

Culture Committee CC-10-01(min)

MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 6 June

Time: 10.00am

Venue: Aberystwyth Arts Centre

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))

Apologies:

Rosemary Butler (Labour, Newport West)

Delyth Evans (Labour, Mid & West Wales)

Jonathan Morgan (Conservative, South Wales Central))

Alison Halford (Labour, Delyn)

Officials

Julia Annand (Committee Clerk)

Stephen Thomas (Deputy Committee Clerk)

Russell Thomas (Head, Culture, Sport and Welsh Language Division)

Also present:

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

Declarations of Interest: None

Introductory remarks

The Chair explained that the purpose of this session was to gather evidence for the Committee's Welsh language review.

Item 1: Review of the Welsh Language

Oral item

Organisation:

Urdd Gobaith Cymru

Presenter:

Jim O'Rourke, Chief Executive

The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- The Urdd's work is targeted within three main age groups: junior schools and community branches, the secondary school sector and the Urddaholics (the over 16s).
- The Urdd puts on many residential opportunities at its centres in Llangrannog and Glan-Llyn, recently held a successful festival and provides many sporting opportunities.
- Recent successes have included a 37% increase in the over-16 membership between 1998 and 2000, whilst the number of hits on the Urdd website has grown remarkably in the last two years. 70% of the hits on the Urdd website during its festival week were from Europe and the rest of the world.
- The organisations also offers many opportunities for families, particularly in the Welsh rural heartland.
- The organisation has suffered badly from the knock-on effects of foot and mouth disease, including the loss of 16 staff, but it hopes that these problems are now behind

it. The National Assembly recently announced an additional £150k funding which will be used for a marketing drive in the autumn.

- For the future, the Urdd believes that Wales needs to have confidence in its language and in Cardiff as its capital.

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

- A base in the Wales Millennium Centre will increase the Urdd's capacity to provide urban opportunities for its members. It will provide a Cardiff-based experience for young people.
- The organisation faces problems in rural Wales, particularly in recruiting volunteers. The Urdd is aware that it must provide activities and opportunities that are relevant to local communities.
- The Urdd membership has grown in recent years, but has not yet matched the highpoint of 1978 when membership reached 62,000. The growth in membership in South-East Wales has to some extent been triggered by the development of Welsh medium education in the old county of Gwent.
- Teachers make a great voluntary contribution to the Urdd; about half the leaders of community groups come from the teaching profession.
- There are a number of after-school clubs run by the Urdd which provide activities which help sustain the language, but Mentrau Iaith are often best placed to do this work.
- Mr O'Rourke stated that traditional Welsh language heartlands were losing young people because of the lack of work opportunities in these areas and poor transportation links.
- Around 65% of Urdd members are Welsh speakers; the other 35% are Welsh learners.

Organisation:

Welsh Books Council

Representative:

Geraint Lewis, Honorary Secretary

Mr Lewis drew the Committee's attention to the importance of reading and writing. The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- The Committee's attention was drawn to the existence of the Basic Occular Observational Kit or BOOK, an electronic device by which you can access any text in the world.
- In today's society, books still play an important role in the development of the child, as a medium of knowledge and in teaching someone to use their imagination in a creative way.

- In a bilingual society, we must ensure that its citizens are able to read in both languages, and that the materials are available to ensure this.
- As a society we also need to produce more Welsh writers able to produce creative works of narrative and verse.
- Young people must have the basic skills in order to utilise e-mail, mobile phones etc.
- Potential authors need to get a handle on which elements of Welsh books make them readable and popular.
- The Books Council have developed books aimed at learners and people moving into Wales and also attempted to produce a series of books that bridged the gap between learners and Welsh speakers.
- The Books Council acknowledge the need to target teenagers. Teenagers tend to read adult books and don't easily fall into particular categories. There are no series of books that bridge the gap between teenage years and adulthood.

Organisation:

CYD:

Representatives:

Jaci Taylor

Felicity Roberts

The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- CYD was founded by Prof Bobi Jones to Welshify the whole of Wales and to regenerate the language. Cyd means "to bring people together" and that is one of the key aims of the organisation.
- Welsh for adults has been something of a cinderella activity over the years, but CYD believe it is essential for the revitalisation of the language. CYD rejoices in the fact that more and more children are becoming fluent in the language, but it regrets that few children use the language outside the classroom.
- It is often difficult for learners to find opportunities to use the language; CYD gives learners this opportunity, and does this through organising outdoor activities and social activities such as quizzes..
- CYD believes that the majority of Welsh people have the potential to learn Welsh and that the aim must be to make Welsh the natural language of the home.
- Tutoring is crucial to the schemes organised by CYD.
- The organisation made a plea for greater financial stability.
- A new pilot scheme is currently being developed by CYD in co-operation with Mentrau Iaith and Welsh adult consortia. The scheme will draw on close community links, strong local knowledge and shared resources with Mentrau Iaith groups.
- The key functions of CYD's head office are to:

- Prepare a national strategy
 - Plan the direction of the work
 - Tuition
 - Increase resources
 - Pioneer, by developing new projects
 - Organise national activities
- CYD is funded by the Welsh Language Board and by the local authorities, but the latter proves problematic as CYD have to submit applications to all 22 authorities. Core funding is vitally important to the organisation and the organisation appealed for more funds and for greater uniformity in the funding process.

The Chair requested that CYD send in a written submission outlining what the organisation could do with more funding.

Organisation:

Ceredigion County Council

Representatives:

Cllr Peredur Eklund

Denver Morgan

The following points were made in presentation:

- Ceredigion County Council serves a population of some 70,000, 60% of whom, speak, read or write Welsh.
- The Council believes it can assist in promoting bilingualism by:
 - Ensuring its own services can be accessed in either or both languages
 - Promoting bilingualism within the wider community as part of the Community Strategy
- In respect of some of the main themes found in Annex C of the consultation document, the Council is active in the following areas:
 - Families and communities
- The Unitary Development Plan includes a policy that settlements are assessed to measure the potential impact of a development on their social, linguistic and cultural characteristics, particularly where the Welsh language is intrinsic to the social cohesion

- of those settlements
- Library services
- Early years education and adult education
- Youth work, including the services centred at Theatr Felinfach
- Support for the arts, again centred on Theatr Felinfach
- Cered

- Economic Development

- The authority is the lead body for the Objective 1 local action plan
- Business Connect
- MARAN (Multi Agency Rural Network for Rural Wales) – the authority is a partner in this.

- Promoting Bilingualism and Maintaining National Consensus and Goodwill

- The Council has its own language scheme and is expected to encourage those in receipt of grant aid to adopt bilingual policies
- The Council's simultaneous translation equipment is loaned free to Community Councils, school governing bodies etc.

- The Council believes that the framework exists in local government, through language schemes and community strategies, to assist the Assembly with the proposals emanating from this Review. The Council will develop these thoughts further and provide a written submission in July.

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

- In response to a question about what the local authority are doing to enable young people to live and feel valued in local communities, Mr Morgan said that although there was little scope for large industries to be brought to Ceredigion, the local authority is promoting smaller industry throughout the county. The advance of electronic working also provides new opportunities.
- Cllr Ekland added that the sale of council houses made things difficult for the local authority. He felt that the Council should be allowed to build houses without necessarily having to sell them on; there are small scale industries in Ceredigion, but little available housing to support the workforce. The Chair requested a paper from the Council on this point.
- The Council operates its own language scheme and, as far as possible, it has officials on hand that are able to converse with the public in Welsh if they so desire.
- Cllr Ekland bemoaned the tendency for Welsh-speaking children to speak English out of the classroom. He applauded any initiative that brought the language and Welsh culture into the home.

Organisation:

National Library of Wales

Representative:

Dr Rhidian Griffiths, Keeper of Printed Books and Director Designate of Public Services

The following key points were made in presentation:

- Dr Griffiths made it clear that he was expressing personal views and not the views of the National Library.
- It was important for the confidence and self-respect of the Welsh language, that it becomes a natural language of public services. "Natural" bilingualism should be the aim.
- It was high time that we in Wales stopped apologising for the language and accepted it as a natural treasure.
- The National Library itself provided a fully bilingual service. If a non-Welsh speaker is appointed to the library staff, that person will be given every opportunity to learn the language and a conducive environment to practice in.
- Dr Griffiths agreed that the policy emphasis should be on supporting language initiatives in local communities. The Library is a significant employer in Ceredigion; it enables Welsh speakers to remain in their localities and helps to perpetuate Welsh life.
- The worldwideweb provides an opportunity for greater awareness of the language in the twentieth century; valuable partnerships could be developed between the Assembly and organisations providing material for the web.

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

- There's a steady flow of Welsh speakers coming through the professional library system, but the situation is a little different in the archive world which is more specialised.
- Dr Griffiths accepted that there would be a cost to business if all business adopted a language scheme, but he stated that costs should not be the over-riding arguments.
- The National Library has the means to contribute to the development of IT services through the medium of Welsh.
- Dr Griffiths agreed that the Assembly should view bilingualism as a cross-cutting issue. It was important that the Assembly as a body uses both languages naturally. Wales is one of the few countries that belittles the ability to speak two languages, yet this skill is accepted by educationalists throughout the world.

Organisation:

Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC) of Wales

Representative:
Gareth Evans Jones

The following key points were made in the presentation:

- The YFC in Wales is a totally bilingual operation, although half of its clubs operate exclusively through the medium of Welsh.
- During its activities, the organisation ensures that all competitors are able to converse in either language. A full translation service is available and all of the documentation is produced bilingually.
- One of the organisation's main treasures is its network of 180 clubs, which are a means of keeping in contact with Welsh speaking communities.
- The organisation is able to offer courses to Welsh learners and creative writing courses for fluent speakers.
- YFC recently applied for funding from the Welsh Language Board for innovation schemes. Members were disappointed that a grant of only £5k was awarded; this amounted to 83.5p per member. Several members have complained that the Language Board is not aware of the organisation's work in promoting bilingualism.

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

- Members commented that YFC presents an example to other organisations in promoting bilingualism and working in a totally bilingual climate.
- The organisation is dependent on voluntary contributions. About 1,000 volunteers a year give their time to oversee YFC' activities.
- The bilingual nature of the organisation, affords non-Welsh speakers the opportunity to become more aware of the language.
- Although the YFC is often branded as an agricultural organisation, it is primarily a youth movement – 50% of its members have no agricultural links. The YFC deserves greater recognition for its youth work.

The following comments were made in the open microphone session:

- Eileen Curry commented on the unique bilingual nature of Radio Ceredigion. The station does not mix languages between programmes, feeling that to do so would devalue both languages. It has a high % of listeners in the Aberystwyth area (42% in this catchment area). The potential anglicisation of the station poses a threat to the language and must be kept an eye on.
- She also drew the Committee's attention to the small size of the advert placed in the local press to publicise this meeting.

Committee Secretariat
June 2001