

Culture Committee 08-02 (p.2)

Date: 25 April 2002

Time: 2.00pm-4.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales

WELSH LANGUAGE REVIEW:ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

"We accept that the success of the Assembly's economic policies will have a direct bearing on the survival of Welsh as a community language". (Economic Development Committee).

"The Review needs to consider the basic economic future of the countryside and how it will relate to the language. That is a very difficult task and one that holds no great promise of language regeneration". (Professor Harold Carter).

Introduction

The Committee has received a great deal of evidence on the influence of economic development on the language and local communities, particularly in the predominantly Welsh speaking areas. The Committee has already accepted that there is a direct correlation with in and out migration and the state of the language and that economic issues are a key contributory factor to this demographic change. This note summarises the views put to the Committee about how this might be addressed. Some have previously been discussed in committee during its evidence taking sessions; this meeting presents an opportunity for committee to determine its recommendations on economic and community development and the Welsh language.

Summary of Issues

Evidence on the relationship between the state of the language and economic and community development came from a broad cross-section of organisations. Not only the business and community sectors, but also local government, academics and language pressure groups. All agreed that the economy had a fundamental impact on the Welsh language and on those rural and valleys communities which are predominantly Welsh speaking.

A number of submissions maintained that Welsh speaking communities are economically disadvantaged with many located in Objective 1 areas. That this led to out-migration particularly by young people was undisputed. It was also claimed by some that there is a tendency for native Welsh speakers to be in lesser paid employment and to receive fewer

opportunities than the in-migrating non Welsh speaking population. The lack of suitable as well as available employment opportunities was highlighted by, inter alia, the Economic Development Committee. It felt that the most important inter-relationship between economic activity and the health of the language is the negative effect on the Welsh speaking communities of an inadequate number and range of jobs within reasonable reach. That Committee also felt, however, that the Welsh language is a valuable resource for economic development. It suggested that the language offers a wide range of direct and indirect opportunities for businesses and the basis on which to present a positive and vital image for Wales.

Deficiencies and Proposed Solutions

There was a good deal of agreement amongst the organisations which responded about the measures that should be undertaken to improve the economic situation in Welsh speaking communities. There was also some dissent and criticism of existing policies.

National Economic Development Strategy and Single Programming Documents

It was claimed that the National Economic Development Strategy (NEDS) is an example of the lack of provision towards the continuation of Welsh as a community language. The same criticism, it was said, applied to the Single Programming Documents (SPD) on Objective 1 funding. There were few references in either to the Welsh language or the provision of employment or training which can utilise those skills. One contributor maintained that not only were references to the language scarce, they were also erroneous and unclear. It quoted as an example an extract from Section 5 of the SPD - "an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Welsh culture might be perceived as evidence of insularity and could discourage inward investors and lead to reduced opportunities for innovation".

It was suggested that there should be an urgent review of the way that Objective 1 monies are spent in Welsh speaking areas and that the Welsh Language Board should be a statutory observer on the Objective 1 committee. There was a view that Welsh language considerations should be mainstreamed into economic development policies; the language should be seen as offering opportunities and not as a threat.

Co-ordination and Employment Programmes

It was also suggested that the National Assembly should make the Welsh Language heartlands an attractive place for people to set up and grow businesses. This, it was said, would require action across the Assembly's policy areas and may require current thinking to be challenged.

Also at national level, a Labour Market Strategy was proposed, in order to identify employers'

needs across a number of different sectors for staff with bilingual skills. This should use input from economic development, education and training organisations and the careers services. In addition it was felt that the WDA should target Welsh speaking towns (not regions or counties) for economic development.

It was suggested that bilingualism can be a benefit not a hindrance to successful commerce. Different levels of government should look to raising awareness of the Welsh language and emphasise the benefits of maintaining a bilingual work force.

One local authority believed that the new Unitary Development Plans can assist in ensuring an economic foundation which will sustain Welsh speaking communities by:

- estimating how much industrial land will be required during the scheme's duration then distributing this supply according to the UDP Strategic Development framework and designating appropriate sites;
- establishing policies which will promote the creation of a sustainable economy whilst safeguarding environmental and social interests.

Another observer felt that Local Authorities should co-operate with the Assembly and the WDA to formulate a strategy relating to the creation and preservation of employment which is adequate to meet the needs of rural Wales and the wishes of local workforces.

The need for co-ordinated action between the agencies and the Assembly was emphasised by a number of organisations. One suggested that there should be better co-operation between business development agencies, community development organisations and language initiatives in order to secure the economic wellbeing of Welsh speaking areas. Another specified the Assembly, WDA, ELWa and WEFO as partners to work together in order to generate economic prosperity in North and West Wales. Menter a Busnes also put forward proposals for co-ordinated action. At the Committee's request further details were submitted, and these are attached at Annex A.

Finally, on a positive note, it was suggested that informed companies often wish to invest in Wales because the country has two different cultures and languages.

National Language and Economic Development Body

The creation of an organisation with statutory powers to promote the economy, education and training, community development and the language was proposed by Mentrau Iaith. They suggested that such a body should draw on the expertise of the WDA, ELWa, WTB, CCW, Menter a Busnes and Antur Teifi.

Similarly, Cymuned proposed the establishment of an Economic Development Authority for Welsh speaking communities to establish and develop indigenous companies, attract appropriate inward investment and ensure economic development does not mitigate against the interests of the language.

The Economic Development Committee however, did not see the need for new bodies to oversee or promote the incorporation of Welsh Language considerations in economic development policies.

Regional Devolution

A number of organisations felt that the Assembly and relevant ASPBs should be relocated from Cardiff into the Welsh speaking heartlands. This would increase the range of opportunities for young people to find professional and attractive careers. The WLB, WTB, ACW S4C, Assembly Departments and educational establishments were proposed as candidates for this.

S4C was asked by the Committee to submit further evidence on the feasibility of relocation. This is attached at Annex B.

Transport Infrastructure

The poor condition of the transport infrastructure in Wales was commented upon by several organisations. One suggested that it was unacceptable and a key factor in the continuing failure to attract major employers to rural Wales. It was felt that a basic transport infrastructure must be created which encourages employers to invest away from the main M4/A55 corridor.

The CBI suggested that Business can do most to assist the survival and development of the language by providing employment in Welsh speaking areas. But business cannot create more jobs unless NAW creates the right business environment:-

- addressing deficiencies in transport and planning policies
- incentivising language use not penalising non-use.

Community Fund

The establishment of a Community Fund for rural communities to establish co-operative companies to safeguard local services such as village shops, public houses, post offices and petrol stations was proposed. A community Development Bank for indigenous businesses was also suggested.

The CBI felt however that Wales is too small a market to allow development of purely local businesses.

Bilingualism as a Skill

It was felt that the Welsh language should be treated in the business world as it is in education i.e teachers receive an allowance/grant with training to teach a shortage subject such as Welsh and so language is treated as a skill. Supporting employers in this way would raise the status of the language and encourage its use.

Small Businesses

The Federation of Small Businesses suggested that a major means of promoting the local economy would be to increase the emphasis, opportunity and importance of small businesses. This would require specific policies by the Assembly through advice, assistance and financial measures. It would also require a revolutionary change in attitude towards education, training, discussion activity and entrepreneurship. This was especially true in Welsh speaking areas where there has been tradition, over emphasis and tendency to follow a career in the public sector.

The Federation said they would welcome any measure that would support bilingual entrepreneurship with incentives that would offer language training opportunities amongst owners and staff.

Finally, the Economic Development Committee felt that the language is an important element of the cultural sector which it considers particularly important in the development of the Welsh economy. They saw it as a valuable tool in helping to protect and develop rural communities.

Committee Secretariat April 2002