

Move the Welsh Assembly out of Cardiff

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 27 Mehefin 2017
Petitions Committee | 27 June 2017

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-762

Petition title: **Move the Welsh Assembly out of Cardiff**

Text of petition: We the undersigned call for the National Assembly be moved from Cardiff to Aberystwyth to begin 'rebalancing' the national life and economy of Wales.

Cardiff is prospering, and growing at an exponential rate, while most parts of Wales stagnate, which makes it clear that the current Cardiff/Wales model of economic development does not work for eighty per cent of the country.

Cardiff getting the lion's share of investment and jobs impacts adversely on the rest of the country, and while this trend was observable in earlier decades it has gained greater momentum and become even more damaging for the national good since the National Assembly for Wales first sat in 1999.

Worse, there is growing evidence of corruption; the kind of corruption that is inevitable when those with political influence and control of the public purse regularly meet, in social and other contexts, those seeking to take advantage of such contacts.

We believe that in the short term the easiest way to remedy this unsustainable and growing imbalance, and the increasing threat of corruption, is to move the Welsh Assembly and its assorted departments and agencies out of Cardiff.

Aberystwyth would be an ideal and central location for the Assembly and its support staff, other agencies could be located around the country, for in the era of the internet and video conferencing civil servants and others do not need to work next door to each other.

The benefits accruing to some of the more neglected parts of Wales would soon make up for the initial costs involved in the relocations. To continue with the current arrangement is to condemn Wales to a future as a city state, with all benefits accruing to Cardiff. This is not

the future we want for our country.

Background

Following the referendum which gave the green light for devolution in September 1997 it was assumed the new Assembly would occupy Cardiff City Hall, given its proximity to the Crown Buildings which housed the Welsh Office.

Negotiations commenced on 9 October 1997 between Cardiff Council and the Welsh Office but broke down on 24 November, when the UK Government rejected the deal offered by Cardiff. In December 1997 the Welsh Office issued a consultation document suggesting alternative sites and inviting applications. 24 applications from around Wales were received by the Welsh Office by 31 January 1998. In February 1998 the Secretary of State, Ron Davies, announced a shortlist of four locations – three in Cardiff and Swansea Guildhall. In April the final announcement of Cardiff Bay was made. There was to be a new building but Crickhowell House (now Ty Hywel) would be used as a temporary location. The Pierhead also became part of the Assembly estate. The new building – the [Senedd](#) – opened its doors in 2006.

The Assembly also has a [North Wales information centre](#) in Colwyn Bay.

Since 2007 there has been a distinction between staff who work for the Assembly who are employed by the **Assembly Commission** and civil servants who work for the **Welsh Government**.

The Welsh Office in Cathays Park became the headquarters of the Welsh Government but subsequently the Welsh Government has opened [offices across Wales](#). There are Welsh Government Offices in Holyhead, Caernarfon, Dolgellau, Llandudno Junction, Wrexham, Llandrindod Wells, Newtown, Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Milford Haven, Swansea, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Nantgarw, Newport, Treforest, Bedwas and Caerphilly. There is also an office located in [Aberystwyth](#) where most of the staff dealing with agriculture are located.

Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government publishes an [annual State of the Estate Report](#). This contains information about the numbers of staff employed in different parts of Wales. For 2015/16 it was:

North Wales 522

Mid Wales 470

South West Wales 452

South East Wales 1,279

Cardiff 2,647

In 2014 the Wales Audit Office published [a report](#) on the Welsh Government's Location Strategy. This report examined whether the Location Strategy Programme has delivered its objectives in a way that provides value for money. The report concluded that the Welsh Government has delivered the objectives of the Location Strategy, but the overall value for money of the Programme is uncertain. This is because, although the Welsh Government delivered the new office buildings to the expected quality and within contracted costs, limited consideration was given to alternative accommodation options, robust estimates of programme costs were lacking, and realisation of all the Programme's continuing benefits is no longer being monitored.

The report stated:

The Welsh Government had a clear objective to increase the proportion of staff working outside Cardiff, but workforce planning was hampered by limitations in the information on staff numbers, limited consideration was given to accommodation options, and the costs of the Programme were underestimated.

And

The Programme has increased the percentage of staff working outside Cardiff, but the Welsh Government has not relocated as many employees as planned.

National Assembly for Wales action

The Public Accounts Committee in the fourth Assembly discussed the Wales Audit Office's report on [the Welsh Government's Location Strategy in 2014](#). The Committee received a briefing from the Wales Audit Office and resolved to write to the Welsh Government. The Permanent Secretary provided a [detailed response](#) to the WAO's recommendations. The Committee decided not to hold an inquiry into the Location Strategy.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.