

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Date: 25th November, 1999

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

Title: Assembly Office in Brussels

Purpose

1. To update members on the latest position regarding the Assembly's office in Brussels

Recommendation

2. Committee Members are invited to note the following action:

I. The Assembly is to set up an office in Brussels attached to UKRep, following conclusion of the necessary arrangements with the FCO

II. The Assembly's office will be co-located with the Wales European Centre

III. Personnel Management Division will identify officials to second to the Assembly's office in Brussels

Background

3. At its meeting on 14th October the Committee supported the principle that the Assembly should be separately represented in Brussels, but with its staff also being part of the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation . The Chair requested a more detailed paper to be presented to this meeting.

Proposals

4. Following the last Committee meeting, discussions have taken place with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation. Discussions have also been held with staff in the Scottish Executive's office in Brussels, and their premises

visited.

5. The following arrangements are proposed:

- I. The Assembly will establish an office in Brussels. This will formally be part of UKRep.
 - II. The aim will be to have the office operational by April 2000
 - III. Two officials from the Assembly will form the core staff for the office – a Middle Manager and an Executive Officer.
 - IV. The office will be co-located with the Wales European Centre, but for reasons of security and confidentiality will be based in a separate part of the building
 - V. Annex A outlines the role of the Assembly's office
6. These arrangements will be reviewed twelve months after the office is created, and adjustments may be made to the arrangement at that time.

Compliance

7. The Concordats on International Relations and the Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues provide the policy framework for the Assembly to establish an office in Brussels

Financial Implications

8. There are three elements to the financing of this arrangement:

- I. The cost of staffing the office
- II. The cost of setting up and running the office
- III. Rent payable to the Wales European Centre.

9. The cost of staffing the office, including allowances, will be accommodated within Personnel Management Division's Secondments Budget. The provisional draft budget tabled before the Assembly on 4 November proposes establishment of a Miscellaneous European Support Services expenditure line with a provision of £0.4m from 2000-01 onwards, some resources from which will be put towards the cost of setting up and running the office and paying the rent. Financial Planning Division has been consulted and is content with the financial aspects.

Cross-cutting Themes

10. By working with the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation the Assembly will demonstrate its commitment to working with the United Kingdom government. By locating the Assembly's office with the Wales European Centre the Assembly will be working in partnership with other Welsh organisations.

Contact Point

11. European Affairs Division

ANNEX A

The Role of the Assembly's Office in Brussels

General Principles

The Assembly's office will be part of the overall UKRep structure and will liaise with:

- The Wales European Centre
- Key contacts in a range of European Union institutions
- Welsh representatives in the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee
- The offices of other European regions located in Brussels
- Appropriate European Organisations.

As part of the diplomatic representation of the UK, the Assembly's officials would have access to information and policy advice from UKRep desk officers and be able to attend relevant negotiations as part of the UK team. They would also be able to plug into UKRep's administrative support services, although detailed arrangements for this would have to be negotiated and there would be a charge. Although Assembly officials attached to UKRep will report to and receive instructions from Cardiff on the range of Welsh-related issues, they would be subject to the authority of the UK Permanent Representative on issues such as personal conduct and the exercise of diplomatic privileges and would ensure that their activities fit in with the substance and presentation of UK policy by UKRep.

The work of the Wales European Centre and the Assembly office in Brussels would be separate. On the occasions they do work together, activities would focus on lobbying and the provision of information.

The office will also have a role in raising the profile of Wales in Europe, though much of the publicity and events will be arranged in conjunction with the Wales European Centre.

Functions

1. The following functions are proposed:

- Influence European Union decision-making
- Arrange meetings for Assembly representatives – particularly Assembly Secretaries and officials - with key decision-makers within the Commission, European Parliament and other institutions
- Participate in Commission Working Groups on behalf of the United Kingdom, as appropriate

2. Support for visiting Assembly representatives, in particular

- Arrange meetings, briefings and attending meetings with Secretaries and officials whilst they are in Brussels
- Provide support for Cabinet Secretaries attending meetings of the Council of Ministers
- Assist with meetings for other Assembly members
- Handle press enquiries about official visits
- Provide office facilities for visitors to Brussels

3. Information

- ensure that UKRep is fully aware of developments within Wales, and bring key policy issues to their attention
- ensure that vital information from UKRep is brought to the attention of the Assembly officials at an early stage
- follow the progress of proposals through the Council of Ministers in liaison with the European Affairs Division and Assembly policy Divisions
- alerting the Assembly to key legislative proposals and Regulations/Directives which will have an impact on Assembly policy or subordinate legislation