

## SOUTH EAST WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING

**Date:** Friday 7 December

**Time:** 9.30am to 12.40pm

**Venue:** Coleg Gwent, Usk Campus

#### **Attendance:**

##### *Members:*

Jonathan Morgan (Chair)	South Wales Central
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff Central
Rosemary Butler	Newport West
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Jane Davidson	Pontypridd
David Davies	Monmouth
Geraint Davies	Rhondda
Janet Davies	South Wales West
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Sue Essex	Cardiff North
Michael German	South Wales East
William Graham	South Wales Central

Jane Hutt	Vale of Glamorgan
David Melding	South Wales Central
Jenny Randerson	Cardiff Central
Owen John Thomas	South Wales Central
Phil Williams	South Wales East

*In attendance:*

Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Chair, Culture Committee
Euryn Ogwen Williams	Expert Adviser
Shelley Megenis	Torfaen County Borough Council
	Torfaen County Borough Council
Ellis Griffiths	Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw
Sue George	University of Newport
Elen Rhys	ACEN
Phil Richards	Business Connect
Branwen Miles	CSV Cymru
Gareth Gregory	Newidiem
Steffan Webb	Menter Iaith yn Rhondda Cynon Taf

*Secretariat*

Roger Chaffey	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

## **Opening remarks**

David Davies formally welcomed the Committee to Usk. He extended a welcome to all those present including members of the public and presenters.

The Chair said he was pleased to be meeting at Coleg Gwent, Usk and extended his thanks to the Coleg staff for their assistance and use of facilities.

The Chair said that the theme of the meeting was the Welsh language review currently being undertaken by the Assembly's Culture Committee. He said it was important for the Regional Committees to input into the current consultation, which would assist the Assembly in developing a strategy to meet its objective of creating a bilingual Wales.

## **Item 1: Apologies for absence**

1. Apologies for absence were received from Peter Black, Alun Cairns, Jocelyn Davies, Janice Gregory, John Griffiths, Brian Hancock, Pauline Jarman, Carwyn Jones, Peter Law, Huw Lewis, Dai Lloyd, Rhodri Morgan and Lynne Neagle.

## **Item 2: Minutes of the meeting held on 2 November: SEWR-05-01 (min)**

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November were approved.

## **Item 3: Open mike session**

3.1 The following issues were raised by members of the public:

- Exemptions from Welsh language classes for children with special educational needs;
- The need to address problems associated with economic migration, particularly in Welsh speaking communities;
- The need to address the shortage of speech and language therapists working within Wales;
- The Assembly's National Economic Development Strategy including the nature of targets contained within the Strategy;
- The need to promote the Welsh language through primary education and to ensure that appropriate methods of teaching are used to facilitate the learning process;
- The need to consider the provision of further secondary schools in the South East Wales region, which teach through the medium of Welsh;
- The need to raise awareness amongst school and college leavers about employment opportunities for Welsh speakers.

3.2 In response to the above the following points were raised:

- The Committee noted that schools were able to consider removing Welsh from the curriculum via temporary disapplication for children with special educational needs (SEN). It was felt that adequate resources were required to assist schools in addressing the needs of pupils with SEN. This, combined with additional support for staff, would enable teachers to effectively deliver the Welsh language curriculum to children with learning difficulties and, where appropriate those with SEN. It was suggested that SEN children should receive mainstream education where possible.
- Members felt it was important to promote inter-authority working in order to successfully address the individual needs of SEN children. It was noted that the Education Bill 2001 included the proposed provision of new SEN regional centres and the establishment of a separate SEN tribunal for Wales. It was envisaged that this would increase the involvement of pupils in educational plans.
- The Committee agreed that the effects of economic migration were not limited to Welsh speaking communities. It was important for the Assembly to ensure that local people were given the opportunity to remain in their own communities if they so wished. This would be achieved by providing affordable housing and appropriate employment opportunities, particularly for young people. It was felt that promotion of the Welsh language amongst people moving into Welsh speaking communities would assist in sustaining the linguistic viability of those communities. In addition, in-migration could benefit communities and assist in their economic regeneration.
- Concern was expressed about the lack of available speech and language therapists in Wales, which prevented vital assessments and early identification of problems. In particular, it was important to increase the provision of support through the medium of Welsh. The Committee noted that the Welsh Assembly Government was conducting an All Workforce Planning Review in conjunction with the National Health Service in Wales. The review would identify the future staffing requirements of the National Health Service and gaps in provision. Members agreed it was important to adequately increase the staffing levels and the number of healthcare professionals in training. It was suggested that speech and language therapists could be employed directly by schools and that their pay structure should be reviewed.
- There was general agreement that targets were a necessary part of the National Economic Development Strategy. Some Members suggested that some targets contained within the Strategy were unachievable, in particular the commitment to significantly increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Wales by 2010. Members felt that it was vital to set ambitious targets which the Assembly could work towards.
- Some Members felt that GDP was a misleading measure with which to assess standards of living. It was suggested that average employment rate for people of working age would be a more accurate measure, however the suitability of available employment must also be taken into account.

#### **Item 4: Culture Committee's Welsh language review**

4.1 Rhodri Glyn Thomas said that the Assembly aimed to create a bilingual Wales. The Culture Committee's review of the Welsh language would assist the Assembly in developing a concrete strategy of actions for achieving bilingualism.

He emphasised the following points:

- it was important people living in Wales to be given the opportunity to use the language of their choice in all aspects of national life and in their communities;
- the Welsh language must be promoted as a family and community language;
- it was vital to provide opportunities for people to learn Welsh and to use it;
- it was necessary to create equal respect for both Welsh and English, and maintain national consensus and goodwill about bilingualism.

## **Item 5: Welsh language review**

5.1 Shelley Megenis outlined the work of Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC) in promoting the Welsh language. She said that TCBC recognised the need to allow people to access local authority services in the language of their choice and that it had adopted a positive approach in taking this forward. The council's Welsh Language Scheme was developed following the introduction of the Welsh Language Act. The Scheme was based on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

5.2 Welsh language within the local authority. Events were organised throughout the area which aimed to widen local interest and enthusiasm in both the Welsh language and culture.

5.3 TCBC had a monitoring system in place to ensure a consistent approach was adopted in the use of the Welsh language throughout local authority services. This system included a designated Welsh language monitoring officer for each department who was responsible for ensuring that targets were met.

## **Item 6: Welsh language review**

6.1 Ellis Griffiths, Headmaster of Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw said that the school was the sole Welsh medium school in the South East Wales region. He explained that 94 per cent of pupils were from homes where neither parent spoke Welsh and that most pupils used the medium of English in all other aspects of their lives. It was important to ensure that there were adequate learning and employment opportunities for Welsh speaking school leavers.

6.2 Ellis Griffiths explained that the school served five education authorities throughout the region and that only 25 per cent of pupils came from Torfaen. He said that there was a growing demand for places in the school and that this would need to be met by adequate resources and suitable building premises.

6.3 Sue George of the University of Wales, College Newport outlined the provision of Welsh as a second language in the University's School of Education. She said that the majority of students came from South East Wales and England. Most had no prior knowledge of the Welsh language. The University aimed to offer training in Welsh medium schools to students whose first language was Welsh. However this was often problematic due to the limited opportunities available.

6.4 Sue George said that 270 students were following the Welsh as a second language course, which was now an integral part of the primary BA and post graduate course. She explained that Welsh language was a mandatory part of the course during the first year of study. However, during the second year alternative options were available.

6.5 During training students were encouraged to use innovative teaching methods to capture the interest of their pupils. Trainees carried out oral, written and reading tasks and were given certificates to show their level of attainment. Sue George said that the aim was to ensure a level of competence, which enabled students to teach a range of subjects on qualification.

6.6 Ellen Rhys said that ACEN were responsible for producing programmes and publications in the medium of Welsh as well as providing Welsh language resources and training. She said that ACEN were currently identifying ways to promote learning opportunities using new technologies such as the internet.

6.7 Ellen Rhys outlined the need for strategic planning to take forward the Welsh language and to recognise the impact of current initiatives on the future development of the bilingualism in Wales. It was vital to ensure that investment into the promotion and expansion of the language was targeted effectively. She suggested that investment was needed to support the intergenerational transmission of the Welsh language and highlighted the need for adequate learning opportunities for parents.

6.8 Phil Richards said that Business Connect provided a gateway for individuals or companies to access business support by directing them to organisations, which would offer advice and assistance.

6.9 He explained that the Torfaen and Monmouth branch of Business Connect had received no enquiries in the medium of Welsh since it was established in 1996. Indeed, experience had shown that the Welsh language was not widely used by the business sector in the Torfaen and Monmouth area. Despite this, Business Connect produced bilingual publicity material and was able to offer their services through the medium of Welsh if required.

6.10 Branwen Miles emphasised the role of the voluntary sector in developing and sustaining the Welsh language. She that CSV Cymru worked in communities throughout Wales and

helped promote the use of Welsh as a community and family language.

6.11 She outlined the importance of assisting vulnerable people to access services in the language of their choice, in particular older people and those with specific care needs. This helped strengthen contact between service users and their communities and helped promote a sense of belonging.

6.12 After leaving the education system, young Welsh speakers may have limited opportunities to use the medium of Welsh. The voluntary sector offered a range of activities, which enabled young people to develop their linguistic skills.

6.13 Gareth Gregory said that it was inappropriate to promote Wales as a bilingual country. It was important to recognise the diverse cultural heritage of Wales and that the Welsh language could add value to that heritage.

6.14 He had been encouraged to learn Welsh by his own positive experience of living in a Welsh speaking community. He felt that others could be similarly persuaded to learn the language. It was important that people were given the choice to learn Welsh and that there was a purpose behind language acquisition, particularly for school children.

6.15 Gareth Gregory outlined the importance of sustaining and strengthening Welsh speaking communities as these would be the foundation for the future promotion of the Welsh language.

6.16 Gareth Gregory felt that the demand for Welsh speakers within local government and the public sector would not be met by the supply of new Welsh learners. The creation of bilingual employment opportunities such as the Assembly's Translation Unit, in non-Welsh speaking areas had resulted in the out-migration of young people from Welsh speaking communities. This would result in the linguistic decline of those communities. He felt it was more appropriate to locate public sector services, which were reliant on Welsh speakers in Welsh speaking areas.

6.17 Steffan Webb felt that the Welsh Language Act, which provided for the development of Welsh Language Schemes and the Welsh Language Board, had been successful to date in promoting the Welsh language. He suggested that Welsh speakers were no longer concentrated in rural communities and that a significant number of Welsh speakers were now living in urban areas throughout Wales.

6.18 Steffan Webb raised the issue of the legislative powers of the Assembly to tackle linguistic problems throughout Wales. He felt it was important to improve the implementation of planning guidance and to establish a Property Act, which would assist in addressing the decline of Welsh speaking communities. In addition, it was suggested that the Welsh Language Act be extended to include the private sector Finally, Steffan Webb said that

consideration should be given to introducing legislation to increase the provision of air-time for Welsh language radio and television programmes.

6.19 It was felt that additional funding should be made available to the Welsh Language Board and other bodies working to develop the Welsh language, which would allow the implementation of creative schemes to promote bilingualism.

6.20 The following points were raised in discussion:

- The Committee recognised the need to develop a flexible strategy to address the diverse range of Welsh language issues throughout Wales. It would be important to sustain the Welsh language in Welsh speaking communities and to promote learning opportunities in non-Welsh speaking areas.
- Some Members felt that it would be difficult to achieve bilingualism throughout Wales and that in some areas non-Welsh speakers demonstrated indifference to the Welsh language. It was suggested that the decision to learn Welsh in schools should be a matter of individual choice.
- The Committee agreed that it would be important to develop innovative approaches in order to promote the Welsh language. In addition, it was vital to adopt creative teaching methods, which would facilitate learning, particularly amongst children and young people.
- It was vital to encourage young people to use the Welsh language in activities other than those associated with education. It was recognised that popular culture and entertainment had partly succeeded in promoting the medium of Welsh amongst young people.
- It was felt that the extension of the Welsh Language Act to include the private sector could discourage the establishment of new businesses in traditionally non-Welsh speaking areas and so limit the potential for economic growth.
- It was suggested that examples of best practice from bilingual countries, such as Canada, could be used to inform the development of a Strategy to create bilingualism in Wales.

### **Item 7: Date of next Meeting: 1 February**

7.1 The Chair said that the next Committee meeting would be held on 1 February. He invited Members to comment on the suggested future agenda items for the spring term, which had been circulated by the Committee Clerk.

7.2 Members agreed that the next meeting should focus on Regional Economic Development.