

**MEETING OF THE REGIONAL INVESTMENT IN WALES STEERING GROUP
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 25 February 2021

Time: 14:00 – 15:00 (via TEAMS)

Annex A: Attendees

1. Welcome (14:00 – 14:05)

- The Chair welcomed Members and thanked the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, Jeremy Miles MS for attending today's meeting.
- The Chair noted the purpose of the meeting was to discuss recent developments regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

2. Update from Counsel General and Minister for European Transition (14:05)

- The Minister made the following key points:
 - The Spending Review unequivocally failed to uphold previous public commitments that Wales would be no worse off in respect of the SPF.
 - The UK Government also now intends to control Wales' funding from the Levelling-up Fund in contradiction to its announcement in the 25 November Spending Review that this money would come to Wales in the usual way (i.e. via the Barnett Formula).
 - All of the recent developments disrespect our devolution settlement and undermine the work carried out by this group to develop a new Framework for Regional Investment.
 - The approach the UK Government is taking seems to be a deliberate attempt to undermine a strategic and planned approach to regional development in favour of a more politically discretionary fund with very little policy development, stakeholder engagement or consultation.
 - The Welsh Government remains committed to the Framework for Regional Investment as the model for long-term regional economic development in Wales, outlining the imminent establishment of local authority-led Corporate Joint Committees as key to the ambitions to decentralise funding and decision-making.
- Comments made by Members in response to the Counsel General and Minister for European Transition's update included:

- Discussion around opportunities to work with other UK organisations and organisations in devolved nations to influence the longer-term development of the SPF.
- Danger that if the UK-led approach to the SPF isn't aligned to Welsh context, its interventions could be damaging instead of helpful. Concern that competitive bidding process could undo the progress made by Welsh local and regional collaboration.
- Discussion around the unease over the bypassing of the Welsh Government balanced against the pragmatism of maximising funding into Wales.
- Query on funding for R&D and whether different approaches to funding settlements might follow based on recent announcements and the UK Internal Market Act.
- Interest in developing a 'Plan B' for maximising funding due to UK Government announcements on SPF and Levelling-up Fund.
- In response to the issues raised by Members, the following points were made:
 - The Framework is a consensus approach to regional investment and a shared agenda. It can still shape the long-term approach to investments beyond the SPF.
 - Stakeholders should continue to work in a collaborative manner, but take a pragmatic approach to maximising investment into Wales.
 - The Welsh Government will engage constructively but will be pressing for a place-based approach to UK R&D funding.
 - The current approach from the UK Government appears to be systemic, and not just in the case of the SPF and Levelling-up Fund. Ongoing engagement will remain necessary and the next Welsh Government must try to reset relations.

3. Open discussion (14:30 – 14:55)

- Peter Ryland (PR) stated that the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities, which is leading on the SPF and Levelling-up Fund, has shared very little detail with the Welsh Government which makes the transition from EU funds difficult.
- Rachel Garside-Jones (RGJ) said that the next steps were to assess the announcements in next week's UK Budget, and that feedback from today's meeting will help inform a meeting of the Ministerial Working Group on regional investment and a Cabinet Paper next month.
- Other discussion points included:

- Concern about the levelling-up agenda being dominated by north-south divide in England and potential for the Welsh context to become marginalised.
- Need for ongoing collaboration to avoid damaging scenarios based on the competitive nature of UK funds.
- Implications for projects where EU funds have become a core element of funding over time.
- Good progress being made on developing the Regional Economic Frameworks. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

4. Any other business and concluding remarks (14:55 – 15:00)

- The Chair noted the draft minutes from the meeting on 16 December and asked if Members had any comments. There were no comments and the minutes were accepted and will be published on the Welsh Government website.
- The Chair stated that the next meeting would take place in March following the UK Government's publication of the SPF prospectus for the pilot year, which was expected around the time of the UK Budget on 3 March.
- The Chair asked for any further comments before thanking Members for their input and closing the meeting.

LIST OF ATTENDEES

Chair

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, Jeremy Miles MS

Members

Organisation	Name
CBI Wales	Nick Speed, Public Affairs Director, BT
Universities Wales	Amanda Wilkinson, Director
Cardiff University	Professor Calvin Jones, Deputy Dean for Public Value and External Relations
Natural Resources Wales	Ceri Davies, Executive Director of Evidence, Policy and Permitting
Colleges Wales	Iestyn Davies, Chief Executive
South East Wales Partnership	Kellie Beirne, Chief Executive, Cardiff Capital Region City Deal
South West Wales Partnership	Cllr Rob Stewart, Leader, Swansea Council Cllr David Simpson, Leader, Pembrokeshire Council
Growing Mid Wales Partnership	Carwyn Jones-Evans, Growth and Major Developments Manager, Ceredigion County Council
Wales Co-operative Centre	Derek Walker, Chief Executive
Wales Rural Network	Eirlys Lloyd, Community Partnerships/Food Centre Wales Manager, Ceredigion Council
WLGA	Lowri Gwilym, Manager – Europe and Regeneration, Regeneration and Environment
South and Mid Wales Chambers of Commerce	Paul Slevin, President
Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Wales	Ashley Rogers, Director, Gill and Shaw
Cardiff University	Claire Hobbs, Research Officer

Welsh Government attendees

Name	Role and department
Peter Ryland	Chief Executive, WEFO
Rachel Garside-Jones	Deputy Director – Regional Investment, WEFO
Rhodri Griffiths	Chief Regional Officer, Mid and South West Wales – Economy, Skills and Natural Resources
David Rosser	Chief Regional Officer, South East Wales – Economy, Skills and Natural Resources
Alison Sandford	Head of Partnership Working, WEFO
Anton Orzel	Head of Regional Investment Policy, WEFO
Mike Richards	Communications Manager, WEFO
Sheilah Seymour	Head of Research and Analysis, WEFO
Geraint Green	Head of Programme Management (ESF and ETC), WEFO
Tom Brown	Senior Policy Manager, WEFO
Michelle Holland	Regional Investment Support Officer, WEFO
Justine George	Economic Interventions Manager – Economy, Skills and Natural Resources