

Minutes

Date: Friday 30 November 2001
Time: 10.00am to 12.00pm
Venue: Y Ganolfan, Llandrillo, Denbighshire

Attendance

Members

Eleanor Burnham, Chair	North Wales
Gareth Jones	Conwy
Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Karen Sinclair	Clwyd South
Dafydd Wigley	Caernarfon
Ieuan Wyn Jones	

In attendance

Dafydd Iwan

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Howell Rees	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Introduction and apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Llandrillo for its hospitality. Apologies had been received from Dafydd Elis Thomas, John Marek, Alison Halford, Ann Jones, Tom Middlehurst, Rod Richards and Rhodri Morgan.

1.2 Reference was made to recently announced job losses in the area. It was suggested that the WDA and ELWa should be invited to the committee's next meeting to explain what they were doing to retain existing employment and create new jobs in the area.

Item 2: Minutes and report back from previous meeting

2.1 The committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 26 October 2001.

Item 3: Welsh Language Review

3.1 As a member of the Culture Committee, Dafydd Wigley explained the background to its review of the Welsh language. The Culture Committee had invited written submissions and had held a number of meetings around Wales to collect oral evidence. Other Assembly committees had been invited to contribute. The aim was to complete evidence gathering by March and issue a report by May. Anyone who wished to contribute could do so by writing to the Clerk of the Culture Committee. A number of important issues had already been raised and this was an opportunity for people in North Wales to contribute to the review.

3.2 The Chair invited comments from Members and the following points were made:

- the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee was soon to conduct a review of higher education including the need to teach and learn at that level though the medium of Welsh;
- Welsh and other minority languages were threatened by global pressures and so active public support was needed. It was also important to maintain the support of the English speaking population in Wales;
- the number of Welsh learners was increasing and there were many social advantages to learning Welsh. Menter yr Iaith produced welcome packs and other material for people moving into Welsh speaking communities and the Assembly should support its work;
- The survival of the language depended on economic factors to encourage young people to remain in Welsh speaking communities. Support for indigenous businesses was, therefore, important;
- As well as economic factors, social and cultural conditions were also vital if the language was to flourish. The Assembly should aim for a strategy that facilitated the use of the language at different levels and in all aspects of life;
- universities could play a greater role in economic development by creating good quality jobs in the rural areas where they were located;
- the creation of the Assembly had provided a forum for a debate about the language and the opportunity to develop strategies and policies to support it. The Culture Committee's review was an enormous step forward. The migration of young people out of rural Wales and in-migration of English speakers created tension. Local authorities had an important role to play in respect of planning and housing.

3.3 The Chair welcomed Dafydd Iwan to the meeting. He said that the Welsh language was the normal medium of every-day life for many people in Wales, and what was needed was to enable them to use it in all spheres of life. The Welsh language was not a problem, or an add-on extra; it was one of the two official languages of Wales, and its use should be as normal as the use of English. It was important to consider policies to support the language without emotion and to avoid making it a party political issue; all parties should embrace the language. But in any bilingual nation, one language would dominate in any single community, and the number of communities where the Welsh language was dominant was falling. Without such communities, the Welsh language could not survive as a normal, living language. Their demise was being accelerated by a radical population shift - young Welsh-speakers moving out

and older, mostly non-Welsh-speaking moving in. This shift could be slowed by appropriate use of existing planning and housing legislation, and by the introduction of new legislation. For example, the Assembly should provide more funding for local authorities and Housing Associations to operate shared ownership and other schemes to meet local needs. Second homes could be limited to a certain proportion of the housing stock, and new homes in sensitive areas built (or renovated) only to meet local need.

3.4 The provision of a choice of good quality jobs was the most important factor in encouraging young people to stay in their communities. One positive and immediate action that could be taken was to decentralise Assembly jobs across Wales. Modern communications made this a viable option and would provide good quality jobs in rural areas.

3.5 The committee noted that the issue of decentralising Assembly jobs had been discussed in the Economic Development Committee that week..

3.6 In discussion the following points were raised:

- local housing issues should be addressed but no restrictions should be placed on the right of British citizens to live wherever in the country they wished;
- English speaking communities were also affected by young people moving away. It was important that economic development strategies identified specific regional job creation targets;
- the Welsh language was unique and more could be made of it in the tourism sector but effective signage and marketing was vital. While it was important not to burden private sector companies with additional costs, some were failing to provide bilingual signs when new premises were opened or existing ones refurbished;
- the Assembly realised the importance of nursery education and provision would soon be available for all three year olds in Wales. The Education Bill now being considered by Parliament would give the Assembly more control over education in Wales. Concern about the lack of opportunities to learn through the medium of Welsh in further and higher education in Wales had been raised in the review and needed to be addressed.

3.7 The Chair invited comments and questions from the public.

3.8 Dafydd Jones, Conwy County Borough Council, said that the role of nursery schools was important and needed better funding. Young children learned languages quickly and easily. It was more expensive to teach them Welsh later.

3.9 Angharad Thomas, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Cymraeg, asked if the Assembly would be willing to strengthen the Welsh Language Act 1993. Globalisation was putting increased pressure on the language and stronger legislation was needed to encourage private companies to facilitate the use of Welsh. When asked about the possible effect stronger legislation might have on inward investment, she said other countries had strong legislation in place to protect minority languages reflecting a matter of political will. The committee noted that the Assembly did not have powers to make primary legislation but could

make regulations under the 1993 Act. The Act gave equal validity to English and Welsh rather than official status to either.

3.10. Rhiannon Efans from Bethesda referred to earlier comments about the importance of allowing Welsh speaking communities to live their lives through the Welsh language. She was critical that some material from the Assembly was provided only in English. She criticised the policy of selling council houses at a discount. They were often resold at a price local people could not afford.

3.11 Geraint Roberts, who worked in the voluntary sector in Denbighshire, thanked the committee for holding another meeting in a small rural community. He said that the voluntary sector was keen to use the Welsh language but needed help with the additional costs of things such as signs and translation.

3.12 Val Greaves, North Wales Co-ordinating Voluntary Groups, said the language raised equality issues. The voluntary sector could not afford to provide translation and consequently meetings often had to be held in English. She was also concerned that jobs were advertised in north Wales as "Welsh essential" while similar jobs in south Wales were described as "Welsh desirable".

3.13 Jenkin Griffiths, Wales Council for the Blind, said that the Assembly should pay for translators to work with the voluntary sector so that meetings could be held bilingually.

3.14 Jacky Jones, Mayor of Ruthin, raised the issue of housing for local people. She said that a housing association was buying houses in Ruthin and letting them to people with no local connection. There was no local consultation or reference to local needs.

- Dafydd Iwan said Housing Associations should work within the framework local authority housing strategies. In some areas there was an over-provision of rented accommodation and the demand was for affordable homes, in others, more rented accommodation was needed. Local authorities should determine the balance, and the Right To Buy legislation amended to allow variation according to local need.

3.15 Ariel Evans said that the voluntary sector needed more money for technical and translation services. He suggested that when the Assembly paid grants to voluntary bodies part of the grant should be earmarked for translation services. He felt that stronger legislation was needed to protect the language.

3.16 John Mainwaring from Cerrigydrudion said that, if they were to be successful, rural businesses had to sell their goods and services to customers from outside Wales. English was therefore essential to business. A successful economy needed a flow of people and capital and Wales needed investment if the economy was to develop. He suggested that Objective 1 money should be used to develop wind power to stimulate investment.

- The committee noted that wind energy was a sensitive issue. Community support was the key to taking schemes forward. Proposals were also being developed for wind and tidal energy schemes

off the North Wales coast.

3.17 Gwyneth Kensler, Denbighshire County Council, stressed the importance of local authority unitary development plans to determine land use policies in the longer term. She also said that many people were able to speak Welsh but were unwilling to do so in a public forum because of fear of making mistakes. Attitudes therefore needed to change. She felt it was healthy for young people to move away from their communities to gain experience but that good jobs should be available to encourage them to move back later.

3.18 Meurig Hughes, Llangefni Town Council, hoped that the potential development of wind energy and oil fields in the Irish Sea and Liverpool Bay would bring economic benefits to Anglesey. More jobs were needed so that young people who wanted to stay in their communities could do so. In-migration was a threat to Welsh but he urged people to be more optimistic about the future of the language.

3.19 Godfrey Northam from Bethesda said that Welsh should be compulsory in the national curriculum. He agreed that the goodwill of English speakers was vital and suggested that policies were needed which addressed the specific needs of Welsh communities and to apply to those areas only. He said the Assembly should draw on experience in other bilingual countries such as Canada in this regard.

3.20 Martin Boyce from Bangor felt that more could be done to promote and market the language. Many people outside Wales were under the false impression that the ability to speak Welsh was essential to obtain a job in Wales and this was damaging. Wales needed to promote itself as a truly bilingual nation.

3.21 Jim Jones, Flintshire County Council, said that too much legislation could be dangerous. People needed to realise what they were missing by not being able to speak Welsh. Many young people moved away to study because the courses they wanted were not available in Wales and that should be addressed.

3.22 Lesley Conran, Sure Start Ynys Môn, said her organisation was trying to respond to social inclusion issues. Welsh learners should receive appropriate support to help them develop the confidence and skills necessary to use the language.

3.23 Ioan Talfryn, Popeth Cymraeg, said that strict planning rules governed signage in national parks. Greater use of bilingual signs would make the language more visible and increase the number of people wishing to learn Welsh. The number of Welsh learners had increased significantly in recent years but they were still a tiny minority. The Welsh Language Board's annual budget for marketing the teaching of Welsh was limited.

3.24 Dafydd Evans, Menter yr Iaith Dinbych Conwy, said that although many young people moved away others stayed in their communities to find employment. He did not believe true bilingualism existed in Wales - the public sector was not able to deliver it, the voluntary sector was struggling and the private sector was not interested. If bilingualism was not implemented across all three sectors there was little hope of achieving a bilingual Wales.

3.25 Dafydd Wigley thanked those who contributed and said that if anyone had any further views or ideas they should write to the Clerk of the Culture Committee. The minutes of the meeting would be fed into the review.

3.26 The Chair closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. The next meeting would be held in Llanfairfechan on 25 January.

Secretariat

December 2001