

**ANNUAL REPORT TO PLENARY**

**Date: Wednesday 1 May 2002**

**Purpose**

1. To approve the Committee's annual report to plenary.

**Background**

2. Standing Order 9.9 requires subject committees to report to the Assembly from time to time on progress in fulfilling their work programmes. All subject committees will table such reports in May. The Panel of Chairs has agreed that these will not be the basis of plenary debate as in earlier years.

**Timing**

3. The report is to be tabled by 23 May.

**Action for the Committee**

4. The Committee is invited to comment on and approve the draft report attached to the paper.

**Committee Secretariat April 2001**

---

**AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**REPORT TO PLENARY UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.9:**

**MAY 2001 TO APRIL 2002**

## **1 Introduction**

1.1 This report summarises our activities from May 2001 to April 2002. Copies of our reports, agendas, papers, minutes and transcripts of meetings can be found on the National Assembly website.

## **2 Membership**

2.1 Our current membership is: Glyn Davies (Chair), Mick Bates, Jocelyn Davies, Ron Davies, Cynog Dafis, Delyth Evans, John Griffiths, Carwyn Jones (Minister for Rural Affairs), Peter Rogers and Rhodri Glyn Thomas. There were several changes to our membership during the reporting period.

## **3 Remit and Responsibilities**

3.1 Our remit mirrors the portfolio of the Minister for Rural Affairs, Carwyn Jones. This includes all aspects of agriculture and fisheries, development and promotion of food production, forestry and development of rural economy.

3.2 The responsibilities of subject committees are set out in S.O. 9.

## **4 Work and Achievements to Date**

4.1 During the reporting period we met 18 times. Our principal achievements were as follows:

### **Foot & Mouth**

4.2 The most significant influence on the Committee's work during the year was the foot and mouth outbreak. The issue dominated the Committee's work from the start of the year until the summer. Additional meetings were held during the Easter and summer recess weeks and, at the height of the crisis, the subject took up the bulk of the Committee's fortnightly meetings. In this way, the Committee acted as an important public forum to scrutinise the handling of the crisis in Wales and to help disseminate information on emerging developments. In February and March 2002, the Committee devoted two entire meetings to looking back at the outbreak and scrutinising how it had been handled by Assembly Ministers. A report of our findings is to be fed into the UK-led inquiries considering the lessons to be learned from the outbreak.

### **European Commission**

4.3 In June the Committee visited Brussels for a series of meetings with the head of the office of the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, other senior Commission officials and Welsh MEPs.

Policy development (SO 9.7 (i))

### **Diversifying the rural economy**

4.4 In June 2001 the Committee published its report, *Diversifying the Rural Economy*. The report was the culmination of 18 months of work and contained over 60 recommendations designed to strengthen and broaden the rural economic base in Wales. We have received positive feedback on the Committee's recommendations and, in May 2002, will consider the Welsh Assembly Government's response to each of these.

#### ***ICT in rural Wales***

4.5 Following the publication of the report on rural economic diversification, the Committee embarked on a review of information and communications technology provision in rural Wales focussing, in particular, on the steps required to boost the demand and supply of ICT in rural areas. The Committee has now completed the evidence-gathering stage of its review and will publish its report and recommendations before the summer.

### **Contribution to policy development**

4.6 In addition to our own reviews, we also contributed to the Culture Committee's policy review of the Welsh language, as well as key policy developments being taken forward by the Minister for Rural Affairs.

#### ***Review of Expenditure and Administration (SO 9.7 (ii))***

4.7 We regularly scrutinised the Minister for Rural Affairs via his fortnightly report to the Committee. With the Minister's agreement, we introduced a system to allow Committee Members to require specific items to be included in his report so allowing regular scrutiny of both long and short-term issues of importance. An hour of every fortnightly meeting is now dedicated to scrutiny of the Minister in this way.

4.8 In addition, the two sessions dedicated entirely to examination of Ministers' handling of foot and mouth represent one of the most significant scrutiny exercises undertaken by an Assembly Committee.

#### ***Review of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) (SO 9.7 (iii))***

4.9 Although no major ASPBs fall directly within the Committee's remit, we continue to take an interest in the activities of the Welsh Development Agency, Wales Tourist Board, Countryside Council for Wales and the National Parks as key players in rural Wales. These bodies have all contributed to our policy reviews and are key to the delivery of our recommendations.

### ***Legislation (SO 9.8(i))***

4.10 In December 2000 the then Hunting Bill was remitted to the Committee for consideration of its impact on Wales. Although the Bill was not passed before the General Election, the Committee had by then invited views on the proposal. Now that the UK Government has signalled its intention to introduce fresh legislation, the Committee will use the 900 or so submissions it received as the basis for a short report to feed into the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the parliamentary process.

4.11 The Committee reported to plenary on six draft regulations which had been referred to it under SO 22.5. The Committee also received reports on forthcoming legislation in respect of agriculture and rural development at the beginning of each term.

### ***Budget (SO 9.8 (ii))***

4.12 Our budget preferences were set out in the summer term, and we commented on the draft budget in the autumn term.

### ***Complaints (SO 9.8(iii))***

4.13 No complaints were referred to us during the reporting period.

### ***Public Appointments (SO 9.8(iv))***

4.14 Our public appointments nominees were consulted on numerous appointments to public bodies during the reporting period.

## **5 Forward Programme**

5.1 Looking to the future, our strategic work programme for 2002-03 is attached at Annex 1.

**Agriculture and Rural Development Committee**

**May 2002**

---

## Annex 1

### AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

#### STRATEGIC FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME MAY 2002-MAY 2003

##### Introduction

1. The Agriculture & Rural Development Committee is one of the National Assembly's seven subject committees. The responsibilities of the subject committees are set out in Standing Orders, as reproduced at **Annex A**.

2. Standing order 9.9 requires subject committees to maintain a rolling programme of work covering periods of at least 12 months. The Panel of Chairs has agreed that committees' work programmes should be strategic and cover an 18 month to 2 year time frame, supported by more detailed work programmes covering a three month period. This work programme sets out the Committee's strategic priorities between May 2002 and the next Assembly elections in May 2003.

**Remit3. The Committee's remit is based on the portfolio of the Minister for Rural Affairs, Carwyn Jones, which embraces all aspects of agriculture and fisheries, development and promotion of food production, forestry and the development of rural economy.**

##### Aims

4. The Committee aims to promote a stronger, more diverse rural economy and sustainable rural communities in Wales.

##### Priorities

5. The Committee's priorities for the coming year are as follows:

- *Policy development (SO 9.7(i))* - the Committee will focus on those areas of policy development where it can make the greatest impact and will seek to complement, rather than duplicate, policies being developed by the Minister. In the coming year the Committee proposes to review topics from the following policy areas:
  - *The organic sector*
  - *An audit/progress report on the roll-out of European structural programmes in rural areas*
  - *Tir Gofal*

The Committee will give its views to the Minister on the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural

Policy (CAP) when European Commission proposals are published later in 2002.

- *Scrutiny of the Minister (SO 9.7(ii))* - the focus for the Committee's scrutiny of the Minister for Rural Affairs will be a report submitted to each of its fortnightly meetings. Provided reasonable notice is given, the Minister will include in this report, and take questions on, issues requested by Committee Members. The Committee may also scrutinise the Minister on performance against targets and undertake thematic scrutiny sessions from time to time. The Committee also intends to scrutinise the delivery of the recommendations in its report *Diversifying the Rural Economy*.
- *Scrutiny of sponsored bodies (SO 9.7 (iii))* - Although no major Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies currently report directly to the Minister for Rural Affairs, the Committee will look to scrutinise the performance of public bodies in discharging their functions in rural areas. The Committee will also scrutinise the delivery by Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies of the recommendations in its report *Diversifying the Rural Economy*. The committee will continue to monitor regularly the work of the agri-food partnership.
- ***Other items (SO 9.8) - the Committee will also consider the following items as they arise:***
  - *proposed legislation affecting Wales (SO 9.8(i) and 22)* – each term the Minister will outline forthcoming secondary legislation to enable the Committee to identify areas where it wishes to be consulted. Following the National Assembly's consideration of the Queen's speech, the Committee will consider any draft primary legislation remitted to it by plenary. The Committee will also consider draft secondary legislation referred to it by the Business Committee, as appropriate;
  - *proposals for the Assembly's budget (SO 9.8(ii))* – the Committee will indicate its budget priorities in the summer term and comment on the draft budget in the autumn term;
  - *complaints (SO 9.8(iii) and 21)* – the Committee will consider any complaints referred to it;
  - *public appointments (SO 9.8(iv) and 20)* – the Committee's two public appointment nominees will take part in the process of appointments to public bodies as vacancies arise;
  - *other matters referred by the Assembly (SO 9.8 (v))* – the Committee will consider other matters referred to it by the National Assembly, but would ask Assembly Members to consult the Committee Chair before tabling motions inviting plenary to remit work to the Committee.

## ANNEX A

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF SUBJECT COMMITTEES

1. Standing orders 9.7 and 9.8 set out the responsibilities of subject committees.

"9.7 Each subject committee shall

- i. contribute to the development of the Assembly's policies within the fields for which the relevant Assembly Secretary is accountable to the Assembly;
- ii. keep under review the expenditure and administration connected with their implementation; and
- iii. keep under review the discharge of public functions in those fields by public, voluntary and private bodies.

"9.8 Each subject committee shall also, within the relevant fields,

- i. advise on proposed legislation affecting Wales, including performing its functions under standing order 22;
- ii. provide advice to the Assembly Cabinet on matters relating to allocation of the Assembly's budget in accordance with standing order 19;
- iii. perform its function under standing order 21 (complaints);
- iv. perform any functions assigned to it under the Code of Practice on Public Appointments Procedure made by the Assembly under standing order 20; and
- v. consider matters referred to it by the Assembly within its fields."