

Questions to the Assembly Commission – 25.09.2013

Accessibility of Assembly Broadcasting for People with Disabilities

Eluned Parrott, Assembly Member 14:57: Will the Commission make a statement on the accessibility of Assembly broadcasting for people with disabilities?

Sandy Mewies, Assembly Commissioner 14:57: I thank the Member for South Wales Central for the question. I should say in the first place that I think that all Members had a question about British Sign Language from a constituent in Newport. I have written to the gentleman, giving him a very full explanation of the situation as it is now and, maybe, as it will change in the future. I think that everybody here knows that we as an Assembly are committed to accessibility and to ensuring that everyone can engage with our work. We make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities whenever we can. In June, Action on Hearing Loss awarded us the Louder than Words charter mark for reducing barriers for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss. In addition to the live online broadcast on Senedd.tv, a summary of Plenary business is published on our website within 30 minutes of the end of each meeting, with full transcripts available within 24 hours. As technology allows, we will give consideration to further options, such as signing or subtitling.

Eluned Parrott 14:59: Thank you very much for that answer, and thank you for the correspondence regarding the issue. As you say, there is no signing or subtitling, but I have had representations from people who say that some of the accessibility software that is available to read web pages has difficulty with the Assembly's Record. Does the Commission conduct a regular audit of the accessibility of our business here?

Sandy Mewies 14:59: I think that Peter Black was listening very carefully to what you said. I would imagine that it does happen, though I cannot say for sure. However, I am sure that he will be in touch with you, or at least someone from the Commission will give you

a full answer on that. Perhaps I should say that the Assembly has the technical capacity to include in-vision British Sign Language signing for one meeting at present, and we are working with S4C on a pilot project to broadcast BSL interpretation for First Minister's questions. The signed broadcast feed will be shown on S4C's 'Y Dydd yn y Cynulliad' programme on Tuesday evenings, and also on the Assembly's internal television system. As part of the pilot we will evaluate how we can provide a BSL signing service in future, how effective it is, the benefits it delivers, and what the implications are in terms of the likely cost and resource implications of continuing or expanding the service. As part of the development of the new Senedd.tv service, we are aiming to implement a captioning system that will give us the ability to provide subtitles of proceedings. As this would be a brand-new service for the Assembly, we would need to take a detailed look at how it could be provided in terms of the resources and cost before a pilot could be set up.

We do provide a bilingual Record of Proceedings, as I have said, within 24 hours to ensure that all people in Wales have an opportunity to access an accurate and timely record of debates, which is considered best practice by Action on Hearing Loss. Before I finish, I think that I should pay tribute to the continuing work that Ann Jones does supporting people with hearing problems. She continues to bring such problems to our attention.