

Western Gateway Partnership Board meeting

Tuesday 16th July 2024 10:00-12:00

In person (Arup, Bristol) and on Teams

<p>Attendees</p>	<p>Sarah Williams-Gardener (Chair) (SWG) Cllr Mark Hawthorne, Gloucestershire County Council (Vice Chair) (MH) Cllr Huw Thomas, Cardiff City Council (Vice-Chair) (HT) Cllr Dimitri Batrouni, Newport City Council (DB) Cllr Tony Dyer, Bristol City Council (TD) Cllr Darren Price, Carmarthenshire County Council (DP) Cllr Rowena Hay, Cheltenham Borough Council (RH) Cllr David Hopkins, Swansea Council (DH) Kristy Tillman, Swansea Council (KT) Cllr Ian Boulton, South Gloucestershire Council (IB) Cllr Rob Stewart, Swansea Council (RS) Russell Frith, Wiltshire County Council (RF) Andy Cornelius, South Gloucestershire Council (AC) Joe Coyne, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (JC) Sally Edgington, Department for Business and Trade (SE) Ruth Dooley, Gloucestershire Economic Growth Board (RD) Ben Pritchard, Arup (BP) Hillary Marshall, West of England Combined Authority (HM) Jo Jenkinson, GW4 Alliance (JJ) Andy Thomas, Bath & North East Somerset Council (AT) Denise Gonzalez, Department for Business and Trade (DG) Naomi Lynch, Bristol City Council (NLY) Jonathan Day, Cardiff City Council (JD)</p>
<p>Apologies</p>	<p>Cllr Claire Young, South Gloucestershire Council (CY) Prof. Ian White, University of Bath (IW) Ian Edwards, The Celtic Collection and ICC Wales (IE) Mayor Dan Norris, West of England Combined Authority (DN) Richard Bonner, Atkins-Realis (RB) Cllr Anthony Hunt, Torfaen County Borough Council (AH) Cllr Mary Ann Brocklesby, Monmouthshire County Council (MAB) Cllr Richard Clewer, Wiltshire Council (RC) Cllr Robert Francis-Davies, Swansea Council (RFD) Cllr Jim Robbins, Swindon Borough Council (JR) Cllr Mike Bell, North Somerset Council (MB) Colan Mehaffey, Cardiff Capital Region (CM) Cllr Kevin Guy, Bath & North East Somerset (KG) Geth Williams, Wales Office (GW) Huw Bryer, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (HB) Oliver Rooke, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (OR) Tom Taylor, Department for Business and Trade (TT) Stephen Peacock, West of England Combined Authority (SP) Gareth Newell, Cardiff City Council (GN)</p>

	Paul Orders, Cardiff City Council (PO)
In attendance	John Wilkinson, Secretariat (JW) Steph Jary, Secretariat (SJ) James Cooke, Secretariat (JC) Sara Pritchard, Secretariat (SP) William Mansfield, Secretariat (WM) Billy Davis, Secretariat/GW4 (BD) Nicola Lomax, Secretariat (NL) Fiona Williams. Secretariat (FW)
Chair	Sarah Williams-Gardener
Minutes	Nicola Lomax
Venue	Arup, Bristol
Start time	10:00 am
Finish time	12:00 am

Item	Summary of the discussion held and decisions made	Deadline
1.0	Welcome, apologies for absence and declaration of conflicts of Interest	
	<p>SWG thanked the Board members for attending and Arup for kindly hosting the meeting.</p> <p>SWG welcomed two new members to the Board, Cllr Tony Dyer, the new Leader of Bristol City Council and Cllr Dimitri Batrouni, the new Leader of Newport Council.</p> <p>SWG extended her welcome to Ruth Dooley who re-joins the board as the Gloucestershire representative of their new Economic Growth Board.</p> <p>SWG noted that this will be the final meeting for two board members. Professor Ian White, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Bath, is stepping down from his role at the University. Cllr Claire Young, Leader of South Gloucestershire Council has been elected as the MP for Thornbury and Yate. SWG expressed her thanks to both for their dedication and support during their tenures on the Board.</p> <p>No new conflicts of interest were declared. Apologies for absence were noted.</p>	
2.0	Minutes of the last meeting, action tracker and matters arising	
	<p>The actions from all previous meetings have been collated into an action tracker (See Item 2 Partnership Board Action Log for further details).</p> <p>Questions relating to inclusive growth and how we will articulate this around the business plan and how the WG fits in with other local/sub-regional structures were covered as part of the Director's update. The governance actions were covered within the Governance update.</p> <p>JW provided an update on the remaining open actions, all of which are in progress.</p>	

<p>An amendment to the minutes of the last meeting was noted to reflect SWG's concern about future funding for the Partnership. She emphasized her commitment to retaining and supporting the Secretariat team as a top priority.</p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and no further matters were arising.</p>	
<p>3.0 Director's update</p>	
<p>(For full details see paper Item 3: Director's update)</p> <p>JW reported that the balanced scorecard updates (see item 6) demonstrate that good progress continues to be made against our priorities.</p> <p>Since the last Board meeting, significant focus has been on the successful delivery of the Western Gateway presence at UKREiiF. As part of our reflections on the event, it was felt that the Pavilion was too busy at times which prevented some one-to-one conversations with investors. The team is using feedback from this year to improve our approach to next year's event.</p> <p>SWG noted the rain was probably a significant contributing factor to the crowded nature of the tent and, otherwise, the facility including the outdoor area, would have been sufficient.</p> <p>As a result of the General Election, the Convention for the Western Gateway was rescheduled for 17th October. JW expressed his thanks to the team for all the work they have carried out to get over £100k in sponsorship (compared to £7.5k last year). It is a sign of the value placed in the Partnership by the private sector and demonstrates our ability to convene at scale.</p> <p>We continue to be approached by organisations who see value in our convening power and wish to work with us to deliver benefits for the Western Gateway. JW provided an update on three new areas of activity:</p> <p>The Western Forest</p> <p>Following agreement from the Board we collaborated in a DEFRA bid (England only) to deliver a new National Forest. The Forest of Avon Trust are leading on the bid and JW provided an update to the Board.</p> <p>IB asked if the Secretariat could share a plan of the proposed Western Forest locations. WM noted that it covers most of the WG English geography, with a focus on joining up existing areas of forest. WM will share a map with the Board. MH expressed his tentative support for the bid but is keen to receive reassurance that the project will not compromise Gloucestershire County Council's planning targets and obligations. JW agreed to further investigate this. JW asked if the Board are happy for us to continue to engage with the bid as the team will need feedback and letters of support quickly to meet their next deadline.</p> <p>Floating Offshore Wind (FLOW)</p> <p>JW noted that we have been approached by the Crown Estate, the South West Infrastructure Partnership and other partners to play a convening role in exploring the economic opportunities from FLOW in the Celtic Sea. We are exploring what role</p>	

Western Gateway could play within the capacity we have to develop a Western Gateway and Great South West vision for FLOW.

HT asked what the implications are for offshore wind in light of the new government's committed to onshore wind.

JC explained that we are at the start of our journey with FLOW. The Secretariat felt it was important to explore this area because of the scale of interest from industry and partners. It is felt that the announcement about onshore wind could only magnify the interest and opportunities.

SJ noted that the WG region potentially has the same onshore wind capacity as Scotland so a key question will be to understand what further capacity the area has for onshore wind.

DP noted that a great deal of work has already been undertaken within Pembrokeshire and Neath Port Talbot Councils on FLOW, including work with the Crown Estate. It is important to avoid duplication of work and for the Secretariat to connect with the key officers who are undertaking this work. SWG noted it is in our interests to make sure we have a joined-up approach to this work. DP will provide details to JC.

MH suggested that many local authorities have already done a great deal of scoping work in relation to onshore wind and are aware of the planning implications for these developments. TD added that many local authorities, such as Bristol City Council, will have already identified what the most appropriate forms of renewable energy are for specific areas. Grid capacity was a key issue that was raised at the recent South West Councillors AGM.

JC requested that anyone with expertise or useful information on FLOW or on-shore wind forward it to the Secretariat team. We will also engage local authorities on this topic when we reconvene the low carbon project officer group.

SSE Energy Solutions

JW shared an update on SSE Energy Solutions. They are one of the largest suppliers of energy infrastructure in the UK. They have agreed to be our headline for the Convention and we are now in discussions with them to develop a longer-term partnership to support the delivery of £bn's of investment into the Western Gateway area.

JW updated the Board on budget and staffing. JW reported that six out of thirteen funding partners have agreed to approve the underwriting, discussed at the last Board meeting, at the requested level. This ensures financial security for the first quarter of next year. The budget remains tight but on track in terms of spend.

The Secretariat remains fully staffed and JW expressed his thanks to the team for all the hard work they continue to do. The Partnership remains in the position of having no certainty of funding after 31st March 2025 so the Secretariat's ability to maintain a fully staffed team remains one of our highest risks.

<p>HT enquired if we are now able to reassure Secretariat staff, given that we have received underwriting confirmation. JW clarified that this assurance only covers the first quarter of next year. While this enables us to book necessary events and make deposits for UK-REiiF, it does not allow us to provide long-term assurance to staff.</p> <p>Decision: The Board confirmed they are happy for the Secretariat to progress conversations on the Western Forest bid, subject to the caveats and information requested.</p> <p>Decision: The Board agreed that the Secretariat should continue to work with SSE to explore investment in the region.</p> <p>Decision: The Board agreed that the Secretariat should continue to explore opportunities related to FLOW, ensuring that any initiatives are coordinated with ongoing regional activities.</p> <p>Action 1: Secretariat to provide further details to the Board about the proposed locations as part of the Western Forest bid and further clarification about any planning implications.</p> <p>Action 2: DP to provide contact details for officers working on FLOW in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire.</p>	
<p>4.0 Governance update</p>	
<p>(For full details please see Item 4 Governance paper and Appendix 1 Proposed Steering Committees 2024).</p> <p>JC provided a governance update. We are finalising the minor updates to the Constitution and the Accountable Body Terms of Reference, as agreed at the last Board meeting and outlined in update paper. The Secretariat will circulate these updated documents for agreement following the meeting.</p> <p>At the last Board meeting, we discussed options for a new Steering Committee governance to align with the Business Plan, ensuring our committees are agile, fit for purpose, and equipped with the right expertise</p> <p>The proposal presented in Appendix 1 seeks to re-align the steering committees with the Business Plan whilst accounting for the live programme of activity. The Secretariat would welcome the Board’s feedback and volunteers for steering committee membership.</p> <p>SWG thanked the Secretariat for building upon the governance conversations at the last board meetings.</p> <p>IB noted that South Gloucestershire would like to be represented on the Innovation Steering Committee.</p> <p>IB asked about the officer groups and how the Secretariat plan to ensure they have the correct representation on these groups. What is the review process for this?</p>	

	<p>JC explained that the majority of the officer groups are already in place. One exception is the Energy Officers Group which due to resource constraints was difficult for the Secretariat to maintain. This group is open to all local authorities.</p> <p>How we provide the right officer support for the cyber/tech officer group is still be defined and the Secretariat would welcome suggestions.</p> <p>JC made an additional point about the Finance, Employment and Appointments Steering Committee. We need to ensure we have the right balance in the group from a EDI perspective, particularly following the merging of the LEPs/Growth Boards and CJsCs. The Secretariat would welcome any suggestions on this.</p> <p>SWG explained that following Cllr Jane Mudd’s resignation, there is a vacancy for a Vice-Chair. Given the new political make-up of the pan-region, it was agreed that we need a Labour Vice-Chair and for geographic balance, the chair should come from a local authority in Wales. Cllr Huw Thomas has been nominated and is willing to become the Vice-Chair.</p> <p>Decision: The Board voted unanimously for the election of Cllr Huw Thomas as Vice-Chair.</p> <p>SWG welcomed Cllr Thomas to his new role. SWG noted that the Board has previously discussed the value in having multiple ‘Vice-Chairs’ to reflect the scale and political make-up of the Partnership.</p> <p>MH agreed that the principle of having a spread across the political parties is important and one constant that has held the Partnership together has been cross-party representation and collaboration. MH welcomed the appointment of Cllr Thomas.</p> <p>HT noted that he has been involved with the Partnership for a long time and is looking forward to representing the Partnership as Vice-Chair. It is important we reflect on how we can represent the wider political make-up of the region going forward, in Wales and England and we should consider how to show that diversity in the Vice-Chair role.</p> <p>MH pointed out that models, such as those used by the LGA, exist that we could use to make sure we are covering all political persuasions.</p> <p>SWG agreed that representing the broader political landscape is important and we want to ensure everyone is represented without the vice-chair governance becoming too unwieldy. It was agreed that this is a conversation we will take forward into the next Board meeting.</p> <p>Action 3: Secretariat to circulate the amended Constitution and Accountable Body Terms of Reference for sign-off by the Board.</p>	
5.0	Plan for Sustainable Growth	

(For full details please see Item 5 Plan for Sustainable Growth)

SJ provided some background to the development of the Plan for Sustainable Growth. Two pieces of independent research, the Independent Economic Review and the EY Investment Report, have underpinned our reform of our business plan and the development of the balanced scorecard.

One of the key findings from the EY report was that there is a significant gap in investment in the region. EY have recommended that a single Economic Narrative for the Western Gateway area is produced and utilised consistently when talking about this area, its potential and its needs. Their research suggests investment goes to where there is a clear articulation of what an area “is”.

SJ outlined the aim to create an Economic Narrative in partnership with the Board and wider stakeholders which will be at a sufficiently high level to include the whole area, but with enough detail to provide a strong outline, structure and a clear identity for the area within the Western Gateway. The Secretariat are committed to ensuring the approach and plan enhances and supports individual area plans whilst providing a cohesive whole for our area.

The Plan for Sustainable Growth can be considered the “little cousin” of the Economic Narrative. This is intended to be a simpler, shorter set of positive suggestions and asks of Government and will operate more as a manifesto than a detailed plan. The aim will be to capitalise on the opportunities presented within the first 100 days of a new government.

IB asked how the economic narrative will align with the government’s aspirations for growth. SJ noted that from what we have seen in the Labour manifesto and from emerging policy, there is strong alignment with our emerging economic narrative. The IER highlighted five key sectors that are strong in the region and these align with the government’s priorities.

DB expressed his support for a high-level cohesive strategy and noted the need to make sure our message is clear, that we have broad political consensus so we can drive growth across the region. It is important we have a single voice and a clear message to both Government and business.

SWG reflected on the experiences at UK-REiIF and for investors coming into the UK, politics is often irrelevant, it is about a clear message and a clear view on where the investment opportunities lie.

TD noted that Bristol is currently working on their economic strategy, as discussed already with the Secretariat. TD pointed out that we need to make sure we can link in with the government’s emerging industrial strategy and local growth plans. We will also need to understand how the narrative could link in with WECA’s regional growth strategy.

SWG asked SE for her view on this from a civil service perspective. SE noted that it is very early days and departments are working with new ministers to understand how manifesto commitments translate into policy. There is a sense of significant,

	<p>fast-paced change. Relationships will be key and there will be a need to use all political assets in order to get your voice heard.</p> <p>The government’s announcement on devolution within England was discussed following Angela Rayner’s letter to local authorities. The consensus across the Board was that there is a clear direction of travel towards greater devolution but further detail and frameworks are needed.</p> <p>RD reflected on the work previously undertaken on local industrial strategies which has been drawn upon to produce the economic growth plan for Gloucestershire. A key consideration has been to look at what we have and ensure it is aligned with government, along with any funding bids or additional asks of government.</p> <p>SJ emphasised that the Economic Narrative and the Plan for Sustainable Growth are intended to be collaboratively developed with input from all local authority partners. The Secretariat welcomes contributions and is committed to working closely with all partners</p> <p>SWG thanked the Secretariat for their comprehensive work on this.</p> <p>Decision: The Board agreed that on the approach for developing an Economic Narrative for the area within the Western Gateway region.</p>	
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Progress against the balanced scorecard and deep dive on the Severn Estuary Commission</p>	
	<p>(For full details see paper Item 6 balanced scorecard activity update)</p> <p>JC gave an overall update on progress against the actions in the Business Plan. He noted the inclusion of a new activity in relation to FLOW.</p> <p>UK-REiiF was discussed and the Board agreed that in light of the funding partner assurances previously discussed, the Secretariat should make a deposit for next year’s event on similar terms to this year.</p> <p>HT requested that we consider our objectives and look at what we want to achieve as part of our attendance at UK-REiiF. JC acknowledged this.</p> <p>JC noted that at each Board meeting we will provide a deep dive on one of the projects.</p> <p>WM provided an update on the Severn Estuary Commission work programme since its launch in March.</p> <p>The Secretariat have been working towards a number of key deliverables since the launch; defining the Commission’s work programme; ongoing stakeholder engagement and relationship building; appointment of consultant teams to carry out the work programmes and securing additional resource.</p> <p>A Call for Information was sent directly to 224 contacts across a wide range of organisations identified by the initial Evidence Base and Framework, and</p>	

contributions from the Commission. We received a wide range of responses from organisations such as The Crown Estate, Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, Historic England, Cadw, National Energy System Operator, Local Authorities, DfT, academia, scheme developers, and individuals.

Following a Request for Proposals, several candidates were invited to interview for the Environment and Socio-economic work packages. The consortium of WSP, APEM, and Tresor Consulting were appointed to the Environment Work Package. This work package will examine the baseline environmental condition of the Severn Estuary and in the broadest terms look at how tidal range would impact the Severn, taking future considerations such as climate change into account.

Hardisty Jones, Oxford Economics, and Arcadis were appointed to the Socio-economic Work Package. This work package will look at the socio-economic impacts of developing tidal range within the Severn, examining supply chain, skills and labour impacts.

Over the coming months, the Secretariat and Commissioners will work with the consultants to develop the baseline information utilising the existing evidence base and responses to the Call for Information. Targeted engagement on specific topics will be undertaken to develop this data further.

Larger scale stakeholder engagement will be undertaken in the Autumn months to test this baseline information and develop it further, particularly focusing on ensuring the outcomes are stakeholder led.

We are currently in discussion with the Offshore Renewable Energy and Energy Systems Catapults on delivering the Energy work package with input from The Crown Estate, NESO and DESNZ. This work package will consider the question of “What are the impacts of tidal range on the energy system, compared to other proposed net zero options in the mix?”.

The Commission will also examine the financial and governance aspects of developing tidal range in the Severn Estuary. The Commission Chair is continuing to define this work and we are still look for a Commissioner to lead this work. SWG asked the Board to look at their networks for an infrastructure finance expert who may be able to support the Commission.

The Secretariat have signed a MOU with the Crown Estate who are providing funding towards the Commission’s work and are providing in-kind contributions of expertise. This is in recognition of the alignment between the Crown Estate’s work and the Commission and is based on the agreement that the Commission has been established to provide independent, impartial, expert advice.

The Chair has engaged extensively with individuals relevant to the work such as Charles Hendry, Sir John Armitt, key academics, and many others previously involved in this topic.

	<p>We are watching policy developments from the new Government closely as there are indications that they view tidal range more positively than the previous government. The Commission plan to write to key Ministers within the UK government and their Welsh equivalents to provide a briefing and request introductory meetings.</p> <p>DB thanked WM for the work done to date and noted that it will be important to have a plan in place to carry the Commission’s recommendations forward as we will need to move quickly.</p> <p>TD recommended that the Commission contact Kerry McCarthy as she is working under Ed Miliband at DESNZ. He noted Bristol City Council’s place on the Oversight Group and is keen to continue to support the Commission’s work.</p> <p>HT reflected on a positive Oversight Group meeting yesterday. He reiterated his point that the Commission have been set challenging timescales in order to conclude their work by March 2025. The Oversight Group aim to meet with Andrew Garrad in early autumn to assess progress against the timescales.</p> <p>IB requested that it would be helpful to have an update on the Commission in written form.</p> <p>SJ reminded the Board that the Commission is independent. The Commission’s recommendations will be based on the review of the available evidence and we need to be prepared that they may find that it is not feasible to develop tidal range in the Severn Estuary. It is important that the Commission’s independence is maintained.</p> <p>JW noted that we also need to be prepared for an outcome where there is a solution. The question remains about who would take the Commission’s recommendations on to the next stage and it may be prudent to consider this.</p> <p>SWG noted that a huge amount of work has been summarised and thanked the Commissioners and the Secretariat team for all their work on this.</p> <p>Decision: The Board agreed that in light of the funding partner assurances previously discussed, the Secretariat should make a deposit for next year’s UK-REiIF.</p> <p>Action 4: Secretariat to book a place at next year’s UK-REiIF.</p> <p>Action 5: Secretariat to provide a written update to the Board on the Severn Estuary Commission.</p>	
7.0	Post election wash-up	
	<p>BD provide an updated on the Secretariat’s activities during the general election and reflections on what a new government means for the Partnership.</p> <p>Although we were bound by pre-election period rules, a candidate information pack was produced and sent to all prospective parliamentary candidates. We received a number of positive responses and requests for further information or follow-up meetings.</p>	

<p>The Western Gateway region has become a more politically diverse region following the general election with all five parties represented, which broadly aligns with the national picture. A significant number of MPs in the region (52%) are new MPs so engagement will be key and there is an opportunity to build good relationships from the outset.</p> <p>We have a number of Labour Ministers in our region and since the election, we have written to all Ministers with a briefing and invited them to our Convention. We have also written to all MPs in the region and requested briefing meetings and have received several positive responses.</p> <p>We are working with Public Affairs Company (PAC) on an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) strategy so we can utilise the APPG to its fullest value. Jessica Morden, depending upon on her new appointment, may continue to Chair the APPG.</p> <p>We are committed to attendance at the Labour and Conservative Party Conferences and will obtain delegate spaces at the other conferences to ensure we have a presence.</p> <p>We are expecting more detail on devolution and the government’s industrial strategy and what this means for the Partnership following the King’s Speech.</p> <p>BD noted that we will advise Board members if we are having conversations with MPs/Ministers within their areas so we can ensure we have a joined-up, collaborative approach. BD noted that if Board members are having similar conversations, we are happy to provide briefings where appropriate.</p> <p>DB asked whether our relationships are developed with officials within the civil service.</p> <p>SJ noted we have good relationships with most government departments but we don’t have all the relationships we need and are actively engaging to form those relationships. It is important to have a number of routes into government departments so we welcome any support from the Board in order to do this.</p> <p>SWG noted how quickly the government are working which is having a significant impact on the civil service. Clarity and speed in our messaging and asks of government will be key.</p> <p>TD noted that two local MPs elected, Carla Denyer and Damon Egan have long experience of local government. BCC are looking to organise an event where those MPs can meet city partners so this may be an opportunity for engagement.</p>	
<p>8.0 Chair’s reflections</p>	
<p>SWG reflected on the truly collaborative nature of the Board and our partners. There is a collective sense of this being a key moment in time, particularly with a new government, to work together and get the region the recognition it deserves. There is a real opportunity for growth.</p>	

<p>SWG reflected on how the Pan-Regional Partnerships are working closely together, alongside the Mayoral Combined Authorities and there is a growing recognition of the value of PRPs across the country.</p> <p>SWG noted that the Secretariat team work very hard despite the funding uncertainties and it remains her number one priority to secure a guarantee for their roles as soon as possible. We need to have further conversations about the financial sustainability of the Partnership and these are conversations we will bring back to the Board in due course.</p>	
<p>9.0 Partner updates</p>	
<p>There were no partner updates.</p>	
<p>10.0 AOB</p>	
<p>Time and date of the next meeting: 28th October 2024. DB generously offered to host the next Board meeting in Newport.</p> <p>SWG expressed her thanks to the Secretariat team for their comprehensive preparations for the Board meeting and thanked the Board for their time and valuable contributions today.</p>	