
NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD

28 June 2019

Present:

Voting Members - Councillors:- Hugh Evans (Denbighshire Council), Llinos Medi Huws (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Mark Pritchard (Wrexham Council), Ian Roberts (Flintshire Council), Dyfrig L.Siencyn (Gwynedd Council), Sam Rowlands (Conwy County Borough Council).

Advisors – Dafydd Evans (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai), Maria Hinfelaar (Glyndwr University), Prof. David Thomas (Bangor University), Steve Jackson (Coleg Cambria) and Ashley Rogers (North Wales Mersey Dee Business Council).

Chief Officers - Anwen Morgan (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Colin Everett (Flintshire Council), Nicola Stubbins (Denbighshire Council), Ian Bancroft (Wrexham Council) and Dilwyn Williams (Gwynedd Council).

Officers in attendance - Ffion Madog Edwards (Representing the Section 151 Officer), Iwan Trefor Jones (The Board's Lead Director), Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Nia Medi Williams (Senior Executive Officer) and Annes Siôn (Member Support Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were given by Judith Greenhalgh (Denbighshire Council), David Jones (Coleg Cambria), Iwan Davies (Conwy County Borough Council), Vice Chancellor Prof. Graham Upton (Bangor University), Dafydd Edwards (Section 151 Officer) and Dr Gwynne Jones (Isle of Anglesey County Council).

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The Lead Director and the Senior Executive Officer left the meeting for the urgent item due to an interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

It was noted that there was one urgent item to discuss - Appointment of Programme Director.

Resolved to discuss this item at the end of the meeting.

4. UPDATE ON THE WORK PROGRAMME

The report was presented by Iwan Trefor Jones, Lead Director.

DECISION

Review, update and approve the RAG status of all actions within the Work Programme.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

There is a need to update the progress of tasks on the Work Programme.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted, noting that the Board was getting closer to Heads of Terms for the Growth Deal and that it would be possible to sign them before the end of July. It was noted that a Challenge Session with the Private Sector and UK Government and Welsh Government Ministers had now been held which had been positive with constructive feedback.

Attention was drawn to £7 million which had been approved by the Government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport as part of the Local Full Fibre Network Programme. It was added that the Digital Programme Manager post had been advertised.

It was noted that an update letter had been sent to Ken Skates AM, Alun Cairns MP and Kevin Foster MP following the previous meeting, and that similar correspondence would be sent following every meeting of the NWEAB.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The challenge meetings were discussed, noting that the session with the Private Sector was positive with constructive suggestions given.
- The importance of signing Heads of Terms before the end of July was stressed.
- It was noted that there was a need to stress and convey that everyone had a role to play to ensure that the Growth Deal worked, not only the authorities.
- Concerns were expressed about some of the projects that were in the second phase, as some companies were ready to make financial contributions. It was noted that there was a need to be flexible with projects and take advantage of opportunities when they arose. It was added that challenge sessions for the second phase projects would be held shortly.
- It was noted that a timeframe was needed for the decisions which will need to be made by the authorities in order to programme them in their Cabinet and Full Council meeting arrangements.
- Attention was drawn to the simple newsletter which had been created but it was noted that additional information was needed with reference to the 14 projects and specifically with scrutiny in every edition, complete with an update on every project.

5. PROGRAMME OFFICE STRUCTURE

The report was presented by Iwan Trefor Jones, Lead Director.

DECISION

To approve the core structure of the Programme Office as set out in the report and move to recruit on condition that it does not add to the core financial contributions of the Councils and Partners.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

In order to progress the development and delivery of the Growth Vision and Growth Deal, a Programme Office will need to be established. The Programme Office will be responsible for supporting the activities of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board and will also be responsible for progressing key elements of the Growth Deal.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting that the principle of the Programme Office had been accepted by the Joint-Committee but that there was a need to proceed. It was added that various sources were funding the Programme Office but the aim was to be self-funding within five years. The Programme Office needed to be developed in order to proceed with developing and delivering the Growth Vision..

Further information was given about the financial streams used to part-fund the Programme Office costs, specifically the bid for ESF Funding as well as the element of capitalising projects on a scale of approximately 0.75% - 1%. It was added that the low level of capitalisation would ensure that the core funding of the Growth Deal would be used specifically on projects.

Observations arising from the discussion

- As many of the first phase projects were ready, there was a need to move on to start recruiting.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that no administrative element had been included in the staffing structure.
- There was a discussion regarding financing the programme office and members noted that they were happy with capitalising projects on a scale of approximately 0.75% - 1% for staffing costs. It was noted that they agreed to proceed but on condition that the Councils and Partners would not have to make further financial contributions.

6. DELEGATION AND STAFFING

The report was presented by Iwan Evans, Monitoring Officer - Accountable Body.

DECISION

It was confirmed that the staffing structure of the Programme Office during the continuation of Governance Agreement 1 ("GA1") shall be determined by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

It was agreed to delegate the responsibility of appointing posts on the approved staffing structure below Programme Director level to the Programme Director and in the interim period, to the Chief Executive of the Accountable Body in accordance with the report.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Under GA1 the North Wales Economic Ambition Board has power to delegate its functions to Sub-Committees and/or Officers. One of the key elements of the project is the establishment and management of the Programme Office. Although the staff are legally employees of the Accountable Body they constitute a regional resource for the NWEAB and are established and resourced through the Joint Committee budget. The NWEAB therefore needs to set out clear principles in relation to these arrangements.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and the decision and the need to delegate powers to the Programme Director to appoint staff was noted.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that this matter was an operational matter as the decision related to who would appoint to posts and not the staffing structure. It was added that the posts would be appointed via the Accountable Body.

7. TRANSPORT UPDATE AND PROGRESS WITH ESTABLISHING A TRANSPORT SUB-GROUP

The report was submitted by Councillor David Bithell.

RESOLVED

1. To note the report and the progress made to establish the Transport Delivery Sub-Board
2. To ratify the acceptance of the funding support offered by WG and authorise the signing of the grant offer letter by the Host Authority.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The NWEAB has decided to establish a Transport Delivery Sub-board and a report was provided on the progress on implementing the decision together with the work of the existing Transport Group as it transfers to the formal structure. The most urgent matters in relation to the regional bus network and the follow up to the consultation on the White Paper on Improving Public Transport were reported upon.

In order to respond to an offer of a grant received from Welsh Government for research regarding developing the proposals of the White Paper on Improving Public Transport.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted noting the background of the Transport Sub-group and noting that when the Regional Transport Consortia had been dissolved in 2014, Cabinet members had continued to meet informally. It was added that they were now eager to have formal governance arrangements for the next meeting of the group.

An outline of the Sub-group's most recent work was given, emphasising a regional Bus Network, decarbonisation of transport and pilot projects together with implementing 20 mile per hour zones.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stressed that the joint-working seemed to be positive.
- A member asked for clarity on the projects as some of the Growth Visions' schemes were ones that should be undertaken by Welsh Government and Local Authorities. It was noted that many large and small developments were being carried out in order to see integration across the region such as developing a Public Transport Strategy.
- Some of the projects were discussed, stressing that transport was a central part of economic development.

8. SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME, NORTH WALES GROWTH VISION

The report was presented by Iwan Trefor Jones, Lead Director.

RESOLVED

To defer the decision of funding one FTE post (£50,000 for 12 months) to continue work on Information & Advice Gateway and Employability Pathway projects in order to take the opportunity to consider the projects in light of the Skills Strategy which will be submitted to the Board shortly, investigate and have discussions with Welsh and UK Government about the field.

To defer confirmation of the approach to coordinate the skills and employability programme and seek further information and clarity in relation to the Skills and Employment programme.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The Joint-committee requested further information and clarity in relation to the Skills and Employment programme prior to making a decision on the matter.

DISCUSSION

The report was submitted and the five key projects were noted as well as the fact that a clear work programme was in place to proceed with the projects. It was added that the programme would proceed with the Information and Advice Gateway and Employability Pathway projects, but that additional resources were needed to enable the work to move ahead. It was noted that substantial work had been done which showed good practice in the fields.

Observations arising from the discussion

- Concerns were raised about the need to obtain resources to move ahead with the two projects: Information and Advice Gateway and the Employability Pathway. It was added that there were concerns that this would duplicate work by Welsh Government.
- It was noted that it was premature to make a decision and that more clarity was needed on the two projects, as well as discussions with Welsh Government about its role within the projects together with the relationship between the NWEAB and the Regional Skills Partnership.

9. ESTABLISHMENT OF ENERGY SUB-GROUP AND UPDATE ON REGIONAL ENERGY PLANNING

The report was submitted by Rhys Horan, Strategic Leader - Welsh Government Energy Service.

RESOLVED

1. To establish an Energy Sub-Group with the Role and Terms of Reference set out in Appendix 1 of the report.
2. To appoint Cllr Llinos Medi, Leader of Anglesey Council as a member of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to act as a link member for the Energy Sub-group.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

To improve the co-ordination of energy-related projects within the region and to deliver the Low Carbon Energy target as identified in the Growth Vision.

That the status of the Sub-group be developed as part of the review of the governance arrangements to be established in Governance Agreement 2.

DISCUSSION

It was noted that climate emergency declarations had been made recently and it was stressed that North Wales needed to be at the forefront in relation to energy. It was added that work needed to be carried out on regional energy planning and developing the vision and for the Ambition Board to take ownership of the projects.

Observations arising from the discussion

- The Sub-group's place within the NWEAB framework was outlined, noting that it would be an Advisory Board.
- The membership of the board was discussed, specifically Natural Resources Wales, noting that it may be challenging for them as they are a regulator.
- It was emphasised that local benefits needed to be ensured with any low carbon energy.

10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

To exclude the press and public from the meeting during the discussion on the following item due to the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 12, Section 4, Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972. This paragraph is relevant as the report contains information about specific individuals who have the right to privacy. There is no public interest that calls for disclosing personal information about these individuals which would outweigh the rights of these individuals. Consequently, the public interest falls in favour of maintaining the exemption.

11. APPOINTMENT OF PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

DECISION

To re-advertise the post with a salary set at between £86,000 and a maximum of £106,000 subject to a report on the proposed salary to the Full Council of the Accountable Body which will host the post.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Members of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board noted, following the failure to appoint a Programme Director, that there was a need to re-advertise in order to make the key appointment of the Programme Director as soon as possible, ensuring that the recruitment process and arrangements are effective and robust.

In order to address the statutory guidance "Pay Accountability within Local Government in Wales - Guidance under Section 40 of the Localism Act 2011".

DISCUSSION

It was reported following recent interviews that there was no appointment to the programme Director Post, and as a result there was a decision on the way forward.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was noted that there was a need to advertise as soon as possible in order for the period without a Programme Director in place to be as short as possible.
- The maximum salary was decided and it was noted that the Board would accept a secondment to the post also to encourage interest.

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 3.20pm.