

Third Sector Ministerial Meeting: Economy

Note of meeting on 1st November 2021

List of Attendees

Name	Organisation
Ben Lloyd (BL)	WCVA
Gurmit Singh Randhawa (GSR)	Interfaith Council for Wales
David Hagendyk (DH)	Learning and Work
Susie VentrisField (SV)	Welsh Centre for International Affairs
Clare Rudall (CR)	Business in the Community
Michelle Rowson-Woods (MRW)	Coalfields Regeneration Trust
David Williams (DWi)	Lais y Goedwig
Derek Walker (DWa)	Wales Co-operative Centre
Tabea Wilkes (TW)	Wales Environment Link
Peter Williams (PW)	DTA Wales
Matthew Williams (MW)	Welsh Sports Association
San Leonard (SL)	Social Firms Wales
Matthew Brown (MB)	WCVA

Welsh Government

Vaughan Gethin SM (MEcon)	Minister for the Economy (CHAIR)
Julian Carpanini (JC)	WG
Claire McDonald (CM)	WG
Vanessa Dean Richards (VDR)	WG
Andrew Chapman (AC)	WG
Chris Buchan (CB)	WG
Janet Owen Jones (JOJ)	WG
Peter Ryland (PR)	WG
Jonathan Price (JP)	WG
Jonathan Bonville-Ginn (JBG)	WG
Andrew Lock (AL)	WG

Apologies

Fiona Reid	Disability Sports Wales
Dafydd Gruffydd	Menter Mon

Agenda Item 1 – Introduction

MEcon welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked third sector members for providing their discussion papers in advance. **MEcon** outlined the two main issues to be discussed which included the importance of social enterprise and business moving forward as well as the third sector's concern over the delivery and direction of current UK Government funding programmes.

Agenda Item 2 – Social Enterprise Paper, (Wales Cooperative Centre).

MEcon invited **DWa** to set out the key points in the social enterprise paper. **DWa** highlighted the importance of a greener economy and reminded everyone that climate change should be at the forefront of business development, (particularly so at present with COP26). **DWa** outlined the traditional sustainable approach taken by social enterprise in Wales. **DWa** also referenced clear associations between social enterprise and the programme for government objectives. A key emphasis was placed on establishing how the sector and Welsh Government could best work as partners. **DWa** suggested the following points:

- To use the profile of **MEcon** to build the profile of the sector in Wales and beyond. Work has been carried out in educational establishments however it would be good to make further inroads, (for example expanding on the work already carried out with Cardiff Business School). A request was made of **MEcon** to help raise awareness of social enterprise across different meetings, events and forums.
- To build on clear links with policy objectives. **DWa** explained how there were clear policy links in the programme for government and asked how these commitments would be taken forward.

MEcon highlighted the importance of partnering to deliver objectives and was positive about social enterprise accessing wider business support funding. The Welsh Government was also keen to support employee ownership as a model of succession, as well as ensuring that programme for government commitments are talked through and achieved by working with stakeholders. **MEcon** recognised the quality delivered by social enterprise (the greatest gain) in that a significant amount of work in Wales happened with individuals from areas of deprivation. **MEcon** also emphasised the reality around budget determining delivery capability.

DWa thanked **MEcon** and mentioned a future ministerial visit planned to mark 'Social Enterprise day' to promote successful activity.

MEcon reflected to the group, that it was important to appreciate that social enterprise forms a valuable part of the business sector.

Agenda Item 3 - UK Government Funding, (Wales Council for Voluntary Service).

MB presented the paper to the group and Minister. **MB** outlined the key issues currently experienced by the voluntary sector with UK Government funding. This included ability to access funding as well as general support within existing frameworks. **MB** suggested that it may be useful if **MEcon** was able to add anything further about the Shared Prosperity Fund, Community Investment Fund and the overall levelling up agenda.

MEcon highlighted current issues with the planning, co-ordination and delivery of the funds. This was not just in relation to the UK Government's lack of engagement with the Welsh Government but also UK Government discussions with key organisations

at a regional and local level. **MEcon** highlighted the pressure put onto local authorities who have had to respond within very challenging timescales.

MEcon went on to say that funds should be used to support those projects which deliver the biggest gains, and not just to those who were well versed in submitting applications. It was also important to make sure that the funding supported those people in greatest need and also impacted areas of deprivation.

MEcon mentioned current business support funded through EU programmes. He would like to see a more optimistic approach and hold constructive discussions with the UK Government and he would confirm with them that the current design was a major problem. **MEcon** noted that he hoped a more progressive approach with devolved administrations would be adopted by the UK Government.

MB thanked **MEcon** for his feedback which mirrored the principles raised in the paper. In looking forwards **MB** suggested different approaches to improve an imperfect system. Additionally, advice on how the voluntary sector can help improve the design and delivery of the funds.

MEcon highlighted that it was widely believed that there was more to gain from unified support and a more coherent design of the process, (whilst also making sure levels of funding remained). **MEcon** felt it was important to maintain this approach, (which was recognised by leaders of local authorities and also the Welsh Local Government Organisation), bringing focus to funding for business and skills in particular. It was important that momentum was maintained and the voluntary sector had a significant role to play. **MEcon** also outlined the issue around volunteer hours not being eligible as match funding and the challenges raised for organisations and delivery on the ground. The white paper will provide further details about how things will move forwards.

MB agreed with this approach and suggested a best way of moving forwards with the current circumstances. There was ongoing communication with English counterparts to discuss issues and implications. Advice and support was also a key issue when advising and supporting organisations to apply.

MEcon outlined the current issue of the competitive bids process rather than a needs based assessment process. Many local authorities in Wales have not worked in this way unlike their English counterparts, hence creating an uneven process with regards to applying for UK wide funds. **MEcon** has heard repeated commitments about maintaining the previous overall amount of funding, however it was currently unclear how this will look and develop moving forwards.

Agenda Item 4 – Any other business

TW made the minister aware of a funding proposal taking place around the Valleys Regional Park. The proposal aim was to develop jobs and skills along the lines of a green recovery.

MEcon advised that he wouldn't usually be made aware of proposals at receipt stage but asked officials to make sure he is sighted on the proposal.

Action - Officials to brief the minister regarding the proposal.

MRW explained that the Coalfields Regeneration Trust had been successful in applying to the UK Government Community Ownership Fund. Although still at early stages the proposal looks to fund a training and skills centre in Penywaun.

CR thanked **MEcon** for recent involvement with Business in the Community which was valued by board members. **CR** gave further outline about developments with a place based approach to the skills and business network.

MEcon thanked everyone for their open and honest contributions. It was important to find ways forward through some of the current issues. With that in mind it would be beneficial to arrange another meeting early next year.

Action – AC to liaise with BL to arrange a meeting in the New Year.

Note Taker: Andrew Chapman

2 November 2021

Meeting comments:

[12:23] Dave Williams (Guest)
learning curve in geography for UK Govt colleagues....

[12:27] Dave Williams (Guest)
extending the distance between decision and delivery for funds and grants is rarely helpful - perhaps important to determine some key principles here.

[12:30] McDonald, Claire (ESNR - Business & Regions - Economic Policy)

Yes please Matthew Brown. That would very helpful.