

MID WALES REGIONAL COMMITTEE

REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY

Introduction

1. The Mid Wales Regional Committee is one of the Assembly's four regional committees. SO 10 sets out the geographical areas of the committees and also states that their remit.
2. Glyn Davies has chaired the Committee for the session that began in May 1999. The chairmanship will pass to a new Chair from July 2000. Up to the 30 April 2000 the other members were Mick Bates, Nicholas Bourne, Cynog Dafis, Elin Jones, Alun Michael and Kirsty Williams. Delyth Evans replaced Alun Michael as from 1st May 2000. The Presiding Officer, Lord Dafydd Elis Thomas has chosen not to take up his membership of the Committee. By June the Committee had held 6 meetings and 2 roadshows.

Method of working

3. The Committee has been keen to develop an open and participative style of working. All of its meetings have been held in public. A summary of the items considered by the Committee is at Annex A. It has invited a number of outside bodies to contribute to its discussions, for example, the Mid Wales Partnership, Dyfed Powys Health Authority, Brecon Beacons National Park, North Wales Police Force, Wales Tourist Board and the Environment Agency.
4. The Committee has included an item at each meeting where members of the public and local organisations can briefly draw Members' attention to an issue of local concern or an example of innovative work being undertaken in the region. The range of issues has been wide and included for example concern over planning decisions; low flying aircraft; equality in education, the work of local town and area development bodies and environmental issues. A full list of all public representations is at Annex A.
5. Where the National Assembly for Wales is engaged in a consultation on particular issues the regional committees have taken part by holding roadshows in their regions. During 1999/2000 two roadshows were held. The first was part of the consultative process on Objective 1 funding and was held jointly with the Economic Development Committee. The second was part of the National Assembly's consultation on its Sustainable Development Strategy.

The Committee's remit

6. The regional committees' remit is to advise the Assembly on matters affecting their regions the effect of Assembly policies in those regions and the work of public bodies there.

Priorities

7. The Committee's agendas reflect its objective of achieving a balance between the priorities set out in www.betterwales.com and responding to issues of concern to the communities the Members represent - therefore items considered have been a mixture of strategic issues and items that are responsive to local concerns.

Issues Considered

Economic

8. The economy of Mid Wales is very dependent on farming and small businesses. This brings with it particular problems such as sparsity of markets, distance from major suppliers and retailers and an exodus of young and talented members of the population. However, it also shares the problems common in other parts of Wales such as skills' shortages and transport and communication difficulties.

9. The Committee has been grateful to the Mid Wales Partnership Forum for the presentations it has received on various aspects of the Partnership's work in Mid Wales. This has given the Committee the opportunity to consider the various strategies that the Partnership has in place to improve the economy of Mid Wales, such as its integrated transport strategy and its' Mid Wales Tourism Strategy. The Committee received a presentation from the East Wales Partnership on the Objective 2 single programme document focusing on what action organisations could take in preparing projects for application for funds.

Health

10. The Committee considered the cost of providing health services in rural areas with the help of a presentation from Dyfed-Powys Health Authority together with a number of responses that it received to its invitation to organisations for their views on the issue. The Committee expressed the view that the Resource Allocation Formula should be reviewed as a matter of urgency. The Committee also highlighted the need make progress on the introduction of tele-medicine in a measured way. It felt that this could have substantial value in the delivery of health care in rural areas. It concluded that the differential impact that health policies and practices may have on the delivery of health care in rural areas should be actively considered by the Health and Social Service Committee.

Crime Reduction

11. Although the National Assembly does not have responsibility for policing it does have a responsibility for crime reduction under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The two police authorities covering the regional Committee's area were invited to inform the Committee about their local strategic plans on crime reduction. Unfortunately the Dyfed-Powys police authority were unable to attend but the Committee had a very helpful and interesting discussion with the Chief Constable of North Wales Police. Issues raised were the additional cost of policing in a rural community, the innovative approach taken to drug offenders in the North Wales region, the use of new technology in crime detection. The Committee felt that it would be worthwhile for the National Assembly to forge closer links with the police authorities in Wales.

Farming

12. Farming is the cornerstone of the Mid Wales economy and the Committee was alert to the difficulties faced by the farming communities during this period. It focused its consideration on the Strategic Action Plan for the Welsh Organic Food Sector published by the Organic Industry Working Group, now succeeded by the Organic Strategy in relation to Mid Wales. The Committee invited the views of a number of organisations on the Plan including the farming organisations, consumers and the retailers. The respondents identified a number of key issues relating to the setting of production standards; the need for a single inspection and certification body; the need to be proactive in disseminating good practice and the need to develop a better infrastructure from producers to finishers of organic produce.

Transport

13. The geographical profile of Mid Wales presents particular challenges to the development of an integrated transport policy. The Mid Wales Partnership Working Group presented their strategy to the Committee which had been structured to address three main issues: social inclusion - the difficult problem in rural areas where a car or other accessible and regular transport already impacted on choice, lifestyle and employment opportunities; economic disadvantage - inadequate roads and transport costs influenced business confidence and investment potential; and environmental impact - particularly the adverse effect of traffic in small towns and villages.
14. The comments of the Rail Users Consultative Committee on the strategy were constructive and gave a useful customer perspective to the discussion. The Committee hoped that both presenters would be able to work together on developing the strategy.

Scrutiny

15. As part of its role the Committee has scrutinised a number of organisations as to their policies and strategies for the Mid Wales region. This has led to many interesting presentations about the work of organisations in a number of diverse fields and identified some common themes and objectives between them. In the Mid Wales Region the two national parks - Brecon

Beacons and Snowdonia have an important role to play. The Committee has heard from the **Brecon Beacons National Park** about its future strategy.

16. Tourism has a significant role to play in the economy of Mid Wales and the Committee heard a positive and inspiring presentation from the Chief Executive of the **Wales Tourist Board**. The Committee believes that the role of tourism to the economy of Mid Wales should be strengthened and developed in order to maximise its potential. It was pleased to note the work being done by the Wales Tourist Board to promote partnerships throughout Wales and in raising awareness in schools and colleges of the need for appropriately and highly trained staff and managers in the tourism industry.

17. The living environment of Mid Wales is the basis of many aspects of its economy e.g. farming and tourism therefore the **Environment Agency** has a key role to play in future. The Environment Agency reported to the Committee on its work in Mid Wales and Cardigan Bay. The Committee was pleased to note the work of the Agency in developing partnerships with bodies such as the Wales Tourist Board and local authorities. Its work on sustainability was important to the future economic needs of Mid Wales.

18. Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water had a major investment programme over 5 years, which would continue the improvement already seen in the quality of potable water and in sewage treatments. The Committee again noted the fact that much of Dwr Cymru's work complemented those of other agencies and urged all these agencies to develop close working partnerships.

Public Presentations

19. The Committee has taken a structured approach to the involvement of the public in its meetings. It has taken the view that this is as much an opportunity for members of the public and local organisations to have a platform to inform people about an issue or project that they are involved in as it is an opportunity for the Members to learn about the concerns and achievements of their constituents. A wide variety of subjects have been covered and a full list is attached in the Annex.

Forward work programme

20. The Committee will elect a new Chair at its next meeting and that Chair, in consultation with the other Members, will develop the future programme of work.

However, the first meeting will continue with the approach already adopted and will be looking with the Mid Wales TEC at the important issue of developing the skills of and meeting the training needs of the people of the Region.

Conclusion

21. The Mid Wales Regional Committee fulfils an important role in being a bridge between the National Assembly for Wales and the people it represents in their localities. It will need to continue to develop this bridge and encourage greater participation at its meetings. One of the keys to this development is the need for the regional committees to have a clearly identified way of inputting their views into the National Assembly's consideration of policies. This needs careful thought and I am grateful to my fellow regional chairs for their contribution to this consideration that has yet to reach a conclusion.

Mid Wales Regional Committee

June 2000

Annex A

Mid Wales Regional Committee

Summary of Work Programme 1999/2000

Chair: Glyn Davies, Conservative, Mid and West Wales

9 July 1999	Llandrindod Wells, Council Chamber	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Election of Chair 2. Forward Work Programme and methods of work 3. Practicalities

17 September 1999 Roadshow	Ceredigion County Council Chamber, Aberaeron	Joint meeting with Economic Development Committee to consider Objective 1 funding
1 October 1999	Owain Glyndwr Centre, Machynlleth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economic Development - Priorities for Mid Wales 2. The cost of providing Health Services in Rural Areas
3 December 1999	Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organic Farming in Mid Wales 2. Brecon Beacons National Park
4 February 2000 Roadshow	Coleg Powys, Newtown	Consultation on Sustainable Development Strategy
10 March 2000	Ysgol y Molewyn, Blaenau Ffestiniog	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reducing Crime in Rural Communities 2. Wales Tourist Board
7 April 2000	Cardigan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrated Transport Policy for Mid Wales 2. Environment Agency
9 June 2000	Corn Exchange, Welshpool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Objective 2 Funding 2. Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water Investment Programme

Public Representations

<p>1 October 1999</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Llandrindod Wells - a prosperity creation initiative 2. Pre School Playgroups Association 3. Campaign against Nant Carfan Wind Turbine application 	<p>Mr David Beswick</p> <p>Ms Lynne Jones, Regional Executive Officer</p> <p>Julie MacDonnell, Countryside Care</p>
<p>3 December 1999</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Low Flying Aircraft 2. Development of old farm sites as 'brownfield sites'. 3. Support for organic and sustainable food production 	<p>Mr Dixon/Mr and Mrs Woods</p> <p>Mr John Hopkins</p> <p>Dr Paul Benham, Primrose Organic Centre</p>
<p>10 March 2000</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Equality in Education 2. The Work of 'Cyfle Ffestiniog' 3. Y Cylch/The Circuit 	<p>Iwan Morgan Williams and Llinos Lloyd Roberts - Ysgol y Moelwyn School Council.</p> <p>Dylan Rhys Griffiths, Town Development Manager</p> <p>Julie Turner</p>
<p>7 April 2000</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improving the A470 in the Ffestiniog area 2. Improving the A470 3. Work of Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) 4. The Market Town Initiative 	<p>Bryn Williams, Chair of Cyfle Ffestiniog</p> <p>Gwyn Roberts, Clerk, Dolwyddelan Community Council</p> <p>David Cooke, PAVO</p> <p>Julian Beynon Lewis, Menter Aberteifi</p>

9 June 2000

- Improving the River Wye

Habitat

2. An Education Programme tailored for Aberystwyth Town
3. Biofuels

4. Timber Growing

Ian Lyndsay, Project Manager

Mr Mike Underwood, Chief Executive, Biognosis.

David Balfour, Chief Executive, BSW Timber plc.

George Johnson, Chair, Timber Growers Association and Patrick Bordillon, ex Chair.