

Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys

23 April, 11:00 – 13:00 Dove Workshop, Roman Road, Banwen, Neath

In attendance:

Taskforce Members

Leader of the House and Chief Whip, Julie James AM (Chair)
Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services, Alun Davies AM
Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport, Ken Skates AM
Minister for Housing and Regeneration, Rebecca Evans AM
Ann Beynon, Non Executive Director and member of CBI Wales Council.
Jocelyn Davies, Former Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration
Judith Evans, Principal, Coleg y Cymoedd
Fiona Jones, Director DWP
Gaynor Richards, NPTCVC
Brian Morgan, Professor of Entrepreneurship at Cardiff Met University
Andrew Diplock, Entrepreneur, Angel Investor and Advisor
Madeleine Brindley, Special Advisor

Programme Board Members

Maureen Howell, Equality and Prosperity – Deputy Director
John Howells, Director, Housing and Regeneration (SRO)

Valleys Taskforce Team

Phil Lewis, Head of Prosperity for All
Laurie Hayward, Senior Programme Manager, Valleys Taskforce
Nicola Leadbeatter, Programme Manager, Valleys Taskforce

Speakers

Auriol Miller, Director, Institute of Welsh Affairs
Keith Watts, Smart Region Project Co-ordinator, Institute of Welsh Affairs
Caren Fullerton, Chief Digital Officer for Welsh Government
Jonathan Fudge, Head of Planning Policy, Welsh Government
Gareth Hall, Senior Planning Manager, Welsh Government

Welsh Government Officials

Richard Sewell, Deputy Director, ICT Infrastructure
Glyn Jones, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government

Observers:

Lee Waters AM
Bonnie Lewis, Office for National Statistics

Apologies:

Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan AM
Dr Chris Jones, Interim Chair, HEIW
Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf
Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC
Jeremy Miles, AM
Alison Ward, Chief Executive Torfaen Council
Matt Lewis – CCR City Lead for Digital Strategy

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

1. The Leader of the House and Chief Whip Julie James welcomed taskforce members to the ninth meeting and explained that she would be chairing the meeting due to the focus on digital.
2. JJ recognised that there is a big challenge ahead of us to eradicate digital exclusion in the Valleys, whilst trying to keep on top of digital advancements and making the most of the digital revolution we are currently part of.

Item 2: A Digital Vision for the Valleys

3. Ann Beynon presented her slides.
4. There was a need to be savvier in capturing digital ideas that are working well elsewhere and utilise those ideas in Wales.
5. The voice of the citizen would always say that “simple is best”. This is not about creating complex “techy” solutions, but simple things that will work for everyone.
6. Auriol Miller provided a brief update on the work that the IWA is doing. She introduced Keith Watts who will be leading on the Smart Region Project which has received funding from various workstreams.
7. The IWA project will take a bird’s eye view audit of who is doing what, why they are doing it, and where they are doing it. It will also look from the citizen’s point of view: what people on the ground would like to see happen and why.
8. Caren Fullerton provided a brief overview of the work Welsh Government is doing digitally. She highlighted the fact that there is a digital link in all policy areas.
9. Practically there were some things that WG were focusing on. Infrastructure wise, contributing money to increase internet connectivity across Wales, Superfast Broadband and improving connectivity in schools.
10. Also work going on to increase digitally focussed apprenticeships, helping those who may have missed out on an education.
11. Members of the public are accessing public services via a digital route more and more. It would be important to work with members of the public on future ideas.
12. Alun Davies AM (AD) suggested that although we know how to collect and use data effectively, we need to focus on the next step which is what these means for the citizens of Wales. AD raised the issue of digitalising the high street, we weren’t ready five years ago but what are we able to do now?
13. AB then moved on to present her first idea of rolling out a Community WiFi scheme in the Valleys. People in the Valleys with insufficient income to have WiFi access should be given the opportunity to use community buildings for their WiFi access. In addition an app could be created to show where there are public places in their locality that provide this service. A sticker could be placed outside any venue willing to provide the access for free. AB suggested a pilot be planned to see if such a scheme would be possible.
14. Richard Sewell explained that this was something that PSBA were exploring, and a trial could be possible in the VTF footprint.
15. Glyn Jones enquired if the app could be built with no re-registration required. This would be possible for venues on the PSBA network.
16. Fiona Jones highlighted that Job Centres are rolling out superfast Wi-Fi, you

can now log on in any job centre to use the internet. There was a query on whether members of the public who weren't job centre claimants could enter the job centre to use the Wi-Fi, if it was being advertised as a venue for free Wi-Fi

16. AB presented her next idea of a Valleys community transport scheme aimed at getting people to and from their Health appointments, working with Chris Jones (Taskforce Member) and the community to see how best to do this. Possible use of the National Software Academy to create a telephony services, a website and an app to make better use of the community transport which already exists.
17. Gaynor Richards confirmed that the Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service would be willing to get involved in this piece of work.
18. LW mentioned the "bwcabus" technology available in some areas of Rural Wales, worth investigating how well that is used.
19. MB highlighted that if this service covered non-emergency appointments, then consideration should be given to the Griffiths Review which looked at this.
20. AB outlined her third idea which was to provide more resource to the data mapping tool Lle. It was created to map environmental data under the requirements of the Environment Act (Wales). If it were expanded to provide data that business need in order to invest and/or expand in Wales it would be even more valuable. GJ confirmed that this tool is a hidden gem, which even some statisticians in WG don't yet know about. Could be a world-leading tool if a team was put in place, and funding was provided.
21. John Howells felt that all three ideas were exciting, but did flag that Lle is a Welsh tool, not a Valleys tool. AB felt that if we started with inputting data from the Valleys area and it was a success, it could then move to the rest of Wales.
22. AB would need to discuss all of this with contacts from City Deal to ensure they're also involved.
23. AD confirmed he would be keen to meet AB to discuss milestones and deadlines for this work, and would be interested in seeing the project plans when complete.

Item 3: National Development Framework

24. JJ introduced Jonathan Fudge and Gareth Hall to present their discussion paper on the National Development Framework.
25. JF identified an immediate link with the topics being discussed with Lle being the mapping tool that would be used for the development of the NDF. JF highlighted that there is a real opportunity for the NDF to assist in making some of the VTF actions achievable, for example, encouraging housing sites near strategic hub locations.
26. AD said that he would welcome a conversation with Lesley Griffiths on how to encourage Local Authority co-operation with this work. He also said that he hopes this will help to drive decisions and choices, including those around strategic hubs and the A465 strategy. We would also need to see development which is linked to the Metro, stop the gridlock entering Cardiff.

Item 4: Any other business

27. AD confirmed a proposal was being developed on an 8th strategic hub in Ammanford. Members were invited to get in touch to highlight any issues they could foresee on this.
28. JJ reminded members that highlight reports were sent as papers to note for the meeting, any comments to be fed back to Nicola Leadbeatter or Laurie Hayward. The next meeting will take place on 28 June, at the Richard Price Centre, Bridgend.
29. The meeting closed at 13:00.