

Culture Committee CC-16-01(min)

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 7 November 2001

Time: 9.00am-12.00pm

Venue: National Assembly for Wales

Attendance:

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Plaid Cymru, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Chair)

Jenny Randerson (Liberal Democrat, Cardiff Central, Assembly Minister)

Owen John Thomas (Plaid Cymru, South Wales Central)

Lorraine Barrett (Labour, Cardiff South and Penarth)

Dafydd Wigley (Plaid Cymru, Caernarfon)

Jonathan Morgan (Conservative, South Wales Central)

Delyth Evans (Labour, Mid & West Wales)

Alison Halford (Labour, Delyn)

Huw Lewis (Labour, Merthyr Tydfil) – substituting for Rosemary Butler

Apologies

Rosemary Butler (Labour, Newport West)

Officials

Julia Annand (Committee Clerk)

Stephen Thomas (Deputy Committee Clerk)

Adam Peat (Group Director, Local Government, Housing and Culture)

Russell Thomas (Culture, Sport and Welsh Language Division)

Margaret Evans (Culture, Sport and Welsh Language Division)

Declarations of interest: The Chair declared his membership of the shadow board for Cardiff's bid for European Capital of Culture 2008.

Dafydd Wigley's wife is a prominent player in the Welsh artistic scene. He also declared that he was about to have a book published under the auspices of the Welsh Books Council.

Introductory remarks

The Chair informed the Committee that BBC Wales had invited members to visit the set of its new drama series *The Bench* in Newport. The Chair said that he would ask the Clerk to arrange a convenient time for him and any available members to attend.

The Craft Forum Wales wrote to the Chair asking if they could make a presentation to the Committee. Members indicated that they would wish to receive such a presentation.

The Chair reminded Members of an additional Committee meeting on 15th November at Newport Centre when it would take evidence as part of the Welsh Language review.

Item 1: Committee's review of the Welsh language

Paper: CC-16-01(ps.1&2)

The Chair informed members that three organisations/individuals due to present evidence on the Welsh language had withdrawn. Members expressed concern at this. The Chair agreed to write to the organisations concerned asking them why they had pulled out; he also asked the Clerk to find them alternative slots.

Organisation:

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)

Representatives:

Dr H Mushaq Ally

Cherry Short

Cherry Short gave a presentation based on the CRE's paper (CC-16-01(p.1)).

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In reply to a question on how the CRE implements its Welsh language scheme and the difficulties it faces in doing so, the CRE noted that the original perception of the Commission itself has changed. The advent of devolution had gone some way to sharpening people's perception of the CRE with regard to issues of race and identity.
- In response to a question on whether communities have the same rights as the individual, the CRE stated that the rights of communities were as important as that of individuals; people should feel comfortable in their own communities and with their own languages.
- The CRE viewed the English and Welsh languages as having equal status. Those people living in a predominantly Welsh-speaking community who are unable to speak Welsh have a right to express themselves and should be given every assistance to learn the language if they so wish.
- In the CRE's view, organisations that work exclusively through the medium of one language are excluding people from the services provided and failing to promote equality of opportunity. Much of the recent debate on the Welsh language centred upon the destruction of the language in the so-called heartland areas, but the CRE stated it was concerned about the state of the language throughout Wales. The Assembly and the Wales Tourist Board needed to do more to promote the Welsh language and deliver a programme which offered opportunities for those that wish to speak Welsh to do so. The Assembly could take practical steps to ensure that every person in Wales knows what it means to be a citizen of Wales and that the Welsh language is deserving of support. The Assembly also has to demonstrate practically how it intends to support the language and how to lift the prevailing debate on the language.
- The inflammatory language used in debates on the language over the summer was not helpful and was used by the media to further the tension. The CRE did all it could to diffuse this situation.
- In respect of its language policy, the CRE's representatives said that the organisation tries to ensure that its employees who have direct access to the public have the necessary skills in both English and Welsh. It makes a clear distinction between those staff who are engaged with the public and the research and backroom staff who have relatively little contact.
- The Chair thanked the CRE for their evidence and said that the Committee might seek

further advice from it in due course, particularly about the rights of communities.

Organisation:

Cymuned

Representatives:

Magi Lewis

Dr Simon Brooks

Lowri Jones

Dewi Prysor

Magi Lewis introduced Cymuned's evidence by saying that the majority of its members are ordinary people who have come together in opposition to the forces that mitigate against the Welsh language and its heartland communities.

In the age of globalisation, she wanted to see a more innovative approach to language issues. The Assembly has set itself the strategic aim of creating a bilingual Wales, but this can only be done if the language is shored up within the heartland communities.

The Assembly should take firm action to halt the decline of Welsh as a community language. The language is currently even contracting in some traditional strongholds such as Blaenau Ffestiniog. In Ceredigion for instance, only 28% of children are now brought up in Welsh speaking homes.

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- Several Committee members expressed concern about some of Cymuned's proposals, which they saw as creating language ghettos and divisions between Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers.
- Representatives of Cymuned replied that it was not the intention to exclude anyone. They stated that there should be job opportunities for people within their own communities; many people currently have to move to Cardiff or London to find work. Agencies and bodies such as the Assembly and S4C have a responsibility to relocate some of their jobs to areas such as Machynlleth, Caernarfon and Bangor. By doing so, this would create a more distinct urban environment in these towns and cities and make them more attractive to young people.
- Cymuned also spoke of its wish to give parents greater opportunities to learn Welsh with

their children, as happens in the Basque Country. The Government of the latter spends 1.9% of its budget on language planning; the government of Wales spends 0.069%. The reason for this is that Wales continues to operate under a financial settlement inherited from the pre-devolutionary era.

- Unless Wales has a number of communities in which Welsh is the natural language, the language will die. The future of bodies such as S4C is wholly dependent upon the survival of such communities.
- The Assembly should do everything in its power to make it easier for local residents to buy houses within their communities.
- The Chair thanked representatives of Cymuned for their evidence and said he would write to them with further questions and for clarification on some of their answers.

Item 2: Assembly Minister's Report

Paper: CC-16-01(p.4)

The Minister presented the paper summarising her activities since her last report to the Committee on 18th July 2001. In addition, she gave an oral report on a meeting of the UK Sports Cabinet she had attended on 31st October. Discussion there had centred upon the outcome of the Cunningham Review of Funding of Sport and Elite Sport Schemes. The Minister noted that the Welsh Scheme was already well established and was regarded as a model in this area.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Deputy Minister's Publishing Group would produce a paper for the Committee in due course, but the Group was some way from completing its deliberations.
- In respect of the discontinuation of the Place Names Advisory Committee, the assistance of individuals with appropriate expertise would continue to be available to the Welsh Language Board who now have responsibility for the function previously performed by that Committee. The Minister emphasised that the exercise of that function would continue to be on an advisory basis only.
- The Sports Council for Wales had yet to complete its plans for refurbishment of the Welsh Institute of Sport in Sophia Gardens. Until this was complete, the fate of the existing swimming pool at Sophia Gardens remained uncertain. Discussions were underway with the City and County of Cardiff regarding the possibility of providing an alternative facility in the city.
- In reply to questions about the financial position of Clwyd Theatr Cymru, the Minister expressed the intention that the significant increase in funding for the Arts Council for

Wales included in the draft budget would allow the long term needs of Clwyd Theatr Cymru and other organisations suffering from similar difficulties to be addressed. The Minister stated that she would shortly meet the Finance Minister and Flintshire County Council to discuss this issue. One member commented that Clwyd Theatr Cymru would benefit from being officially designated as the National Theatre of Wales

- Concern was expressed about the lack of investment in arts and sport in the South Wales Valleys. The Minister agreed to write to Huw Lewis about this, outlining the expenditure of the Arts Council of Wales in the South Wales Valleys in per capita terms.
- The Minister said that her recent visit to New York was poignant and very worthwhile. Wales was exceptionally well represented at the "UK with NY Festival". Members commented that this Festival would have provided a great opportunity for the broadcasters to make a documentary programme promoting Wales abroad. The Chair agreed to write to the broadcasters on this point.

Item 3: Consideration of draft budget for 2002-05

Paper: CC-16-01(p.5)

The Minister asked for questions and comments on the draft budget paper. The following points were raised in discussion:

- It was noted that provision for the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) had been established separately to the budget round. The Minister agreed to supply the Committee with a note about WMC funding and on the additional £2m available proposed for North Wales to counter-balance funding on the WMC.
- Jonathan Morgan hoped that the increase in provision to the Arts Council of Wales would go to practitioners and not on administration. It was his contention that 22% of the increase in the Culture budget would be spent on administration and he would write to the Minister about this.

The Committee agreed that the Chair would circulate a draft response to the Minister for members to approve outside of committee. The Minister would then convey the Committee's views to the Finance Minister in accordance with Standing Order 19.

Item 4: Quinquennial Review of the National Library of Wales

Paper: CC-16-01(p.6)

Richard Clarke presented the paper which laid out the proposed terms of reference for the

review. The National Library had been consulted on these and the Committee's comments were now sought.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- The indicative cost figure of £50,000 for the review may vary slightly depending upon whether external consultants were contracted to carry out the review or whether the review was carried out in-house.
- Members felt it was important that the review give consideration to the legal framework governing the National Library. Acts of Parliament associated with the establishment of the National Assembly may have implications for the framework under which the National Library operates, and these would be fundamental to the review.

The Committee noted that a draft interim report would be presented to it around Easter 2002.

Item 5: Minutes of the meeting held on 24th October

These were agreed without amendment.

Committee Secretariat November 2001