

Mid Wales 02-99(min)

Minutes of Mid Wales Regional Committee – 1 October 1999

Date : Friday 1 October, 1999

Time : 9.30 am

Venue : Owain Glyndwr Centre, Machynlleth.

Attendance :

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|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Glyn Davies, Chair | Conservative | Mid and West Wales |
| Mick Bates | Liberal Democrat | Montgomeryshire |
| Cynog Dafis | Plaid Cymru | Mid and West Wales |
| Elin Jones | Plaid Cymru | Ceredigion |
| Kirsty Williams | Liberal Democrat | Brecon and Radnorshire |

Committee Secretariat :

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Delyth Thomas | Committee Clerk |
| Brian Duddridge | Deputy Committee Clerk |

Apologies :

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| Alun Michael | Labour | Mid & West Wales |
| Nick Bourne | Conservative | Mid & West Wales |

Substitutions : None

Declarations of Interest : None

Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed Members to the Owain Glyndwr Centre and thanked

Mr Harry Evans of the Management Committee and Mr Tegwyn Griffiths, Manager of the Centre, for allowing use of the rooms and for their help in making the meeting possible. Members of the public were welcomed to the first meeting of the Committee in which they would be able to make presentations on a subject of their choice. It was unfortunate that access for the disabled was restricted but the Committee had

been particularly keen on this occasion to meet at the Centre. The Chair reminded the public that this was a full meeting of the National Assembly and normal provisions would apply. Alun Michael had offered his apologies for the meeting he was otherwise engaged in his role as First Secretary. Nick Bourne was engaged in his role as Leader of the Conservative Party.

The Chair expressed regret that there may have been some misunderstanding with the Town Council about the Committee's visit to Machynlleth.

The meeting would involve presentations by the Mid Wales Economic Forum (one hour), the Dyfed-Powys Health Authority (one hour) and finally by three members of the public.

Agenda Item 1 : Economic Development – Priorities for Mid Wales Region

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1.1 David Rowe-Beddoe (Chair of the Welsh Development Agency, but present

in his capacity as the Chair of the Mid Wales Partnership) thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and introduced members of the partnership - Mal Thomas, Secretary of the Partnership, Jacky Tonge, Chief Executive, Powys County Council, Mr Grenville Jackson, Chair of the Partnership Skills and Training Working Group and Nick Talbott, Chair of the IT Working Group. He also introduced Cllr Derek Lloyd-Evans a founder member and Deputy Chairman.

Mr Rowe-Beddoe described the background to the Partnership, which grew from a natural empathy amongst a number of providers for a co-ordinated approach to enriching prosperity in the rural economy and encouraging social development across the region. Membership included the three County Councils of Ceredigion, Gwynedd and Powys and other employers and agencies including the WDA, Mid Wales TEC, FUW and NFU, the University of Wales Colleges of Aberystwyth and Lampeter, Wales Tourist Board, Wales TUC and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

Mal Thomas

Mr Thomas described the Partnership's mission statement, its purpose, objectives and principles of operation. He explained that there were five working groups – rural affairs, European affairs, information technology, skills and training and transport – and referred to recent and current projects ranging from the development of economic and social indicators to an integrated training action plan for Mid Wales.

A copy of the presentation is at **annex 1**.

Copies of the four strategy documents on 'Economic and Social Indicators for Wales', 'Tourism for Mid Wales', 'Mid Wales Integrated Transport Strategy' and 'Modernising Mid Wales – a Gateway to the Information Age' had been placed in the National Assembly Library.

Jackie Tonge

Miss Tonge presented a public sector perspective of issues of rurality, the points she addressed are at **annex 2**. In particular she stressed the need for external funding through private sector investment,

corporate planning on priorities for the locality, the need to empower communities, the externalisation of certain council services. Miss Tonge felt that unless new funding was made available by central government, the National Assembly should resist pressure to top-slice the block grant available.

Grenville Jackson

Mr Jackson described the need to raise skill levels and to improve employability as centre-stage of the economic policy agenda. The Skills and Training Working Group had undertaken an analysis of current provision including the problems and their causes. Low productivity, social exclusion, current managerial practices and low skill levels were constituent parts of under achievement and poor progress generally. The situation was not helped by the continued outward migration of qualified young people; he said that employers complained that 16 year olds were poorly equipped for work, that 18 year olds were little better and that graduates were regarded as high flyers and too good for local employers. There was a need to raise early awareness in schools of the importance of quality skills essential for employment and the enrichment of the local community. The Group's action plan would concentrate on this, also the need to create a training programme to meet business and other needs, and the need for investment in ICT.

A copy of the presentation is at **annex 3**.

Nick Talbott

Mr Talbott's presentation was in part an introduction to the Partnership's report

'Modernising Mid Wales – A Gateway to the Information Age'. He emphasised the contribution that new information and communication technologies would make to the economy and enrichment of mid Wales, by improving business opportunities, the development of tourism, improving quality of life and education provision, and providing a variety of customer orientated services, etc. It was essential that mid Wales had early, easy and affordable access to an ICT infrastructure. As a guide to current costings he quoted a permanent Internet connection within Cardiff as being under £3,000 per year compared to an estimate of £33,000 for a similar link from Machynlleth to Cardiff. The financial consequences for small businesses with a low volume of activity were obvious. Similarly for small rural schools where the benefits of provision were equally important. Potential users were doubly disadvantaged in that they were falling further behind their counterparts in urban areas.

Mr Talbott sought the support of the National Assembly in addressing with providers the need for affordable ICT services throughout mid Wales.

A copy of the presentation is at **annex 4**.

1.2The Chair thanked all presenters for their contributions and invited questions; the issues raised included :

- how did the WDA promote rural area links on ICT?
- what did the Partnership want the Committee to tell the Assembly to do?
- could competition be promoted between providers?
- could digital television help?
- had the Partnership responded to the WDA corporate plan?
- had the DBRW integrated effectively into the WDA?

- following the report on social and economic indicators showing the difference of approach to urban and rural areas, what was the next step?

The Partnership felt that potential ICT users were at the mercy of the market, the Assembly should address the question of provision directly with providers such as BT. The most advanced networking facilities centred on large population centres where demand but not necessarily need was highest, the costs of rural provision were higher per head and disproportionately so. In rural areas BT needed to be persuaded to provide a service at least to towns with secondary schools.

Whereas the various agencies could play their part, private sector support was needed within the Objective 1, 2 and 3 proposals. Alternatives included radio microwaves, this was being looked at in mid Wales, ultimately it could provide the solution but was still some way off. Presently, it only offered good point to point links. Fibre optics offered another alternative but was a very expensive alternative. Digital television was effective for remote interactive tele-meetings offering 2 way broadband information.

There was a need to identify and agree a national economic development strategy that would involve young people in enterprise within their rural communities.

The work of the former DBRW would help focus the WDA in tackling the needs of all rural areas within Wales. The difficulties found in mid Wales applied to all rural areas. Representatives were confident that integration had been seamless and a good working relationship had developed. The Mid Wales Partnership had yet to responded formally to the corporate plan but had liased with the Agency in preparing a study on the Mid Wales economy, a full report would be made.

The report on social and economic indicators had identified potential tensions between rural and urban needs. In its report the Economic Forum referred to a number of action points it had directed to the National Assembly, including the need for a central register of available indicators and for the establishment of a working party to monitor and review technical standards for data collection and use.

Action Points

1.3The Chair thanked contributors to the discussion, a number of issues they had raised had generated much interest amongst Members including the provision of an ICT framework. The Committee would write to Rhodri Morgan, Assembly Secretary for Economic Development and to Val Feld, Chair for the Economic Development Committee drawing their attention to the presentation and discussion of this item. In particular it would express the Committee's concern at the need to develop an ICT network in Mid Wales that was both widely accessible and affordable. The Committee would be considering its Forward Work Programme at its next meetings and the Chair was certain that many of the issues raised would be included in future agendas for more detailed consideration.

Agenda Item 2 : The Cost of Providing Health Services in Rural Areas

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(p.2)**

2.1 The Chair introduced the agenda item by thanking all those health organisations and bodies in Mid

Wales who had responded in such a considered manner to the Committee's request for written submissions on this issue.

Dr William Ritchie of Dyfed Powys Health Authority presented the paper attached as **annex 5**. He emphasised a direct association between the existing geographical distribution and configuration of health services throughout Wales and their accessibility to the people they served. There was requirement for equity of access related to need and, high quality of provision. Dr Ritchie commended the response of the Montgomery Community Health Council to the Committee as it summarised the issues that faced rural health providers.

2.2 The health resource allocation formula in Wales contained weighting factors for sparsity or rurality. A recent review of that formula, whilst acknowledging the need to adjust for the additional costs for the provision of rural health care, recommended no change. Dr Ritchie highlighted a number of points including:

- the potential loss of £8.5m to Dyfed-Powys by the method of determination of the sparsity factor;
- that the results of research in Scotland and Northern Ireland suggested that the health service allocation formula in Wales was insufficiently sensitive to achieve reasonable equity of access for the rural population to future health services in Wales;
- that Powys County Council had identified substantial evidence of material and social deprivation, of financial insecurity and evidence of low wage levels and a drop in farm income;
- that the lack of and the unavailability of private transport severely hindered access to GP's and hospitals;
- that one of the values underpinning the 'Better Health Better Wales' agenda was fairness, this meant, he suggested, that everyone should have access to treatment and services according to their needs, good health should not be dependant on where a person lived; and
- the scope for tele-medicine to utilise and share new technology.

2.3 The Chair thanked Dr Ritchie for a comprehensive and challenging presentation.

2.4 Issues raised in discussion included:

- the health resources allocation formula would be looked at later this year by the National Assembly Health and Social Services Committee;
- in comparison to the problems of areas like Rhondda and Torfaen it might be argued that people in mid Wales enjoy a better standard of health and in some cases easier access to GP's;
- whether there was evidence that health authorities were tackling problems together?;
- whether there was scope for pursuing the use of tele-medicine through the Mid Wales Partnership?;
- standards of service and clinical governance matters, was it an excuse for centralising services and therefore putting the long term future of smaller hospitals at risk?
- the balance between provision of specialist services, general medicine and services.

2.5 Dr Ritchie emphasised that he was not making a special plea on behalf of Dyfed Powys Health Authority but for all rural areas suffering similar problems. The difficulties experienced in areas like Rhondda and Torfaen although no less acute than in rural areas might more probably be related to poverty, social issues and a poor attitude to educational opportunity rather than locational access to health services,

but their problems were no less worthy of solution.

2.6 Powys and Pembrokeshire had been pooling resources to tackle such problems as drug/alcohol abuse, care of the elderly etc. Good progress was being maintained.

2.7 Dr Ritchie had had experience of telemedicine during an appointment in central Australia some twenty years ago. Technology had of course advanced; his Authority had developed a pilot project on teledermatology as an example of what could be done. In practice it could be used in a variety of ways; Dr Ritchie cited the provision telemedical advice on radiography matters as an example of a service that could be provided from a remote location through digital imagery. This was an example of what could be done, the quality of a variety of services could be improved with the volume of activity, particularly at smaller hospitals where clinical support might be absent. Clinicians in neighbouring trusts would hopefully come to think of themselves as being part of a team. However, caution was needed in rushing too quickly ahead, investment was needed to ensure tele-care was evaluated properly. There were links between Powys Healthcare and Powys County Council evaluating an information access network, following a grant from Llwybr, involving the NHS intranet (Walesweb).

2.8 Mrs Margaret Price, Chair of the Dyfed Powys Health Authority, advised that the provision of tertiary services and equality of access from rural and urban areas was being looked at. The availability and quality of provision, for example, in Aberystwyth should be accessible to more rural areas, clinical governance was no excuse for the non-availability of a service. Dr Ritchie said that this was a complex issue, access to and costs of a particular service should not be used as a 'smokescreen' to argue for centralisation. If anything the smaller hospitals of Dyfed might become unsustainable through problems of recruiting expert/specialist staff rather than clinical governance.

2.9 The Chair thanked both Dr Ritchie and Mrs Price for their presentation and invited Dr Ritchie to provide a note on the provision for dentistry, an academic strategy and ambulance services – points raised in discussion but unanswered due to lack of time.

Action Points

2.10 It was agreed that the written submissions received, including Dyfed-Powys Health Authority's contribution should be sent to Jane Hutt, Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services and to Kirsty Williams, in her capacity as Chair of the Health and Social Service Committee. The Mid Wales Regional Committee would recommend that the Assembly Secretary and the Health and Social Services Committee take account of the views that they contained when considering the resources allocation formula. The Committee also hoped that the Mid Wales Partnership would explore further the need to ensure good ICT networks for health reasons as well as the reasons it had stated in its presentation earlier in the morning.

Agenda Item 3 : Public Presentations Mid 02-99(p.3)

3.1 The Chair described this item as an innovation for a National Assembly meeting. The Committee had decided at its first meeting that members of the public who had written to the Clerk could be invited to address the Committee on a subject of their choice, provided standards of propriety were applied and that the subject was within the remit of the National Assembly. The suggestion had provoked a degree of interest. In future there would be a ballot of applications received.

3.2 On this occasion there were three presentations – following one withdrawal – by Mr David Beswick, the

Pre-School Playgroup Association and Julie Macdonnell representing Countryside Care. All three speakers spoke to their papers and these are attached as **annexes 6,7 and 8 respectively**.

3.3 The Chair thanked all the presenters

Agenda Item 4 : Minutes of last Meeting – MID 01-99(min).

4.1 The minutes were agreed.