Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys

The Issues

1. The establishment of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is a Programme for Government commitment. The taskforce is chaired by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language (membership is detailed in the annex) and its inaugural meeting was held on 22 and 23 September.

2. The taskforce’s aims and objectives were outlined in an oral statement on 5 July. It will support change in the South Wales Valleys, maximise opportunities for local populations and improve outcomes across a range of measures. Over the next five years, the taskforce will ensure a sharper focus on the regeneration and sustainable growth of valleys communities, with a specific emphasis on jobs and skills; generating inward investment and delivering integrated public services, which respond to the needs of local communities.

3. It will build on previous policies and programmes, which have been aimed at regenerating the valleys, but will place particular emphasis on public engagement and ensuring new initiatives, such as the South Wales Metro, city regions and city deals, achieve maximum benefits for valleys communities.

4. At the taskforce’s first meeting, a number of fundamental questions were raised about how the taskforce should approach the regeneration of the valleys and prosperity. These included how community-led engagement can help drive change. There were calls for a more engaged and integrated approach to the way we support access to employment and provide better jobs; how we increase skills; and how we promote the delivery of integrated public services which are more engaged with the local population. These calls to action reflect recent demands made by the First Minister for a more holistic approach to tackling long-standing and intractable issues and the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act). They also align with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children’s new approach to communities, which was agreed by Cabinet on 4 October.

5. The EU referendum demonstrated that many communities feel disconnected and disempowered from decision-makers and decisions taken in their name. This is a reason why the slogan used by the Leave campaign – “take back control” – resonated so widely among those communities, including valleys communities, which voted in favour of leaving the European Union. If the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is to have a real impact – on jobs, improving skills, educational attainment and health outcomes – it is important this is not another initiative which is done to communities in the region, but is developed in collaboration with local people.
Taskforce priorities

6. A number of key challenges have been identified:

- Positive communication and true community engagement;
- Increased access to good quality jobs, increasing employability skills;
- Better integration and coordination across public services;
- Maximising benefits from structures and organisations working with and in the valleys.

7. The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language has written to all Cabinet Secretaries highlighting these themes and asking them to consider and identify how their portfolios can support the taskforce agenda. All have been asked to identify Taking Wales Forward commitments which relate to the taskforce’s aims and could be piloted or taken forward in the valleys. A number of opportunities have already been identified, including piloting the new childcare offer; the delivery of apprenticeships; and the all-age Employability Programme.

Forward work programme and outline proposals

8. Cabinet is asked to support the development of specific proposals, which will form the basis of the taskforce’s forward work programme. These are set out below:

9. Communication and engagement

This will be framed as a comprehensive community engagement programme designed to involve communities in the work of the taskforce and to help shape its priorities and outcomes.

- We will listen to communities as we develop the taskforce’s work programme to ensure they are involved and engaged and are able to contribute their ideas.
- We will undertake a twin-track engagement programme to involve valleys communities and populations in the taskforce’s work, to ensure communities help to develop the priorities for action and outcomes for success. As part of this work, we will explore the option of commissioning an external contractor to work with the taskforce to collect real-time information about people’s attitudes, aspirations and local priorities.
- We will also deliver a targeted campaign to raise the profile of the valleys to encourage pride in the locality.

10. Better access to good quality jobs

The second meeting of the taskforce in November will be a jobs and skills summit and will enable the taskforce to develop specific actions to attract jobs to the valleys and address potential skills shortages. The first meeting identified the following priorities:
• Maximising benefits from the economic development structures working in and with the valleys.

• Ensuring the South Wales Metro, city regions and city deals deliver maximum benefits for valleys communities. A 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.

• Increasing inward investment and entrepreneurship, ensuring skills match employer demand and future sector developments.

• Increasing job opportunities for local people in those sectors already delivering in the valleys, for example, the care sector.

• Ensuring public procurement is a lever for delivering social and economic benefits for the valleys. Piloting the Better Jobs Closer to Home project, designed to create employment and training hubs.

• Ensuring greater local participation in public sector employment by enabling the valleys to be a test bed, most notably in the NHS.

• Addressing barriers, particularly around gender-related imbalances in opportunity (for example, through the provision of part-time education opportunities and childcare).

11. Better integration and coordination across public services

• The taskforce identified the challenges of integration and coordination across public services, the same challenges which have influenced and are reflected in the new approach to communities announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities. In line with this approach, and in keeping with the associated pan-Wales proposals to pilot different approaches to service delivery allied to greater financial flexibilities, we will develop a local delivery model to implement a whole-community approach to education, wellbeing and the delivery of integrated services.

• This will be trialled in three areas of the South Wales Valleys – they will support greater flexibility around how Welsh Government funding is used to support local priorities, enabling local people to use their own experience and initiative to deliver change and ensuring an integrated approach to the delivery of services and support.

• A senior civil servant will work in and with each of these areas to identify the barriers to progress and refer them to a senior Welsh Government committee, tasked and enabled to break down both policy and funding silos.

12. Governance

• Maximise benefits from existing structures and organisations working with and in the valleys.
Impact

13. The proposals set out in this cabinet paper take account of the sustainable development principle set out in the 2015 Act, particularly in terms of focus on integration, collaboration, prevention and involvement via the policy emphasis on engagement. The taskforce will also contribute to the wellbeing goals to reduce poverty and inequality, creating jobs and economic growth and building sustainable communities.

14. The focus on enhancing economic, social and environmental sustainability will support a number of commitments within the Welsh Government’s approach to tackling poverty. It will make an important contribution to the objectives of the Welsh Government’s 2015 Child Poverty Strategy. This includes using all available levers to create a strong economy and labour market, which supports the tackling poverty agenda and reduces in-work poverty; reducing the number of children living in workless households and increasing the skills of parents and young people to enable them to secure well-paid employment.

15. In developing proposals to underpin the work of the taskforce, consideration will be given to the Welsh Language Standards; Equality and Human Rights; the UNCRC; the tackling poverty agenda; rural proofing and EU law (as applicable). The taskforce will engage with trades unions and take specialist policy advice as necessary.

16. The future of EU funding programmes, which target the South Wales Valleys, is a potential risk, which will need to be balanced. A number of employment programmes are funded in the valleys, which are integral to supporting a focus on skills and employment. The South Wales Metro is a catalyst for change but its scale and impact is partially linked to the availability of European funding.

Finance Requirements and Governance Implications

17. In 2016-17, £54,000 has been allocated to take forward the work associated with the coordination of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys within the Communities and Children MEG. This will be used to support the establishment of the taskforce and an initial programme of external engagement. Thereafter, it will be allocated up to £100,000 a year to take forward specific work streams.

18. Cabinet colleagues are requested to endorse the engagement of their officials in the ongoing development of proposals, which will underpin the forward work programme in support of a pan-Welsh Government approach to supporting the regeneration of the South Wales Valleys.

19. Officials will provide further advice about costs associated with specific proposals as the work develops.

20. Given the cross cutting nature of the work, recommendations could have financial implications across a number of different portfolios and MEGs. Officials will ensure timely advice is provided to all relevant Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers to ensure financial implications are highlighted and approval of suitable funding is sought.
21. In line with Finance Notice 01/2009, this paper has been cleared with Strategic Budgeting (SB) Division (SB0049/5) and EPS Operations Team who are content (EPS/ARD/0188/16).

Legal Advice

22. Legal Services have reviewed this Cabinet paper and their comments are incorporated.

Research and/or Statistics

23. Knowledge and Analytical Services have noted the paper.

Communications and publication

24. A communications and engagement plan is being developed as part of the forward work programme.

25. Communications and engagement have been identified as a key priority, particularly during these early stages of the taskforce’s development. Taskforce webpages have been created, which will be used to disseminate information about taskforce membership; its meetings; evidence and analysis; and plans for future engagement.

Recommendation:

Cabinet is asked to:

i. Note the priorities and proposals identified by the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys and agree to the development of a forward work programme, which will underpin and support the delivery of these priorities over five years.

ii. Agree to identify new opportunities and initiatives, which can be developed and piloted in the South Wales Valleys.

Joined-up working

26. As outlined in the annex to this paper, the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys is supported by a Taskforce Board, which includes representation from across the Welsh Government and external members.

27. Officials in the Equality and Prosperity Division will continue to engage and work collaboratively across Welsh Government departments through the Taskforce Board.
Annex

Membership of the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys:

- Alun Davies, Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language – chair
- Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure
- Julie James, Minister for Skills and Science
- Ann Beynon, Chair, Cardiff City Region Board
- Andrew Diplock, Director, Strategy and Governance, Inprova Energy
- Judith Evans, Principal, Coleg Y Cymoedd
- Dr Chris Jones, Chair, Cwm Taf University Health Board
- Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC
- Councillor Andrew Morgan, Leader, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council
- Professor Brian Morgan, Cardiff University

The taskforce is supported by a taskforce board, comprised of senior Welsh Government officials and three external members – Duncan Forbes, Chief Executive of Bron Afon Community Housing Association; Gill Richardson, Executive Director of Public Health, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and Hannah Woodhouse, Managing Director, Central South Wales Education Consortium.