

# **COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

**Date:** Thursday 14 October 1999

**Time:** 9.30am

**Venue:** Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

## **Title: ASSEMBLY REPRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS**

### **Purpose**

To outline issues relating to the Assembly's representation in Brussels as a context for a presentation about the Wales European Centre by its's Chair and Director. More detailed proposals will be brought before the Committee in due course once the direction has been agreed.

### **Recommendation**

Committee members are invited to consider the report and the presentation, and agree how the Assembly should proceed. It is recommended that the Committee agrees:

1. To explore the option of becoming a member of the Wales European Centre
2. To explore the option of setting up a distinct Assembly representation in Brussels within the framework provided by the United Kingdom Permanent Representation.

### **Background**

At the last meeting the Committee agreed that officials from the Wales European Centre should be invited to attend (or submit evidence) when the Committee discussed the relationship between the Assembly and the Centre. The Chair of the Board and the Director of the Centre have been invited to attend and make a brief presentation to this meeting. This report will outline the broader context for a consideration of the Assembly's relations with the Wales European Centre.

### **Assembly Representation**

There is a consensus that the National Assembly for Wales should have a strong presence in

Brussels. This will facilitate the Assembly's links with the main European institutions, including the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee. The issue which needs to be resolved is the nature of the representation, and in particular the Assembly's interaction with the two other types of representation:

- Wales European Centre.
- United Kingdom's Permanent Representation

**Wales European Centre** – background information about the Centre is provided in Annex A, and a list of current members is at Annex B. The Centre is supported by a strong partnership of public sector organisations and has developed extensive expertise in European Union policies over many years. Potentially this is a valuable source of information for the Assembly, and by becoming a member the Assembly would demonstrate its commitment to working with the partners. However, membership of the Wales European Centre by itself would not be adequate to ensure a full service to the Assembly since the Centre, and any Assembly staff seconded to it, would not have diplomatic status. It is therefore necessary to combine any arrangement with the Wales European Centre with an arrangement with the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation.

**United Kingdom's Permanent Representation (UKRep)** – The Foreign Office examined all options extensively when discussing arrangements with the Scottish Executive earlier this year. Whilst it is not proposed that the Assembly necessarily follows the Scottish model, the Foreign Office have highlighted certain elements of the agreement which would provide the basis for any agreement with the Assembly:

- The Assembly should have a distinct identity for its representation in Brussels
- The Assembly's representation would not have to be located with UKRep
- Assembly staff seconded to Brussels would have diplomatic status
- Assembly staff seconded to Brussels would have UKRep passes and access to UKRep computer and communications systems
- Assembly staff could attend Working Group meetings as part of the UK delegation

Under such an arrangement Assembly staff would formally be a part of UKRep, and need to ensure that their operations fit in with the substance and presentation of UK policy by UKRep. They would be subject to the Permanent Representative's authority regarding issues of personal conduct, issues of diplomatic privilege etc.

## **Conclusion**

The Assembly has an opportunity to take advantage of working with the Wales European Centre as well as with the United Kingdom Permanent Representation. It is not a matter of

choosing one or the other, but of finding ways of maximising the benefits which both organisations can offer the Assembly.

## **Compliance**

The Concordat on International Relations provides the framework for the Assembly to establish an office in Brussels

## **Financial Implications**

There will be financial implications of the Assembly joining the Wales European Centre and/or establishing a separate representation in Brussels. Initial estimates are that this will be in the region of £250,000 per annum, but the exact cost will depend on the nature of the arrangements agreed upon. The financial implications will be considered as part of the budget planning round.

## **Cross-cutting Themes**

- The Wales European Centre represents a wide range of public sector and voluntary sector organisations in Wales.
- By working with the United Kingdom's Permanent Representative the Assembly will be demonstrating its commitment to working with the United Kingdom government

## **Contact Point**

European Affairs Division

**ANNEX A**

## **WALES EUROPEAN CENTRE**

### **Background**

The Wales European Centre was established in 1992 to act as the eyes and ears of Welsh organisations in Brussels. During its seven years in existence the Centre has developed considerable expertise in many aspects of European Union policy.

### **Partners**

The Centre was originally established by the Welsh Development Agency and local authorities. The partnership has widened considerably over the past few years, and now includes most public sector organisations active in economic development and training, voluntary organisations and unions. The only significant omission is the private sector, which is represented in Brussels by the Wales Commercial Centre, a local office of the International Division of the Welsh Development Agency. The Wales Commercial Centre has been co-located with the Wales European Centre since June 1999, though remains a separate structure.

A list of current sponsors of the Wales European Centre is attached.

## **The Company**

The Wales European Centre was registered as a company limited by guarantee in April 1998. The Board of Directors consists of representatives of the three categories of members - Welsh Development Agency, Local Government, other organisations. The Board is chaired by George Wright, who represents the Welsh Development Agency.

## **Funding**

The current annual budget is in the region of about £650,000. This can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Welsh Development Agency £263,000
- Local Government £189,000
- Other Organisations £198,000

## **Staffing and Policy Expertise**

There is considerable expertise amongst the staff of the Wales European Centre. The integrated nature of the Wales European Centre has enabled staff to specialise in certain policy-areas and provide advice to all sponsors, regardless of sector. The expertise includes the following areas:

- Structural Funds
- Regional Policy
- State Aid
- Transport Policy

- Agriculture
- Rural Policy
- Environment
- Social Policy
- Employment Policy
- Education and Vocational Training
- Research and Technological Development
- Information Society
- Enterprise Policy, including SME and Tourism Policies
- Culture
- Minority Languages
- Expansion, including aid programmes for Eastern Europe.

This work is shared amongst the Director, five policy advisers, a researcher and an administrator. In addition, there is one civil servant on secondment from the National Assembly for Wales.

## **ANNEX B**

### **SPONSORS OF THE WALES EUROPEAN CENTRE**

#### **Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies**

- Welsh Development Agency
- Training and Enterprise Councils (all four)
- Countryside Council for Wales
- Welsh Language Board
- Wales Tourist Board
- Arts Council of Wales

#### **Organisations indirectly funded by the Assembly and Central Government**

- Universities - Bangor, Aberystwyth, Swansea, Cardiff, Glamorgan
- Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Aberystwyth
- Fforwm - Further Education Colleges of Wales
- National Parks (Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast)

### **Local Government and Local Government Sponsored Organisations**

- Welsh Local Government Association (on behalf of the 22 County Councils)
- Welsh Joint Education Committee

### **Unions**

- Wales TUC
- Farmers' Union of Wales

### **Voluntary Sector**

- Wales Council for Voluntary Action
- Welsh LEADER Groups