

A civic welcome was given by Cllr Dave Roberts, Mayor of Barrow in Furness Borough Council.

1. Attendance and apologies

Attendance

Cllr E. Watts	Acting Chair
S. Fothergill	National Secretariat
J. Dixon	National Secretariat
P. O'Mara	National Secretariat
D. Parry	National Secretariat
B. Cowley	Knowsley
Cllr J. Greer	Knowsley
Cllr K. Cunliffe	Wigan
N. Sherwood	Wigan
Cllr P. Kendall	Allerdale
A Davarey	St Helens
P. Greatorex	Observer
Cllr L. McGuire	St Helens
Cllr T. O'Neill	Warrington
Cllr M. Grant	North Lincolnshire
Cllr L. Wenger	Stoke-on-Trent
Cllr S Manion	Dover
Cllr P. Ansell	Cannock Chase
C. Hunton	Stoke-on-Trent
Cllr E. Blake	Newcastle-u-Lyme
Cllr K. Jackson	Staffordshire Moorlands
L. Farr	North Lincolnshire
Cllr K. Knight	Doncaster
T. O'Connell	Rotherham
Cllr S. Wright	Rotherham
Cllr G. Whelbourn	Rotherham
Cllr W. Mordue	Doncaster
Cllr W. Eckhardt	North Lincolnshire
D. Hewet	East Ayrshire
T. Waiting	BAE Barrow
Cllr E. Rowbotham	Kent CC
P. Huck	Barrow
H. Knowles	Furness Enterprise
A. Laing	Durham CC
Cllr A. Napier	Durham CC
A. Forster	Durham CC
Cllr D. Ledger	Northumberland CC
P. Slater	Alliance Wales

L. Watson	Redcar & Cleveland
Cllr W. Ayre	Redcar & Cleveland
Cllr R. Goddard	Redcar & Cleveland

Apologies

T. Rawsterne	Nottinghamshire CC
Cllr A. Haynes	Nottinghamshire CC
Cllr S. Carol	Nottinghamshire CC
D. Heggarty	Flintshire CC
Cllr G. Beurskins	West Lothian
G. Watson	Cannock Chase
Cllr S. Bainbridge	North Lincolnshire
Cllr S. Anginotti	Sheffield
Cllr J. Kelly	East Ayrshire
Cllr H. Wormstrup	Copeland
B. Hill	Dover
Cllr C. Hibberd	Kent CC
Cllr G. Dunning	Redcar & Cleveland
Cllr R. Wellington	Torfaen
Cllr J. Marshall	Torfaen

2. Minutes of the National General Meeting of 13 March 2009

2.1. It was noted that Cllr Robertson (Fife) had attended the meeting but was not recorded in the minutes. It was agreed to correct this. The minutes were then agreed at a correct record and there were no matters arising.

3. Letter from retiring Chair

3.1. A letter had been received from John Devon, the former National Chair thanking everyone for their kind word and gifts on his retirement. Cllr Ledger, (Northumberland) took the opportunity to comment on the valued contribution of the outgoing Chair and wished him well.

4. Worklessness review

4.1. The Alliance had been involved in intense lobbying of ministers in advance of the Budget to support recommendations in the *Worklessness Review* which had been Chaired by Cllr Steve Houghton, Leader of Barnsley MBC. In particular, support for a Challenge Fund for short-term job creation had been the focus in letters to ministers. Exchanges of correspondence on this accompanied the agenda item.

4.2. In discussion, comments were made about the lack of up-to-date figures on the labour market and the difficulty obtaining a true picture of the impact of the recession in Alliance areas.

4.3. It was agreed that the Secretariat should prepare a briefing note on this matter and circulate it to all Alliance members.

5. Audit Commission event: report back

5.1. An event had taken place in Doncaster on 17 March and an assessment by the Secretariat was given to the Executive meeting. The findings of the Audit Commission report continued to provide good ammunition for the Alliance. They could provide a key tool to help the Alliance engage with government departments on worklessness, skills and health inequalities.

6. Engaging government departments

6.1. The need to build good working relationships with all relevant government departments was the focus of this report. The Audit Commission Report had highlighted where regeneration was at its weakest in former coalfield areas and this was also the case for most older industrial areas. Engagement of DWP, DIUS and the DoH were vital. It was decided to seek the assistance of the DCLG Permanent Secretary to promote better cross departmental working.

7. Future of EU funding

7.1. The Alliance had taken an initial position on the future of EU Structural Funds and associated State Aids for the period post-2013 at the National Executive in January 2009. Two officers from the Secretariat had held a preliminary meeting with government officials at BERR on 21 April.

7.2. The discussions from that meeting were relayed to the Executive. It was evident that there were still a number of problems with the current round of funding and responding to the recession. Specific proposal for funding post 2013 had not developed yet but the position of UK government on re-nationalisation of Structural Funds was a key element in its view on the overall EU Budget published in *Global Europe – A Vision for a 21st Century Budget*.

7.3. Channels of communications were now open with BERR officials on both Structural Funds and State Aids and further meetings are planned as specific proposals begin to emerge.

8. Steel issues

8.1. In consultation with MPs, Corus and the steel trade unions, the Alliance had developed a position to take to the government at the 'Steel Summit' planned for 14 May with the Secretary of State, Lord Mandelson.

8.2. Further meetings had been sought with a BERR minister and officials but this was not now expected until after 14 May.

8.3. Cllr Ayre reported on the precarious position of Teesside Cast Products and the possibility of over 2000 job losses.

8.4. The key medium-to-long-term issue for the future of the steel industry lie with the manufacturing sector. It was agreed it was important to develop this aspect of the Alliance's agenda.

9. Presentation: Barrow in Furness

9.1. Harry Knowles, Chief Executive of Furness Enterprise gave a presentation on the work of the organisation and that of Barrow Borough Council in the area of regeneration and jobs

9.2. There was a comprehensive discussion and comments were made on the benefits of sub-regional partnerships and the positive role of Barrow Borough Council.

10. Sub-National Review: up-date

10.1. It was becoming apparent that progress towards implementing proposals in the Sub-National Review (SNR) could be potentially de-railed by legislative difficulties in the House of Lords. Regions were asked to report on progress in their areas.

10.2. A number of regions (Yorkshire & Humber, North West and Midlands & South) reported that the structures for regional and sub-regional governance were in place but the decision making process on strategies and funding had not really begun.

10.3. There was a concern amongst a number of representatives that the SNR may come to nothing, especially as it was expected that Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) would be disbanded by any future Conservative administration.

10.4. It was decided to continue to monitor developments closely.

11. Regeneration framework: up-date

11.1. In July 2008 the Westminster Government published a new *Regeneration Framework* as a consultation exercise to which the Alliance responded. However, mainly due to the pressures of the recession, it would appear there has been some re-thinking by Government.

11.2. The draft revised framework, for example, no longer considers mapping for regeneration a priority. The lack of formal maps for regeneration need not necessarily result in reduced funding for Alliance areas and may be of benefit to some. It was therefore decided to note developments and assess the final revised *Regeneration Framework* when it is published.

12. Wales IB conference and report

12.1. Preparations for an event on Incapacity Benefit (IB), organised jointly with the Bevan Foundation, were conveyed to the meeting.

12.2. A report on IB had been commissioned by Alliance Wales from Sheffield Hallam University and this would provide the keynote presentation at the event. Plans for the use of this report and its wider distribution in Wales were agreed.

13. Scottish Parliament

13.1. A successful meeting had taken place on 25 March in the Scottish Parliament at which it was agreed to formally set up a Cross Party Working Group on Industrial Communities. It was expected that an inaugural meeting would take place before the summer recess.

14. National Audit Office

14.1. The National Audit Office (NAO) is carrying out an audit of government initiatives towards coalfield regeneration in England. Work is at a preliminary stage. Four areas have been identified for in depth research: East Durham, Pontefract/Castleford, Wigan; Mansfield/Bolsover.

14.2. It was decided to endorse the Secretariat's ongoing co-operation with the NAO and ask member authorities directly involved to take note.

15. Homes and Communities Agency

15.1. Senior personnel from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and CLG had visited North Derbyshire at the invitation of the Alliance.

15.2. The HCA focus had changed significantly due to the recession. A proposed roundtable meeting to focus on the next Comprehensive Spending Review was postponed to allow more time to assess the changing situation.

15.3. It was agreed to continue to pursue the roundtable meeting proposal and that the Policy Advisory Group should discuss work with the HCA with view to bringing a report to the July national meeting.

16. LGA Annual Conference

16.1. In order to raise the profile of the Alliance amongst potential local authority members the Alliance outgoing Chair Cllr Devon had agreed to that there should be an exhibition stand at the Local Government Association Conference in Harrogate from 30 June to 2 July.

16.2. The meeting agreed to endorse this decision and representatives who planned to attend were asked help promote the work of the Alliance at the event.

16.3. Cllr O'Neill (Warrington) encouraged elected Members to actively participate in LGA elections to try to achieve better representation for Alliance areas.

17. Skills: up-date on progress

17.1. The Secretariat was liaising with Dave Anderson MP, Chair of the All Party Coalfield Group of MPs to try to organise an event in Westminster to promote the skills report *What a Waste*. Dave Anderson MP had invited the Secretary of State, John Denham MP. An Early Day Motion (EDM) on skills had also been drafted.

18. Health: update on progress

18.1. Progress in developing the health inequalities campaign in England, Scotland and Wales was reported to the meeting. It was agreed that key element in this would be to build working relationship with senior officials in the Department of Health (see agenda item 6).

19. EUR-ACOM Executive report back

19.1. The substantive items on the EUR-ACOM Executive in Brussels on 16 April were reported on. These included: EU Structural funding; the *Prospects* exchange of experiences project; a minewater project; election of a delegate from Spain to the position of EUR-ACOM Treasurer.

20. Regional reports

20.1. The sub-region of Kent reported on the problem of VAT on capital projects for Coal Industry Welfare Organisation (CISWO) sites. It was agreed that the Alliance should explore with CISWO if it was possible to reach a national solution on this.

20.2. Each other region indicated that all matters had been covered in the main agenda.

21. Any other business

21.1. The meetings attention was drawn to a new organisation – the Clean Coal Coalition. It was decided to discuss this matter at the next Policy Advisory Group meeting.

21.2. The Chair took the opportunity to wish everyone good luck in the forthcoming local elections and closed the meeting.