

Date: 12 December 2002
Time: 9.00am –12.30pm
Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay
Title: Working Group on EU Enlargement

Purpose

1. To report on the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Enlargement which took place on Thursday 14th November 2002.

Recommendation

2. Members note the contents of the paper.

Background

3. At its meeting on 28th June 2001, the European Affairs Committee agreed the draft terms of reference for a working group to consider enlargement issues. The Enlargement Working Group has now met four times – 8th October 2001, 16th January 2002, 15th May 2002 and 14th November 2002.

Report on Enlargement Working Group Meeting, 14th November 2002.

4. The Deputy First Minister introduced himself as the new Chair of the Group. Since the Group was entering its second year, members were invited to revisit the Group's Terms of Reference and membership and send any comments to the secretariat. Proposed amendments would be agreed with the Chair of the Group and put before the European and External Affairs Committee for approval.

5. Paper WGE(04)01 provided the Group with an update on the enlargement action plan and outlined the wide-ranging activity ongoing with the Candidate countries. Following the Group's discussions it was agreed that the plan needed to move on by:

- Capturing the short, medium and long term benefits to Wales;
- Encouraging various areas and sectors of Wales to take up those benefits (eg development of business links and opportunities to market Wales);

- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each of the Candidate countries;
- Putting in place methodologies for building relationships and funding opportunities (Interreg IIIC)

It was agreed that the secretariat would revise the plan and circulate to Group members for approval.

6. Steve Pomeroy from the Assembly's Cabinet and Constitution Unit spoke to the Group about his involvement in a 2-day Decentralisation conference in Bratislava, Slovakia in October 2002.

7. Richard Mulcahy, from the Welsh European Funding Office, also spoke to the Group about his involvement in the opening of the Silesian Regional Office in Brussels (in September 2002) and a study visit of Silesian officials to Wales in October to discuss structural funds.

8. Paper WGE(04)02 provided the Group with an opportunity to note the issues raised at a recent seminar on the future on the structural funds in Wales. It was agreed that an explicit Welsh position should be declared on the future Cohesion policy, in order to influence the UK position.

9. The last item on the agenda "Proposal for the Creation of a Catalyst organisation by Richard Essex, Wales European Enlargement Network" (WGE(04)03), was deferred until a later meeting at the request of Richard Essex. Mr Essex did not attend the meeting.

Compliance

10. Standing Order 15 covers the European and External Affairs Committee's activity. The working group was established on the basis of the Assembly's powers under section 40 of the Government of Wales Act. It is an informal advisory group whose main task is to report to the European and External Affairs Committee. The Assembly Compliance Office has been previously consulted and is content with the compliance aspects.

Financial Implications

11. There are no additional financial implications for the Assembly arising from the issues covered in this report.

European and External Affairs Division