

**NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD  
14/06/2024**

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Present:

Voting Members - Councillors:- Mark Pritchard (Wrexham County Borough Council), Charlie McCoubrey (Conwy County Borough Council), Gary Pritchard (Isle of Anglesey County Council) and Dyfrig Siencyn (Cyngor Gwynedd) (Chair).

Advisors – Dafydd Evans and Aled Jones Griffith (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai), Askar Sheibani (Business Delivery Board) and Paul Spencer (Bangor University).

Chief Officers - Dylan Williams (Isle of Anglesey County Council), Rhun ap Gareth (Conwy County Borough Council), Andrew Farrow (Flintshire Council), Ian Bancroft (Wrexham County Borough Council) and Sioned Williams (Cyngor Gwynedd).

Officers in attendance -

Host Authority - Iwan G Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sian Pugh (Assistant Head of Finance) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

Ambition North Wales - Alwen Williams (Portfolio Director), Hedd Vaughan-Evans (Operations Manager), Stuart Whitfield (Digital Programme Manager). David Mathews (Land and Property Programme Manager), Robyn Lovelock (Growth Deal Programme Manager), Sian Lloyd Roberts (Regional Skills Manager), Rhianne Massin (Procurement and Operations Manager), Angharad Evans (Temporary Skills and Employability Project Officer), Elgan Roberts (Energy Programme Manager) and Nia Medi Williams (Senior Executive Officer).

Observers – Wendy Boddington (Observer, Welsh Government) and Gareth Ashman (UK Government).

**1. CHAIR**

**RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn as Chair for 2024/25.**

**2. VICE-CHAIR**

**RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Mark Pritchard as Vice-chair for 2024/25.**

**3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from:-

- Councillor Ian B. Roberts (Flintshire County Council);
- Councillor Jason McLellan (Denbighshire Council);
- Councillor Llinos Medi Huws (Isle of Anglesey County Council) with Gary Pritchard deputising;
- Professor Edmund Burke (Bangor University) with Paul Spencer deputising;
- Professor Maria Hinfelaar (Wrexham University)
- Yana Williams (Coleg Cambria)
- Dewi A. Morgan (Statutory Finance Officer) with Sian Pugh deputising;
- Neal Cockerton (Flintshire County Council) with Andrew Farrow deputising;
- Dafydd Gibbard (Cyngor Gwynedd) with Sioned Williams deputising.
- Graham Boase (Denbighshire Council)

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The Chair welcomed the deputies to the meeting.

Thanks was given to Dafydd Evans (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai) for his work and his contribution to the Board over the last few years, as he attended his final meeting. Aled Jones-Griffith was welcomed to the Board as his successor. In the same manner, Professor Joe Yates was welcomed to the meeting as the joint representative of Wrexham University following his appointment as the Vice-chancellor of the university.

### **4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

A declaration of personal interest was received from Alwen Williams (Portfolio Director) for Item 8 following her appointment as interim Chief Executive of the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. It was noted that it was a prejudicial interest and she withdrew from the meeting for the item.

### **5. URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent matters were raised.

### **6. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 17 May 2024, as a true record.

### **7. ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24**

The report was presented by the Portfolio Director with support from Ambition North Wales officers.

### **RESOLVED**

**Noted and accepted:**

- 1. To note the Annual Report for 2023/24.**
- 2. To approve the submission of the Annual Report for 2023/24 to the Welsh Government and UK Government, as well as the local authorities' scrutiny committees.**

### **REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

Quarterly and annual reporting on progress against the North Wales Growth Deal is one of the requirements of the Final Growth Deal Agreement. Following consideration from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board, the reports would be shared with the Welsh Government, UK Government and the local authorities' scrutiny committees.

### **DISCUSSION**

It was explained that the report provided an overview of the Growth Deal and the progress that had been made when fulfilling projects, expressing thanks to the Ambition North Wales officers for their quality work throughout the year.

The Members were guided through the Report's main points, drawing specific attention to:

- **2023/24 Highlights** - It was acknowledged that challenges had prevented Outline and Full Business Cases from being approved during the first half of the year and the officers were thanked for their work to ensure that those business cases developed in a timely manner to be considered later in the year. Additionally, it was confirmed that they were working on alternative projects such as the Hydrogen

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Sponsor challenge and they had managed to introduce five new projects to join the Growth Deal. It was emphasised that many Outline Business Cases, such as the Tourism Talent Network and Former North Wales Hospital, and Full Business Cases, such as the Deeside Anaerobic Digestion Work had been approved by the Board during the second half of the year. It was elaborated that the Former North Wales Hospital Full Business Plan had now been approved by the Board.

- **Digital Signals Processing Centre (DSP)** - It was confirmed that this was the first project to reach the aim of fulfilment and that 2023/24 was its second year doing so. They were proud that the project had led to creating 13 jobs and had produced an additional GVA of £1.275m. It was elaborated that the project had now secured additional funding of £1.5m. It was noted that the project continued to collaborate with 18 partners and that 53 people had attended the skills and training sessions during the year.
- **Enterprise Engineering & Optics Centre** - Pride was expressed that the work of building the centre had commenced since February 2024 and that the work continued to develop ahead of schedule. They were reminded that the centre was an innovative building to develop business cooperation and develop skills in optics, photonics and composites, as light alternative choices for manufacturing. It was also noted that the development would integrate hydrogen as an alternative fuel source, contributing to sustainable practices in industry by reducing the carbon emissions of regional companies. It was emphasised that a key part of the project was attracting investment to north Wales and creating local employment, emphasising that approximately 70 to 90 new jobs were anticipated to be created within the centre and over a thousand people trained to provide innovative solutions for the future.
- **Local Broadband Fund** - It was explained that the project had upgraded broadband connections on 17 sites managed by the public sector and had installed fibre optic broadband with gigabyte ability in areas of the local authorities and health sites in Wrexham, Gwynedd, Flintshire, Denbighshire and Conwy. It was acknowledged that it had not been possible to report on the wider impact of the work to date but the suppliers had confirmed that such data would be available to the Members soon.
- **The Regional Skills Partnership** - Members were reminded that the partnership's current Skills Plan had been in operation for a year by now and that the partnership's work focused on the priority of 'Enabling and Empowering Employers' as well as 'Enabling and Empowering Individuals'.
  - It was reported that officers had been collaborating with employers in the low carbon sector to understand their needs before collaborating with colleges and universities to address any gaps in key skills. It was acknowledged that businesses were not aware of the innovative equipment and provision that was available in North Wales. It was emphasised that this had led to skills prospectus development which shared information about the skills that can be nurtured in colleges and universities in the region. Pride was expressed that the prospectus enabled companies to re-train their staff and gave confidence to anyone who moved into the area, that it was possible to learn these skills here.
  - Reference was made to the work that the partnership had been doing with HMP Berwyn to recruit previous offenders. They were proud that this scheme had been successful as officers had held discussions with employers and that many previous offenders had managed to get a job following their release from prison. It was emphasised that this work would continue over the next year.
  - It was reported that officers had been collaborating with young people to teach them about career pathways and help them to succeed in following it whilst remaining within the region. It was explained that officers had managed to do this by promoting courses that were available within the region as well as drawing attention to jobs that were available in North Wales. It was reported that this was currently being trialled through a joint

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pilot scheme with Isle of Anglesey County Council. It was detailed that the partnership had collaborated with the five secondary schools in the County to integrate career pathways as soon as possible when young people moved to primary schools. It was explained that the pilot would extend to Flintshire County Council over the next year.

- **Digital Skills Research** - Reference was made to research commissioned by the Skills Partnership which engaged with organisations in each sector. It was noted that work had commenced via a questionnaire and 68 responses were received across the region from different sectors. It was acknowledged that many matters had arisen within this questionnaire, including lack of diversity within workplaces, with fewer women working in some fields. Attention was given to many exciting aspects that were underway, such as Artificial Intelligence and technological games.
- It was reported that the enquiry commissioned had led to eight recommendations for the future, and that many of them detailed collecting information to ensure that it was available across the region. It was confirmed that work was being done to fulfil these eight recommendations as future targets through a variety of videos, meetings, campaigns and case studies. It was confirmed that the report was available to the Members if they wished to look at it.
- **Young Person's Support Pack** - It was explained that the pack had been divided into four parts to reflect that each young person was different and taught in different methods. It was detailed that the four parts were; written PDF document, animated video, written case studies and case studies in video form. It was explained that a common theme across all these parts were transferable skills and displaying the different ways available to reach career targets. They were proud that over 2000 visits had been made to the site since it was launched in January, with the PDF document downloaded over 1000 times.
- **Local Area Energy Plans and Regional Energy Strategy** - It was noted that officers had collaborated closely with suppliers and the local authorities, as well as stakeholders to develop energy plans. It was emphasised that the main aim of the team was to support the work of local authorities' officers whilst ensuring consistency across all regions and that there was continuous cooperation with Regional Energy Strategy and National Policies and Plans. It was confirmed that the development of the strategy and these plans had been a very thorough process with a high number of contributions by partners. Everyone was thanked for sharing their opinion and experiences to ensure that these plans would help targets to reach Net Zero Carbon. It was reported that the final plans were currently being reviewed to ensure that the information and targets were correct and they would be translated and shared with the local authorities as soon as possible.
- **Shared Prosperity Funding** - Members were reminded that over a million pounds had been secured from the Shared Prosperity Funding to deliver work streams that run in parallel to the plans of the Growth Deal. Pride was expressed that many of the work streams were now operational. An update was shared on the work streams, noting:
  - **Skills and Employment** - It was noted that the Tropic company had been commissioned to develop a Skills and Employment Portal to raise awareness of jobs available in the region and to inspire young people to consider a career in priority sectors within the area.
  - **Benefits and Social Value** - It was reported that an officer was developing an online monitoring platform for social value commitments and best practices would be shared across the region.
  - **Energy and Zero Net** - It was confirmed that small grants were available for small and medium businesses through a project to help write successful bids, in the hope that companies would then go on to make an application to the Growth Plan's 'Smart Local Energy' project when it would be operational.

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- **Digital** - It was reported that this was the biggest work stream within the plan, including 'Rural Digital Community Support', 'SME Connectivity Assessments', 'Access Agreements' and 'Mobile Coverage Survey'.

They were looking forward to next year, noting that it was very busy with many projects underway. It was confirmed that there were many Business Cases to be considered over the year, including 'Deeside Anaerobic Digestion Work', 'Tourism Talent Network', Environmental Biotechnology Centre, LPWAN, Cydnerth, Parc Bryn Cegin, Advanced Wireless and Responsible Adventures.

Attention was drawn to the fact that it was hoped that the transfer of the Portfolio Management Office and the Growth Deal to the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee would happen within the current year, meaning that work would be underway to ensure that arrangements were in place for a successful transfer.

In addition, reference was made to many developments where officers procured for projects. It was detailed that these would include: Smart Local Energy, Environmental Biotechnology Centre, Tourism Talent Network, Cydnerth, Enterprise Engineering and Optics Centre and AAP Framework. They were looking forward to seeing the developments of these projects, as well as all the other developments over the year to come.

The officers were thanked for their continuous work.

### **8. UPDATE: FUNCTIONS OF THE NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD - TRANSFER TO THE CORPORATE JOINT COMMITTEE**

The report was presented by the Chief Executive of the Isle of Anglesey County Council.

#### **RESOLVED**

- 1. To note the progress update on work to establish the North Wales CJC and to respond to the tasks required by its statutory functions.**
- 2. To note the updated plan and revised timetable for the transfer of the North Wales Growth Deal to the North Wales CJC.**
- 3. To approve the extension of the temporary arrangement to release the Portfolio Director's time for two days per week to undertake the Interim Chief Executive role until 31 October 2024.**
- 4. To agree that a further report would be submitted to the Board should there be a slippage in the timetable, in order to seek the approval of the Members for an alternative timetable to transfer the North Wales Growth Deal to the North Wales CJC.**

#### **REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

In December 2021/January 2022, the Cabinet and Executives in each of the six Local Authorities agreed, in principle, that the functions of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board should be transferred by way of a delegation agreement to the CJC. The statutory framework and the establishment of the CJC meant that the proposed transfer needed to be progressed. Approval from partner organisations and governments was required before a transfer could take place.

The 1<sup>st</sup> July had been identified as the provisional target date to transfer functions from the Economic Ambition Board to the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. However, this date was provisional on the grounds that it could be affected by several factors, including the need for partner and government agreement to transfer the Growth Deal; Decision and timetable requirements; Internal capacity limitations and TUPE considerations. Key decisions needed to be made to complete the transfer which could

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lead to some transfer areas being carried out during the autumn 2024 period. Consideration was given to whether the proposed transfer date of 1 July 2024 was achievable. This report and the decisions required set out the revised plan and timetables.

### **DISCUSSION**

All the officers associated from Ambition North Wales and the Host Authority were thanked for their work in preparing a clear report of the current situation. It was acknowledged that it was not an ideal situation, noting that the Report detailed those challenges that had contributed towards the current situation. It was also elaborated that officers' capacity had contributed to the challenges faced.

Attention was drawn to the complexity of the tasks that needed to be completed, as well as the key arrangement of when all the tasks should be completed. Details were given on this information by referring to Appendix 1. Examples of the detail of the tasks were shared by confirming that all of the region's local authorities and the Government needed to agree on each step of the processes, as well as develop robust processes and policies. It was acknowledged that ambiguity regarding financial matters was also a challenge that had been faced recently. The need to ensure that each task had been completed and that sufficient processes were in place before the formal transfer was made, to ensure a reduction in future risks, was emphasised. It was confirmed that it was key to adapt the date of the transfer from July to November, with the hope that all processes would be in place by then.

In response to an enquiry, it was confirmed that it was not possible to ensure that a transfer would be in place by the end of October 2024 because there was a possibility that unforeseen matters would affect the development of those necessary processes, and it was acknowledged that officers had received criticism for missing deadlines on this subject in the past. Following a short discussion, it was confirmed that a report would be presented to the Members, if the need to extend the date of the transfer arose, noting the reasons why the date of the transfer had slipped. However, it was emphasised that officers were confident that the target set in the report was achievable.

It was considered that no detailed discussions had been currently held with the private sector, in connection with the transfer. It was ensured that this transfer was an opportunity to develop an innovative relationship with the private sector for the future, emphasising that the link with the private sector was essential for success. It was ensured that the role of the private sector and advisers within the new joint committee would get continuous attention from officers.

Members expressed their wishes regarding how the Shared Prosperity Funding would be allocated in the future, following the general election. Members were reminded that it would come to an end at the end of March 2025, and any further continuation would depend on the new political developments.

The meeting commenced at 09:30am and concluded at 10:45am.

**Chair**