



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Cabinet Sub-Committee for North Wales meeting: 18 May 2023

Minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee for North Wales
meeting on 18 May 2023.

First published: 30 June 2023

Last updated: 30 June 2023

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Present

- Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS
- Lesley Griffiths MS (Chair)
- Mick Antoniw MS
- Rebecca Evans MS
- Vaughan Gething MS
- Julie James MS
- Jeremy Miles MS
- Eluned Morgan MS
- Hannah Blythyn MS
- Dawn Bowden MS
- Lynne Neagle MS
- Lee Waters MS

Leaders of North Wales Local Authorities

- Cllr Charlie McCoubrey, Conwy
- Cllr Jason McLellan, Denbighshire
- Cllr Llinos Medi, Anglesey (part meeting)
- Cllr Mark Pritchard, Wrexham
- Cllr Ian Roberts, Flintshire

Other external attendees

- Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region
- Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
- Denise McQuade, Consul General of Ireland
- Sarah Mangan, Consul General of Ireland for the North of England
- Paul Stewart, Mersey Dee Alliance

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- Claire Hayward, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership
- Chris Llywelyn, CEO WLGA

Welsh Government officials

- Rebecca Dunn, Head of Cabinet Division
- Jane Runeckles, Special Adviser
- Clare Jenkins, Special Adviser
- Alex Bevan, Special Adviser
- Kate Edmunds, Special Adviser
- Sam Hadley, Special Adviser
- Owen John, Special Adviser
- Phillippa Mawdsley, Special Adviser
- Nick Wood, Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Wales, HSS
- Reg Kilpatrick, Director General, Covid Recovery Local Government
- Tracey Burke, Director General, CCRA
- Claire McDonald, Economic Policy
- Catrin Sully, Head of Cabinet Office
- Elin Gwynedd, Deputy Director North Wales
- Rhys Morris, Chief Regional Officer – Mid and South West Regions
- Rhiannon Evans, External Relations Manager, Ireland
- Christopher W Morgan, Head of Cabinet Secretariat
- Damian Roche, Cabinet Secretariat (minutes)
- Bryn Richards, Head of Regional Planning – North Wales
- Heledd Cressey, Senior Regional Planning Officer – North Wales
- Carys Roberts, Government Business and Operations Executive
- Ceri Christian-Mullineux, Senior Regional Partnerships Manager - North Wales
- Deb Harding, Head of Transport Strategy & Planning

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Apologies

- Jane Hutt MS
- Julie Morgan MS
- Cllr Dyfrig Siencyn

Item 1: Introduction and welcome

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, the Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, Consul General of Ireland Denise McQuade and Sarah Mangan, along with the chairs of the Mersey Dee Alliance and Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership for an historic meeting with Welsh Government Ministers and Local Authority leaders in North Wales.

1.2 The minister explained the focus would be on cross-border relationships and how existing links could be further strengthened. The regional connections between Ireland and the North-West of England were vital for the North Wales economy and this was a useful opportunity to reflect on what more could be done to strengthen connections and the collective impact of working together.

1.3 North Wales had a long and proud history with Ireland and the North-West of England with strong economic and cultural links. In addition, the Welsh Government was a founder member of the Mersey Dee Alliance, which ensured cross-border co-operation to benefit both regions. The Alliance had yielded numerous successes over the years but work between partners on both sides of the border was crucial during the pandemic.

1.4 The landmark Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan was signed in 2021. It set out how Wales and Ireland would work together on areas

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as diverse as culture and language, the economy and renewable energy, including at a regional level.

1.5 The 2 governments had previously discussed renewable energy opportunities at a Ministerial Forum held in Cork last year, which the First Minister and Minister for North Wales attended.

Item 2: Cross-border relationships

2.1 The Minister for Economy provided an overview of the cross-border relationships to the West and East, noting that several opportunities including Hydrogen, Nuclear and Offshore Wind were already taking place, all of which played their part in decarbonising the regions and developing a robust supply chain to support existing, new and decommissioning opportunities.

2.2 The strong links between Wales and Ireland in the geographical sense was evident, and this was reflected in the opportunities for trade and tourism, with a commitment to share policy approaches and promote joint collaboration for a green recovery from the impact of COVID-19, including at a regional level in Wales through the North Wales Regional Deal, the Regional Economic Framework, and North Wales as part of the wider Northern Powerhouse region.

2.3 In 2022, Ireland became Wales' second largest export market, overtaking France and Germany, who had dominated the export league tables in recent years.

2.4 The existing links between North Wales, Northwest England, and Ireland were recognised, along with the opportunity to work even more closely together to support the delivery of prosperous economies, greater connectivity and to improve access to the wide range of services and activities across these areas.

2.5 An example of this was the developments around accelerating Hydrogen infrastructure to be deployed across North Wales, which included cross-border engagement with Ireland and the Northwest. Linking to the vast manufacturing opportunities, carbon capture and energy generation in the region.

2.6 The sub-committee also welcomed developments with the cross-border HyNet consortia, and Hanson's plans to build the UK's first net zero cement works in Wales. This would ensure that Flintshire was at the heart of the green transition and would help decarbonise North Wales and beyond, helping move towards the vision of a Net Zero Wales.

2.7 The strong bilateral relations with Ireland had grown since devolution, when Ireland responded by opening a Consulate in Wales. The First Minister had launched the Ireland Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan with the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney, on St David's Day in 2021.

2.8 The Joint Action Plan within the Shared Statement set out 6 areas of co-operation, for which the Welsh Government had devolved responsibility, with the aim to facilitate and support collaborations which would deliver lasting, positive and mutually beneficial outcomes.

2.9 Ministers were pleased how the annual Ireland-Wales Ministerial Forum had contributed to the successful strengthening of the relationship over the past 2 years, particularly in the face of global challenges.

2.10 In North Wales, the ambition was to transform the rail, bus services and active travel offer, reducing rural isolation and opening-up employment and leisure opportunities across the region. This would, in turn, support economic development as well as create a more sustainable future for tourism.

2.11 Tangible progress was being made in reinstating direct services between Liverpool and North Wales for the first time in generations and providing active travel connectivity to and from railway stations and bus interchanges in

Flintshire, Wrexham and Gwynedd.

2.12 The Welsh Government Metro programmes were central to the vision of an accessible, sustainable, and efficient transport system as set out in 'Llwybr Newydd'.

2.13 To date, over £1.6 billion had been invested across Wales, with individual programmes at different stages of maturity, from early development to design and delivery.

2.14 Visit Wales had been working closely with Marketing Manchester, collaborating on travel trade activity, and work was ongoing on a large US consumer marketing campaign highlighting the ease of access and products of North Wales, for those flying into Manchester. As part of this, work with Manchester on media and press visits was ongoing.

2.15 Through Welsh Government investment schemes, North Wales had seen the development of several quality adventure products including Zip World, Adventure Park Snowdonia, Antur Stiniog and Coed y Brenin mountain bike centres. Many of these products had brought new life to post-industrial landscapes. Continued support to innovators in this sector was being provided through the Wales Tourism Investment Fund.

2.16 The outdoor sector helped deliver wellbeing and health benefits and following the challenges of the pandemic, the current marketing campaign, 'Llwybrau: Wales, by Trails', provided a springboard to exciting experiences and provided businesses, large and small, with the opportunities to get involved.

2.17 The sub-committee noted the potential for all to work together collectively, both as regional partners in North Wales and as neighbours. There was a lot to offer, and to benefit from, as collaboration and partnerships further developed.

Item 3: Presentations from the Mayors of Liverpool and Greater Manchester, the Consul General of Ireland, the Mersey Dee Alliance, the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership and North Wales Local Authority Leaders

3.1 The Minister for North Wales asked each of the representatives from the different regions and partnerships to present to the sub-committee.

3.2 The sub-committee noted the opportunities for collaboration and synergies across the region, including on delivery of net zero targets and creating jobs in low carbon industries and welcomed the opportunity earlier that day to visit AMRC Cymru to discuss transport, skills and the North Wales Growth Deal, alongside a visit to the Port of Mostyn, to discuss tidal lagoon projects on both sides of the Wales-England border.

3.3 There was already a significant amount of work and engagement taking place between Wales, Ireland and the North West of England, including on hydrogen, nuclear and offshore wind and developing a robust regional supply chain to support existing, new and decommissioning opportunities and there was general consensus that further discussions and collaboration would be of benefit to all.

3.4 It was noted that Wales and Ireland had always had a strong and positive relationship, and this was demonstrated by the recent opening of the Irish Consulate in Wales.

3.5 It was noted that work on Border Control Posts between Ireland and Wales had been positive and the freeport status for Holyhead welcomed.

3.6 In addition, development of the Ireland-Wales Shared Statement and Joint Action Plan had provided momentum to that partnership by setting out areas of co-operation, including trade, as Ireland was the second largest export market for Wales.

3.7 The Welsh Government would be hosting the third Ireland-Wales Ministerial Forum in North Wales during the autumn, with a focus on areas such as renewable energy, green skills, education and language and advanced manufacturing. The sub-committee welcomed the First Minister's invitation for the Mayors of Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region to be a part of the forum arrangements, to continue this collaborative work.

3.8 On transport, the sub-committee noted that more than 200,000 people crossed the border from North Wales into North West England or vice versa each day, the majority of journeys taken by car.

3.9 The Welsh Government had ambitious plans to improve public transport across North Wales, and the Mayors in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region, with their devolved powers, had equally ambitious plans.

3.10 The focus of this ongoing collaboration work would be to ensure all these workstreams connected, offering people an alternative to the car and enabling them to travel easily and seamlessly across North Wales to Manchester, Liverpool and beyond.

3.11 The sub-committee noted the issues with traffic congestion on main arteries, particularly during peak holiday season.

3.12 On buses, Greater Manchester would be taking its buses back into public control and integrating its trams and buses, including ticketing. In North Wales, the ambition was to transform public transport and active travel, opening-up employment and leisure opportunities across the region. This would support economic development and create a more sustainable future for tourism.

3.13 To this end, tangible progress was being made by reinstating a direct service between North Wales and Liverpool and through the North Wales Metro programme, providing connectivity to and from railway stations and bus interchanges across the coast.

3.14 More than £1.6 billion had been invested in Wales, but more would be needed to deliver further major improvements, such as linking the coast and Wrexham to the Merseyrail network. Consequential funding from the UK government was being sought for bus services, as a proportion of the additional funding provided in England to support the £2 flat bus fare rate.

3.15 The sub-committee agreed to harness its combined power to make the joint case for greater UK Government investment in rail and bus infrastructure across North Wales and the North West of England and welcomed the offer to work with the Greater Manchester Transport Commissioner, Vernon Everitt to share best practice.

3.16 It was reported that cross-party support existed in the Senedd to push for Wales' fair share of HS2 funding from the UK government and this would extend to supporting North Wales to receive its fair share of UK rail investment from the Treasury, to ensure much-needed schemes could proceed.

3.17 In seeking to strengthen existing relationships with Ireland and North West England, much of the focus would be on the opportunities in green energy, decarbonisation and accelerating the development of hydrogen manufacture.

3.18 As a partner in the cross-border HyNet consortia, Hanson's plans to build the UK's first net zero cement works were welcomed, putting North Wales at the heart of the green transition to a Net Zero Wales.

3.19 It was suggested that a community benefit fund for areas where hydrogen would be stored should be explored and there was potential for development of small nuclear reactors at Trawsfynydd.

3.20 It was recognised that digital connectivity for rural areas would be essential, including more reliable broadband speeds and 5g rollout.

3.21 In addition, the Celtic Sea represented a huge opportunity for renewable energy generation, particularly at the Port of Mostyn. There was a shared ambition to be a net exporter of renewable energy, to work together to upgrade the national grid capacity, supply chain and, most importantly to develop the pipeline of skills needed to supply these new and emerging industries.

3.22 There was already a strong Regional Skills Partnership in North Wales, which worked collaboratively with employers, universities and Further Education Institutions to identify the skills needs, develop valued apprenticeships such as those at Airbus in Broughton, and create local talent pools.

3.23 The Greater Manchester and Liverpool regions both had new devolved powers over post-16 education, and the links would be made on curriculum reform and FE provision, sharing learning from the Welsh Baccalaureate to inform development of their regions own offering, particularly in developing the Manchester Baccalaureate, which focused on developing skills. University links with Ireland would also be strengthened via connecting respective Language Technology Units.

3.24 On tourism, Visit Wales were working closely with Marketing Manchester to highlight the ease of access and products of North Wales for those flying into Manchester, with a large US campaign planned.

3.25 In addition, learning would be shared on the introduction of a tourism levy in Greater Manchester, including the positives and challenges experienced, prior to its rollout in Wales.

3.26 Questions were raised over whether it was possible to reduce the cost of operating the Dublin to Holyhead ferry crossing, to increase potential tourism between the 2 countries.

3.27 On housing, Greater Manchester had devolved powers over the social and private rented sector and would be looking to create a 'Good Landlord Charter', linking the standards agenda to the retrofit agenda, to ensure they worked together to deliver for tenants and landlords alike. Learning on this would be shared between the regions.

3.28 In relation to funding, it was agreed there should be discussions between Welsh Government officials and Manchester on direct funding and the wider fiscal framework, following the recently announced trailblazer deeper devolution deal with the UK government. It was frustrating that Flintshire County Council had been unsuccessful in both its Levelling Up Fund bids to the UK government and was the only region to miss out on this funding completely.

3.29 It was noted there would be an opportunity cost in relation to sustainable land use. Whilst rural communities would need support, it was recognised that landowners usually took a long-term view of land use, which would need to be considered when planning for infrastructure work.

3.30 Finally, there was a request to share learning on health and social care integration, including addressing any barriers and action taken to integrate HSC in the regions.

Item 4: Summary

4.1 In closing, the Minister for North Wales thanked all partners for their attendance and contributions, which would be discussed further between officials over the coming months.

Cabinet Secretariat
May 2023

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