what evidence it can draw upon or develop.

10. Ideas that change Wales

Dr Victoria Winkler, Bevan Foundation gave a presentation about ideas that change Wales and the potential opportunities for the taskforce. Key discussion points included:

- Better advice with expert input and links to employers, with careers advice for adults being viewed as critical.
- Increased employability support, in particular for working age people, particularly for older people and women is needed.
- The All Age Employability programme should aim to build on what works and on the idea of bespoke support.
- Community learning is essential, alongside employer training and development.
- The intermediate labour market was highlighted, which is likely to be particularly important for older people, many of whom may have health issues.
- Engagement with the private sector was felt to be essential, in order to encourage the right kind of investment, but to ensure that businesses stay in Wales.
- Funding spent on employing temporary staff in the health sector could be used to train up existing lower-skilled staff and free up entry level jobs. This could include building in a skills elevator to invest in the workforce and continuous improvement.

- It was highlighted that in-work progression is not happening in all sectors.
- Establishing critical mass around growth poles and around the South Wales Metro could provide a positive way forwards.
- The South Wales Metro could aid mobility, but transport needs to be cheap, flexible and reliable.

11. Priorities and next steps

During discussions the taskforce identified a number of challenges and agreed to prioritise certain issues, all of which need to be driven forward if long-term change is to be achieved. These early priorities and possible actions can be grouped together under four areas:

1. Better integration and co-ordination across public services.
 - Develop a local delivery model which will implement a whole-community approach to education, wellbeing and the delivery of integrated services. It is proposed this will be trialled in three areas of the South Wales Valleys. The trials would support greater flexibility around how Welsh Government funding is used to support local priorities, enabling local practitioners to use their own experience and initiative to deliver change and ensuring an integrated approach to the delivery of services and support.
2. Increased access to good-quality jobs, increasing employability skills and delivering maximum benefits to the valleys communities from initiatives such as the South Wales Metro, city regions and city deals.
 - Maximise benefits from the economic development structures working in and with the Valleys.
 - Ensure the South Wales Metro, city regions and city deals deliver maximum benefits for valleys communities. Move towards the establishment of strategic investment hubs in the valleys by providing greater access and more affordable transport, allied to a more forward thinking and integrated planning regime.
 - Increase inward investment and entrepreneurship, ensuring skills match employer demand and future sector developments.
 - Increase job opportunities for local people in those sectors already delivering in the valleys, for example, the care sector, supply chains for public sector procurement.
 - The valleys could be used as a test bed for ensuring greater local participation in public sector employment, most notably in the NHS.
 - Address barriers, particularly around gender-related imbalances in opportunity (for example, through the provision of part-time education opportunities and childcare).
3. Positive communication and true community engagement.
 - Develop a more innovative approach to community engagement enabling people to have a genuine say in the development of the priorities and outcomes for the taskforce, coupled with targeted stakeholder engagement.
 - Deliver a targeted campaign to raise the profile of the valleys to encourage pride in the locality.
4. Maximise benefits from structures and organisations working with and in the valleys.

The taskforce agreed to develop clear and accountable outcomes for each of these priorities.