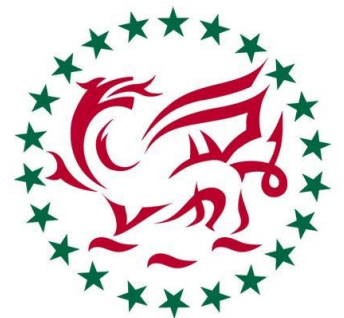


Welsh Local Government and the Committee of the Regions 2006 - 08

17th July 2008



WLGA • CLILC

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members.
2. At a European Union level, the Welsh Local Government Association has been represented by Cllr W.J. Williams (Anglesey) as its full member and Cllr Bob Bright (Newport) as the alternate member since the beginning of the current manage in 2006.
3. This report seeks to summarise a number of their achievements and underline the added value of Welsh local government involvement in the committee.

Background

- 1 The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the political assembly that provides local and regional authorities with a voice at the heart of the European Union.
- 2 Established in 1994, the CoR was set up to address two main issues. Firstly, about three quarters of EU legislation is implemented at local or regional level, so the CoR gives the 350 local and regional representatives from 27 Member States a say in the development of new EU laws. Secondly, there were concerns that the public was being left behind as the EU steamed ahead. Involving the elected level of government that is closest to the citizens remains an important step in engaging citizens concerns head on.
- 3 The Treaties oblige the Commission and Council to consult the Committee of the Regions whenever new proposals are made in areas that have repercussions at regional or local level. The Maastricht Treaty set out 5 such areas - economic and social cohesion, trans-European infrastructure networks, health, education and culture. The Amsterdam Treaty added another five areas to the list - employment policy, social policy, the environment, vocational training and transport - which now covers much of the scope of the EU's activity. The Lisbon Treaty, subject to its final ratification, would

give the CoR the right of recourse to the European Court where the Commission or Member States have not respected the principle of subsidiarity.

4 There are three main principles at the heart of the CoR's work:

- **Subsidiarity** - that decisions within the European Union should be taken at the closest practical level to the citizen. The European Union, therefore, should not take on tasks which are better suited to national, regional or local administrations.
- **Proximity** – that all levels of government should aim to be 'close to the citizens', in particular by organising their work in a transparent fashion, so people know who is in charge of what and how to make their views heard.
- **Partnership** – that effective multi level governance means European, national, regional and local government working together.

5 The UK delegation, which is currently hosted by the LGA, operates a policy of giving the alternate members permanent responsibility for the full UK member's second committee. The secretariat currently supports members in making practical arrangements, providing background briefing on committee and plenary session agendas and organises biannual delegation meetings. The role of the delegation secretariat in relation to setting UK wide priorities is though the subject of increasing scrutiny particularly with the recent Scottish intention to withdraw during 2009.

6 The WLGA increasingly supports the work of its members and seeks opportunities based on its priorities either as political initiatives through so-called 'rapporteurships' (committee draftsman) or through the various high profile events that the CoR is hosting with some effect (i.e. OPEN DAYS).

Added value

7 The CoR is an excellent opportunity to give our members direct European experience in working not only within the EU decision-making process but also as a member of their respective political groups. Whilst the learning curve is a steep one, it serves as an

excellent source of Member development which benefits the WLGA and the member authorities directly.

- 8 The WLGA CoR members have a key opportunity to amend and approve the views of the CoR on priority EU initiatives for local government. With local government responsible for over 65% of the implementation of EU legislation on the ground the role of our members in influencing decisions upstream of their eventual implementation is critical.
- 9 The Association has sought to be represented alongside COSLA (Scotland) and the LGA in the so called *structured dialogue* meetings with the local government associations where the President of the Commission and senior Commissioners speak on the Commission work programme priorities with a potential implication for the local and regional dimension in the year ahead.
- 10 The WLGA is also member of CEMR – the **Council of European Municipalities and Regions**, the pan European association for LGAs. The CEMR plays a key role in influencing policy at the earliest stages before the European Commission publishes its initiative. Given that the CoR is only consulted once the Commission has published its proposals WLGA CoR members can benefit from this earlier engagement in preparing their priorities.
- 11 However, CoR advisory opinions can only be of real value when timely links are made with the European Parliament and MEPs who have responsibility for the same opinions. The European Parliament holds substantially more powers to shape and amend Commission proposals in a variety of policy areas with the Council and the Member states.

Key Developments

- 12 Cllr WJ Williams recently stood down from the CoR at the recent local government elections. With a distinguished 48 years in local government on the Isle of Anglesey, the WLGA congratulates Mr Williams not only on his contribution to the local community but for that of his tireless representation of Welsh Local Government in the CoR.

- 13 In December 2006, as rapporteur on the Fourth Progress Report on Cohesion, Cllr Williams took the partnership debate to the heart of the European Commission as the Regional Transport Committee's (COTER) representative on emerging trends in Cohesion Policy with the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Lisbon Earmarking. Cllr Williams report was unanimously adopted in CoR Plenary and served as a springboard for his political group, the UEN – EA, nominating him to the Working Group of Territorial Cohesion established in 2007 that looks at future regional policy scenarios.
- 14 Both Councillors Bright and Williams supported the Wales European Forum meetings in Wales held in Caerleon and Llandudno during 2007 that sought to communicate the work of Welsh CoR members to a wider audience. Indeed an opportunity at the Llandudno meeting was secured for a Welsh European Social Fund project from Bangor University, GWLAD, to have a stand in the [OPEN DAYS 2007 Investors Cafe](#) – see <http://www.gwlad.org/index2.php>
- 15 In June 2006 and 2008, Ysgol David Hughes, were successful in the UEN-EA schools essay competition that resulted in two students visiting Brussels recently with Mr Williams. The 2008 competition asked students from each of the competing schools to choose one of two titles for their essays - ***How would you enhance intercultural dialog in the different regions of the European Union?*** and ***A young persons view: increasing our role in the European Union decision making process?***. The winning entries from each school were then rewarded with a schools visit that coincided with the June plenary and included a meeting with Commissioner Danuta Hubner. More information on the 2008 Schools competitions is available from http://cor.europa.eu/presentation/down/ea/secondary_school.html The students are now looking forward to sharing their experience with members of Anglesey Education committee when it meets on 15th September. A press release and photos from Brussels will be published after that meeting.
- 16 Cllr Bob Bright is the WLGA alternate member on the CoR and sits on the Education and Culture committee (EDUC). Cllr Bright has played a key role in initiatives on eGovernment and information society which in 2007 led to him being invited on behalf of the EDUC committee to represent the CoR at a major Portuguese Presidency Summit

on eGovernment across the EU. His presence in Lisbon led to Newport City's Council application for eGovernment excellence and its call centre being shortlisted for the Summit exhibition.

17 Cllr Bright was delighted to participate with First Minister Rhodri Morgan in the Brussels launch of the Ryder Cup held at the CoR during the Brussels based St David's Day activities in February 2008. The event served to raise the profile of Wales and Newport, underlined the importance of sport, regeneration and regional policy in Wales and raised the profile of the Welsh CoR members with President Luc Vanden Brande who hosted the event.

18 On 1 July 2008, Cllr Bright narrowly missed out on being nominated for a rapporteurship in the EDUC committee on Modernising School education that the CoR will use to respond to the results of a recent European Commission survey. Whilst the Association is disappointed with the decision of the CoR political groups, the fact that Cllr Bright had become the European PES party nominee for this report was extremely encouraging. CoR rapporteurships are awarded using a transparent points process which often doesn't recognise the regional interest or personal motivation of members seeking to draft reports. Nevertheless, the WLGA is now being consulted informally on the draft opinion over the summer before it is presented to the next EDUC committee. We fully expect Cllr Bright to be nominated in the coming months for a similar report in the months ahead.

19 Finally, the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Local Government Association representatives in Ty Cymru Brussels are leading for the second year running a consortium for OPEN DAYS 2008 – ***the Celtic Connections***. The initiative includes the coordination of a high profile seminar '***Climate Change's impact on our shores - Meeting the challenges posed by extreme weather conditions***' and the coordination of local events throughout the Celtic regions during September / October 2008. Welsh events are being planned for Newport, Pembrokeshire Technium (Pembroke Dock), Trinity College (Carmarthenshire), Cardiff and Llandudno. More information on these events is available through Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Local Government Association European Affairs contacts.

20 In future, it is likely that Cllr Bright will become the Associations full member of CoR. The WLGA Council meeting on the 27th June nominated Cllr Chris Holley, the Associations spokesperson for Regeneration and European Affairs as its new alternative member of the CoR from October 2008. The formal nomination process is now underway.

Conclusions and way forward

- To monitor emerging arrangements for coordination of UK delegation
- Through effective working in Wales House Brussels, effective member contact should be encouraged between Welsh members of CoR, ECOSOC and European Parliament (also the Council of Europe - CLARE.) with a view to increasing influence.
- To identify priority topics for Welsh members to pursue as part of UK delegation.
- To continue to encourage CoR member engagement in WAG Wales European Forum events.

For further information please contact:

Simon Pascoe

simon.pascoe@wlga-brussels.org.uk

Welsh Local Government Association
Local Government House
Drake walk
Cardiff
CF10 4LG

Tel: 00 322 506 44 77