HOUSE OF COMMONS

Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The environmental and economic legacy of Wales' industrial past, HC 560

Wednesday 10 December 2025

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Ruth Jones (Chair); David Chadwick; Ann Davies; Gill German; Gerald Jones; Ben Lake; Llinos Medi; Andrew Ranger; Henry Tufnell; Steve Witherden.

Questions 132 - 160

Witnesses

I: Rebecca Evans MS, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, Welsh Government; Liz Lalley, Director, Economic Policy and Strategy, Welsh Government; Andrew Gwatkin, Director, International Relations and Trade, Welsh Government.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rebecca Evans, Liz Lalley and Andrew Gwatkin.

Q132 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this oral evidence session of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee. My name is Ruth Jones. I am the Chair of this Committee. Today is the fourth oral evidence session in the Committee's inquiries into promoting Wales for inward investment and the environmental and economic legacy of Wales' industrial past.

Today we are hearing from Rebecca Evans, Member of the Senedd, Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning. On behalf of the Committee, Rebecca, thank you so much for joining us this morning and giving us your time. It really is much appreciated.

There are no declarations of interest, but I also need to introduce Liz Lalley, who is alongside the Minister, who is the director of economic policy and strategy for the Welsh Government, and Andrew Gwatkin, who is the director for international relations and trade from the Welsh Government. Thank you to all three of you for appearing before us this morning. It is very helpful.

Let me kick off. Minister, you were very much involved with the Wales investment summit, which happened only this week. A day is a long time in politics. The Welsh Government hosted this investment summit, which was the first of its kind. Can you tell us a little bit about the key outcomes from that and any lessons learned for the future?

Rebecca Evans: Absolutely, yes. Thank you to Committee for giving me the chance to give evidence to you today.

The First Minister was really excited when she announced the investment summit just over a year ago. She very much saw it as a whole year's worth of activity rather than a single point in time. Beyond the actual summit itself, which by all accounts was a roaring success, there is a huge amount of work to do now in terms of making sure that the new relationships that we built at the investment summit turn into investment. We were really pleased to be introducing Wales to 350 different delegates, 150 of whom had never been to Wales before. Overall, 250 different businesses were represented.

One of the big learnings from the event was how successful it was in terms of targeting specific sectors. There are sectors where we know that Wales already has strengths and where we are already primed to grow, particularly because we have the support of the UK Government through the industrial strategy. We looked at areas such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, compound semiconductors and the creative industries, for example. That targeted approach was really important, as was all of the groundwork that we put in in terms of building up relationships through our international offices, for example, with individuals and businesses ahead of the summit.

Another one of the things that we learned was the importance of targeting the right people within organisations. The First Minister was really strict that this was going to be a business-led event in the sense that we would have really successful inward investors and others from Wales selling Wales for us rather than having politicians making the case. That was really important. When we invited people from businesses overseas, we were very targeted in terms of the individuals and the specific roles within businesses who we invited, so that we had decision-makers who we were establishing those relationships with.

In terms of outcomes, £16 billion of inward investment was announced between the announcement of the summit and now. I am really confident that there will be further announcements in the weeks and months ahead following the investment summit in terms of further investment into Wales.

Q133 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Going forward, are there any plans for any future events? Is there anything that you would do differently in the future?

Rebecca Evans: An event of that scale, given the seniority of the people involved, is something that you probably should do sparingly in order to maintain its impact. People came from nearly 30 countries across the world. We had people from Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, all across the Middle East, Europe, the USA and elsewhere. The commitment to come to Wales for those two days showed a real interest. It is not something that you could do annually, despite calls for something like that.

Certainly, you would want to do it again in the future, but the priority now is to build on those relationships and follow up the leads that we had. Over the course of the summit between me, the First Minister and the other Ministers from the Welsh Government who were there, we had 50 different bilaterals with businesses who were interested in exploring what we could offer in Wales. That was really successful. Clearly, we need to follow up on all that now. We are also really grateful to UK Government Ministers. In particular, the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales were all at the event, which we were really grateful for. It really showed that team approach and two Governments working together.

Q134 **Andrew Ranger:** Good morning and thank you for joining us today. I would like to look now more at, as you led on to, how the two Governments work together on promoting inward investment. As a Committee, we recently visited the US and learned how the Government's teams over there work together. Could you tell us more about the practical ways in which the two Governments collaborate on inward investment?

Rebecca Evans: Yes. On a political level, we work very well together. Jo Stevens, the Secretary of State for Wales, and I have got to the point where we joke that we see each other more than we see our own families because we spend so much time together at various business events. We probably see each other at least weekly. That relationship is really important in terms of being able to show politically that the two Governments are working together.

The relationships at official level are really important as well. Our teams work really closely with the UK Government's Department for Business and Trade teams, both in the UK and overseas, to ensure that the UK Government network also takes every opportunity to promote Wales to potential investors. We have an international strategy, which was published in Wales a number of years ago, which really made it clear that we also wanted to work with individual Government Departments to ensure that we receive our fair share of the UK Government's representation and that Wales is included as part of the UK-wide offer and that UK Government Departments are representing Wales and including Wales as part of the offer for inward investment. Lots of work goes on with the embassies and consulates to ensure that networks overseas are informed of the offer here in Wales.

We also work at sector level. We have particular sectors, which are identified through the industrial strategy and our own work, where we want to work with the UK Government to ensure that Wales is seen as a location of choice. One of those would be around the expertise we have in compound semiconductors, for example. We have the world's first cluster. We work really closely with those teams and the Office for Investment at a project-handling level.

Again, our officials work really closely there. There is a lot of good working going on. There are some areas for improvement, as there always will be, but we work really hard to establish and maintain those good relationships.

Q135 **Andrew Ranger:** We saw for ourselves in the consulate in New York how the Wales team and the DBT team are working together there. You had written to us in some evidence saying that there were some areas of improvement between those two teams that you had some recommendations for. Could you elaborate on those points for us? What changes would you like to see to deliver those improvements?

Rebecca Evans: One of the things that we have noted has been a downward trend of DBT-sourced inward investment inquiries for Wales. We want to make sure that UK Government use all of their global reach to enable inward investment into Wales. We have seen a year-on-year decline since 2021 in terms of DBT-sourced inward investment inquiries. At the same time, we have seen an increase in the inquiries generated by the work from our Welsh Government team. We think that there is more to do together in that particular space.

It would also be good to have more consistency in terms of relationships across all divisions or markets of DBT. In some areas, it is really strong. In others, that is not so much the case. To take a really good example, in some of the overseas markets the relationships are really strong and productive, whereas there is still work to do in some of the others.

Andrew Ranger: That is great. Thank you very much.

Q136 **Gill German:** I would like to follow up on Andrew's question regarding our visit to the United States. We have talked already about the connections that we made with the British consulate and Welsh Government officials. They were really informative. One of the things that really stuck with me was when we met Welsh diaspora. These are people who either originated from Wales or had family links in Wales. We met one group in particular in New York called the New York Welsh. I was really pleased that on first meeting with them I was introduced to a man who is from Clwyd North, from my constituency, who now works in banking in New York. He was full of affection for Wales, as were a lot of the people who we spoke to there. Equally, we spoke to people in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia who had Welsh connections, who felt a really strong affinity with Wales.

How has that been explored by the Welsh Government to attract inward investment? That could put Wales on the world stage on an economic level and be a great way to keep those ties between two countries. There is an emotional link with the business as well as earning cash from the profits.

Rebecca Evans: GlobalWelsh has done some really interesting work looking at people across the globe who have links to Wales. They found that many of those people who are working in business would love to invest in Wales. We have been working with them to explore whether they have any leads that we have not already made through our teams in various different countries, for example.

It is absolutely the case that people have that longing for Wales when they are abroad. There is a keenness to invest in Wales. That is why our Welsh brand is really strong. It does have a lot of recognition, both in the US and elsewhere. We do an awful lot of work in terms of promoting Wales through our exports programme. I know you are particularly interested in inward investment, but our export programme is really strong as well in terms of making those links.

We have a particularly strong identity, which we are able to share with the world. We saw lots of interest in that at the investment summit. We were keen to send people away from the summit with a better understanding of Wales. The day before the investment summit itself, we held a series of experiences that people could do, including cycling with Geraint Thomas at the Newport velodrome, for example.

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Q137 **Chair:** Thank you for reconnecting with us, Minister. We appreciate your tech abilities there.

Let us move on now to look at investors who are coming into Wales. We have had various sessions with businesses that have already invested in Wales. A lot of them have talked about the issue of having multiple front doors to get into Wales and having difficulties navigating their way through. Have the Welsh Government considered an investment promotion agency of some kind to co-ordinate and streamline things in the future?

Rebecca Evans: We have that single front door through Trade and Invest Wales. I have recently undertaken a review of the business support landscape here in Wales in the round. That includes for businesses that are indigenous to Wales. One of the things that we found was that there is sometimes confusion. People might be making links with freeports, with city and growth deals, corporate joint committees or with Welsh Government through Business Wales and so on. That is something that we are exploring.

People talk with affection about the WDA, for example. We explored that. The WDA existed at a time when we had a lot of additional European funding. The budgets were many times those that we have now. My concern would be diverting funding away from supporting the activity of business investments to more administrative roles.

It is a fair thing to explore. There is lots of interest in that particular question as we head into manifesto season, when people are thinking about what their offer might be for the future. I hope that the business support review that I undertook will be useful to everybody as they start to get their heads around what the future of business support might look like.

Chair: I am sure we will be reading it very carefully.

Q138 **Ann Davies:** Shwmae and thank you for coming. I was part of the team that went out to America a couple of weeks ago. We went to Pittsburgh, which is a city that was built on steel and coal, very much like the legacy that we have in south Wales. They have regenerated themselves in such an impressive way. Here in Wales we need more of the can-do attitude that you have in America.

They had focused their rebuilding on eds and meds. There were four universities there that were looking forward and rebranding themselves. As we look at our legacy of old coalmines and steel plants, I was wondering what we can we learn from Pittsburgh and whether we can take that can-do attitude into the south Wales valleys.

Rebecca Evans: The investment summit and the UK Government's industrial strategy both give us that opportunity to rebrand ourselves, because the sectors that are focused on are very much the sectors that will define the shape of the future. They are very much focused on technology and digital, advanced manufacturing, compound semiconductors and so on. These are the industries of the future. Of course, we have had the really exciting recent announcements from the UK Government around AI growth zones, which we think will be really critical both in south Wales, in that area between Newport and Bridgend, and in north Wales around Anglesey. There has also been the announcement around new nuclear at Wylfa. Those have all been really exciting.

What we have been trying to do is to open up Wales to investment, particularly the former industrial areas. The largest investment that the Welsh Government have ever made has been in the heads of the valleys road. We have just finished the road now. That provides a really seamless route, but it also provides us with huge opportunities to provide further commercial premises for business. That is one of the top things, alongside planning, that they say they need to see us take more action on.

For example, we have gone into a joint venture with Merthyr Tydfil county borough council to provide further commercial premises at the heads of the valleys. We want to do more of that kind of thing to encourage industry. That could certainly include inward investment in those particular areas. Redefining ourselves as a modern and forward-looking country, which is open to investment and has innovative academia clusters and so on, really helps to redefine ourselves to have that modern investment.

Q139 **Ann Davies:** Can I ask, if you do not mind, about further west of Bridgend? There are a lot of people who live further west. The coalmines and the coal valleys came into the Amman valley, which is in my patch. There are loads of small villages and small towns, which have been decimated, to be honest. There is nothing happening there. How can we regenerate or have inward investment into those areas?

Rebecca Evans: The approach that we have taken through our regional teams within Welsh Government will help in that space. I am further west than Bridgend myself—I am in Swansea. We have looked at what our regional strengths really are. Further west, we look to renewable energies particularly as being a source of strength and investment for the future. We are working really hard to attract further investment there.

There will be opportunities throughout the supply chain for west Wales in relation to the really exciting announcements around the Celtic sea. We now have three companies that will be taking forward the major floating offshore wind projects. We have lots of exciting work going on in terms of what we do around carbon capture and storage in west Wales as well. We need to make sure that all those opportunities then feed through to supply chain opportunities in all our communities rather than big investors coming in and bringing in everything with them.

That is why we have been doing lots of work mapping out what the supply chain will look like. For floating offshore wind, for example, we have done a piece of work that looks at where the opportunities are for businesses in Wales. The Crown Estate has hundreds of millions of pounds available for existing businesses to repurpose towards meeting the supply chains for floating offshore wind. There is definitely more in that space in terms of building up supply chains for the major opportunities that will come ahead.

We have also been recently looking the economy of rural Wales in the round. The most important thing within rural Wales is the foundational economy. That is the colleges, the health boards, the local authorities and so on, in terms of what they can do. Again, we need to be making sure that colleges are properly linked into those big economic opportunities and that local authorities are fully mapping out, through their work with corporate joint committees, where the opportunities lie as well. Understanding where the opportunities lie is important. We are doing that and we have done that work, but making it happen through investment is the next step.

Q140 **Henry Tufnell:** Can I just pick up on the supply chain point in respect of floating offshore wind? Are you at all concerned that a lot of that supply chain might end up in places such as Spain, China and South Korea and that we might lose out in west Wales and parts of Cornwall, particularly on the Celtic sea? If you are concerned, what measures are you taking in order to prevent that from happening?

Rebecca Evans: I set up the Offshore Wind Task and Finish Group. I know you have personally been able to provide lots of information to the Welsh Government on this particular issue.

The Offshore Wind Task and Finish Group set up an action plan as we move to realise these opportunities in the Celtic sea. One of the specific work streams was around the supply chain and making sure that we have not only the capabilities here in Wales, which is partly through the investment that the Crown Estate is making to support existing Welsh businesses to pivot their work towards the opportunities within that supply chain, and the skills piece. We need both those things to work together.

We have been doing work through the skills stream of the Offshore Wind Task and Finish Group to map out what the skills will be in terms of maximising those opportunities for Wales to make sure that Welsh people benefit as much as possible. If it is the case that things are just brought in and Wales does not benefit, we will have clearly missed an opportunity.

The period that we have gone through at the moment has been about mapping out where the opportunities are. We are now positioning ourselves to take advantage of those.

Q141 **Llinos Medi:** It is nice to see you again, Minister. I would like to give us a little plug of being the first authority in Wales to go into a joint venture on building industrial units. They have been a success; they are full of small businesses. They work.

Moving on to regional funding, in July this year it was announced that Wales would receive £211 million annually in local growth funding, which is £633 million over the spending review period. However, the October announcement valued the Welsh local growth funding at £547 million, which is a shortfall of £86 million. What is your understanding for the reason in this change?

Rebecca Evans: I should start off by saying that we are really pleased that the UK Government have now returned the funding and the decision-making to Wales in respect of local growth funds, which previously bypassed the Welsh Government through the shared prosperity fund. We are really pleased that that commitment has been made. We are also really pleased that we have still been able to maintain 22% of the overall fund, which again is really important. We were concerned at one point that we would just have a Barnett share, which just would not recognise the need that there is in Wales. I really want to welcome both of those things.

I understand that the decision was taken that some of the funding would be channelled through the Pride in Place fund. That is a UK Government fund. It is not something that the Welsh Government are involved with. We have not been involved with the design and we do not have a role in the delivery of that either. I will check, but I think the funding that we are talking about here relates to Pride in Place.

Q142 **Llinos Medi:** Minister, you have just mentioned the shared prosperity fund. Between 2022 and 2025, Wales received £38 million more in cash terms from the shared prosperity fund; we previously received significantly more when we were within the European Union from the structural funds. The announcement was that Wales was receiving the biggest settlement ever, but the reduction in regional funding is different. In your view, is the funding adequate, first, in financial terms and, secondly, in terms of the structures and delivery of mechanisms through which it is allocated?

Rebecca Evans: The local growth fund is a significant amount of money and it certainly recognises that there is greater need here in Wales. Again, we are really pleased that it was not a Barnettised amount of funding. We can always use more funding, particularly for schemes that are looking to deal with issues around economic inactivity.

At the moment—it is subject to consultation at the moment and the consultation closes on 19 December—we are prioritising issues around productivity in Wales and economic inequalities. Those are the areas that we would like to channel that money towards in future. In the consultation, we are also exploring the ways in which that funding will be distributed.

The proposal within the consultation is that a significant amount of that funding would go through CJCs, recognising that, while it is important to have that national framework, decisions are best taken closest to people. That is the suggestion within the consultation at the moment. These are open questions for the consultation. The aim is to do as much as we can as close to people as we can.

Q143 **Gerald Jones:** Minister, it is good to see you. One of the questions that I had was around the local growth fund. You will be aware that local government has had a role in the shared prosperity fund in recent years. The consultation is under way, though I appreciate that it does not end for another week or two yet. Has there been dialogue with local government around, in particular, the future make-up of the funds and future involvement locally? I appreciate that you mentioned the partnership arrangements there, but could you just say a little bit more about any discussions or dialogue with local government on the future of the funds and how that is looking?

Rebecca Evans: I have been meeting regularly for a good number of months with the WLGA and their economy spokespeople to talk about the latest developments and to seek their views. I absolutely see a really critical role for local government in terms of the future of the local growth fund. They have been critical through the development of the delivery of the shared prosperity fund and they will be absolutely critical as we go forward.

We are exploring with them at the moment some of the concerns that they have in terms of the proposed funding. Previously, the funding through the shared prosperity fund was around 70% revenue and 30% capital or thereabouts. The funding that has been suggested for the local growth fund this time around is 70% capital and 30% revenue. Clearly, that really does change the options that are available to you in terms of how you invest. That is causing significant concern to local government at the moment.

When the Chancellor delivered her Budget, we noted that there was also documentation provided alongside that showing the split between capital and revenue for the mayoral authorities, which was much more generous on the revenue side. These are some things that we are pursuing with the UK Government at the moment.

The local authorities were really keen to have another transitional year so that they could find themselves in a position, when the new local growth fund scheme comes in, which we are consulting on at the moment, where they will be really ready for it. We have agreed to that because we think it is a practical suggestion from local government. We are absolutely keen to listen to them and work in close collaboration with them.

Q144 **Gerald Jones:** I will move on to coal tips. In 2021, the Welsh Government estimated that the remediation cost around disused coal tips was in the region of between £500 million and £600 million. Could you set out the current position? Is that estimate still the case or has it been reassessed? In particular, could you give a breakdown around the more dangerous tips, the Cs and Ds, and how the split works overall, please?

Rebecca Evans: This sits in the portfolio of the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs. I will do my best, but I will check with his officials afterwards just to make sure that I have not got anything wrong.

I remember that a number of years ago we were suggesting that £600 million was an estimate of what things would cost in terms of that long-term programme of work. Since then the Welsh Government have done an awful lot of work in terms of mapping and recording coal tips. We now believe that the £118 million that we asked for and received is a realistic amount of funding that we can use to protect and to help communities living near coal tips over the next few years.

Again, this is a really good example of two Governments working together. We have always said that coal tips and coal tip safety was absolutely a legacy issue going back well before devolution. At the point of the devolution settlement, there were things that we did not understand as well as we do now, particularly in relation to climate change. Where we have got to now is a pragmatic solution showing the two Governments working in partnership.

Q145 **Gerald Jones:** As you say, it is two Governments sharing responsibility. That is positive. £220 million has been allocated for coal tip safety. Working with the UK Government, are you confident that the required level of funding will be secured to remediate all the coal tips within Wales?

Rebecca Evans: We believe it will help to safeguard hundreds of communities that are living in the shadow of coal tips. We remain focused on ensuring that funding goes to delivering the necessary remediation, safety and monitoring work that needs to be undertaken. It is my understanding that, certainly for the foreseeable future, the period over which we are able to deploy that investment of £118 million, it is considered to be appropriate.

Q146 **Gerald Jones:** In terms of moving forward and completing all the coal tips, even if the funding was available to do it all, there are contractors that will need to programme that work and there is a timescale involved. I appreciate that this is a little bit outside your portfolio, but do you have any views on that and whether the funding and the capacity can be joined up, if you like?

Rebecca Evans: The £118 million that we asked for and received was considered to be realistic in terms of the funding that we could use. If the Committee does not mind, I will get a note from the Deputy First Minister with a bit more detail on what is expected from that funding and a view on whether it is sufficient, both in terms of the immediate work that is being undertaken and that longer-term look. We have always said that this would be a programme that would have to take place over a good number of years.

Chair: It would be helpful if we could have that note, Minister. Thank you very much.

Q147 **Ann Davies:** My constituency borders with my friend from Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe, and there are a number of issues that straddle our two constituencies. In general, we have heard a lot of support for the Disused Tips Authority for Wales. What outcomes does the Welsh Government expect from this new authority when it is established in April 2027? Will the remit of the new authority extend to collaborating with bodies such as Natural Resources Wales and, perhaps even more importantly, the Mining Remediation Authority?

Rebecca Evans: The plan is that it will provide a really robust system for ensuring the stability of disused tips in Wales. That is with a view, of course, to protecting human welfare, safeguarding communities and protecting our critical infrastructure.

The authority itself will take the responsibility for checking, recording, monitoring and managing tips. It is the first organisation of its kind in the UK. In preparation, Natural Resources Wales is working with the Welsh Government, the Mining Remediation Authority and others. They have published the site-specific coal tip contingency plans, which include environmental considerations. Those will be the basis upon which the authority will build its work to resolve some of the issues, including the need for reasonable expectations of others, landowners and so on. Collaborating with existing bodies such as Natural Resources Wales, local authorities and other partners will be central to the success of the function of the authority.

Q148 **Steve Witherden:** It is nice to see you again, Minister. In my own constituency, the Bersham Colliery spoil tip from the last coalmine to close in north Wales is immediately adjacent to the village of Rhostyllen. I am concerned—I am sure many of my colleagues are too—about these companies that want to extract coal from old spoil tips. I am seeking a firm assurance from Welsh Government that we are not going to be allowing these private sector companies to go poking around in our spoil tips, with all the implications for safety that may have.

Rebecca Evans: The implications for safety are top of the agenda, but we have net zero commitments as well. We are very clear that we do not want further coal extraction because of our commitments in terms of net zero.

We understand that there might be some cases for extracting coal if it is absolutely necessary for safety purposes, but not for commercial purposes or for the purpose of burning the coal. Again, I can send a more detailed note on that policy to the Committee as well.

Q149 **Ann Davies:** I promise that this is my last question, Minister. It is about

Ammanford and the Amman valley. Welsh Government have produced a mine water heat opportunity map. What further measures have the Welsh Government introduced to support former industrial areas to maximise these opportunities?

The reason I am asking is that in Capel Hendre in the Amman valley we have a company called Thermal Earth, which has been really successful in harnessing mine water heat. The pilot in Bridgend was not as successful, as we all know. What are Welsh Government learning from the success of Thermal Earth and how can we roll out its success over the south Wales valleys?

Rebecca Evans: We have now developed the mine water maps. They are there for developers to explore where the opportunities might lie. We also have the Welsh Government Energy Service, which is working with public sector organisations to develop ideas further and to see whether there are opportunities to use mine water heat to support public sector buildings and so on. Thermal Earth is a really good scheme that we can look at. One of the benefits that it had was that it was so close to the demand. That has to be part of the consideration as we go forward.

From April of next year, heat networks are going to be regulated by Ofgem. That is going to enhance consumer protection and ensure that people pay a fair price for heat. When you have that kind of regulation in place, it can also stimulate more demand with confidence, if you like. It is something that we definitely want to do more of. We have the maps available now to try to stimulate some more of that.

Q150 **David Chadwick:** Good morning. Thank you for joining us. Last year, the closure of the blast furnaces at Port Talbot cost a lot of jobs and is causing an ongoing economic contraction in south Wales. Do you have confidence that Tata is on track to deliver the electric arc furnace by 2027?

Rebecca Evans: We are in constant contact with Tata. We know that the contracts have been signed. One thing that we have been really pleased with is the fact that lots of Welsh businesses within the supply chain have been engaged with that work. We know that developments are happening now on site in terms of the construction of the electric arc furnace. The word that we have from Tata is that things are on track, which is really positive.

I also want to say a word about the work of the transition board, which is chaired by the Secretary of State for Wales. That has been absolutely critical in terms of bringing together both Governments, local authorities, the unions and the business in a true social partnership to try to support workers. We have done an awful lot to try to provide support both for the supply chain and for individual workers in terms of mental health support, other kinds of support and in finding alternative employment. That group has been really instrumental in terms of our collective response to the close of the blast furnace, which came sooner than we would have wanted.

The Welsh Government have always sought what we called a just transition, in which the closure of the blast furnace would only have taken place once the electric arc furnace was ready. Unfortunately, that is not what happened, but we have tried our best to respond to the needs of the community.

Q151 **David Chadwick:** In terms of following on the just transition point, there are several large-scale renewable energy projects planned for the South Wales Coalfield and Port Talbot floating offshore wind platforms. The building of floating offshore wind platforms is clearly one of those. That could be an opportunity to get great new jobs for people in south Wales, particularly in the engineering and manufacturing sectors. There are plenty of people in the supply chain around there who are very concerned that they are not going to get a proper look in and that the Government are not really committed to using them to build those platforms.

I have had responses from UK Government Ministers suggesting that this will not happen now until the mid-2030s. I was just wondering whether you could give a commitment that as much as possible of the manufacturing and engineering work will be done in south Wales rather than, as Henry mentioned earlier, people such as the Crown Estate opting to use cheaper imports from abroad instead.

Rebecca Evans: Ultimately, it will be the businesses themselves that will take those decisions. The role for Government is to make sure that businesses in Wales and people in Wales with skills are absolutely best placed to take advantage of those things. The Welsh Government have a really important role in terms of convening people, if you like.

At the investment summit at the start of the month, we had a really strong focus on clean energy. There were businesses there that are involved in the supply chain. The Crown Estate was there. The businesses that have been allocated those three large opportunities within the Celtic sea were there. We were able to have those conversations and explore supply chain opportunities as well.

Again, the funding that the Crown Estate is providing, hundreds of millions of pounds for the supply chain, is really important. We need to make sure that Welsh businesses maximise as much of that as possible. We will do everything that we can to make sure that Welsh businesses are in a good position to take advantage of those opportunities.

Part of that is around the investment that ABP will need to make around the port and the discussions we have had there. We recently published a ports prospectus, which covers all our ports in Wales and sets out what the opportunities are there, so that businesses and investors are very clear about the capacity and the capabilities we have around our ports.

The Welsh Government own a lot of land around Baglan. We are trying to ensure that the site is remediated—at the moment we are trying to understand what the needs are there—and that the land there is used in a way that will strategically dovetail with the opportunities in the Celtic sea and the surrounding area.

Q152 **David Chadwick:** You mentioned that those decisions will be made by businesses. I thought the Crown Estate would be making the decisions on which suppliers to use.

Rebecca Evans: The Crown Estate has made the decisions on which of the developers will be taken through those particular schemes. Gwynt Glas was the most recent, for example.

Q153 **David Chadwick:** Do you mind if I just come in on that one? Do you see the Crown Estate as a reliable partner? Research from Greenpeace has shown that the Crown Estate is pushing up the cost of energy by the auction method that it is using for the rights to use the offshore energy seabed. The Crown Estate is clearly trying to push up its own profits and thereby neglecting its duty to the public good. Is that something that you are concerned by?

Rebecca Evans: The Welsh Government have a really strong position in terms of the fact that we would like to see the Crown Estate devolved to Wales, which would give us more decision-making and more access to the funding that is generated by the Crown Estate. That is our strong position.

With that said, we have good day-to-day working relationships with the Crown Estate as well. Ultimately, we want to make sure that these projects benefit Wales. The main way that we can do that at the moment is by maximising those supply chain opportunities.

Q154 **David Chadwick:** Does that mean manufacturing all parts of the turbines in south Wales?

Rebecca Evans: You need to be realistic. We have done some mapping in terms of where we have capabilities at the moment and where the other competitors would be. There are parts that we could definitely see being manufactured in Wales, such as the chains, anchors and boats. Those are the kinds of things that we have capacity for already. Again, I am happy to share a bit more of the detail on the work that we have been doing in terms of mapping out specifically where the commercial supply chain opportunities are.

Chair: Thank you, Minister. That would be really helpful.

Q155 **Henry Tufnell:** Thank you, Minister. You touched upon the build-out of port infrastructure in respect of Port Talbot. What conversations have you been having with UK Government? We are quite a long way down the line in respect of the announcement on FLOWMIS funding. I was wondering what conversations and dialogue you are having with the UK Government to help ensure that the build-out of port infrastructure is realised.

Rebecca Evans: Again, that is something that we talk to the UK Government about both at ministerial level and through officials. We recognise that for floating offshore wind to be a success it will require both Governments to be working together. We will need to use our levers and the ports will need to make the investments that they need to make and so on.

One of the things that we did through our Offshore Wind Task and Finish Group was map out who needs to do what when, so that the different players can give each other confidence to move forward. We have now come to a point where there is that level of confidence. Thanks to the announcements from the Crown Estate, we can all move forward on this together. Bringing all the partners together and understanding things from each other's perspectives has been really important.

Q156 **Steve Witherden:** You have given us a progress update on coal safety through the Disused Mine and Quarry Tips (Wales) Act. Are there plans to introduce similar legislation to deal with contaminated land sites?

Rebecca Evans: I do not believe there are. There are no existing plans because we are so late into the late into the Senedd term. We are working through the remaining legislation that we already have on the book. That would be a question for the next Government now.

Q157 **Steve Witherden:** I have met with Natural Resources Wales twice to discuss what could have been left in the soil in Cefn Mawr and Rhosymedre, site of a now disused chemical plant in my constituency. I was dismayed to learn that these sites are not being tested. According to Natural Resources Wales, there are still potentially over 9,000 contaminated land sites in Wales that have not been fully investigated. How concerned are the Welsh Government with those numbers?

Rebecca Evans: The Mine Remediation Authority has been allocated £4.5 million to help tackle mine pollution in Wales. I know the MRA is currently developing remedial strategies at the highest-priority sites. Where possible, work has already begun on the ground at 25 sites and work is continuing at pace at other locations. There will be community engagement sessions planned in newly identified locations to share plans with local communities in the near future as well. Again, for the detail, I will ask the Deputy First Minister to provide a bit more.

Q158 **Ben Lake:** Thank you, Minister, for appearing before us this morning. I should like to ask you a few questions on the legacy of historic metal mines, especially in mid-Wales and in Ceredigion, part of my constituency. In May 2024, our predecessor Committee held a session on the impact of metal mining in Wales, particularly the lead contamination of certain river systems as a consequence of these historic mines.

I am very grateful for the time that the Welsh Government contributed to that session. They gave us a lot of useful information about some of the work that they were undertaking through Natural Resources Wales in conjunction with the then Coal Authority and now the Mining Remediation Authority. I am just wondering whether there are any updates or any work has been able to take place since we held that session back in May 2024.

Rebecca Evans: We established the metal mines programme in 2020. It was funded by the Welsh Government, but it is now being delivered through the Mining Remediation Authority. It is a UK-wide problem. It affects 9% of rivers in England and Wales and 2% in Scotland. We have worked actively with stakeholders to understand the issue and possible remedies. I mentioned the funding of £4.5 million, which has been provided.

Since 2020 we have provided £40 million to the water quality capital programme, which is being delivered by Natural Resources Wales, to implement targeted remediation as well. The remediation programme also invests in research projects exploring innovative treatment solutions, including then working with industry and academia on treatment trials at both lab and pilot field scale as well.

Again, this is not my portfolio, but I hope that gives you a flavour of the work. We will absolutely send a more detailed note on that, if that is okay.

Q159 **Ben Lake:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. Perhaps I may also ask you to relay to the relevant Minister that a lot of work has been undertaken in terms of addressing the pollution at the sources, the old mines themselves, which is very welcome.

One aspect of this is the historic contamination of river systems further downstream. In many parts of my Ceredigion constituency in particular, we have entire river systems that have been impacted over the last century or, in some cases, even longer. There is some interesting work being undertaken on this by Professor Mark Macklin and Professor Chris Thomas. They have developed a mapping tool that helps agencies and local authorities, where relevant, to identify the high-risk areas in every single catchment area.

What Professor Macklin, in conjunction with Professor Paul Brewer, has recently done in Talybont is used that information to inform a community survey where residents were able to bring soil samples just to get it checked out. The message that is important to get over to communities is that this is a hazard, but it can be managed and mitigated, provided that we know where the highest risk levels are.

I wonder whether something community-based, informed by this mapping tool, could perhaps be an approach to help address and mitigate the risk that this historic legacy poses in some river systems and valleys in Wales. I would be very grateful if you could perhaps relay that to the relevant Minister. The work that has been undertaken in Talybont could be of use to other areas and communities in Wales.

Rebecca Evans: That is really interesting, especially because local authorities have the duty to identify contaminated land in their areas. If there is a mapping tool that can usefully help them do that and involve the community, that is really interesting. I will definitely pass that on.

Q160 **Steve Witherden:** Continuing on the same vein as before, what challenges or successes have the Welsh Government encountered in applying the polluter-pays principle to liability relating to contaminated land remediation?

Rebecca Evans: On this one, if Committee does not mind, I will defer to the Deputy First Minister. I will ask for a comprehensive note on that because that is not something that I have dealt with in my portfolio, unfortunately.

Chair: That makes sense. Thank you, Minister. We are going to wrap up there. Thank you so much for your time this morning, Minister. It is really appreciated. Thank you to Rebecca Evans and to Liz Lalley and Andrew Gwatkin in their supporting roles.

We would appreciate, if you could, those notes that you mentioned. We also had a couple of questions, given the technicalities and things, that we did not get time to address this morning. Would it be okay if we were to write to you with those questions, Minister?

Rebecca Evans: Of course, definitely.

Chair: That is brilliant. On that note, then, thank you very much for your time. I will now bring this session to a close.