

Ministerial Taskforce for the Valleys

04 April 2019, 10:00 – 12:00

The Red House, Merthyr Tydfil

In attendance

Taskforce Members

Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters AM (Chair)
Karen Phillips, Principal, Coleg y Cymoedd
Andrew Diplock, Entrepreneur, Angel Investor and Advisor
Cllr Andrew Morgan, Leader of Rhondda Cynon Taf
Gaynor Richards, Director, NPTCVC
Dr Chris Jones, Chair, HEIW
Ann Beynon, Non Executive Director and member of CBI Wales Council.
Dawn Bowden AM, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney

Programme Board Members

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

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

Martin Mansfield, General Secretary, Wales TUC
Brian Morgan, Professor of Entrepreneurship at Cardiff Met University
Kellie Beirne – Programme Director, CCR City Deal
Jocelyn Davies, previous Minister for Housing and Regeneration
Fiona Jones, Department for Work and Pensions

Speakers

Derek James, Rhondda Cynon Taf
Tony Meacham, Integrated Responsive Transport Programme

Item 1: Welcome and Introductions.

1. The Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport, Lee Waters AM (LW) opened the meeting and welcomed Dawn Bowden to her first meeting as a member of the ministerial taskforce.

Item 2: Update/questions on progress. Discussions on emerging themes

1. LW provided an update on how things had developed since the last meeting. Meetings have been held with Neath Port-Talbot, Caerphilly and Bridgend and best practice discussed. Once meetings with all local authority leaders have taken place LW will consider what the main themes for the taskforce should be and share with the taskforce.

2. The hubs would remain as a strategic planning tool but not as the sole focus of spending from the VTF fund.
3. Possible themes emerging from current discussions included transport, foundational economy and empty homes. The Deputy Minister explained that he was also considering other smaller projects such as the Alumni project which was mentioned at the last taskforce meeting.
4. LW had recently announced £1.5m for a foundational economy experimental fund that local authorities would be able to bid into and would like to allocate an additional £1.5m from the Valleys taskforce funding to match this (specifically looking at projects in the Valleys).
5. Cardiff Capital Region City Deal were also working with the Valleys taskforce team on establishing a Challenge Fund (£3-5m) focussing on the foundational economy.
6. LW provided an update on Preston Plus foundation economy initiative which the procurement team were leading on. The focus was on procurement but there are other areas that should be considered for inclusion. **ACTION – circulate draft report from Centre for Local Economic Strategies.**
7. LW explained the Alumni project he was proposing to pilot in the Valleys which would organise mentoring and work experience. The plan was to offer every secondary school support to establish an alumni association. A small working group would be set up to look at how to make this idea sustainable. **ACTION – Taskforce members to confirm if they would like to be involved in this work.**
8. Karen Phillips (KP) provided an example of learners returning to the college and how important recent college leavers could be. Coleg Y Cymoedd were now in their second year of developing alumni as a resource. **ACTION: KP agreed to ask the person leading the work on Alumni at Coleg Y Cymoedd to join the working group.**
9. Chris Jones (CJ) added that it was equally important to promote ambition within higher education and to link this with work underway in schools and colleges.
10. Phil Lewis (PL) provided an update on the Valleys Regional Park. 9 gateway sites had been identified and 11 invited to bid for the £7m capital funding allocated to support this. The challenge now was to make sure this was sustainable and LW was anxious to explore whether this could become an integral part of the city region vision.
11. Andrew Morgan (AM) underlined the importance of the role of the proposed park rangers and the need to establish close links with Visit Wales. CJ mentioned St Fagans which had changed for the better and that it would be useful to look at their successes. **ACTION – PL agreed to follow up.**
12. LW confirmed that when the final themes had been agreed, membership of the taskforce would be reviewed. Taskforce members could then agree to be the lead for different actions in the Delivery Plan.

Item 3: Integrated Responsive Transport Programme

13. Tony Meacham (TM) presented the work that has been pursued under the Integrated Responsive Transport Programme which is looking at bus services across Wales. An outline case has been produced and there were three main themes.
 - National Bus Network
 - Integrated transport approach – bus to train, ticketing
 - Demand responsive transport (now integrated responsive transport) – drawing on a wide range of users.
14. The plan for the programme was to provide small vehicles (16 seater mini busses) that are cheaper to operate than regular buses. The challenge was to ensure that vehicles were as fully utilised as possible through a variety of purposes including

services for early workers, school runs, health appointments, social use, school pickups, late workers etc.

15. TM had been working with the National Software Academy to develop supporting software and an App has been developed. Arrangements were also being made for call centre access for those unable to use the App.
16. Local Authorities would decide what services they should provide in their areas and would be responsible for the services selected for the trials. Current thinking was that there would be four live trials (including one in the Valleys - possibly in the Blaenau Gwent area).
17. During discussion AM highlighted the RCT experience of issues surrounding persuading the ambulance service to sign up to using a similar scheme. RCT created a service that they felt was more responsive than that available previously but despite its success the scheme stopped at the end of its 2 year funding. Any evaluation needed to consider whether a subsidised version of an existing commercial service might provide a more cost effective outcome. AM was reassured that RCT colleagues had been involved in the planning work for this latest initiative
18. David Rosser (DR) asked whether an impact assessment has been carried out on the possible negative impact on taxi companies. TM said that the service would be semi scheduled and it would be a parallel service and not directly compete with taxi providers.
19. Dawn Bowden (DB) mentioned that one of the biggest problems is people being able to access employment. For example, in Merthyr access to employment at irregular hours is unavailable e.g. Merthyr busses stop at 5:30pm.
20. Maureen Howell (MH) mentioned a pilot that Fiona Jones and DWP is taking forward with the Welsh Government employability team. **ACTION – MH agreed to circulate more information on this.**
21. CJ highlighted that access to bus services had been a consistent theme throughout the Taskforce engagement sessions and it would be important to point out that we had heard what was needed and the Taskforce has responded.

Item 4: Empty Homes

22. AM presented the paper on empty homes. The focus in RCT had been to support home ownership, not investment for private landlords to rent. A house builder forum had been developed to improve apprenticeships and local supply chain. There was also an opportunity for greater skills and SME development.
23. LW said that he was anxious to spread best practice and scale up where possible. Therefore, he was prepared to consider providing match funding from the Taskforce for this scheme.
24. DR asked whether there was potential for the scheme to be extended to retail properties. LW said that Bridgend raised this at their recent meeting. AM said that RCT tackled this with Targeted Regeneration funding and this was available to all local authorities.
25. KP felt we needed to encourage more SME building firms in the Valleys.
26. A workshop was taking place next week to discuss how we shape this project.
ACTIONS – members to forward any further comments to the taskforce team.

Item 5: Feedback on entrepreneurship workshop

27. Andrew Diplock (AD) updated the taskforce on key developments relating to the entrepreneurship and business support work stream.
28. A hub in Welsh ICE had been established and a community manager appointed within the upper Valleys.

29. The Growing Business Programme held a successful pitching event in Cardiff and this was due to be replicated in the Valleys with angel investors (possibly in summer/autumn). **ACTION – If members would like to be involved in this to please let AD know.**
30. AD also provided a verbal update following the entrepreneurship workshop on 1 April.
31. There had been widespread representation at the workshop which had reflected on the taskforce plan and explored what more could be done. There were two elements feeding into more established hubs:
- Involving constituency AMs supported through constituency surgeries to support and signpost businesses and
 - Looking to community places and providing more informal, facilitated places for businesses to come together in the community.
32. LW was concerned that new business development in the Valleys was lower than in Wales as a whole despite having the same offer. This pointed to the need to do something different in the Valleys. The workshop had also highlighted the position of individuals unable to afford the ongoing cost of supported start-up premises. To overcome this it had been proposed that Beddau community centre could be used to pilot a lower key model of business support. LW was anxious to explore other areas where a similar approach might be supported.
33. CJ said that similar challenges faced those individuals attempting to launch manufacturing ventures. He felt there was a gap in the market for business support tailored at their needs and where fledgling entrepreneurs could hire technical support as well more general advice.
34. KP drew attention to the support available through colleges though noted that training tended to be employer led.

Item 6: AOB

35. AM emphasised that there was a need for the empty homes work to align with the timing of decisions around council tax. This needed to be considered in advance if the impact of the scheme was to match that experienced in RCT. The group was informed that there would be a workshop on 10 April 2019 led by Derek James (RCT) and involving housing, skills and taskforce officials to progress the work.
36. Date of next meeting – 5 June, 10:00-12:00. More details to follow.