

Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys

05 June 2019, 10:00 – 12:00

General Offices, Ebbw Vale

In attendance

Taskforce Members

Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters AM (Chair)
Andrew Diplock, Entrepreneur, Angel Investor and Advisor
Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf
Gaynor Richards, Director, NPTCVC
Dr Chris Jones, Chair, HEIW
Dawn Bowden AM, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC
Kellie Beirne – Programme Director, CCR City Deal
Jocelyn Davies, previous Minister for Housing and Regeneration
Fiona Jones, Department for Work and Pensions

Programme Board Members

Maureen Howell, Equality and Prosperity – Deputy Director
John Howells, Director, Housing and Regeneration (SRO)
David Rosser, Director, Sport, ESNR
Huw Bryer, Welsh Government

Valleys Taskforce Team

Sarah King, Valleys Taskforce Project Lead (Speaker)
Phil Lewis, Head of Valleys Taskforce Branch (Speaker)
Lisa Rimmer – Valleys Taskforce Senior Programme Manager
Kelly Clement – Valleys Taskforce Programme Manager

Apologies

Brian Morgan, Professor of Entrepreneurship at Cardiff Met University
Karen Phillips, Principal, Coleg y Cymoedd
Ann Beynon, Non Executive Director and member of CBI Wales Council.

Speakers

Derek James, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Rachel Garside-Jones, Welsh Government

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions.

1. The Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters AM (LW) opened the meeting and introductions were made.

Item 2: Empty Homes Phase 2

1. Lee Waters (LW) provided an update on progress with the empty homes scheme. Meetings have now taken place with all local authority leaders where the RCT model has been discussed. The scheme has been well received.
2. The intention is to use the RCT scheme as a model which could then be adapted and developed in due course to reflect a number of other factors. In order to launch without delay the intention is to roll-out a phase one of the pilot based on

the current RCT scheme with just the following suggested amendments to the terms and conditions:

- Homes would need to have been empty for 12 months and not current 6 months;
 - Property owners will only be able to apply for the grant once to avoid landlords / builders benefiting;
 - Although the maximum grant for this scheme will remain at £20,000, the current Houses in to Homes scheme will include within their terms and conditions that if additional funding is required, it can be used alongside this scheme to “top-up” the initial grant request.
3. As a priority for phase two we intend working with local authorities on developing a framework or similar in order to support the local supply chain which links to skills and supporting the foundational economy. We also want to include retro fit and other energy efficiency measures where possible.
 4. LW stated he had asked for social housing and local authorities being able to apply for this grant be considered for phase two.
 5. As the taskforce boundary does not cover the whole area for three local authorities, LW reported that the taskforce were working with Housing to explore an out of boundary offer for those local authorities.
 6. Dawn Bowden (DB) highlighted that there are certain areas where there are many empty properties but no idea who owns them. How do we bring these properties back into use? John Howells (JH) explained that his team were currently working with local authorities to develop approaches to these more difficult empty homes alongside this new initiative. LH stated that this particular scheme is a preventative and early intervention scheme which aims to prevent properties becoming the more difficult ones.
 7. Andrew Morgan (AM) mentioned that this hadn't been a problem within RCT and there are only a small number of unregistered properties. AM felt that it was unlikely there would be a significant amount of spend this year, but there was an opportunity to scale up by the end of this period.
 8. The taskforce were also interested in whether we could measure by postcode what businesses were being used for this work to monitor whether they were local to the communities.
 9. Rachel Garside-Jones (RGJ) highlighted the importance of employability and skills. Discussions with the taskforce have already begun and her team will be involved in the cross government working group that the taskforce will be setting up.
 10. Fiona Jones (FJ) felt that this was an exciting opportunity. What roles could be made available for those out of work, for example, work experience? Derek James (DJ) explained that RCT had worked closely with Communities for Work and referral pathways and there are opportunities to learn from that and scale up. Consideration would need to be given to a possible Memorandum of Understanding with local authorities.
 11. David Rosser (DR) felt it would be important to get the balance of the scheme right and not overcomplicate by trying to include too much. Lessons need to be learned from phase 1. Huw Bryer (HB) said his team could support small businesses with business advice when developing the framework.
 12. LH stated that all these aspects would be considered, and a cross government working group would now be established to develop this. The taskforce team would also work closely with DJ and his team who are delivering on this.

Item 3: Valleys Taskforce Priorities and Ways of Working

13. LW provided an update on the new Valleys Taskforce priorities. Meetings had been held with the Leaders of the local authorities in the Valleys and this had informed the focus of the taskforce going forward. The new priorities would be:
- Grounded Firms and Foundational Economy - including business growth and start-ups, entrepreneurship
 - Transport
 - Housing – including the RCT Empty Homes model
 - VTF Innovation Fund – including Alumni
 - Valleys Regional Park
 - Strategic Hubs – including A465 and digital
14. The Deputy Minister reminded the Taskforce that at a previous meeting, ownership and role clarity had been discussed. **ACTION - LW invited members to put themselves forward to lead on the new priorities.**
15. Kellie Beirne (KB) suggested that it would be important to be as clear as possible of the remit under each theme. What were they about and what were we trying to achieve?
16. It was important for the Valleys Regional Park to continue to have an existence when the discovery gateways had been delivered and the taskforce comes to an end. It was encouraging in this aspect that the local authority leaders had agreed to fold the Valleys Regional Park into their existing city deal governance structure. The Valleys Regional Park will remain a sub group of which JD would be a member of and represent on the full Taskforce.
17. AM said that it would be important to gain the support of the AMs for the work on the A465. There was a need to create industrial sites along the heads of the valleys and continue to explore what might be developed in addition. DB mentioned that it may be useful for officials to start work on mapping land owned by Welsh Government.
18. The new priorities were agreed.
19. LW moved the focus of the discussion onto the Terms of Reference and invited comments from the group. A discussion took place around fair work practices. There was a need to improve the definition of fair work and establish a structure on what this would look like. A fair work logo was being developed but is not ready yet.
20. The Terms of Reference were agreed.

Item 4: Engagement: Progress Statement and Valleys Taskforce Engagement Plan

21. Lucy Hoddinott (LH2) introduced a proposal for the next stage of community engagement activities. The taskforce had continually engaged with our partners, stakeholders and communities so that they have had a genuine impact on the policy making process. The team felt that this was the right time to go back to communities and discuss what had been achieved to date, to present the renewed priorities and what they might mean locally.
22. During the first round of community engagements the number one issue that was consistently raised was Transport. At the heart of the programme, was a commitment to work with Transport for Wales (TfW), to develop a series of events. The first event would be in Merthyr and LH2 invited DM and DB to be involved.
23. LH2 invited input from the taskforce on what the events could look like more generally. Where should they be, who should be there? The current intention was to organise a 'market place' at the start of each session followed by a panel discussion with taskforce members, TfW and local authorities. Feedback from the early engagement events was that evening events worked well for local communities.

24. If the pilot Local Business Surgery in Bargoed with Hefin David later this month is successful, LW would be writing to the other valleys Backbencher AMs to invite them to hold a similar event in their local area.
25. A written statement was planned for 18 July. This was an opportunity to highlight new priorities for the taskforce and make announcements including:
 - Empty Homes – RCT model and best practice
26. AM highlighted the benefits of harnessing a short animation video to show achievements and said that RCT would be happy to produce this for free.
27. KB mentioned creating something highly interactive and engaging for young people. Maybe an app or gaming platform.
28. **ACTION - LH2 agreed to send out the Valleys Taskforce social media pack.**
29. It was agreed that the plan was the correct way forward and engagement needed to be a key part of the sub groups.

Item 5: AOB

30. LW provided an update on the reporting of actions within the Delivery Plan. CPMS is the reporting mechanism used by officials for monitoring progress. The current reporting period closed on Friday so a detailed report would follow around the time of the progress statement. The report would provide a snapshot of progress being made against each of the actions in the Delivery Plan.
31. FJ was keen to include some customer stories as part of the engagement and progress statement. **ACTION - FJ agreed to see who would be willing to provide a testimony and share with LH2.**
32. Pitch it Valleys was launched in early May and was exclusively for Valleys businesses. It would provide businesses with access to angel funding for their business growth. There were 43 applications, the majority of which were very good and around half of applications were from female founders. These have now been narrowed down to 15 companies who will pitch on 20 June. The businesses will be narrowed down to 5 who will then receive a robust intensive support package though the summer and autumn. At an event in November the final 5 will pitch for investment.
33. AM highlighted that 4 wards in the Valleys Taskforce area are in the top 20 for highest deprivation. Was this something we needed to look at? Maureen Howell (MH) updated that the First Minister has asked for work to be done on child poverty. MH agreed to keep the taskforce updated on what is happening
34. Huw Bryer (HB) mentioned the Valleys peer to peer network where businesses in the valleys can learn from each other and their challenges. The closing date for applications was 21st June.
35. **ACTION - LW agreed to provide an update on the Alumni work at the next meeting.**
36. Date of next meeting – 16 October, 10:00-12:00. More details to follow.