



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Cabinet Sub-Committee for North Wales meeting: 18 November 2021

Minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee for North Wales Zoom meeting on 18 November 2021.

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Contents

Present

Project HELIX

Recruitment and social care workforce

Corporate joint committees

Local authority leaders

Present

- Lesley Griffiths MS (Chair)
- Lee Waters MS
- Mick Antoniw MS
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Jane Hutt MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Eluned Morgan MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Julie Morgan MS
- Lynne Neagle MS

Leaders of North Wales local authorities

- Cllr Ian Roberts, Flintshire

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- Cllr Mark Pritchard, Wrexham
- Cllr Charlie McCoubrey, Conwy
- Cllr Llinos Medi Huws, Anglesey
- Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn, Gwynedd

Other external attendees

- Professor David Lloyd, Cardiff Metropolitan University (item 1)
- Martin Jardine, Grwp Llandrillo Menai (item 1)
- Jo Whitehead, Chief Executive – Betsi Cadwaladr UHB (item 2)
- Mark Polin, Chair - Betsi Cadwaladr UHB (item 2)
- Chris Llewelyn, Chief Executive, WLGA
- Stephen Jones, WLGA

Welsh Government officials

- Andrew Goodall, Permanent Secretary
- Des Clifford, Director General, Office of the First Minister
- Judith Paget, Director General, Health and Social Services
- Keith Smyton, Head of Food Division (item 1)
- Albert Heaney, Chief Social Care Officer Wales (item 2)
- Andrew Sallows, Delivery Programme Director, Health and Social Services (item 2)
- Claire Germain, Deputy Director, Local Government Performance and Partnerships (item 3)
- Paula James, Deputy Director, Local Government Performance and Partnerships (item 3)
- Lisa Hughes, Senior Policy Manager, Engagement and Transformation (item 3)
- Will Whiteley, Head of Cabinet Secretariat
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Andrew Johnson, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser

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- Ian Butler, Special Adviser
- Mitch Theaker, Special Adviser
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes, items 2-4)
- Huw Llewellyn Davies, Cabinet Secretariat
- Duncan Hamer, Chief Operating Officer, North Wales
- Bryn Richards, Head of Regional Planning, North Wales
- Heledd Cressey, Senior Regional Planning Manager, North Wales (minutes, item 1)
- Carys W Roberts, Government Business, North Wales

Apologies

- Rt Hon First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS
- Dawn Bowden MS
- Cllr Hugh Evans, Denbighshire

Item 1: Project HELIX – presentation from Food Innovation Wales

1.1 The Minister for North Wales introduced the item, which was to share information with those present on Project Helix. Food Innovation Wales, backed by the Welsh Government brought together three food centres of excellence. Their role was dedicated to encouraging the development of the food sector and providing technical and operational support on all aspects of food manufacturing predominantly through Project HELIX.

1.2 The Minister for North Wales invited Professor David Lloyd, Director of ZERO2FIVE Food Industry Centre and Vice Chair of the Food and Drink Wales Industry Board and Martin Jardine, Director of Agri Food at Grŵp Llandrillo Menai - to provide an up-date on the success of the project to date.

1.3 The Cabinet Committee welcomed the progress being made by Project HELIX and its contribution to a growing food industry in Wales.

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Item 2: Recruitment and social care workforce update - North Wales

2.1 The Minister for North Wales introduced the item by recognising the challenges facing the region in terms of recruiting staff across all sectors, which was having a direct impact on the health board, local authorities and the delivery of social care. This was highlighted in the paper produced by the Co-ordination Group.

2.2 The minister thanked the Regional Skills Partnership for their excellent work and proposals being brought forward as part of the North Wales Covid Recovery Prospectus.

2.3 The Minister for North Wales welcomed the Chair and Chief Executive of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to the meeting and asked the Leader of Anglesey County Council to outline the situation on the ground in North Wales, before handing over to the health board for a situation report.

2.4 It was reported that staffing issues were not isolated to individual sectors in North Wales and were being felt across the public and private sectors. There were recruitment difficulties in tourism, hospitality and retail businesses alongside issues retaining staff in local authorities and Health Boards.

2.5 It was very much an employee's market at present, with pressures from cross-border movement of staff being felt as a result of a number of factors, including better pay and conditions. Allied to this was the impact of the pandemic on the increased numbers of experienced staff retiring and the subsequent loss of corporate memory, which posed a risk to the delivery of statutory functions across LAs.

2.6 It was important to ensure there was no over-reliance on agency staff, particularly given the lack of job security offered by agency contracts.

2.7 In terms of BCU health board, approximately 1,600 vacancies from a total 18,000 staff headcount were evident at present. There was positive news in terms of nurse recruitment, as 300 had recently joined across the region, but

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shortages remained across certain specialisms such as pharmacists. There was an issue of staff movement between public services that needed to be addressed, but the medium to longer term student and research staff recruitment outlook was good.

2.8 The issues with the social care workforce were recognised and it was hoped that a future increase in the real living wage would go some way to addressing this. The £2 million provided towards domiciliary care packages was welcomed, but more resource was always required.

2.9 It was noted that social care recruitment was a UK-wide issue and national campaigns were being run to try and address some of the shortfall. The recent £735 bonus for all Social Care staff in Wales was welcomed and the efforts of all in the sector throughout the pandemic were praised.

2.10 The committee recognised the challenges in recruiting across the piece in North Wales and pledged to continue working collaboratively to address the difficulties.

Item 3: Corporate joint committees – North Wales

3.1 The North Wales Minister introduced the item, which considered the development of the corporate joint committees (CJCs).

3.2 Following the introduction of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and establishment of 4 regional CJCs earlier this year, the development of the regulatory framework underpinning the corporate joint committees was continuing.

3.3 The Minister invited Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn to provide an update on progress being made to establish the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee, and to cover any issues or challenges being faced by the region in doing so.

3.4 It was reported the basic principles by which the North Wales CJC would operate had been established, which would provide clarity and simplicity,

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minimising bureaucracy and costs wherever possible.

3.5 It was flagged the growth deal was protected by reserved matters and the importance of subsidiarity in this process could not be underestimated. Local authorities should be able to make their own decisions on important areas, working in conjunction with the Welsh Government and other delivery partners.

3.6 The future devolution of powers was also highlighted as having the potential to deliver further benefits, but there would be significant work establishing the CJC to focus on in the short term.

3.7 The proposal was to integrate the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (EAB) in to the CJC, streamlining the number of delivery bodies and ensuring the 6 LA Leaders in North Wales were at the heart of the decision making process.

3.8 This was welcomed by the committee and it was noted the regulations had been drafted to provide the necessary flexibility for LAs to operate in this way if they chose to do so.

3.9 There would be some technical issues in terms of VAT with a move away from Gwynedd Council being hosts for the EAB, but these were not insurmountable and any assistance LAs could provide government officials in quantifying the impact would help when making the case for relief to HMRC.

3.10 The issue of borrowing facilities was raised and, whilst it was noted that the Public Works and Loans Board was still available to all LAs, there would need to be further work on pragmatic interim solutions, as some other LAs had requested direct borrowing facilities.

3.11 It was noted the North Wales leaders had made a successful bid for an equal share of the £1 million CJC establishment fund. This resource would support the establishment of necessary support arrangements for the CJCs, and the appointment of a project manager.

3.12 The point was made that the LA leaders had committed to embedding the CJC as a statutory function.

3.13 The committee recognised the differing views about the implementation of the CJC, but agreed a shared understanding of the approach to be adopted in establishing the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee was key, along with regular updates to the committee on progress made.

Item 4: Key issues from local authority leaders

4.1 The North Wales Minister invited the local authority leaders to provide an update on key issues across their areas.

4.2 There was significant anxiety about the report of the Roads Review Panel and its impact on several projects across North Wales.

4.3 The Minister for Economy and Deputy Minister for Climate Change acknowledged the disappointment many would feel as a result of the independent review. However, there were strong arguments why its recommendations had to be accepted, not least the need to address the climate emergency. The Welsh Government continued to seek to resolve issues of congestion on the network in partnership, to deliver economic development throughout Wales, including across rural areas.

4.4 The committee recognised that, in light of the recent COP26 in Glasgow, the path to net zero must be central to future investment decisions for all tiers of government. In addition, the review had not been conducted as a package as requested by LAs, but the review would consider the remaining projects as soon as possible.

4.5 The performance of Transport for Wales services and the subsequent impact on encouraging the use of public transport rather than car use was raised. The difficulties relating to recent strike action by Arriva bus staff along with the impact of Covid and other winter pressures on services were acknowledged. The Minister for North Wales would be meeting the Chief Executive of TfW to discuss these and other issues and would subsequently write to the leaders.

4.6 The age demographic in Conwy County Borough Council was raised, with a

significant elderly population, pressure on social services was a particular issue and it was noted the government would be working with the WLGA on the funding formula going forwards.

4.7 The additional funding provided by the government for those in fuel poverty was welcomed and it was noted the WLGA were working with LAs and the government to roll this out from mid-December. The challenges in ensuring operational systems were in place to deliver in a short timescale were recognised.

Cabinet Secretariat & North Wales Regional Team
November 2021

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