



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

A Shared Mineral Planning Service

Collaborative working in North Wales

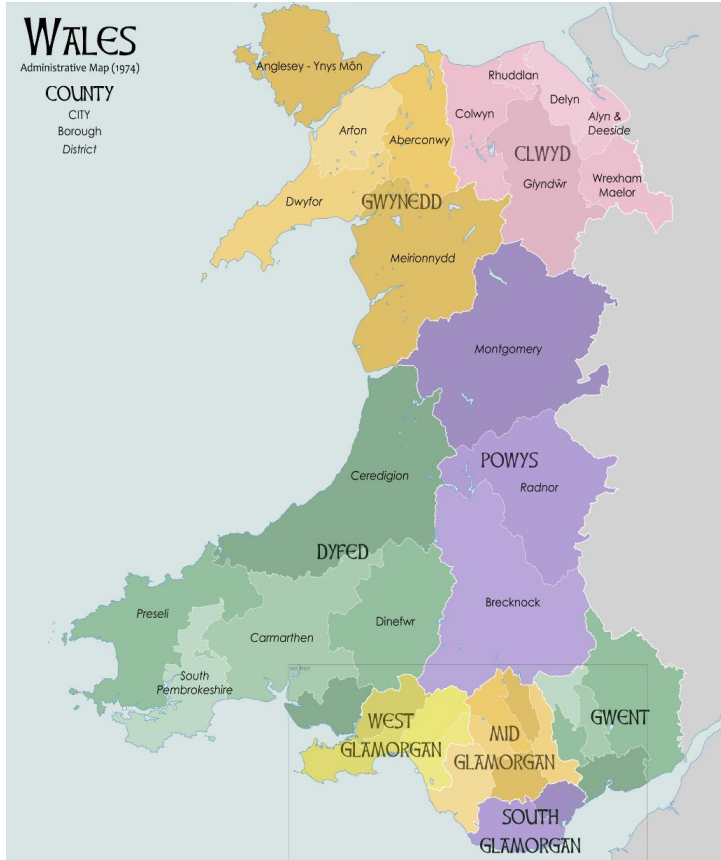
Andrew Farrow; Chief Officer – Planning, Environment
and Economy (Flintshire County Council)

Councillor Win Mullen-James
Lead Member for Local Development and Planning
(Denbighshire County Council)

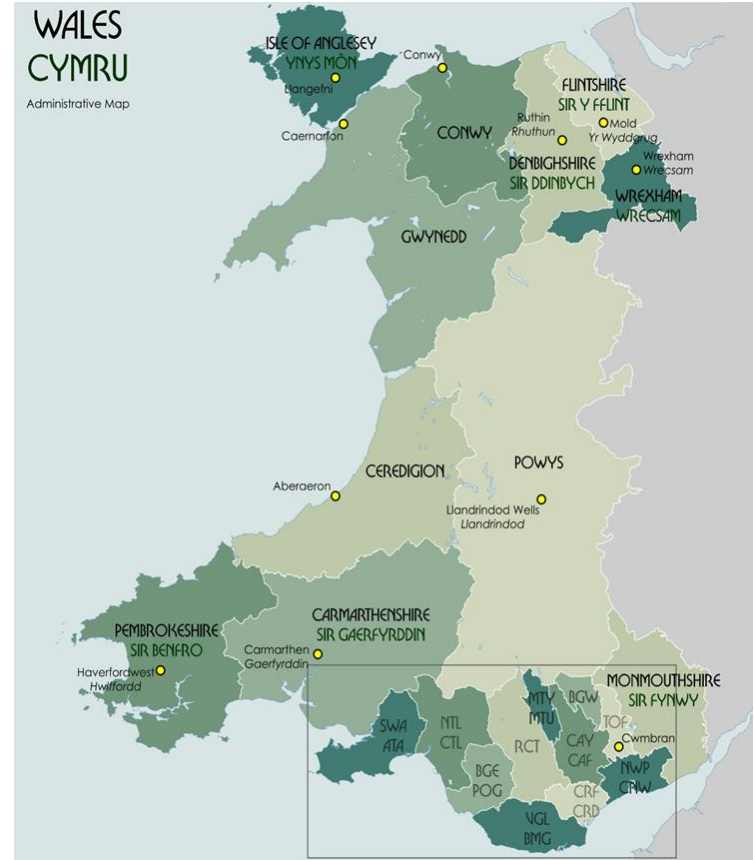
Collaborative Working in North Wales

- Background – The Theory
 - National context - Drivers for collaboration
 - Setting up a shared service – the North Wales Experience
- North Wales Minerals and Waste Shared Service – 10 years on...
- The Practice
 - Who are we and what do we do?
 - Advantage/Disadvantages
 - What's gone well/What's not gone well
- A view from one of our partners

Map of Wales pre 1996 LGR



Map of Wales post 96 LGR



Why collaborate?

What were the drivers...

- Relatively small Local Planning Authorities with limited resilience
- Some Minerals and Waste services had “failed”
- Large consultancy fees when specialist services were procured
- Inconsistent service being provided to national operators
- No career opportunities for staff dedicated to a specialist function as operating in small teams
- No opportunity to adopt best practice processes to optimise service efficiency and effectiveness
- Little opportunity to bring in income from site monitoring and build community confidence.

Other drivers...

Why we collaborated in North Wales?

- Commitment, expectation and support from Welsh Government for collaboration
- History of collaboration in planning across North Wales since LGR
- A commitment from Chief Execs, Directors and other Heads of Planning to collaboration
- Funding available to support initial work on collaboration
- Existing North Wales infrastructure to support collaboration
- A desire to stop talking about it and make something happen
- An acceptance by the Heads of Planning that we didn't have the capacity to deliver collaboration ourselves.

How we made it happen in

North Wales

- Identified project lead officer
- Sought external funding for project support
- Scoped the project
- Assessment of the extent of minerals and waste work in North Wales
- Engaged with those undertaking the work
- Developed the model including funding, structure, processes, work programme and Service Contract
- Agreed structure, Job Descriptions, appointed and implemented structure in April 2011.



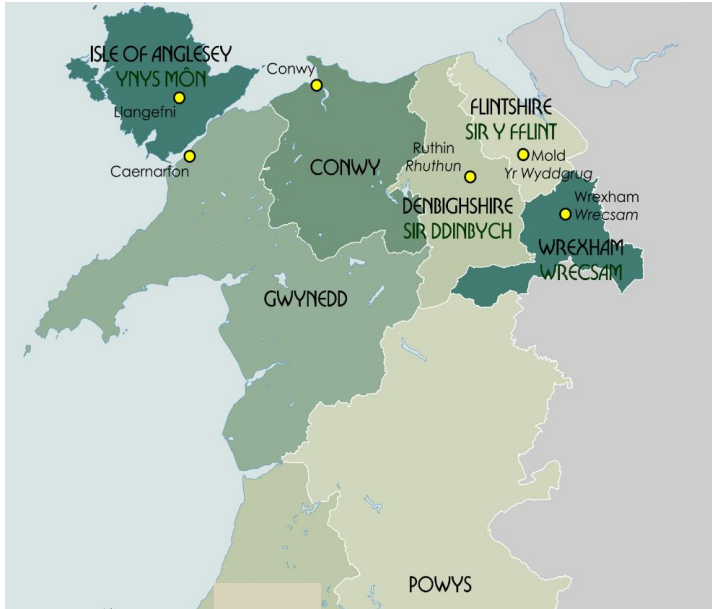
It still took
two years!!

The Shared Service 10 years on...

- ✓ Who are we?
- ✓ What do we do/don't do/can do
- ✓ Advantages
- ✓ What's gone well
- ✓ Challenges



North Wales Minerals and Waste Shared Service; Who are we?



- ✓ 7(.5) partner authorities, Flintshire CC as the lead
- ✓ Service Contract sets out scope and Business plan
- ✓ Different funding options for partners
- ✓ 1 manager, 4 senior planners, 2 planning/monitoring officers
- ✓ Two centres – Ewloe nr Mold and Caernarfon (East and West)



Core functions of the Service

What we do:

- ✓ Pre-application advice/Planning applications – recommendations
- ✓ Chargeable site monitoring and reports
- ✓ Screening/scoping – recommendations
- ✓ ROMPs
- ✓ Enforcement investigations/evidence gathering
- ✓ Policy input to LDP process

Core functions of the Service

What we don't do:

- × Administration/consultation
- × Any of the legal “stuff” ie issuing decision/serving notices

What we can do (in addition to the core functions)

- ✓ Other non-minerals and waste work; Renewable Energy projects, Developments of National Significant (DNS), Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP), decommissioning of Nuclear Power Plant

Advantages...what has gone well?

- ✓ Sharing knowledge, expertise and resources
- ✓ Trying to bridge and develop the skills gap
- ✓ Consistent approach across the region
- ✓ More staff to cover work load in different authority areas
- ✓ Element of neutrality, useful for controversial sites
- ✓ Opportunities for staff
- ✓ Succession planning
- ✓ Regional working – aware of issues across region
- ✓ Supported by Welsh Government
- ✓ Brings in income



Attracting
skilled and
experienced
Officers

What's gone well? Parc Adfer, Energy from Waste



Case Study

Parc Adfer, Energy from Waste Facility

- Local authorities residual waste project
- Wheelabrator – preferred bidder
- Energy from Waste plant
- Extensive pre-application discussions
- Different officer able to deal with the application
- Less than six months to get a Committee decision of permission
- Low levels of opposition
- No Judicial Review



Less than 6
months for a
committee
decision!

Challenges...

- Internal communication in Partner Authorities
- ICT systems/File Retrieval – still not connected and all different
- Establishing an identity for the service e.g. branding
- Limited time and resources to do the PR, communications and website
- Staff retention
- Since the delivery of the project the impact of severe constraints on public sector finances increased
- Travel times across the region
- Different schemes of delegations/committee procedures
- Different development plans and LDPs at different stages
- Job security – SLA still to be renewed

Reflections from a Partner

Councillor Win Mullen-James
Lead Member for Local Development and Planning

Denbighshire County Council

Reflections: A Councillor perspective

Advantages

- Able to call on highly qualified and experienced
- Gives a confidence to the Local Authority that they are in 'safe hands'
- Reduces risk to the Authority
- Members are assured and have faith in Officers
- Saves time and money
- No need to directly employ staff



“
We are in
'safe hands'”

Reflections: A Councillor perspective

Challenges

- A perceived loss of local control
- Members are uncertain around the role of the regional team
- Member/Officer relationship building
- Justification and benefits for being part of the Collaboration
- Funding the arrangement in challenging financial times especially when some years demand may be less
- However, more cost effective than outsourcing to a private consultant
- Language for some non-Welsh speaking staff

Reflections: An Officer perspective

Advantages

- ✓ Cost effective, flexible and professional
- ✓ Fosters good working relationships between Planning Officers of our own council and the Shared Service
- ✓ Reduced pressure/case load to hand over to the Shared Service
- ✓ The Local Authority retain overall control in terms of assessments and decision making as a Local Planning Authority
- ✓ Opportunities to expand services that the Shared Service provides such as renewable energy/NSIP and DNS projects

Reflections: An Officer perspective

Challenges

- How to maintain the shared service with reduced budgets and retain specialist staff
- Lack of specialist officers to feed into the process (ie lack of environmental health officers, ecologists, landscape officers) to assist the Shared Service

Reflections for future
collaboration projects...

What would our advice be?



From our experience of setting up a Shared Service

- ✓ Secure independent project manager
- ✓ Research other projects and experiences
- ✓ Keep initial service design simple
- ✓ Engage with Government at an early stage for potential support
- ✓ Communicate, communicate, communicate
- ✓ Need the commitment of the partner authorities and senior staff to take it forward
- ²¹ ✓ Ensure ICT and connections/licences/passwords are in place

Lessons learnt for future projects

- ✓ Engage frontline staff throughout the process
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- ✓ Create / identify resources to design, facilitate and manage change
- ✓ The move to sharing services benefits from the opportunity of service manager posts becoming vacant.
- ✓ Prioritise the important role specialist support services (HR, Finance, Legal, ICT) play in helping to create shared services.
- ✓ Need to be aware of new skills needed by staff
- ✓ The loss of power and control as well as perceived loss of local knowledge are likely to be potential barriers to project progress.
- ✓ The model works well in Wales due to size of the unitary authorities