



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Strategic Forum for Regional Investment in Wales meeting, 6 July 2022: minutes

Minutes for the Strategic Forum for Regional Investment in Wales meeting, 6 July 2022.

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# 1. Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking members for their attendance and welcoming Cllr Bryan Davies, Leader of Ceredigion Council, who has joined the Forum as the new representative of the Growing Mid Wales Partnership.

The Chair noted that since the last meeting (25 April), local authorities have been developing regional investment plans for the first year of the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which are due for submission to the UK Government by 1 August. Tim Peppin (TP) of the WLGA will be providing an update on progress during the meeting.

The Chair encouraged members from other sectors to also share their experience of engaging with the SPF and noted there would be an open discussion following TP's update.

At the invitation of the Chair, the draft minutes of the previous meeting of 25 April were passed without further comment.

## 2. Welsh Government update

The Chair invited Peter Ryland (PR) to give an update on behalf of the Welsh Government.

PR said that the political environment is still very difficult for the Welsh Government, noting the UK Government position expressed at the recent Senedd Finance Committee on post-EU funding arrangements. He reiterated that the Welsh Government is fully conscious of the impact this is having on stakeholders trying to navigate a disrupted funding landscape.

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PR added that the Welsh Government will be willing to discuss specific interventions proposed by local authorities following the UK Government's approval of regional SPF investment plans.

Alison Sandford (AS) noted that the Minister for Economy wrote to the then Secretary of State, Michael Gove, in June to confirm the Welsh Government's position on the SPF. Ministers cannot endorse the approach the UK Government has taken and the Welsh Government will not play any formal role in supporting the implementation of the SPF as things stand. This position has also been outlined in a recent Written Statement.

AS said that Ministers are open to dialogue with the UK Government if they are prepared to address concerns around the funding allocation and devolution settlement.

AS added that the Minister for Economy had also written to local government leaders last month to clarify the Welsh Government position and offer support in developing investment plans and brokering collaboration and cross-sector partnership to avoid duplication of activity and ensure alignment with WG policies. The letter set out areas the Welsh Government could support e.g. in skills and supporting business, but each intervention would be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Following a request from the WLGA, PR agreed that the next Forum meeting would also include an update on post-EU rural funding from the Welsh Government.

### **3. WLGA update**

The Chair invited TP to give an update on developments at local government level including progress on SPF investment plans.

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TP said that lead local authorities are co-ordinating engagement and forming a regional picture as they develop investment plans. Timescales are difficult because they need to report into individual local authorities within their region and have reports cleared by all constituent local authority cabinets. Investment plans will be high-level in nature, with specific projects and interventions to be decided after the plans have been approved by UK Government.

TP said there are some practical issues to work through with UK Government such as the request for spend profiles and deliverables, when a more broad-brush picture is required at this stage of the process.

TP added that local authorities are looking at proposing block allocations of funding for certain areas, with the detail, delivery arrangements and scope of provision to be decided post-approval. Discussions with stakeholders will continue until the funding for this financial year is received in October – opportunities remain for partnership discussions.

TP noted that a lot of organisations have approached local authorities for SPF funding, and they are trying to respond in a systematic way despite the timescales not allowing for the level of engagement that is realistically needed.

With regard to the Multiply scheme, which is to be funded out of the SPF, TP said that the WLGA is lobbying for more flexibility and some of the funding to be spread over the core SPF investment priorities. Local authorities are concerned about the likelihood of under-spend and duplication given the scheme is currently too narrow in focus.

TP said that there is a level of reluctance to propose revenue-based projects within SPF plans because they rely on a permanent source of funding whereas the SPF currently ends in 2025.

## 4. Update on Multiply scheme

The Chair invited Sam Huckle (SH) of the Welsh Government to provide an update on the UK Government's adult numeracy scheme, Multiply, which is being funded out of the SPF.

SH said the Welsh Government has concerns about Multiply and its potential for duplication with existing devolved provision. The amount of funding allocated to the scheme in Wales is disproportionate given the Welsh Government's significant investment in this area.

SH said that there will be real challenges around deliverability, for example the recruitment and training of sufficient tutors, value for money, and being able to use the entire allocation of funding.

There is some ongoing confusion over the relationship between the UK Government Department for Education national platform which offers skills diagnostics etc and the funding allocated for local skills provision.

SH added that the Welsh Government is also trying to get UK Government to broaden the scope of the scheme to include essential digital skills for example, so it better meets Wales' distinct needs.

## 5. Open discussion

Members made the following points:

- EU-funded third sector services are now coming to an end with no sign of replacement funding. This is going to have a major impact on vulnerable people and in communities across Wales.

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- Wales needs a proper governance structure for stakeholders to engage with the SPF – this has been raised with UK Government. It could be a structure that evolves out of this Forum.
- The UK Government is interfering in devolved areas. This Fund would be better co-produced and managed in Wales. There will be real problems spending the Multiply funding as the scope of the scheme is far too narrow.
- Local authorities are working hard on engagement. Strategic plans will need to continually change due to events that create gaps in existing provision. Staff recruitment to support delivery is going to be challenging.
- The FE sector has had good engagement with local government and is currently costing up potential provision under the People and Skills investment priority.
- Important to note that the cost of developing rural projects is significantly higher than in urban areas. SPF funding does not come close to matching what was received via previous EU funding rounds.
- The International and Cross Border sub-group of the predecessor Steering Group to this Forum is evolving into an advisory group to support an Agile Cymru initiative aimed at supporting international collaboration opportunities. There is currently funding available to maintain and build co-operation with the regions of Baden Württemberg, Brittany and Flanders.

## 6. AoB and Closing remarks

No further business was raised.

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The Chair thanked members for their ongoing support and advised that the next meeting would take place after the submission of SPF investment plans in early Autumn.

## Annex A: list of attendees

### Chair

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

### Members

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Organisation	Name
Wales Rural Network	Eirlys Lloyd, Chair
Grahame Guilford and Company Ltd	Grahame Guilford
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	Hywel Edwards
Natural Resources Wales	Ceri Davies, Executive Director of Evidence, Policy and Permitting
Cardiff University	Kevin Morgan, Professor of Governance and Development, School of Geography and Planning

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Organisation	Name
WLGA	Tim Peppin, Director of Regeneration and Sustainable Development
	Lowri Gwilym, Team Manager – Europe and Regeneration
Colleges Wales	Lisa Thomas, Head of the The College Merthyr Tydfil
Third Sector Partnership	Matt Brown, Director of Operations, WCVA
Chambers Wales	Oliver Carpenter, Policy Executive
Third Sector (social enterprise)	Glenn Bowen, Director of Enterprise, Cwmpas
Development Bank of Wales	Rob Hunter, Head of Strategy
Growing Mid Wales Partnership	Cllr Bryan Davies, Leader, Ceredigion Council
North Wales Partnership	Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn, North Wales Economic Ambition Board
	Alwen Williams, Programme Director, North Wales Growth Deal

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# Welsh Government Attendees

Name	Role and department
Claire McDonald	ETC – Deputy Director, Economic Policy
Duncan Hamer	ETC – Director of Operations, Business& Regions
Peter Ryland	WEFO – CEO
Mike Richards	WEFO – Communications Manager
Alison Sandford	WEFO – Head of Partnership Working
Geraint Green	WEFO – Head of Programme Management (ESF and ETC)
Thomas Brown	WEFO – Senior Policy Officer (Regional Policy)
Sheilah Seymour	WEFO – Head of Research and Analysis
Sam Huckle	Head of Delivery and Operations – Employability and Skills
Ann Watkin	ETC - Head of Strategy, Operations Alignment and Planning

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