

European and External Affairs Committee

Minutes

Date 11 November 2004
Time 9.00 to 12.10
Venue National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Attendance

EDT Members

Sandy Mewies (Chair)
Nick Bourne
Rosemary Butler
Christine Chapman
Mike German
Christine Gwyther
Ieuan Wyn Jones
Jonathan Morgan
Rhodri Morgan
Rhodri Glyn Thomas

Constituency

Labour: Delyn
Conservative: Mid & West Wales
Labour: Newport West
Labour: Cynon Valley
Liberal Democrat: South Wales East
Labour: Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire
Plaid Cymru: Ynys Môn
Conservative: South Wales Central
Labour: Cardiff West
Plaid Cymru: Carmarthen East & Dinefwr

ECTARC presenters

Sharon Thomas
Vanessa Baldry
Phil Moran

European Information advisory manager, Director,
Head of Youth and Training
beneficiary, Wales programme

Officials

Peter Kellam
Gary Davies
Des Clifford
Ifona Deeley
Rob Halford

APS (as Assembly BIIPB Secretariat)
European and External Affairs Division
European and External Affairs Division
European and External Affairs Division
Economic Policy Division

Secretariat

John Grimes
Siân Wilkins

Clerk
Clerk

Item 1: Introduction, apologies and substitutions

1. Apologies had been received from Rhodri Morgan AM and from Glenys Kinnock, MEP and Eluned Morgan, MEP.
2. The Chair said that Nick Bourne, Mike German and Ieuan Wyn Jones would have to leave part way through the meeting to attend the opening of a Welsh Garden of Remembrance in Gorsedd Gardens. She also said she proposed observing a two minute silence at 11 o'clock as a mark of respect for those who had lost their lives as a result of war and invited members, who wished to, join her.

Item 2: Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

1. The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October were agreed as a true record. The Chair welcomed the summary of action outstanding which she said she intended to continue.

Item 3: Report on the British and Irish Inter Parliamentary Body conference, 17-19 October 2004

Paper: EUR2 08-04(p1) – British and Irish Inter Parliamentary Body - update

1. Mike German reported on the recent plenary session of the BIIPB and drew attention to two particular developments. The first was the decision to allocate time in each plenary session to a debate sponsored by one of the devolved bodies. The first of these had occurred at this meeting and which Jane Hutt had spoken about smoking in public places. The second was the decision to form a sub committee to develop proposals for potential cross border European funding. He was chairing this and which John Griffiths, AM was also a member.
2. In the discussion Mike German agreed to ensure that a copy of the deliberations of the BIIPB on smoking in public places was passed to the Assembly committee considering this. [Action: Mike German].
3. Members welcomed these developments which they felt would, through a 'ripple effect', lead to significant benefits. They hoped the use of sub committees would continue.
4. Summing up the discussion, Chair said the Committee very much welcomed the two developments highlighted in the report and was pleased that Wales had been involved with them at the start. It was agreed that the Committee would receive regular reports on the sessions of the BIIPB and that they should receive the Agenda for these meetings in advance of their being held. [Action: Mike German/Clerk].

Item 4: First Minister's Report

Paper: EUR2 08-04(p2) – First Minister's report

1. In the absence of the First Minister, who was attending an Armistice Day service, officials outlined a number of high profile visits by various overseas Ambassadors to Wales. They were proactive in inviting diplomats to Wales and found great value in meeting newly appointed Ambassadors before they took up their posts. These visits provided a good opportunity to promote Wales and to build links which could generate inward investment and assist international trade in the future.
2. Officials updated the Committee on the meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee held in October. It had been a routine meeting with much of the discussion centred on the Working Time Directive. There was currently deadlock in the European Council on this with the UK and France holding completely opposite views regarding the proposals for an individual 'opt out'. They also discussed the White Paper on Governance which aimed to reduce the regulatory burden. Officials referred to the recent visit by the First Minister to Emilia Romagna. This had been at the invitation of the President and had served to cement the relationship between the region and Wales which already existed at official level. It was important for Wales to maintain key relationships with regional governments throughout Europe.
3. Members recognised the relationships Wales had with regions in the 'big 5' member states, namely, Brittany (France), Silesia (Poland), Baden Wurttemberg (Germany), Catalunya (Spain) and now Emilia Romagna (Italy), and wondered if there would be merit in bringing together the regions to increase their lobbying power. Officials said that there was scope to bring them together but they currently took a 'pick and mix' approach forming alliances with regions when they had shared interests. These regions had their own alliances with other parts of the EU which could also be of benefit.
4. Members asked about the likelihood of an early resolution on the Working Time Directive. Officials said that given the current deadlock, this was unlikely. The Chair asked that the Committee be kept informed of developments. [Action: First Minister.]
5. Members welcomed the visits to Wales by overseas Ambassadors and the visits that Welsh Assembly Ministers made abroad. They were concerned however that the Home Office did not really understand the political and cultural links that Wales had with the rest of the World and they cited a number of examples of visitors to promotional activities being refused access to the UK. Officials said that this was a matter for the Home Office. While they could not get involved with individual cases, they would consider working with organisers of events such as the International Eisteddfod to ensure problems were anticipated and to see if they could be dealt with before they arose.
6. On the forthcoming UK Presidency, officials confirmed that there was a lot of Welsh input at official level and they were hopeful that a number of significant events would be held in Wales with obvious spin-offs for Welsh businesses.
7. Members said they would welcome further reports on some of the visits and meetings referred to in the report. Officials agreed to provide further details on the First Minister's visit to Emilia-Romagna. They also said they were happy to deal with individual requests from Members for

more detailed reports. [Action: First Minister]

8. In relation to the Minister for Environment , Planning and Countryside's involvement in the Steering Committee of NRG4SD, which promoted sustainable development. Members agreed that the Minister should be invited to the Committee to report on the First General Assembly in Sumatra. [Action Clerk]
9. Reference was made to the Wales Euro Preparations Committee (WEPC) which was being chaired by the Secretary of State and of which the First Minister and the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services were Members. The Chair asked if the Committee could have an update at the next meeting on the preparations. [Action: Chair/Clerk]

Item 5: Welsh Assembly Government's External Relations Strategic Framework Paper: EUR2 08-04 (p3) – Wales, A World Nation – A Strategic Framework

1. Officials outlined the key sections of the paper which set out the framework within which the Assembly Government would take forward its international activities to improve Wales' recognition throughout the World. They welcomed Members comments on this draft.
2. Members were unclear about the status of the paper and said they found the style confusing. They said it was not clear who the audience was or what purpose the report would serve once finalised. If the document was intended for a wider audience it should be sharper and more consideration of the audience should influence its style and language.
3. In discussion Members highlighted several areas that they considered needed further definition or clarity:
 - More should be made of the Assembly's gender balance. It was a unique position and Members said that they saw a steady stream of visitors from abroad who were interested in this particular area. Officials said that they did use this when promoting Wales but a reference to it could be included in the report.
 - Further work should be done on involving the private sector. If the Government was serious about a Team Wales approach then the private sector should be more involved. Many Welsh companies had strong links abroad and these should form a central part of any strategy for promoting Wales.
 - The reference to the role of Culture in promoting Wales abroad should be strengthened in the paper.
 - Where the report referred to partners, it should be noted that individual Assembly Members had a role to play as well as the Welsh Assembly Government.
 - It would be helpful to have a list of the Honorary Consuls in Wales annexed to the report as well as an explanation of some of the acronyms or a glossary of terms. Officials agreed to provide members with the list of honorary consuls. [Action: First Minister]
 - It was important to outline the role that civic society played in promoting Wales. Officials said they had held discussions with WCVA The importance of the Welsh Diaspora and Alumni was highlighted, and it was agreed this was very much an untapped resource at present.
 - The document should have a stronger reference to the relationship Wales has with UK bodies that promote the UK abroad.

4. Some members were also concerned that that bringing ASPBs in house could have a negative effect on the individual 'unique selling points' individual ASPBs used in their marketing, such as the WTB's 'Wales – A Big Country' campaign which focussed on the environment. There was a danger that the individual messages would become diluted. Officials believed that the merger of the WDA and WTB into the Assembly would make it easier to manage a more corporate approach to promoting Wales overseas. A Member said that these organisations were constantly lobbied by companies and organisations wanting greater promotion for their own products and the independence of the ASPBs meant they could take a 'hard nosed' business approach to decisions. Members felt this aspect was very important. Officials pointed out that a similar situation to the merger had arisen at the time of the creation of Wales Trade International (WTI) as an integral part of the Assembly Government a few years ago. The track record of WTI was impressive and they constantly had to make decisions taking account of priorities and resources.
5. Members were interested to know how the document would be taken forward. They agreed that all Assembly Members should be involved in its development. Officials said they welcomed Members comments on the document and agreed to ask the First Minister to consider a debate in Plenary on the final version. The Chair asked that a revised paper be brought back to the Committee at the appropriate time. [Action: First Minister]

Item 6: NUTS 2 and 3 mapping implications

Paper: EUR2 08-04(p4) - Review of Regional Aid Guidelines: Alternative Map Scenarios

1. Officials went through the analysis described in the paper and how the various maps presented had been derived. They noted that they were based on the latest GDP figures available but, since these were for 2001, they would change before final decisions were taken. It was noted that there might in fact need to be 2 revisions as figures for 2002 and, subsequently, 2003 became available.
2. Members welcomed the analysis which they found very helpful. They commented that alongside Assisted Area coverage, a key issue was the level of support which would be available in each category of area.
3. As regards timing, officials said that a multi lateral meeting which the European Commission had envisaged holding with Member States during September had been deferred to allow a proper dialogue with Member States on their individual concerns with Commission proposals. It was thought that this meeting might now not take place until early 2005. It was agreed that the Committee would come back to this issue after the meeting had been held. [Action: First Minister]
4. Members noted that the decision on the designation of the assisted areas map was one for the European Commission, not the Council of Ministers. The new map would come into effect on 1 January 2007 and run until 2013. Officials indicated that it was assumed that the issues would be resolved and the decision taken so that this start date could be achieved.

Item 7: Paper on EU legislation processes/update

Paper: EUR2 08-04 (p5) - EU legislation scrutiny in Assembly Committees

1. Members welcomed the proposals for a revised approach to handling EU legislation and felt it important that subject committees followed the proposals. It was agreed that these should now be put to the Panel of Chairs to consider.

Item 8: European proposals deposited in the UK parliament

Paper: EUR2 08-04(p6) - European proposals deposited in the UK parliament

EUR2 08-04(p9) – Additional information on EU deposited documents requested at meeting on 14 October 2004.

1. Members did not identify any particular issues for further consideration but, since a number of members had since left the meeting, it was agreed that the Clerk would e-mail them seeking suggestions out of Committee. [Action: Clerk]
2. Reference was made to a recent directive on services through which the EC was proposing to open up the market for pharmaceutical services. It was agreed to look further at this to consider whether any action needed to be taken by the Committee. Officials agreed to find further information on this. [Action: EEAD Officials/Clerk.]

Item 9: European Centre for Training and Regional Cooperation (ECTARC)

Paper: EUR2 08-04 (p7) – European Centre for Training and Regional Cooperation

1. Sharon Thomas outlined the history of ECTARC's establishment and its key activities. In particular the fact that it was a flexible, non-bureaucratic organisation with a long track record of developing successful European education and training projects. Its flexibility allowed it to respond quickly to new initiatives. She outlined the challenges they continued to face on funding, the need for strong partnership working and the benefits to individuals attending the programmes.
2. A large part of ECTARC's work was the European Information and Advisory Service for Wales (EIAS). Vanessa Baldry explained that this was a 2 year contract with the Assembly to support Higher and Further Education Colleges in accessing EU education and training programmes as well as providing briefing and advice to the Assembly on related issues. She highlighted the specific projects and programmes that ECTARC were involved in.
3. One of these was the Leonardo Da Vinci programme which provided vocational and language training abroad. Through the programme ECTARC currently sends 100 students a year to Europe. They develop their language skills, experience different cultures, improve their own employability and experience new methods of working. Phil Moran had been a beneficiary of this programme and he explained to the Committee his experience and the benefits he had gained particularly from the work placement in Germany. He had benefited from the networking opportunities the visit had provided and hoped to use them to expand his film making business as well as the obvious improvements in his language skills.
4. In the discussion, Members congratulated ECTARC on their work. They were surprised that there was not more demand for the Leonardo programme but ECTARC said that one of the main barriers in Wales was a lack of the basic language skills needed to access the programme. Members asked whether there was a need for more specific marketing and questioned the

accessibility of the scheme. ECTARC said that they concentrated a lot of effort in marketing the programme. They had recently been visited by the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and had discussed the possibility of providing the programme as a module in FE courses. They saw this as an ideal opportunity to widen access. They said that students from all parts of Wales went on the programme and agreed to let Members have further details of the take up by students including their geographic location. [Action: Clerk/ECTARC]

5. A Member referred to their lack of ELWa accreditation and whether it created problems. Aside from the obvious difficulties with funding, ECTARC believed they had turned this to their advantage as it did allow them to be creative and respond to customer's needs.

Item 10: Reports from Members of the Committee of the Regions, Welsh MEPs and the Commission Office in Wales (12.00 - 12.10)

1. There was nothing to report under this item.

**Committee Service
November 2004**