

APPENDIX 1

NORTH WALES LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Economic ambition

A Strategy for Change



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Foreword

Together we are greater than the sum of our parts.

As we are all keenly aware, public services are facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of prolonged recession and deep cuts in government expenditure. However, this challenge also provides the region with a major opportunity – enhancing the drive, desire and willingness to increase the pace of improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of our public services.

For these reasons a range of local authority services are being looked at anew, including economic development. This function is being prioritised because it is recognised that a pro-active and strategic approach is required.

In the absence of an agreed framework decisions will be made in isolation. This would result in a piecemeal approach which will not secure the desired economic objectives for North Wales.

Hence the Local Authorities, with the Welsh Government, felt that the most appropriate and positive way to respond, and protect services that deliver real benefit to local communities, was to initiate a fundamental review of their economic development activities.

This review has been driven not just by a desire to achieve cost savings. This statement of intent reflects a commitment and details an approach to reshaping local services collaboratively, with a view to realising economies of scale and maximising the impact of scarce resource.

This has entailed a clear statement of regional needs and a rethinking of existing patterns of service delivery from first principles. The strategy set out here looks to then rebuild these services in the most cost effective manner, bearing in mind social needs, economic returns and the many inter-relationships that exist between local economies that comprise the region.

I believe, this approach offers the greatest opportunity for successful regeneration. Resources and policy will be evidenced based and focused squarely on the key challenges facing North Wales. In turn, achieving these ambitions has also necessitated reconsideration of the most appropriate governance structures for the region in the 21st century.

This framework will help to ensure that North Wales does not lose any ground in its ambition and objective 'to develop a diverse and high value economy which can provide a range of quality employment opportunities for its people'.

Relevant Councillor details

Report purpose

The purpose of this document is to identify how the six local authorities in North Wales can collaborate and realise the full potential of the regional economy and so create more and better employment opportunities for its people. It is now widely acknowledged that we need to get ourselves organised as local authorities, and also with key partners and stakeholders to realise this aim.

Collectively, we can provide some critical mass to:

1. Create jobs and improve skills
2. Increase efficiency and maximise the impact of current resources
3. Increase investment and enterprise in Wales.

We are committed to providing leadership and work with our partners to inform, inspire, influence and innovate to deliver on our core purpose and deliver the change required for the economy of North Wales.

This report sets out a strategic direction and priorities that will provide a focus for local authorities and its partners. We recognise more consideration is required in terms of governance arrangements to deliver these priorities and several options are under active consideration, although further debate with our partners is required before coming to a view. More detailed operational plans will be developed and will set out the actions and transformational projects required to achieve each strategic priority.

Achieving sustainable economic growth will require a range of approaches and interventions by local authorities, partners, businesses and the community. We will build on success whilst addressing the on-going challenges, particularly productivity levels which lag those of the UK, youth unemployment and the fragile nature of the more remote parts of the region. In moving forward it is also recognised that North Wales is made up of many local economies and that growth has not been evenly spread across the region. However, collectively we can address these challenges and deliver our ambitions for North Wales.

Our vision

'A confident and outward looking region with a diverse and high value economy providing a range of quality employment opportunities for its people'

This is a bold and transformational framework that holistically seeks to link evidence based needs with policy, delivery and governance structures, informed by evidence of economic return and good practice. It is a statement of intent not a detailed strategy providing a compelling strategic rationale for reconfiguring economic development services across North Wales as well as outlining the broad 'route-map' forward.

The case for change

Why is change required?

There is a compelling case for change and in many ways it can be argued that the recession and government's fiscal austerity programme have prompted changes which are perhaps long overdue.

The case is based on:

- The continuing deterioration in relative economic performance
- Evidence in relation to economic returns or the 'bangs for bucks'
- Recession and fiscal austerity
- Services are fragmented, disjointed, with duplication resulting in the best use of resources not being realised.

Regional disparities are growing, not reducing

- In the period 2000-2008, the UK economy grew by 50% and Wales by 42%. North Wales grew by only 36% and now has three of the poorest counties - Anglesey, Conwy and Denbighshire - in the UK.
- Objective 1 funding from Europe did little to arrest the decline. Even Gwynedd, which received more European funding per head than most in Wales, has seen its relative prosperity decline during the last few years.
- Despite the advantage of large companies such as Airbus and Toyota, Wrexham and Flintshire have grown by only 27% since 2000, which is the worst performance of any part of Wales.
- Productivity continues to fall further behind UK levels.
- Levels of youth unemployment are high throughout the region.

'We have to change our culture and way of working and we have to ensure that the public sector is arranged in the right way to support the local economy at a North Wales and a local level'.

Workshop conclusion held in collaboration with the North Wales Economic Forum (17-06-11).

Current policy challenges

A review of the evidence base provides a number of challenges to current policy approaches, namely:

- There is a mismatch between patterns of spend and the major challenges and opportunities facing the economy at a regional level.
- There is some duplication across the six authorities where greater collaboration would reduce costs.
- Spending is strongly influenced by the major funding streams which can 'skew' local resources and priorities (as well as being bureaucratic and inflexible).
- Evidence on economic returns contrast with current priorities and patterns of spend.
- There are a number of policy areas where impact could be increased through greater collaboration between the six local authorities.



Challenges and opportunities

North Wales has a unique cultural and environmental heritage providing a strong sense of community and identity. In part this is also a reflection of the peripherality and poor connectivity of many parts of the region. This is associated with its own economic challenges including:

- An unbalanced economy with an over-dependence on the public sector
- Few larger firms or corporates and more limited employment opportunities
- Low productivity and earnings
- The out-migration of younger often more qualified younger people
- High levels of economic inactivity.



Many of the challenges and opportunities which policy must address have also changed in quite fundamental ways in the past few years. These reflect growing concern over the environment, developments in technology, as well as the global financial crisis, recession and the sovereign debt problems.

New challenges include:

- Low levels of growth and job creation
- The squeeze on disposable incomes and associated falls in retail and consumer services spend
- Weaknesses in construction, housing and property markets
- The consolidation in the service sector
- High levels of youth unemployment.

Welsh Government aims to maximise:

'funding available to deliver effective, high quality and value for money regeneration activity across Wales'.

'the regenerative potential of all capital and revenue spend.'

Source: Welsh Government. A Framework for Regeneration Areas, October 2010.

A further outcome of the recession has been the sovereign debt problems and associated fiscal austerity programmes. Cuts to public spending provide a further challenge to the status quo. In short, more needs to be achieved with less.

However, while these challenges are considerable, there are a range of opportunities to be exploited:

- Depreciation of sterling and improved competitiveness of manufacturing in export markets
- The strong presence of manufacturing in the region including the investment by Airbus at Broughton
- The major investment in a replacement nuclear reactor at Wylfa
- The development of low carbon technologies and 'Energy Island' plans
- Developing and enhancing connectivity through improved broadband access and key infrastructure projects
- Tourism and the growth in overseas and domestic visitors also linked to sterling depreciation.



The outcomes desired

Some of the key impacts we aim to achieve for the North Wales economy are:

1. Increase productivity & growth by:

a) Reducing the gap between the regional and national annual growth rate in regional GVA; and b) the gap between those areas which are lagging behind the regional average growth rate and those performing more strongly.

2. Increase the number of jobs in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, knowledge based and local carbon sectors.

3. Increase inward investment from both domestic and international companies.

4. A stronger support sector to underpin the attractiveness of the region to new and expanding businesses.

5. Increase innovation and business start ups, provide effective support to growing companies and support improved productivity more generally.

6. Greater connectivity supporting business and employment growth and labour market efficiency.

7. Improve skills levels throughout the workforce particularly in those sectors where skill deficits are acute

8. Reduce the level of youth unemployment to below the UK average and increase economic activity of people currently outside the labour market.

9. Create a vibrant business base where companies can innovate and flourish and the region becomes a recognised place to do business.

Organisational changes required to deliver the desired outcomes

Although options for organisational change are discussed in more detail in the delivery section, it is important to highlight here that these changes are seen as key to delivering more effective policy and ultimately achieving better outcomes.

The proposed changes to governance arrangements and associated organisational changes will result in more strategic, integrated, aligned and responsive services and policies targeting increased investment & productivity.

The organisational changes are seen as integral to the overall strategy providing a basis for improving both efficiency and effectiveness through for example:

- Reducing the level of duplication and overlap
- Realising economies of scale
- Achieving greater critical mass and with it more potential to leverage wider resources and skills
- Enhanced strategic approach bringing greater potential for more focused and targeted approaches.

In short, within North Wales we are about to embark on a journey to meet head on the challenges that we face. This strategy sets out a route-map identifying the outcomes desired, the policies required to achieve these outcomes, as well as the mechanisms for delivering them.

However, the local authorities cannot do everything and it will also be important to engage other key public sector organisations as well as harnessing much more effectively the resources, skills and vision of the private sector.

Collectively, with an agreed vision and coupled with the opportunities offered by European Convergence funding, we can make a difference.

The strategy for change

What changes are required?

There are five major issues facing North Wales that will need to be addressed to deliver the outcomes outlined above.

Strategic Issue

Action Programmes

Economic leadership

- Intelligence
- Clear, strategic focus
- Capacity to deliver
- Exploring opportunities to resource regional development including European funding
- To develop and foster relationship with regional partners and deliver a 'Team North Wales' approach.

Rebalancing the economy to increase growth and productivity

- Supporting businesses and social enterprises to realise their growth aspirations
- Information & signposting
- Encouraging inward investment
- Supporting new start-ups
- Develop key sectors including advanced manufacturing, LCT, tourism, creative
- Supply chain support & development
- Promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership.

Addressing peripherality & improve our infrastructure

- Improving broadband access to ensure North Wales is a digitally well connected region
- Infrastructural improvements to encourage business growth and expansion
- Exploiting opportunities to develop a low carbon economy
- Advise and support communities and businesses to maximise the benefit of high speed digital services.

Upgrading the skills base, reducing inactivity & tackling youth unemployment

- Skills workforce development
- Addressing co-ordination 'failures'
- Improved intelligence and labour market planning
- Tackling youth unemployment
- Effectively targeting & tackling deprivation
- Building strong links across to health and education

Strategic Issue 1: Leadership

The Issue:

The duplication in current service provision, lack of co-ordination and strong leadership. The local authorities have come together with a view to taking the strategic priorities identified forward.

- 1.1 The consensus amongst the local authorities provides the basis for clear, strong and focused leadership.
- 1.2 The joint capacity to deliver continues to develop pace. In July Gwynedd Council, on behalf of the six local authorities, appointed a Project Co-ordinator. Task and Finish Groups have also been set up to progress work on the programme areas.
- 1.3 We will continue to explore with partners, Welsh Government and the EU innovative financing mechanisms for investment in the region's economic priorities. Current delivery arrangements have evolved over a long period and allow for a high level of collaboration. They will be reviewed to assess whether further efficiency savings can be made.
- 1.4 The significance of private sector involvement is recognised and will be taken forward as an integral part of the proposed governance plans.
- 1.5 Additionally, developing a credible leadership position in relation to the regional economy will require access to high quality research & intelligence.

Strategic Issue 2: Rebalancing the economy

The Issue:

The public sector is in many parts of the region a larger employer compared to the UK. There is a need to rebalance the economy through support for the growth of the private sector with a view to improving the range and quality of employment opportunities. This has wider ramifications in terms of increasing new firm formation rates and levels of entrepreneurialism, support for (high growth, low carbon technology and advanced manufacturing) businesses as well as addressing wider supply side constraints (finance, infrastructure, skills).

- 2.1 Task and Finish Groups have been set up to cover : information & signposting; inward investment; start-ups ; sector support; supply chain development; and general business support.
- 2.2 There are also two major opportunities:
 - The Airbus investment at Broughton, which makes Flintshire the LAD with the largest proportion of manufacturing employment of any in the UK; and
 - The commissioning of a replacement reactor for Wylfa and wider potential to develop low carbon technologies.
- 2.3 Models for collaboration in this sphere already exist. The local authorities already jointly deliver contracts notably FS4B. This provides a strong basis for taking forward work in this area as joint protocols and governance structures already exist.
- 2.4 A separate Task and Finish Group has been established for Inward Investment, a priority given Enterprise Zone designation in Anglesey and Deeside. Work to establish a virtual North Wales Investment Office has started with the website domain already registered.

Strategic Issue 3: Addressing peripherality through improved connectivity

The Issue:

This is an factor affecting much of rural North Wales, the north west of the region but especially Anglesey. The latter continues to exhibit many of the classic characteristics of a peripheral region, including a very narrow industrial base, low levels of entrepreneurship and low job density. Addressing the very poor performance of Anglesey is also important to the wider region.

3.1 Improved high bandwidth broadband infrastructure together with a demand stimulation programme for business can play a major role in overcoming some of the disadvantages arising from geographical peripherality; a major constraint on the region's development.

3.2 Previous mention has been made of the economic issues facing Anglesey where peripherality is a particular challenge. Here, there is the potential to address these the opportunities presented as a result of investment in a replacement nuclear reactor as well as development of the wider low carbon technology sectors.

3.3 Infrastructure requires on-going investment and renewal particular focused on our strategic bottlenecks, especially where these constrain private sector employment growth. This includes the existing Britannia bridge which is the only single carriageway section of the Trans European Road Network route E22 and acts as a significant bottleneck to commuter and holiday traffic.

3.4 We also propose working with local businesses and communities to increase their understanding and use of digital technologies.

3.5 There is also a particular need to improve connectivity to major employers - such as Airbus - and other areas of high employment density. This will help to ensure that the benefits to the regional economy are maximised and leakage reduced.

3.6 Tourism will help to address Strategic Issues 2 and 3. It remains a very significant area of core spending for local authorities and of course is vital to the economy of our remoter rural communities. In total local authority expenditure exceeds £3.7 million and employs 65 staff directly. There are however significant opportunities for streamlining activity. For example, there may be merit in reducing the number of marketing areas and tourism information centres. There are also efficiencies to be gained by realising the potential of new media for marketing purposes.

3.7 Integrally linked to rural development and tourism initiatives are the RDP funds. Hence, this might also be an opportune moment to relook at way in which these funds are delivered, together with our RDP partners. In addition to examining the potential for efficiency savings, we would also want to discuss the merits of targeting the funds on a needs basis (including notably the former mining communities of North East and North West Wales), as well as ensuring the funds are sufficiently flexible to support entrepreneurs and innovative ideas.



Strategic Issue 4: Upgrading the skills base, reducing economic inactivity rates and tackling youth unemployment

The Issue:

The issue of quality of employment as well as the more limited presence of higher level skills are noted together. This is because measures to tackle this (and hence of course the relatively low level of Gross Value Added per head), need to address both supply and demand components in order to ensure regional benefits are maximised.

Effective measures need to address the supply, demand and effective use of higher level of skills. This is likely to imply a strong role for both further and higher education colleges in the region as well as analysis of future supply of - and demand for - skills bearing in mind both demographic change and current curriculum provision.

It also emphasises the need to grow high value added industries including notably advanced manufacturing and low carbon technology sectors.

Finally, a further area where the region appears to face some common issues concerns that of high incapacity benefit levels generally and high levels of youth unemployment. This further suggests some engagement with the health and education sectors in tackling these issues.

4.1 The role of higher and further education in promoting business transformation and high level and value skills is of critical importance. We will continue to support Bangor and Glyndŵr Universities with the development of a strong business facing culture - including technology transfer, student placements, and ensuring the graduate needs of the major employers are met. We want to reinforce a culture of enterprise and creativity at all levels of skills and learning,

and to continue the growth in expansion of higher level skills attainment.

4.2 Our discussions with major employers underline the significance of skills and the shortages that are emerging in many parts of industry. Our ambition to rebalance the economy will be jeopardised unless we can ensure relevant skills are available.

4.3 However, in common with many other parts of the UK there appears to be little co-ordination between overall labour demand and employer requirements and labour supply. We will establish an on-going mechanism for the long term co-ordination of education and training, in relation to likely labour demand, including engagement with key regional businesses. This is particularly pertinent to North Wales in light of the major demand arising from the commissioning of a replacement nuclear, as well as the large number of apprentices employed by Airbus.

4.4 Youth unemployment has significantly increased across the nation and North Wales is no exception. The issues facing the UK and the Eurozone suggest to us that the pace of recovery will continue to be slow and protracted.

4.5 Youth unemployment is a major issue for North Wales. We therefore propose to establish a high level cross-organisational working group to consider: the current initiatives in place; the appropriateness of these initiatives in relation to the scale of the challenge; co-ordination failures and how these might be overcome in order to ensure a 'joined-up response'. In due course, the remit will extend to consider measures to tackle the high level of inactivity across the region.

Delivering the strategy

How will the changes be delivered?

Whilst the local authorities in North Wales working together more collaboratively lie at the heart of efforts to lead the delivery of the economic ambitions outlined here, success will depend on working effectively with our partners. This includes the North Wales Economic Forum, the private sector, higher and further education institutions, Welsh Government and the third sector will be vital if we are to deliver the ambition and vision outlined in this document. We must also make the most of the opportunities offered by Convergence, public and private sector funding.

In the short term a Management Board has been established to improve co-ordination and deliver change. However, it will also need to consider the most appropriate governance arrangements going forward. Presently three options are under consideration:

Option 1: Retain the Status Quo

Retaining the status quo has the advantage of working with established processes and structures – there would be no disruption under the 'business as usual' scenario. It would further retain a much higher level of local political control and responsiveness to local needs.

There is widespread agreement that to continue on a 'business as usual' basis is likely to result in an irrational allocation of resources in light of spending cuts both to local authority and wider public sector budgets. This risks: gaps in services, lack of focus on priority issues, reductions in spend on high return activities, fragmented activity and spend lacking 'critical mass'. All this would limit the impact leaving North Wales to continue to fall further behind.

Option 2: Management Board

A second option is to constitute a Management Board and Executive. This is relatively straightforward and it should be noted does not necessarily preclude formation of a Development company at some later date. It would also be a significant step forward in joint working compared to current arrangements.

The drawback of this option is that the Board to be representative may be large and unwieldy and too open to local political priorities at the expense of true strategic direction. It might also leave relatively cumbersome delivery arrangements in place.

Option 3: Development Company

The third option to form a Development Company provides an independent and legally constituted body that would also be able to lever in further resources and bid for contracts. It might be easier to ensure that the private sector is engaged at Board level. There would be a high level of transparency and accountability in relation to objectives.

The drawbacks of this approach are that it would represent a significant and decisive shift in arrangements. In the short term this could cause some difficulties in continuing to meet current service delivery targets. It may be more complex to broker such an arrangement between six authorities, especially as it would result in some reduced level of political influence.

The key point to make is that whichever option is selected, the strategy is already in place and will shape the work of all partners in North Wales to the same vision and outcomes that in time will transform the North Wales economy.

