

Culture Committee CC-17-01(min)

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 15 November 2001

Time: 2.00pm-4.30pm

Venue: Newport Centre, Newport

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)

Apologies

Rosemary Butler (Labour, Newport West)

Alison Halford (Labour, Delyn)

Officials

Julia Annand (Committee Clerk)

Stephen Thomas (Deputy Committee Clerk)

Russell Thomas (Culture, Sport and Welsh Language Division)

Also in attendance:

Euryn Ogwen Williams (Committee's expert advisor on the Welsh language review)

Introductory remarks:

The Chair received the Committee's agreement in principle to commissioning an attitude survey/opinion poll about attitudes to the Welsh language. This issue would be discussed further at a future meeting.

The Chair informed Committee that Vincent Kane of Cardiff Marketing Ltd would give a presentation about Cardiff's bid for European Capital of Culture 2008, in the Assembly on 21 November at 5.30pm.

He also informed the Committee that he had invited Lord Gwilym Prys Davies to give evidence on the Welsh language review on 5 December.

Item 1: Committee's review of the Welsh language

Paper: CC-17-01(ps.1&2)

Organisation:

Welsh Development Agency

Representative:

Gareth Hall

The following points were made in presentation:

- The WDA recognise the key role of economic development in the future of the Welsh language and believes that bilingualism is a vital aspect of many communities across urban and rural Wales.
- The Agency's community regeneration policy is based on an area-based approach and provides for the integration of complementary economic, social, cultural and

environmental measures, many of which have evolved or developed from the needs identified in separate areas.

- WDA schemes that support community regeneration include the Market Towns Initiative in Mid Wales, which has more recently evolved into the Community Regeneration Tool-kit which is wide-ranging and available across Wales.
- WDA has been a core funder of Menter a Busnes from the outset to encourage Welsh speakers to venture into business.
- Extensive support has also been provided in recent years to the media industry, a major promoter of the Welsh language and provider of quality jobs.
- Projects such as the Llwybr Pathway Partnership and MARAN have resulted in higher bandwidth access being available to a range of businesses and consumers in areas that would not otherwise have been served by private telecommunications service providers, many parts of which are in the predominantly Welsh speaking areas.
- The WDA acknowledge that an even more cohesive approach can be adopted with regard to promoting linguistic considerations in our activities. To this end, it is working with the Welsh Language Board to explore areas for future co-operation.
- The WDA's work promotes the economic viability of many bilingual communities but it has not been presented as contributing directly to the future of the Welsh language. One possible activity for the WDA would be to engage in marketing with messages of support for bilingual communities.

Organisation

Wales Tourist Board

Representative:

Susan Morris

Ms Morris spoke to her paper (CC-17-01(p.2)).

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

WDA

- In answer to a question about the accessibility of broadband radio, Gareth Hall said that the infrastructure was very much in place, what was now needed was to energise the demand for it.
- The WDA is equally committed to rural and urban investment.
- Gareth Hall agreed that taking an holistic approach to bilingualism was not always the best policy and that campaigns in South East Wales needed a different emphasis to those in the North West.
- Overseas companies recognise that bilingualism is very much a positive. First and foremost, inward investors are looking for a pool of skilled and loyal labour and these characteristics are to the fore in Welsh communities.
- Gareth Hall said that he had only ever seen a downside to the language when it was not communicated as bilingualism.
- The WDA monitor the success of its programmes as a matter of course.

Wales Tourist Board

- Over 50% of income from tourism comes from Welsh heartland areas. The "sense of place" project is crucial to tourism and bilingualism. Susan Morris agreed to supply Members with further information about this project.
- This project is targeted on a regional basis; millions of pounds have also been targeted at "tourism growth areas".
- It is not always easy to persuade businesses of the advantages of the Welsh language. The controversial comments made about the language during Eisteddfod week undoubtedly had a negative effect on tourism and led to some people cancelling their holidays. However, in general, there is little negativity towards the language.
- Courses in marketing are available to everyone in receipt of a WTB grant.
- The Wales Tourist Board's website has become a very important tool in attracting people to Wales.

Organisation:

CBI Wales:

Representative:

David Rosser, Director

The following points were made in presentation:

- Language skills are highly valued by employers.
- The Assembly should not place any requirements on private companies in respect of the Welsh language. Any attempt to compel business to use the language will be counter productive.
- Any move to extend the provisions of the Welsh Language Act to require all banks, for example, to use the Welsh language would only increase the costs of those businesses that are already adopting the language on a voluntary basis.
- The Assembly needs to create the right economic conditions in the Welsh heartlands to enable people to set up businesses in these areas.
- Improving the business environment of the rural heartlands will require the transport infrastructure to be improved.
- The tone of the language debate over the summer had a damaging impact and sometimes portrayed Wales as unwelcoming. Potentially, this had a negative effect on inward investment.

Organisation:

Wales TUC

Representative:

David Jenkins, General Secretary

The following points were made in presentation:

- Wales TUC represents broadly 45% of the workforce in Wales, spread across a number

of individual unions. As an umbrella organisation, the Wales TUC has adopted the position of trying to develop the Welsh language in the Trade Union movement.

- However, recent research has shown that there has been a slight reverse in the number of unions in Wales having a Welsh language policy. Four Trade Unions in Wales have a Welsh language policy, another eight are actively considering the adoption of such a policy.
- Unions are now adopting a bilingual approach to the way they communicate with the outside world, but it is a slow process and only one union in Wales has simultaneous translation facilities available at its all-Wales meetings.
- Usage and demand for the language is relatively low within the trade union movement. For instance, 150 contributions were made at last year's annual conference, but only five of these were made in Welsh.
- There is a strong level of support for the cultural and day to day life of the language, but less demand for Welsh in the workplace.

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

CBI Wales

- In reply to a question about whether the CBI does anything to encourage people to enter businesses that are run through the medium of Welsh, Mr Rosser replied that the CBI does not discriminate in favour of such businesses; there is no positive discrimination of this kind.
- Mr Rosser wanted to address the misconception that costs aren't important in big businesses. He assured the Committee that every member across Wales, even in the largest companies is keeping a close eye on costs. The bigger the business, the more internationally exposed that company is and the more it has to watch margins and cost pressures.
- Most companies in Wales who operate bilingually, do so on a goodwill basis, believing that it assists them in customer relationships.
- The tone of debate on the language at the recent CBI conference was very positive. The conference was multilingual.
- One of the main attractions for inward investors into the UK is the English language. The vast majority of inward investors would view any attempt to compel business to use the

Welsh language as an additional cost.

- In reply to a question about how the CBI saw the development of workbased training in language skills, Mr Rosser replied that the CBI does not differentiate between language training and other types of training.

Wales TUC

- Trade Union membership in Wales is primarily located in North Wales and industrial South East Wales and tends to predominate amongst the older population.
- Language issues have tended to form part of the equal opportunities agenda within the Wales TUC and have treated on the basis that it is right and proper that language provision be made.
- The Wales TUC has tried to get its affiliated unions to adopt a voluntary Welsh language policy. Unions are nervous about getting dragged into the realms of compulsion. They prefer the current unspecified, unstated approach rather than having it in codified form

The Chair thanked the CBI and TUC for their positive and realistic contribution to the language debate.

Organisation:

Newport County Borough Council

Representative:

Colin Crick

The following points were made in presentation:

- Mr Crick had not submitted a written response to the review, but promised to do so within the next two weeks after it had gained the endorsement of the Cabinet and Council.
- In Newport, implementation of the Welsh Language Scheme has been slower than the Council have wished, but there is a strong desire within the Council to enable all its citizens to access services through their chosen language, wherever possible.
- The Council has recently appointed an Equality Officer at a senior level and will treat the

Welsh language as a mainstream equalities issue.

- There have been many positive recent developments within Newport. These include the establishment of a 52-place Welsh-medium nursery, the introduction of bilingual Council tax forms, a bilingual website. The Council is also undertaking a fundamental review of the democratic structure of the Authority.
- The Council recognises that to ensure social inclusion, it must have provisions in place in the Welsh language.
- The Council will also, from the new year, have a new communications channel so that problems can be dealt with in Welsh and other minority languages.
- Mr Crick promised to get back to the Committee with its official response to the review and to the queries from the Committee on education issues.

David Davies AM

The following points were made in presentation:

- The majority of people in the Newport area believe in the importance of the development of the Welsh language in South East Wales.
- The mistake made by Government at the moment is to adopt a blanket policy for the language throughout Wales. The Assembly should permit local authorities to adopt policies should suit each respective area.
- Mandatory teaching of the Welsh language for children in Monmouth is a waste of public money. It is difficult to find teachers qualified in the language and it is also difficult to teach children who have little interest in learning Welsh. We should concentrate on those pupils that want to learn Welsh.
- The Assembly, and other public bodies should also look very closely at what documents they translate and the amount of public money spent on translation.
- The Assembly should do everything it can to support the language but should do this through policies of choice.

Open microphone session

The following contributions were noted:

- Shirley Mills stated that the Welsh nation is due an apology from the English for their treatment of the Welsh language through the centuries. She went on to say that most people were opposed to the compulsory teaching of Welsh. Every person should have the right to learn Welsh, but it should not be forced upon people.
- Alun Thomas criticised Newport Borough Council for not responding to the Welsh Language Act in any way. It is the only Council in Wales not to provide public services through the medium of Welsh. Mr Thomas felt that the main reason that the National Eisteddfod was to return to Newport in 2004 was to increase its chances of achieving city status.
- Stefan Lewis stated that Welsh is the language of Wales and people should accept the fact that this is a bilingual country. He also criticised the Council for not providing bilingual signs or services and he alluded to some anti-Welsh attitudes which prevailed in Newport and the former county of Gwent which sometimes made him feel like a second class citizen in his own country.
- Debbie Griffiths alerted the Committee to the difficulties faced by parents in trying to establish a second Welsh-medium primary and secondary school in Newport. She hoped that the Assembly could do something to move this matter forward.
- David Thomas said that Welsh speaking people did not always take advantage of the language provisions that were in place.

The Chair thanked members of the audience for their lively contribution.

Other matters

- The Chair told the Committee that this was likely to be Jonathan Morgan's last meeting as a Committee member. On behalf of the Committee, he thanked him for his valuable contribution.
- Delyth Evans asked the Chair when the Committee was likely to consider the matter of evidence taking in other countries. The Chair said that the matter of foreign visits would be discussed at the Committee's next meeting on 21 November.

Committee Secretariat November 2001