

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Date: 25th November, 1999

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

Title: Wales European Centre

Purpose

1. To update members on the latest position regarding the Assembly's proposed membership of the Wales European Centre

Recommendation

2. Committee Members are invited to note the proposed arrangements.

Background

3. At its meeting on the 14th October this Committee received a paper, and a presentation by the Chair and Director of the Wales European Centre. Members supported the principle of Assembly membership of the Wales European Centre

Proposal

4. Attached at Annex A is a paper outlining the Assembly's requirements from the Wales European Centre. Attached at Annex B is a paper considered by the Wales European Centre's Board following discussions between the Assembly and the Wales European Centre.

5. The Assembly's requirement from the Wales European Centre focuses on three issues:

- Policy advice
- Support on lobbying
- Enhanced profile for Wales in Europe.

6. The service provided by the Wales European Centre will be complemented by the

Assembly's own Representation, which will focus on:

- Dealing with the requirements of the Assembly Cabinet and other Members
- links with the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation and the Council of Ministers

7. The Wales European Centre is currently consulting its members on its draft Business Plan. A decision will need to be made soon regarding the Assembly's membership since this will have implications for the content of the Business Plan. The current members also have to be consulted about Assembly membership since the Memorandum and Articles of Association will have to be amended to reflect the Assembly's role on the Board.

Protocol on Access to the Wales European Centre by Assembly Members

8. As a general rule it is envisaged that WEC would deal directly with officials rather than politicians. This would limit the demands placed upon WEC, thus limit the need for expansion and would be reflected in the Assembly's membership fee.

9. Cabinet Secretariat would deal directly with the Assembly's Representation in Brussels in the first instance. The Assembly's Representation will liaise with WEC, who will be responsible for much of the arrangements in terms of arranging meetings, preparing briefings, arranging transportation and accommodation in Brussels for Assembly Secretaries.

10. Assembly Members would have access to the WEC web-site and WEC Funding Directory. The Assembly's library would be able to use WEC as a source of information to respond to particular queries by Members.

Compliance

11. The Concordat on Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues provides the policy framework for the Assembly to establish an office in Brussels to assist direct relationships with other regional governments and with the institutions of the European Union.

Financial Implications

12. The Assembly will be required to pay a membership fee if it decides to join the Wales European Centre. The sum is to be negotiated once the type of service required has been agreed. The provisional draft budget laid before the Assembly on 4 November proposes establishment of a Miscellaneous European Support Services expenditure line with a provision of £0.4M from 2000-01 onwards, resources from which would be used to meet the cost of the Assembly's membership of the Centre. The precise level of fee is subject to further discussion. Financial Planning Division has been consulted and is content with the financial aspects.

Cross-cutting Themes

13. By joining the Wales European Centre the Assembly will demonstrate its commitment to work in partnership with other Welsh organisations on European issues.

Contact Point

14. European Affairs Division

ANNEX A

The Assembly's Requirements from membership of the Wales European Centre

Full service currently available to all Members

In addition the Assembly will require the following services:

Politicians

- Support for visiting delegations, including arranging meetings and preparing briefings
- Arranging receptions
- Policy briefings for Assembly Secretaries in Wales
- Support for Assembly members of the Committee of the Regions
- Access to web-site for Assembly Members

Work with Assembly Divisions

- Work with a range of Divisions within the National Assembly for Wales to identify policy priorities and information/intelligence requirements, in particular in relation to proposed legislation
- Policy briefings for civil servants (one additional visit per year per policy adviser, or four additional days per year added to planned visits)
- Work with International Relations Unit in relation to inter-regional links
- Regular video conference meetings to provide European Affairs Division with up-dates on events

Secondments

- Liaison with Welsh people/friends of Wales living and working in Brussels to identify networking opportunities and secondment/recruitment possibilities
- Identify opportunities for secondments to a wide range of European institutions
- Providing information to the Assembly and other Welsh organisations on opportunities for secondments and recruitment through the weekly Newsletter
- Support for Assembly staff on secondment in Brussels (a home-base, practical advice and support)

The Assembly's contribution

- Membership fee, which is to be agreed
- Rent for office space of the Assembly's Representation
- Member of staff on secondment, to be a full member of the WEC staff, with an allocated portfolio and accountable to the Director. Salary and allowances to be paid by the National Assembly for Wales
- Enhanced team through the presence within the WEC building of Assembly staff with access to UKRep and good knowledge of the Assembly
- Enhanced profile through events involving Assembly Secretaries

ANNEX B

Wales European Centre

Board Meeting 22 November 1999

Assembly Membership of WEC

<p><u>Recommendation</u></p>
<p>That the Board note the contents of the attached paper and agree to its circulation to all WEC members.</p>

At its last meeting the Board considered the progress being made in discussions with the National Assembly for Wales on its proposed membership of WEC. The Board expressed the view that the terms of discussion should be made transparent so that the existing members could be kept informed of the issues and the likely form of membership.

The attached paper sets out the draft agreement in the form of a proposal for membership. The proposal summarises the issues under discussion and presents those areas where agreement has been reached. The main outstanding issue concerns the level of subscription

and discussions are continuing to resolve this point.

The subscription needs to be sufficiently large to provide for an expansion of WEC to provide the additional services which the Assembly seeks. On the other hand there is some sensitivity that the Assembly should not become a dominant presence in WEC.

Joseph Gallacher

Director

November 1999

Draft

Proposal for Membership of the Wales European Centre by the National Assembly for Wales

Introduction

Since the election of the first National Assembly for Wales, discussions have been taking place on the form of representation which the National Assembly for Wales would have in Brussels and in particular on the membership of the Wales European Centre.

This paper sets out the main terms on which the National Assembly for Wales would join the Wales European Centre. It is in effect the draft agreement between the National Assembly for Wales and the Wales European Centre. Implementing the agreement would require changes to the Articles of Association, which can only be done at a General Meeting of the company.

The paper covers background on Wales European Centre and the needs of the National Assembly for Wales for representation; governance and subscription level; management arrangements; the independence of WEC members to pursue separate policy lines and confidentiality. A draft service level agreement is attached.

Background

The Wales European Centre acts on behalf of a partnership of over 70 public sector bodies in Wales. It provides a range of services from monitoring policy developments to support for lobbying and building relationships in Brussels and with other regions of Europe. These services, which could also be made available to the National Assembly for Wales, include:

- providing hard information on policies and programmes
- gathering intelligence on policymaking;
- maintaining extensive contacts with the European Commission;
- building a relationship with the European Parliament, not just the Welsh MEPs but the Committee chairs and group co-ordinators;
- networking with other regions;
- supporting delegations;
- providing a base for visitors during delegations;
- supporting members on the Committee of the Regions;
- organising profile raising events and activities.

WEC has a number of key strengths, on which the Assembly could build, include:

- an established presence with a high level of recognition among Brussels policy makers
- an experienced team skilled in policy analysis in the Brussels context and familiar with EU policy across a range of issues;
- established mechanisms of communication - online newsletter, policy papers, email alerts seminars, etc.;
- experience in sustained lobbying and organising delegations;
- contacts with key decision makers in the institutions;
- established relationships with the offices of other regions;

The Assembly will also play a role in the Council of Ministers, which requires a separate arrangement, however with some expansion WEC could provide the same services to the Assembly that it currently provides for the other partners.

Membership

On joining WEC the National Assembly for Wales would have the right to appoint up to three Directors to the Board and up to four people to attend General Meetings of the company.

There are currently five categories of director:

- WDA: 3
- WLGA: 3
- General Members: 4
- Managing Director: 1
- Co-opted members: currently none.

Both the WDA and WLGA exercise one vote at General Meetings, however all decisions of such meetings require a positive vote by the WDA and WLGA. The National Assembly for Wales would also exercise one vote which would need to be cast in favour of any resolution for

that motion to be carried.

The initial subscription for the National Assembly for Wales would be £... per annum.

WEC's total budget for the year 1999-2000 is £670,000 and its income derives from contributions by the members. WEC currently has over 70 members but the largest part of the budget is provided by the WDA which contributes £264,300, and local government which contributes £189,000.

Office Space for Diplomatic Staff

In addition to membership of the Wales European Centre the Assembly plans to second a small number of staff to Brussels who will be accredited with diplomatic status as part of the UK Representation to the EU. The Wales European Centre would provide office space, equipment and ancillary services for these staff, the costs of which are not included in the subscription and would be the subject of a separate agreement.

Liaison and Management

Regular contact would be programmed between the Director and other WEC staff on the one hand and Assembly Members, the Assembly's Europe Committee and officials on the other by:

- Visits to Cardiff
- Video link.

On Occasion WEC staff may be invited to attend meetings of Assembly Committees appropriate to their portfolios and the Committees' agendas.

All Assembly Members would have direct access to some WEC services, such as the online newsletter and the funding directory, while other enquiries or assistance in making contacts in Brussels would be channelled through the Assembly's library and officials. The Assembly would nominate appropriate staff to channel Members' requests.

Policy Independence

The Wales European Centre does not formulate nor promote its own policies. It is a channel for the promotion of the policies of its member organisations. While Wales is most successful in Europe when it works as *Team Wales*, differences of view will arise from time to time. It is understood that each member of Wales European Centre is free to represent its own policies to the European Institutions and to use the resources of WEC for that purpose.

Confidentiality

The National Assembly for Wales or any other member may invoke a right of confidentiality with respect to the work which WEC is carrying out on its behalf. WEC staff will adopt professional standards of confidentiality which respect "Chinese walls", meaning that they do not discuss information which they have obtained in confidence from one member with another.

Annex

Draft Service Level Agreement

The Wales European Centre will provide the following services to the National Assembly for Wales:

Policy monitoring

The first set of services concerns the monitoring and reporting of policy and legislative developments in Brussels.

WEC Weekly News

- Information and intelligence will be made available via the WEC Weekly News on the Internet or by telephone/fax or other means as appropriate, this will include:
- all news, 'hot tips' and other intelligence
- reports of meetings, conferences and other events attended by WEC
- advance notice of meetings, conferences and events to be attended by WEC
- progress and timetables for proposed legislation
- details of published and unpublished material received by WEC
- advance notice (where possible) of deadlines for funding programmes or calls for proposals

Funding Directory

WEC will provide to all Assembly Members a directory of all funding opportunities, which will be:

- revised and reissued annually
- updated regularly

Briefings

WEC will help to raise awareness and knowledge of EU issues within the Assembly by:

- organising and hosting appropriate 'study visits' as required
- producing regular occasional papers analysing EU policies and proposals including annual work programmes and budgets
- providing on request briefings on specific issues

Specific enquiries

On request from the Assembly, WEC will provide information and intelligence on specific topics.

Advocacy

Wales European Centre's advocacy and lobbying services must begin with the identification of legislative and policy developments of interest to the Assembly. Each year a dialogue between WEC will assist the Assembly to establish priorities using both the Assembly's work programme and the Commission's forthcoming work and legislative programmes.

Lobbying Strategies

WEC can assist the Assembly in lobbying by providing:

- analysis of the decision making process on each priority item;
- identification of key decision makers on each item;
- advice on lobbying strategies;
- briefings for MEPs, including drafting amendments to legislation;

Delegations

WEC will facilitate links between the Assembly and EU institutions by:

- providing assistance to arrange meetings and introductions including briefing and debriefings
- providing facilities for meetings in Brussels
- [providing office space for Secretaries, Assembly Members and officials to enable them to continue working during visits];
- on request accompanying the Assembly Secretaries, Members and officials to meetings

Committee of the Regions

Support to Assembly Members on the Committee of the Regions should be seen in this context. General support and briefing is already provided by other bodies therefore WEC will concentrate on the key issues of interest to Wales by:

- providing briefings on key issues;
- helping to secure rapporteurships on strategic issues;
- assisting in drafting Opinions for Assembly Members;
- assisting in drafting amendments to Opinions.

Other Services

Promotion and representation

WEC will facilitate the promotion of the Assembly interests to EU institutions by:

- hosting and organising promotional events in Brussels as required
- providing agreed information about Wales and the Assembly
- compiling and promoting examples of best practice as agreed by the Assembly;

Secondments

WEC will assist the Assembly in expanding the network of Welsh people (or people with Welsh connections) both working in Brussels and with experience of working in Brussels by:

- assisting in identifying opportunities for the secondment of civil servants to EU institutions;
- providing short-term secondment opportunities to WEC.

Seminars and conferences

WEC draws together the partnership in Wales by:

- organising or contributing to seminars in Wales
- contributing to other events on request

Inter-regional co-operation

WEC will assist the Assembly to develop participation in EU policies and programmes by.

- maintaining relationships with the Brussels Offices of key European regions
- publicising requests for partners in Wales received from other EU regions
- disseminating requests for partners in other EU regions received from the Assembly
- providing advice guidance and feedback on applications to funding programmes

administered by the Commission as far as is possible.

Quantified targets for these services will be established and reviewed annually as part of the business planning process.