

MEETING	FULL COUNCIL
DATE	12 MAY, 2016
SUBJECT	THE REFERENDUM ON MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
PURPOSE	To seek the Council's views on the issue
AUTHOR	Councillor Dyfed Edwards, Council Leader

1. On 23rd June, the referendum about whether or not Britain will remain in the European Union will take place.
2. Clearly, this is an issue of the greatest importance and, already, the arguments for an against have been highlighted by both sides.
3. Since we as a Council have a duty to lead our communities and ensure a sustainable future for our residents, we have a duty to discuss the issue and come to a conclusion about whether or not to remain a member of the European Union is a good or bad thing for the residents of Gwynedd.
4. One thing about which both sides of the debate agree is that the result of the vote is one of the most important issues about which residents will have an opportunity to express a view for some time and encouraging as may as possible of our residents to vote is of the greatest importance.
5. The arguments in favour and against remaining in the European Union are broad that are receiving much attention in the Press. They can be summarised under the following headings:-
 - Consumer Matters – Matters regarding prices, safety testing and treating customers fairly, with both sides differing on the benefits of having the safeguards provided and the costs of that for homes.
 - The Cost of Membership– The Cost of Membership on one side and what we receive back on the other, with both sides differing on the value of Britain's investment in the Union compared to the benefit in return.
 - Education and Research – How membership effects education and medical, technical and scientific research, with both sides differing on the Union's intention to spend €80bn on research between 2014 and 2020.
 - Energy and the Environment – The availability of Energy and how the Environment is protected, with both sides differing on the benefit of working towards an integrated energy market and more control from Europe on climate change and pollution.
 - Farming and Fisheries – The effect of the Union and its policies on agricultural and fishing policies, with both sides differing on the benefit of the Common Policies and the subsidy given to agriculture in particular.
 - Britain's Role World-wide and Defence – Defence and the strength of Britain's position as a state within the world, with both sides differing on the increasing role of Europe in foreign policy.

- Immigration – The issue of Immigration and freedom of movement across the Union, with both sides differing on the impact of membership of the Union on the ability to control immigration.
 - Policing and Safety – Policing and Cross-border Security, with both sides differing on this bearing in mind that Britain is not part of the Schengen free movement area.
 - Sovereignty and Law-making – The extent to which Britain makes its own laws and how it is run, with both sides differing on the extent to which Britain has to accept laws and directives from Europe
 - Trade and the Economy – The effect of the membership of the Union on Trade and the Economy, with both sides differing on the effect of remaining in the European Union that does represent about half of Britain’s trade.
 - Travelling and Working Abroad – Living and travelling abroad for work and leisure, with both sides differing on the effect of membership on the freedom of individuals to live and work freely throughout the Union.
 - Work and Pay – The effect of membership of the Union on work pay and conditions, with both sides differing on some workers rights being enforced by Europe.
6. Clearly, all these factors are important but there are some arguments that are of particular relevance to Gwynedd residents.
 7. First of all, general taxation funds 73% of all the Council’s services, and since that money is dependent on the strength of the economy, the view on what will happen to the economy if we withdraw from the European Union is one vital factor. We know, of course of the impact the recent financial squeeze has had on services to the people of Gwynedd so far.
 8. We should also note that Wales and Gwynedd specifically have benefited substantially from European structural funds (£1.8bn to Wales during the 2014-2020 period); money for the Rural Development Plan (£490m over Wales) and also the money that comes to agriculture from the Common Agricultural Policy (approximately £230m per annum). Over the years, Gwynedd has been exceptionally successful in attracting European money. Since the turn of the Millenium, grant money to the value of £158 million has been attracted to the county to fund over 120 projects that have been vital for our communities. Between 2007 and 2013, European funding has assisted 1,475 businesses to grow and expand, helped establish 560 new businesses and 2,320 new jobs. The funding also helped over 12,000 people in Gwynedd to gain qualifications and assisted over 1,800 people back into work. Of course, the argument by those wishing to leave is that it would be possible to continue to pay these sums from the money we would save from our contributions to Europe. In my opinion, there is no certainty that this would happen.
 9. Having considered the areas noted in paragraph 5 above, some clearly offer themselves naturally for action at an European level rather than individual states. We need to respond to issues such as the crisis of global warming and the efforts to prevent war. The role of the European Union in this is vital.

10. On a different issue, we need to consider Wales' specific position as part of the pattern of governance in Europe. Devolution is still on a journey in Wales, with the Welsh Assembly receiving more powers gradually. Most of the "new" countries in Europe see their future as part of the European Union.
11. Whilst the discussion on whether or not to remain a member of the European Union has concentrated on the issues raised in paragraph 5, I believe that the most important consideration is our attitude to the world as a people and as a nation. As the world becomes smaller, as we see greater inequalities in the world and the threats of famine, global warming and war increase, I believe that we need a community of European nations to co-operate and strive together to respond to these situations. While we see ourselves as citizens of Wales, we also want to see ourselves as citizens of Europe and the world.
12. It is worth noting the views of local government in Wales. The Welsh Local Government Association's Manifesto sets out clearly that it is strongly in favour of remaining part of the European Union, noting three main points to support this. With regard to the Economy and Prosperity, the Association notes that Wales would be hit harder if Britain were to leave with Union with the value of Welsh exports to the European Union amounting to 8% of Wales' economic value added, the second highest in Britain. It also noted that Wales is a net gainer from European Union moneys and, without the assurance of any meaningful regional policy, there is no certainty that Wales' position would be safeguarded if Britain left the Union. With regard to Society, the Association is of the view that European legislation on environmental issues, equalities, employment and health has a positive impact on the quality of life of Welsh residents. Finally, on Security, the Association is of the view that the advantages arising from membership in terms of cross-border working and working internationally with partners makes our country safer.
13. Having weighed up the arguments in favour and against and, in considering the factors that are more specific to Gwynedd, I am of the view that it would be of greater benefit to the residents of Gwynedd to remain a part of the European Union and I recommend therefore that the Council should state that such is the Council's view.