

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a
Llywodraeth Leol

Communities, Equality and Local Government
Committee

Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



Bae Caerdydd / Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd / Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM
Chair
Environment and Sustainability
Committee

28 January 2014

Dear Dafydd

As you will be aware, matters relating to the Welsh language fall within the remit of the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. We have recently taken evidence from the First Minister, as Minister with responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating Welsh language policy. The Committee has subsequently written to the First Minister highlighting specific areas of Welsh language policy that we intend to keep under review. A copy of the letter is enclosed, for information.

The session covered a number of issues, including some that fall within the remit of other scrutiny committees. As such, it served to reinforce the cross cutting nature of the Welsh language and highlighted the importance of a more co-ordinated our approach to its scrutiny across committees.

In this context, the Committee agreed that I should write to all committees asking them to consider their existing approach to scrutiny of the Welsh language as it relates to their remit and to seek views on how best the Welsh language can be mainstreamed into all aspects of our scrutiny work. In addition, the Committee would welcome your views on how best Welsh language considerations could be taken forward in the budget scrutiny process.

It would be helpful if you could provide your views on the above as soon as practicable and, if possible, by the end of February.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine Chapman." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Christine Chapman AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair

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Carwyn Jones AM
First Minister

28 January 2014

Dear First Minister

Thank you for attending the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee meeting on 4 December 2013 to give evidence in relation to your responsibilities for Welsh language policy within the Welsh Government.

As you will be aware, the 2011 Census results showed that the percentage of Welsh speakers in Wales fell from 20.8% in 2001 to 19.0% in 2011. Following the meeting on 4 December, the Committee agreed to write to you outlining its thoughts on the way in which the Welsh Government has responded and is responding to these statistics and driving forward policy in this area.

On 4 December, you told us about a number of on-going initiatives that you had put in place in response to the Census figures, particularly as a result of *Y Gynhadledd Fawr*. You also referred to a number of policy reviews, surveys and task and finish groups established to inform future policy developments in this area, including those on Welsh-speaking communities; the Welsh language and the economy; and *Mentrau Iaith*. You told us that this work would feed into a further and more detailed statement in due course, after the evidence had been collated and analysed.

We believe that this work has the potential to go some way towards addressing concerns about the future of the Welsh language. We are also pleased that you have recognised the urgency with which these issues need to be addressed. We intend to keep this matter under regular review and, as part of this, we will be inviting you to a further scrutiny session in the summer term to discuss progress with this work.

Further to the above, the following are specific areas of Welsh language policy that we intend to keep under review, and wish to revisit with you in due course.

Progress on the strategy, *A Living Language: A Language for Living*

The Committee awaits the publication of the annual report on the Welsh language strategy, *A Living Language, A Language for Living*, and will be interested to see how it demonstrates the Welsh Government's progress towards achieving its aim to increase the number of Welsh speakers in Wales. We will wish to discuss this with you in our follow-up session in the summer term.

In particular, we note that this strategy only contains references to the 2001 Census figures, and was therefore prepared before the 2011 Census figures were available. In light of the demographic changes in Welsh-speaking communities highlighted by the 2011 figures, we would be interested in your views about whether this strategy is still appropriate and adequate, or whether there is now a need to revise the strategy.

Y Gynhadledd Fawr

We acknowledge the initial steps that the Welsh Government is taking to address some of the challenges highlighted by *Y Gynhadledd Fawr*, which you set up in response to the 2011 Census figures. We believe that, collectively, these steps have the potential to bring about a certain degree of positive change. However, in this context, we would like further information on the specific outcomes you expect to see as a result of the initial actions that you announced, and when you expect them to be achieved.

Further to this, we welcome your commitment to making a further statement on additional actions the Welsh Government will be taking in response to *Y Gynhadledd Fawr*. We look forward to this statement and, in particular, to hearing more detail about the timetable for action in this respect.

Mainstreaming the Welsh language within the Welsh Government

You will be aware that, following our scrutiny of the 2014-15 draft budget, we were critical of the Welsh Government's approach to assessing the impact of budget allocations on the Welsh language, particularly as funding for the Welsh language had been reduced in certain areas. This was a concern we raised in a letter to the Minister for Finance on 29 October 2013, stating that "a more systematic way is needed for ensuring that policies and budget decisions are screened for their impact on the Welsh language."

In this context, you referred to an Improvement Plan that was being developed to embed Welsh language considerations within the Welsh Government, and to assess the impact of decisions on the language. You said that an important part of this included appointing officials as 'language champions' within departments. We look forward to following up on these developments in due course, and to hear more from you about the outcomes the Improvement Plan has led to in this respect.

You also told us that you were preparing “to put a more thorough system together” in terms of how expenditure impacts on the Welsh language. We would like you to provide us with more detail on this later in the year.

The Welsh Language Commissioner’s budget and role

In her meeting with the Committee on 14 November 2013, the Welsh Language Commissioner raised some concern about the impact of the 10% reduction in her budget for 2014-15 on the work of her office. When questioned on this issue, you stated that, despite the reduction, the budget remains “substantial” and one within which the Commissioner “can manage”.

While we acknowledge that budget reductions are symptomatic of the current financial climate, we question how the 10% reduction in the Commissioner's budget compares to the percentage reductions across other spending areas. As such, we would welcome further information from you on the work that was undertaken to assess the impact of this reduction on the Commissioner’s role, particularly given the fact that 2014-15 will see Welsh language standards being introduced for the first time as part of the implementation of the *Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011*.

With regard to the Welsh Language Commissioner’s wider role, we note that your paper explained that the Framework Agreement governing the relationship between the Welsh Government and the Commissioner was being reviewed, and would hopefully be published in the new year. You told us that now was an appropriate time to look at whether the arrangements were right in terms of who was leading on which elements of Welsh language policy, and the way in which the Commissioner and the Welsh Government were collaborating, especially in terms of language promotion and facilitation. We look forward to the publication of the new Framework Agreement in this respect.

Communities, planning and population migration

We note that the latest progress report on your *Programme for Government* (July 2013) recognises the impact of population migration on the Welsh language. As such, we welcome the publication in October 2013 of the revised *TAN 20: The Welsh Language*, by the Minister for Housing and Regeneration. You told us that local authorities would be expected to take account of TAN 20 in the early part of the LDP preparation process and when reviewing those plans.

When we heard from the Welsh Language Commissioner, she emphasised the importance of “clear guidance” for local authorities in relation to the application of the revised TAN 20. She also referred to a “nervousness” among some planners who “feel that they do not have the tools to make evidence-based decisions” in this respect. To this end, we welcome the Welsh Government's intention to develop guidance for planning authorities, but seek clarification from you as to how this will make clear the expectations for authorities in respect of the revised TAN 20 and the LDP review process. We would also like further information on the timetable for the development and publication of this guidance.

Linked to this, we note that the Task and Finish Group set up to look at the future of Welsh-speaking communities published its report following our meeting on 4 December 2013. We would be grateful if you would indicate the likely timing of the Welsh Government's response to this report.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill

Responding to concerns raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill contains no reference to the Welsh language, we note your suggestion that secondary legislation was the most appropriate place for this, and would be interested to hear more from you as to why you believe this to be the case

In this context, we remain concerned about the opportunities for training within the field of health and social services through the medium of Welsh, and issues around the availability of a Welsh-speaking workforce. We note your view that it was incumbent on local authorities to ensure sufficient numbers in the workforce who can provide services through the medium of Welsh, and to provide the necessary resources to facilitate this. However, we would like further information from you about the arrangements in place to monitor this, to ensure that patients have access to health and social services, including those relating to personal care, through the medium of Welsh.

Sustainable development

We draw your attention to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Annual Report for 2012-13 in which she states that her response to the White Paper on a Sustainable Development Bill note "that the Government's definition of sustainable development was not totally clear in relation to the Welsh language, and that the emphasis on the Welsh language in the wider context of sustainable development was not robust enough". We would welcome your response to criticisms from the Commissioner about how the Welsh language links in with the Welsh Government's approach to sustainable development.

Flying Start and links with the tackling poverty agenda

During our meeting, we touched upon the importance of adequate nursery and pre-school provision through the medium of Welsh. Linked to this, we would welcome more detail about the work you are doing to ensure that Flying Start works with, and is coordinated with, Welsh-medium education more generally.

Welsh-medium education

We are aware that the Annual Report on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy for 2012-13 stated that "there has been little progress made against the strategy's targets" and that the target of 25 per cent of seven year olds being taught through the medium of Welsh by 2015 is "unlikely" to be achieved. In contrast, you told us you believed this target is "more than achievable". We are concerned that there seems to be a divergence of opinion within the Welsh Government on this issue, and we would like further information from you in relation to this.

On a related matter, the Welsh Language Commissioner strongly emphasised the need to ensure better progression within the education system as far as Welsh language skills are concerned. You told us that the “link between skills, the economy and Welsh-speaking communities is something that we are considering at the moment” and will be addressed in a further statement to be made by you in the spring. We look forward to see what specific action this will entail, and intend to revisit this issue with you in our follow-up session in the summer term.

The Welsh Language Commissioner also highlighted the need to ensure that young people made use of the language more often in social contexts. You agreed that this was an issue that needed addressing, and suggested that providing more activities through the medium of Welsh outside school and more opportunities to use technology through the medium of Welsh could be a way of doing this. However, you made no reference in this context to asking schools about the barriers and disincentives facing pupils in speaking Welsh outside the classroom. We believe this is an area where further work could be undertaken and we would like to hear more from you in due course about the steps you have taken to provide these opportunities and the outcomes of these.

Finally, we discussed the importance of ensuring a positive experience for all children and young people taking part in the Urdd Eisteddfod, given its potential to shape their future views on the Welsh language. While we recognise the importance of the competitive element of the Urdd, we would like you to consider how best to reward the efforts of participants who are not prize winners.

I will write separately to you about a further scrutiny session to follow up on progress with the specific areas of Welsh language policy referred to above. In the meantime, I look forward to receiving a written response from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Chapman".

Christine Chapman AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair