

Minutes

Date: Friday 8 October 1999

Time: 10.00am to 1.00pm

Venue: Guildhall, Wrexham

Attendance

Members

Gareth Jones, Chair	Conwy
Alison Halford	Delyn
Christine Humphreys	North Wales
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Ynys Môn
Tom Middlehurst	Alyn and Deeside
Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Karen Sinclair	Clwyd South
Dafydd Wigley	Caernarfon

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Clerk
Howell Rees	Deputy Clerk

The Chair said that apologies had been received from Dafydd Elis Thomas, Ann Jones, John Marek and Rod Richards. He thanked Wrexham County Borough Council for their hospitality and said that the Committee had decided to meet in Wrexham to raise the profile of the Assembly in North East Wales and give the people of Wrexham an opportunity to see the Assembly at work.

Item 1: Presentation by the North Wales Health Authority followed by discussion

The Chair welcomed the representatives of the North Wales Health Authority to the meeting. The Chair of the Health Authority, Enid Rowlands, introduced her colleagues, David Hands, Chief Executive, Peter Higson, Director Patient Care and Jeremy Corson, Deputy Director of Public Health. She said that the Authority appreciated the opportunity to meet the Committee and was pleased that health was the first issue the Committee was looking at. There was considerable pressure on the health service and the Authority faced some difficult choices.

David Hands made a presentation that focused on the theme of working in partnership for health.

The Health Authority team then responded to questions raised by the Committee and the following points were made:

- smoking was one the most important current public health issues and the Authority had made a bid to the Assembly for a health promotion scheme. Key targets would be reducing smoking amongst young women and encouraging more non-smoking environments. Legislation to increase the age limit at which young people could buy tobacco might help but the key issue was the enforcement of the current limit;
- the Authority was unable to give any assurances about when construction of the proposed community hospital in Porthmadog could be started as capital funding for community hospitals and other major investments was a matter for the Assembly. The scheme to provide a new community hospital in Holywell was at a similar stage of development;
- the Authority said that Flint Community Hospital provided a good service, within the limitations of the facilities. If capital money were available the Authority would like to develop the Hospital. It was, however, vital that revenue funding continued to be distributed by the Assembly by reference to an objective formula;
- the Authority was committed to working with the voluntary sector and made grants of £1.3 million to the sector each year. Health Alliances, which would be established next year, would involve the voluntary sector in the planning of health services;
- Strategic Health Alliances would provide the framework for closer partnership working between the Authority and the six North Wales local authorities. The Health Authority and the local authorities were required to work together to design appropriate care packages for their

populations;

- all new drugs were assessed for both effectiveness and cost effectiveness before they were prescribed by the NHS. Generic drugs were used where effective because they were cheaper. It was not correct that cheaper drugs were used in Wales and the Authority did not support post code prescribing;
- improved primary care and a better relationship between primary and secondary care were the keys to tackling bed blocking by elderly patients and preventing institutionalisation. It was noted that 60% of hospital beds were occupied by patients over 60 years of age.

The Chair thanked the Health Authority for a very helpful presentation and for responding fully to the Committee's questions.

The Committee then broke for 15 minutes.

Item 2: Presentation by the North Wales Economic Forum followed by discussion

The Chair welcomed the representatives of the North Wales Economic Forum to the meeting. The Chair of the Forum, David Rowe-Beddoe, introduced his colleagues, Sheila Dury, Chair of the Education, Training and Skills Group, Trefor Jones, Chair of the Developing Competitive Business Group and Councillor W J Williams, Chair of Transportation Standing Committee. Presentations were made by Sheila Dury on *the Implication of Future Skills Wales on North Wales*, Trefor Jones on *Business Connect, Operating Aids, North Wales Strategic Sites* and *Information and Communication Technology* and Councillor Williams on *North to South Rail Links, North to South Road Links* and *North Wales coast line improvements for passengers and freight*.

The Economic Forum team then responded to questions raised by the Committee and the following points were made:

- the economy of North West Wales depended on improving communications links but it appeared that the Forum had reduced the priority of rail links between Holyhead and Cardiff. The Forum confirmed that its first priority remained to secure extra services between Holyhead and Cardiff. However Wales and West Trains wanted £1.7 million a year to run one extra train a day on that route. Central Trains were keen to improve services along the North Wales coast and that could be achieved sooner and at less cost;
- a bid had been submitted by Conwy County Borough Council on behalf of the other local authorities for a Transport Grant to increase line speed on the North Wales coast line and the Assembly was urged to support it;
- Railtrack had estimated the cost of upgrading the North Wales coast line to take 9'6" freight boxes would be over £100 million. However consultants believed the cost would be less and negotiations with Railtrack were proceeding;

- Flintshire County Council had improved Flint Station but had not been able to persuade train operators to stop there. The Council was also expected to pay for bridge improvements. It was noted that discussions were being held with operators to stop at Flint but Rairack had been reluctant to invest in infrastructure;
- disabled people would benefit from more through trains since changing trains was difficult. The Disability Discrimination Act should make the upgrading of stations a greater priority. The Forum agreed to take this up with Railtrack;
- Future Skills Wales' focus on improving generic skills was right but it was acknowledged that specific skills were very important and also needed to be developed;
- because the VAT threshold could act as a disincentive for small company growth a graduated scale was suggested as a possible operating aid. The Committee noted that VAT rates were set at the UK level and could not therefore be used as an operating aid in Wales;
- A proposal had been made at the Roadshow meeting in Rhyl to establish a special women's enterprise fund. The Forum felt it was better to support business generally and involve women in that process. Positive discrimination would not be useful;
- There was a danger that Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were taking the lion's share of European funds and investment was not getting down to the grassroots. It was noted that TECs' funding was under tremendous scrutiny and changes to the funding regime were likely. TECs were very efficient at contracting out services and using their reserves to fund, for example, the North Wales associate groups. Individual learning accounts would meet individuals needs and make a real difference;
- it was vital to encourage small businesses to make use of the Internet and to develop a information and communications strategy for North Wales. The Committee noted that there were many good small projects, particularly in education but take up was not great. The capacity of telephone lines was adequate but there were technical problems in exchanges that the Forum was discussing with British Telecom and the Welsh Development Agency. A survey by BT would be available by March 2000.

The Chair thanked the Forum for the presentation and said the Committee appreciated the work the Forum was doing.

Item 3: Report by the informal group on north south rail links

It was agreed that, in view of the discussion under item 2 on rail links, this item should be deferred.

Action points

- Include report on north south rail links in next agenda - **Secretariat.**

Item 4: Consideration of draft forward work programme

The Chair invited the Committee to note the draft forward programme.

In discussion the following were made:

- one local authority had pulled out of negotiations to establish a cycle path, as part of the National Cycle Route, between Holyhead, Bangor and Chester. It was vital that the route was complete and the Committee was invited to endorse it. Alison Halford said she had already written to Flintshire County Council about this and agreed to pass a copy of the reply to the Committee;
- if the Committee held open forum meetings the meetings must be genuinely open. The Committee noted that the North Wales Police organised open forum meetings and the Committee could learn from their procedures.

The Committee agreed;

- to invite the North Wales local authorities and the North Wales Fire Authority to the Committee's meeting in Caernarfon on 10 December 1999. It was suggested that the authorities should provide an update on progress on objective 1;
- that members should pass suggestions for future meetings to the Secretariat;
- that there was insufficient time to arrange an open forum meeting on 12 November but one should be arranged in January. Possible topics included the North Wales Early Years Forum and sustainable development;
- to delegate to the Chair decisions on which proposals for Committee business received from organisations and individuals should be included in the forward work programme.

Action points

- Forward work programme to be revised and circulated - **Chair and Secretariat.**
- Invite north Wales local authorities and North Wales Fire Authority to meeting on 10 December - **Secretariat.**
- Reply on National Cycle Route problems from Flintshire County Council to be copied to the Secretariat for circulation to the Committee - **Alison Halford and Secretariat.**

Item 5: Minutes of meeting of 2 July 1999

The minutes were adopted.

