

South East Wales Regional Committee

Report to the Assembly

Introduction

1. The South East Wales Regional Committee is one of the National Assembly's four regional committees. The geographic area of the Committee, as specified by Standing Order 10.1, is Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Torfaen and The Vale of Glamorgan.

2. During its first year Carwyn Jones has been Chair of the Committee. The other Members are Lorraine Barrett, Peter Black, Rosemary Butler, Alun Cairns, Christine Chapman, Jane Davidson, David Davies, Geraint Davies, Janet Davies, Jocelyn Davies, Ron Davies, Sue Essex, Michael German, William Graham, Janice Gregory, John Griffiths, Brian Hancock, Jane Hutt, Pauline Jarman, Peter Law, Huw Lewis, David Rhys Lloyd, David Melding, Rhodri Morgan, Jonathan Morgan, Lynne Neagle, Jenny Randerson, Owen John Thomas and Phil Williams.

Remit and method of working

3. The role of the regional committees, as defined by Standing Order 10.2, is to advise the National Assembly on matters affecting their regions, the effect of Assembly policies in those regions and the work of public bodies there.

4. At its first meeting, the Committee considered whether to divide into a number of sub-committees covering different parts of the region. The Committee was conscious that there are marked variations in social and economic conditions within the region, including some areas of serious deprivation. However, it felt that South East Wales did represent a natural entity, so that it was appropriate to maintain a single committee covering the whole region.

5. The Committee also decided at its first meeting that it would adopt a 'themed' approach to meetings, with each meeting considering a particular issue in depth. It has covered a range of economic, transport, health, education and training issues on this basis. The Committee has also held two 'roadshow' type events as part of major consultation exercises undertaken by the National Assembly. The first, which was held jointly with the Economic Development Committee, was on Objective 1 status for West Wales and the Valleys. The second was part of the consultation on the development of a sustainable development scheme.

6. Over the year the Committee has established links with key partners throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors in the region, as well as existing regional partnerships such as

the South East Wales Economic Forum and the South East Wales Transportation Forum. The main bodies invited to meet the Committee during the year are shown in the table below.

7. The Committee agreed to meet throughout the region, and each of the seven meetings to date has been held in a different local authority area (again as set out in the table below). Apart from the first meeting in the plenary chamber, meetings have been held in council offices which generally have the facilities to accommodate such a large committee and are accessible to the public.

8. Public attendance at meetings has fluctuated over the year, from single figures to over 100 on one occasion. Hopefully a more stable pattern will evolve as publicity arrangements develop and public awareness of the Committee increases. 'Open mike' sessions have been held at most meetings, with members of the public able to put questions to the Committee. Where necessary arrangements were made for these questions to be answered in writing by the relevant Assembly Secretary.

Meetings to date

9. A summary of Committee meetings to date is set out below:

Date	Venue	Topic
9 July	Cardiff	Initial meeting to elect Chair, discuss practical arrangements and consider forward work programme.
17 September	Tredomen, Ystrad Mynach	Joint roadshow meeting with Economic Development Committee on Objective 1 status. Presentations were received from 13 organisations and individuals whose comments were input into the development of the National Economic Development Strategy.
1 October	Merthyr Tydfil	The Committee considered the economic development strategy for the region with the South East Wales Economic Forum. It also discussed the operation of the European Structural Funds programmes.

3 December	Bridgend	The Committee considered integrated transport in the region, with presentations from Assembly officials, the South East Wales Transportation Forum, the Confederation of Passenger Transport Wales and the Association of Train Operating Companies.
4 February	Newport	Roadshow meeting on sustainable development. Presentations and contributions were received from 24 organisations which were input into the consultation on the National Assembly's sustainable development scheme.
10 March	Barry	The Committee considered health inequalities in the region, with presentations from the Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services, health authorities, local authorities and community health councils. There was also a presentation by the Post Office on postal addresses, following concern about changes in postal addresses in a number of Valleys communities.
9 June	Clydach Vale, Rhondda	The Committee considered post-16 education and training, with particular emphasis on adult basic skills. There were presentations by the South East Wales Economic Forum, the Basic Skills Agency, the Federation of Small Businesses Wales and Wales TUC Cymru.

Forward work programme

10. The next Committee meeting will be held on 7 July in Pontypool. In addition to the election of the new Chair, the meeting will include presentations by the East Wales Partnership on Objective 2 status for East Wales, as well as a draft action strategy for the South Wales Valleys which is being prepared following the plenary debate last November.

11. The new Chair, in consultation with Members, will develop the future work programme. There are plans to cover the health improvement programmes being co-ordinated by the health authorities in the region, as well as the 'Communities First' concept to tackle the problems of the most deprived communities.

Conclusion

12. The South East Wales Regional Committee provides a crucial link between the National Assembly and local communities. In its first year it has considered a wide range of policy issues, including the local economy, transport, health, education and training. It has also participated in major consultation exercises on Objective 1 status and sustainable development. Links have been developed with key partners in the region, and steps have been taken to encourage an increasing level of public participation in meetings.

13. I hope that my successor will be able to build on the Committee's achievements in its first year and continue to develop its vital role in the work of the National Assembly.

Carwyn Jones
Chair

20 June 2000