

Minister for Housing and Local Government meeting with Public Service Board Chairs, 22nd March 2021

Attendees

Ministers

- Minister for Housing and Local Government
- Deputy Minister and Chief Whip
- Deputy Minister for Economy and Transport

PSB Chairs

- Emyr Williams - Anglesey / Gwynedd
- Mark Brace – Bridgend /Cwm Taf
- Cllr Philippa Marsden – Leader – Caerphilly
- Cllr Huw Thomas – Leader – Cardiff
- Barry Lyles - Carmarthenshire
- Cllr. Ellen ap Gwynn – Leader – Ceredigion
- Roger Thomas – Mid and West Wales Fire & Rescue Service – NPT
- Karen Jones – Chief Executive Officer – NPT
- Cllr Jane Mudd – Newport
- Tegryn Jones – Pembrokeshire
- Cllr Rosemarie Harris – Leader – Powys
- Cllr Andrea Lewis – Swansea
- Cllr Anthony Hunt – Leader - Torfaen
- Cllr Neil Moore – Vale of Glamorgan
- Sue Price – Wrexham

Other attendees

- Michelle Morris – Managing Director, Blaenau Gwent Council
- Adam Hill – Deputy Chief Executive – Swansea
- Vanessa Dale – Neath Port Talbot – Co-ordinator
- Gwyneth Ayres – Carmarthenshire – Co-ordinator
- Nonn Hughes – Anglesey/Gwynedd – Co-ordinator
- Diana Davies – Ceredigion – Co-ordinator
- Bernadette Elias – Blaenau Gwent – Co-ordinator
- Michael Cantwell – Wrexham – Co-ordinator
- Nicola Kneale – Denbighshire – Co-ordinator
- Rachael O'Shaugnessy – Torfaen – Co-ordinator
- Fran Lewis – Conwy – Co-ordinator
- Emma Palmer – Powys – Co-ordinator
- Nicholas Evans – Pembrokeshire – Co-ordinator
- Kathryn Peters – Caerphilly – Co-ordinator
- Lyndon Puddy – Torfaen – Co-ordinator
- Rhian Jones – Powys – Co-ordinator
- Kirsty Smith – Cwm Taf – Co-ordinator
- Lisa Toghill – Cwm Taf – Co-ordinator
- Nathan Swain – Cardiff – Co-ordinator
- Sharran Lloyd – Monmouthshire – Co-ordinator

Introduction

MHLG opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for their time. She explained that currently Ministers only get to hear about the work of PSBs second hand through the Welsh Government representatives that sit on the boards. She asked for a frank and open discussion with Chairs on their reflections on the last 5 years and how we move forward.

A number of themes emerged during the discussion:

Regional approaches

Chairs in the Gwent region spoke positively about plans to merge their PSBs. They have already been working closely and felt this helps alleviate duplication of effort, but they also recognise the importance of not forgetting local needs.

However, there was also a call for the need for flexibility in regional approaches. Some boards are on different regional footprints for different partnerships. Some preferred not to be formally merged but, instead, to operate in informal regional working relationships.

Response to covid-19

There was a consensus that the good working relationships already in existence because of the PSBs had improved the response to Covid because the trust was already established.

Complexity of partnerships

There was frustration expressed about the volume of partnership meetings, particularly for some partners who sit on multiple PSBs e.g. NRW, Fire & Rescue Services, etc. It is difficult for officers and leaders to attend so many meetings. With CJs soon to join the partnership landscape it was feared this would be exacerbated. The scope, and appetite, to streamline was discussed.

Funding

There was a call for parity in terms of funding with RPBs, given PSBs are compared with them. There was also a call for more sustainable, long-term funding. The MHLG noted that it was difficult to provide long-term funding forecasts of funding given the Welsh Government's funding from Westminster was on an annual basis.

Foundational Economy

DME&T challenged the Chairs on work around the foundational economy. He said he was disappointed with a lack of progress, acknowledging that Covid had not helped. He said he felt like there was not a huge amount of good practice sharing and asked for the Chairs' thoughts.

PSB Chairs responded that they had different experiences of working with foundational economy. One noted that they were working with another PSB on this activity and activity was reported regularly to their PSB. Another acknowledged that there had been a slow start but now pleased with progress and looking at something emerging from the pilot project.

DME&T told the attendees a £3m scale-up fund was available for foundational economy projects that show promise.

Good practice sharing

The challenge of 'spreading and scaling' good practice was raised, with a call for PSBs to think about how they learn from experiences elsewhere. A forum for this to happen was suggested

Third Sector

DM&CW asked for views on involving the third sector as feedback from the sector was that they can feel peripheral to PSB activities and decision-making. The response was that PSBs have been working closely with the third sector during the pandemic. Many PSBs have third sector representatives.

Conclusion

MHLG notes that she wished that this sort of meeting had happened earlier and said she would encourage the incoming Minister to meet Chairs of PSBs more often - at least once a year.