

Meeting of the Mid Wales Regional Committee

Date: 17 May 2002

Time: 10.30- 1.30pm

Venue: Neuadd Pendre, Tywyn

Attendance:

Delyth Evans, Chair	Labour	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Liberal Democrat	Montgomeryshire
Elin Jones	Plaid	Ceredigion
Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas	Plaid	Meirionydd Nant Conwy
Nick Bourne	Conservative	Mid and West Wales

Committee Secretariat

Stephen Tomas	Deputy Committee Clerk
Eirian Dyer	Committee support

Apologies:

Glyn Davies	Conservative	Mid and West Wales
Cynog Dafis	Plaid	Mid and West Wales

Introduction: The chair thanked Mr Elwyn Evans for the use of the hall and his assistance with the arrangements for the Committee.

Feedback from previous meetings:

The Chair informed the Committee that she had written to the Minister for Health, Jane Hutt, about the concerns voiced over the proposed reduction in maternity services in Knighton Hospital.

The Chair had received a letter from Severn Trent Water Authority in reply to that sent by the Committee regarding the services in the Knighton area. The letter stated that work has been carried out on the sewage system to prepare it for any possible flooding and that the Authority had met with Knighton Town Council to discuss its concerns. The letter enclosed a cheque for £30 for failure to respond within 30 days. The Committee agreed that the money would be donated to a charitable cause.

Agenda Item 1: Discussion session on the provision of Further Education, Lifelong Learning and Training in Mid Wales

Coleg Harlech

Paper: Mid 03-02 p1

Presenter: Annie Williams, Principal.

The following points were made during presentation:

- Lifelong Learning meant learning skills throughout a person's lifetime. A narrowing of this interpretation (for instance, the emphasis placed on qualifications) meant that this restricted the possible learning undertaken to those in employment, or those who were economically active. Although qualifications were easy to measure, the language used in qualifications was narrow, whereas the language used in learning was broad and involved wider participation.
- There should be a greater emphasis on informal non-vocational learning. Evening classes were often the lifeblood of the community. Widening participation in informal learning often led learners into qualifications they would not otherwise undertake.
- Entry to higher education and further education should be via one route.

- Funding mechanisms requiring a certain number of people or length of course were geared towards full time, and not community based, learning. The rich history of 'liberal' adult education, provided by institutions such as Coleg Harlech, was in danger of being pushed to the periphery.

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- Although there was a trend towards accreditation in learning in recent years this was not the only way in which funding bodies could evaluate the work of further education institutions. It was possible for ESTYN to evaluate the quality of the educational provision by Coleg Harlech, for instance.
- Currently, approximately 50% of courses run by Coleg Harlech were accredited.
- Although learning for its own sake was justifiable, it had to be accountable; putting on classes for very small numbers was therefore not always practical.

The Basic Skills Agency

Paper: Mid 03-02 p2

Presenter: Sandra Morton

The following points were made during presentation:

- Ms Morton drew attention to 'Adult Learning Week'. She pointed out that the numbers of adults in education recently fell from 29-23% in the UK. The figure for Wales was even lower. Of that number, approximately 60% came from professional and managerial backgrounds, and about 25% from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The majority of adults who needed help were not illiterate or innumerate, they only required a short amount of tuition to achieve the level of skills needed.
- The Basic Skills Strategy was one year old and consisted of:
- A strategic approach to planning and delivery based on local knowledge and partnerships with groups such as Sure Start and Communities First. Also, increasing the range and opportunity for young people and adults to improve their basic skills. Basic skills were also needed to increase consumer knowledge. The quality of learning was also an important area which needed to be addressed.

The following points were made during the subsequent question and answer session:

- There was no one method of evaluating the work of the Agency, each strand of the Strategy was measured.
- The Agency did not provide learning itself, it fed into other activities that people were already involved in. The Agency provided advice and support to Local Authorities on

how to spend money and design training courses. It worked strategically with learning providers. The emphasis at the moment was to undertake a marketing campaign aimed at breaking down the stigma attached to basic skills provision.

The National for Education and Training Wales - ELWa Mid Wales

Paper: Mid 03-02 p3

Presenters: James Gibson-Watt, Mid Wales Regional Chair and Robin Beckmann, Director

The following points were made in presentation:

ELWa's first operational plan was recently approved by the Assembly. There were three key national priorities:

The needs of the economy

Raising the quality of learning provision

Raising demand for learning

A Regional Statement of Needs and Priorities has also been completed for Mid Wales.

The Mid Wales region, faced several challenges such as:

poor communication links

Sparsely located population and businesses

Lack of a distribution channel

Increasing female employment and decreasing male employment

Priorities for Meirionydd included:

- Addressing pockets of education / skills deprivation
- Basic ICT skills
- Developing approaches to delivering learning to small rural communities
- Up-skilling the under-utilised, particularly in tight labour markets

- Activities to help attract and retain talented young people in Mid Wales
- Providing skills for business, focussing on key sectors, eg, agri-food, renewable energy, tourism, ICT

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- The successful projects in Penrhyndaedraeth and the Centre for Alternative Technology could be repeated elsewhere.
- There has been a major change in the philosophy and delivering of learning in Wales. Foundations had to be built in creating a learning infrastructure.
- One of the National Council's biggest tasks was to oversee the work of Community Consortia for Education and Training.
- The National Council provided Local Authorities with support and identified learning needs but did not provide learning.
- There was a recognition that small businesses had difficulty in releasing employees for learning, it was the Council's task to convince them of the benefits of learning.
- The Wales Tourist Board were the lead agency for learning in the tourism sector.
- The issue of whether people had to move outside of Mid Wales was largely due to the economic base in the region and attracting businesses to the area that could provide jobs with sufficient value to meet the existing skills.
- Video-conferencing and ICT learning would be important for Mid Wales once the learning infrastructure was in place, although distance learning could not replace the valuable social contact with a teacher.

During the subsequent open microphone session the following points were made:

- Councillor Wyn Davies said that Mid Wales still lacked adequate transport links which would bring in businesses. However well people were trained they would still leave the area if they could not find jobs locally.
- The importance of ICT should not be underestimated. ESDL would be a primary means of communication in Mid Wales for those looking for job opportunities.

Agenda Item 2: Discussion session on coastal erosion in the Tywyn area

Papers: MID 03-02(p4-6)

The Chair asked the presenters for some constructive proposals for moving this issue forward.

Gwynedd County Council

Paper: MID 03-02(p4)

Representative:

Bob Daimond, Chief Surveyor to the Council

Huw Davies, Group Engineer, Coastal Protection

The following key points were made in presentation:

- The Council emphasised the fact that the sea has moved closer to Tywyn beach over the last 150 years since the wall was first built.
- The current scheme was implemented in response to Gwynedd Council's responsibilities and not due to lack of action or negligence by the Council. Repair work to existing walls have since been undertaken.

The following key points were made in the question and answer session:

- Due to the Council's 2000 resolution and in light of much opposition, the Council decided not to proceed with the original scheme.
- The Council's scheme of 2001 was to use "rock armour" to protect the property behind it. However the Council stated that the first scheme was too ambitious and raised expectations. Although the former Welsh Office stated it would detrimentally affect the rest of the coastline, the Council quoted the opinion of experts who believed that this was impossible to prove.

Tywyn and Aberdyfi Coastal Protection Group

Paper: MID 03-02(p5)

Representative:

Mike Stevens

David Inman

The following points were made in presentation:

- It was noted that the Group was not only concerned with coastal erosion but with the

long-term economic viability of Tywyn and Aberdyfi.

- The Group raised concerns about Gwynedd Council's rock armour scheme.
- The Group favoured the Second Opinion Report which stated that fishtail groynes would give the greatest benefit to the area as they would enhance and protect the beach. Environmentally, this was considered to be the best option.

The following points were made in the Question and Answer session:

- The fishtail groynes scheme was likely to attract some funding from the Assembly but an estimate of the additional cost to Gwynedd Council was needed, as this would have an enhancement effect.
- The Group believed that Gwynedd Council saw the rock armour scheme as the only option available to them.
- The current scheme did not allow for any enhancements or improvement to the area. The current regulations do not allow for another scheme and the present budget is too controlled and needs to be more flexible. A cheap quick fix scheme was not sufficient.
- Due to the Foot and Mouth Crisis Tywyn witnessed a 40%-45% downturn in business, therefore it was essential that whichever scheme was implemented, it must benefit the people of the area.
- A "champion of the cause " was needed to view the totality of the problem and to bring together all interested parties to produce a scheme worthy of the area and acceptable to all sides.

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Paper: MID 03-02(p.6)

Representative:

Fiona Evans, Team Leader Meirionydd

Dr Rod Jones, Senior Coastal Scientist

The following points were raised in presentation:

- It was noted that the process of erosion was a natural process and problems arose when man-made structures were built too close to the sea.
- Beaches were the first line of defence and further environmental problems could be caused when trying to restrict erosion. Sea defences did not necessarily prevent beach erosion and could encourage the loss of the beach and erosion of the underlying seabed. Changes in the nature of the beach from sand to shingle would in turn have an impact on the beach as a tourist resource.

- It was predicted that due to global warming, sea levels would increase causing high wave energy at the back of the shore and that the erosion would continue and worsen.

The following points were raised in the subsequent Question and Answer session:

- It was important to think of this issue in terms of sustainability - helping to maintain landscapes which will add value to the Welsh coastline. CCW explained that it would be publishing guidelines on this.

Environment Agency Wales (EA)

Representative:

Phillip Jones

The following points were raised in presentation:

- A brief history of Environment Agency Wales' role in the Tywyn/Aberdyfi area was given. Apart from private frontages, the Local Authority dealt with coastal erosion and the Environment Agency dealt with sea defence. On this basis the EA signed up to the original scheme and would have contributed financially to it. However when the scheme broke up, the EA took on the sea defence aspect (Penllyn Frontage) and had dual responsibility with Railtrack North of Tywyn.

The following points were raised in the subsequent question and answer session:

- The Cardigan Bay Coastal Group are in regular dialogue with all bodies but there is no drive to bring all constituent parts together to embrace one scheme. The Group consisted of Railtrack, CCW, NAFW and the EA.

National Assembly for Wales

Representative:

Kerry Keirle, Flood and Coastal Defence, Environmental Protection Division

The following points were made in presentation:

- The Welsh Assembly Government has overall responsibility for coast protection in

Wales and the aim of the coast protection grants to Local Authorities was to support essential works to protect people and property from coastal erosion.

- The issue of what is the most appropriate scheme for Tywyn was a local matter for Gwynedd Council to determine. It was within the Council's prerogative to promote a scheme which provided other improvements as well as coastal protection.
- The Assembly could give financial assistance towards the fishtail scheme but it would be limited to the cost of the most cost effective and appropriate scheme in terms of providing coastal protection.

The following points were made in the open microphone session:

- The importance of the Aberdyfi and Tywyn amenities must be recognised.
- There were three main areas of concern i.e Aberdyfi Golf Club, the promenade at Tywyn and also the valuable agricultural land on the lowlands
- All interested parties must pull together to agree a comprehensive scheme to protect everyone
- Alternative methods of funding must be found
- The issue does not only affect Tywyn but also the surrounding areas to the North.

Closing remarks from the Chair:

The Chair of the Committee stated that the Committee was concerned to resolve the issue and suggested writing to Sue Essex AM, Minister for Environment with the conclusions reached at the meeting. As the Assembly had a central role in the matter, the Chair also suggested that Assembly officials bring together all the interested bodies who had a role in progressing the matter, to take the process forward and to attempt to devise a scheme that would be acceptable to all parties.

Item 4: Mid Wales Regional Committee's Annual Report

- Members were content with the Committee's report.
- The Chair sought Members' agreement to the Committee meeting once a term. This was agreed.

Item 5: Minutes of 8 March meeting - MID 02-02 (min)

The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed without amendment.

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Item 6: Nominations for a new Chair

- Mick Bates was nominated as the next chair to the Mid Wales Regional Committee.
- Nick Bourne thanked Delyth Evans for her work as Chair of the Committee.

Closing Remarks:

- As the general open microphone session had largely been given over to coastal erosion issues, the Chair stated that those members of the public who wanted to express concerns about other issues should write to the Assembly about the matters.

Committee Secretariat May 2002