Regional Committee – 11th Meeting

Minutes of Meeting

2pm, Friday 19th June 2026

Building 20, Global Centre of Rail Excellence Site

Attendees:

- **Kirsty Williams – Chair of GCRE Regional Committee**
- **Simon Jones - Chief Executive, GCRE Ltd**
- **Dr Debra Williams – Chair, GCRE Ltd**
- **Andrew Johnson – Head of Strategic Communications, GCRE Ltd**
- **Rebeca Philips MS – Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd**
- **Iain McIntosh MS – Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd**
- **Cllr Steve Hunt – Leader, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**
- **Cllr David Thomas – Leader's representative, Powys County Council**
- **Diane Reynolds - Director of Economy & Community Services, Powys County Council**
- **Nicola Pearce - Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**

Item 1: Welcome and Minutes

1.1 The Chair opened the session and welcomed attendees. This was the eleventh GCRE Regional Committee meeting. Apologies had been received from Catrin Lloyd, Jane Dodds MS and David Chadwick MP.

1.2 Following the Senedd elections in May, the Chair welcomed new members from the Brycheiniog Tawe Nedd constituency to the committee and explained its purpose. The forum meets quarterly and offers members regular updates on the GCRE project's development, as well as an opportunity to ask questions of the team.

1.3 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed without amendment. The Chair indicated that the minutes of the committee would be published on the GCRE website as set out in the Terms of Reference.

Item 2 – GCRE Oral Update

2.1 GCRE Chief Executive Simon Jones gave a project overview for new members and provided an overview of recent progress. He highlighted the updated independent economic impact assessment that had been undertaken of the project by PWC and gave an investment update for the group. He said discussions were underway with Welsh Government about GCRE's future.

2.2 Simon gave an update on the process to secure an Energy and Data Centre Partner (EDCP) for the GCRE site. Encouraging interest had been identified during the procurement process. A dialogue phase was underway, with a partner hoped to be appointed before the end of the year.

2.3 Iain McIntosh asked about rail connections to the site via the Neath and Brecon Branch (NAB) line and about the energy generation mix sought through the EDCP. Simon said that the branch line would be helpful during construction and operation of the site, and that bidders were still developing their proposals for the energy mix.

2.4 Cllr Hunt said that Neath Port Talbot Council remained very supportive of the project and expressed the hope that, should the GCRE project be a success, it would open up opportunities for creative thinking about the future of the NAB line.

2.5 Simon outlined the next step options for GCRE it had put forward to Welsh Government through an updated business case it had submitted for Ministers to consider. He highlighted that a successful EDCP process could help underpin any financial package to move the rail project to the construction phase.

2.6 Cllr David Thomas underscored the importance of the GCRE project to the regeneration of south Powys and Ystradgynlais. He said that there remained a significant body of support for the project in the local area.

2.7 Nicola Pearce said that GCRE would be important in creating demand for new jobs in the area and supporting the planning of new infrastructure needed in the communities around the site. Simon reiterated GCRE's desire to work with both local authorities and regional CJCs through the next phase to support effective place-based development.

2.8 Members noted the oral update.

Item 3: Productivity

3.1 Andrew Johnson introduced the paper. Wales has the lowest productivity rate of all UK nations and regions, with productivity in 2023 more than 15% below the UK average. Cardiff Business School reported in January 2025 that productivity in Powys was only 63% of the UK average, lower than any other local authority area in the UK, while places with stronger industrial centres, such as Flintshire and Wrexham in North East Wales, have seen much stronger productivity growth over the longer term.

3.2 The new Welsh Government has set a target to halve Wales' productivity gap with the UK within 10 years. The Global Centre of Rail Excellence could make a practical contribution to the national productivity mission by helping to address some of the most persistent weaknesses in the western valleys: low levels of research and development, weaker innovation diffusion, skills leakage, underinvestment and the need for more high-quality industrial clusters.

3.3 Cllr David Thomas welcomed the paper and highlighted the challenging macroeconomic picture across the UK.

3.4 Iain McIntosh asked about the level of interest in the EDCP process. Simon Jones said interest had been strong and that GCRE hoped to have a partner contracted by the end of 2026.

3.5 Members noted the paper.

Item 4: Any Other Business

4.1 No other business was proposed.

4.2 The Chair indicated that the next meeting of the group would be on Friday 11th September 2026.

4.3 The Chair brought the meeting to a close.