

## **The sixth meeting of the Cross-party Group on the Welsh language** **Minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2014 at 8.15 a.m.**

1. Introduction by the Chair, Keith Davies AM.
2. Apologies.
3. Minutes of the previous meeting (4 December 2013).  
<http://www.senedd.assemblywales.org/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=762>  
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4. Flying Start: Martin Swain, Deputy Director, Children, Young People and Families, the Welsh Government. Followed by questions from the floor.
5. The Planning Bill: presentation by Aled Davies, Head of the Regulatory Department (Planning, Transport and Public Protection) Gwynedd Council. Followed by questions from the floor.
6. Discussion topic for the next meeting.
7. Discussion about setting up a video link and about holding meetings outside the Assembly.
8. Any other business

### **Present:**

Keith Davies AM (Chair)  
Mike Hedges AM  
Alun Ffred Jones AM  
Aled Roberts AM

Mark Major – on behalf of Suzy Davies AM  
Elizabeth Laird – on behalf of David Melding AM

### *Speakers:*

Aled Davies – Gwynedd Council  
Martin Swain - The Welsh Government

Ceri Owen – RhAG (Parents for Welsh Medium Education)  
Colin Nosworthy – Cymdeithas yr Iaith  
Dona Lewis – Mudiad Meithrin  
Meinir Jones – Welsh Language Commissioner’s office  
Gwyn Williams - Welsh Language Commissioner’s office  
Manon Humphreys - Welsh Language Commissioner’s office

Dai Williams – Menter Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Mynwy a Chasnewydd  
Emily Cole – Mentrau Iaith Cymru  
Rebecca Williams – UCAC  
Penri Williams – Mudiadau Dathlu'r Gymraeg / Celebrating Our Language

## **Apologies**

Simon Thomas AM  
Phil Bale  
Dr Huw Thomas  
Dr Hywel Glyn Lewis  
Elfed Roberts – Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru  
Catrin Dafydd  
Sian Lewis – Menter Iaith Caerdydd  
David Wyn Williams – Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg

## **Further agenda items**

**Item 3.** The minutes of the previous meeting that were published on the Assembly's website were agreed.

### **Item 4. Presentation on Flying Start by Martin Swain, Deputy Director, Children, Young People and Families, the Welsh Government.**

This non-statutory programme was established in 2006; it focuses on children between the ages of 0 and 4 and targets the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. It is a holistic, interdisciplinary programme that works with a host of specialists. It was emphasised that the programme works with children for a very short period in reality and that the children and families involved have significant challenges to overcome.

The programme has four core objectives, which are:

(i) Health visitors; (ii) Childcare – for children between the ages of 2 and 3; (iii) Parenting support; (iv) Language and play – increasing the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults.

In 2006, support was given to 18,000 children, and by 2014, that number has risen to 24,000. The target is to double the programme from 18,000 to 36,000 by the end of the present Assembly's term.

Every local authority receives a percentage of Flying Start funding; that is done by taking every county into consideration and identifying the most disadvantaged areas.

£22 million of capital funding has been invested in the programme, and an additional £3-4 million is to be invested. The programme has invested in 200 health visitors and 1,000 additional childcare workers.

It was emphasised that the Welsh language is a core element of the programme. It has been clear from the outset that parents should have the choice of Welsh language provision if they so wish.

In Gwynedd and Môn, most of the provision is through the medium of Welsh. In areas where Welsh-medium education is growing, they are continuing to establish that provision, for example, the growth of Welsh-medium education in the valleys equates to a growing demand for Welsh-medium Flying Start provision.

It was noted that no provision has been available in Newport. It is possible to confirm that provision is now available.

It was emphasised that Flying Start operates in the most socially challenging areas and that it is a challenge to attract practitioners to work in those areas at all.

Every effort is made to supply Welsh-medium provision according to demand, but that that must be done within the context of providing a service that is of the highest standard.

They have asked all local authorities to draw up three-year strategic plans that state where they could establish Welsh-medium provision. These plans are on the Flying Start website.

Recently, local authorities were instructed to be more proactive in response to that. There is more effort now to inform parents that this provision is available, rather than waiting for parents to call for it.

### **Questions / discussion**

Mudiad Meithrin is keen to collaborate by buying places in the present nursery groups, known as Cylchoedd Meithrin, rather than establishing new provision every time.

There are ongoing deficiencies in terms of Welsh-medium staff training at level 5. Once again, Mudiad Meithrin is keen to collaborate on a solution to this.

The terms and conditions and salaries are lower in the sector, and, therefore, the workforce is lost to schools, which is another challenge.

There is a need to change attitudes and to professionalise the sector in order to establish a situation where people are keen to work in the sector or aim to do so.

Has the message reached the local authorities yet? That is a fundamental question, and there is a need to continue to push this.

How much collaboration is taking place with Families First? This varies from area to area. The objective is to offer continuation after Flying Start to ensure wrap-around care.

What connection is made between the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and the Flying Start programme? Three-year plans have been agreed with the local authorities recently, and if there is dissatisfaction with a county, they can be looked at again. It is emphasised that 95-100% of the demand is met at the moment.

They were very ready to look at individual cases in local authorities where there are problems or specific deficiencies and they welcome evidence to prove that.

The mentality prevails that the provision must be asked for rather than it being available conveniently. MS is keen for it to be a proactive option for parents.

The programme's main focus is the challenges in relation to the development of the child but it wants to be proactive in terms of language choice.

**Item 5: A presentation was given by Aled Davies, Head of the Regulatory Department (Planning, Transport and Public Protection) Gwynedd Council.**

It is an exciting time in the planning sector, with big changes afoot. The Minister has set a clear and ambitious vision, but yet there is no specific reference to the Welsh language within that vision.

There is an opportunity through the Bill to give the system more capability. There are substantial requirements of the system when, perhaps, it was not designed to provide for those. An ambitious programme of change needs to be looked at in order to modernise the system and to put the emphasis on the client, who is the service user.

Are there missed opportunities? Are there too many layers in the Bill?

There is no mention at all of the language as a central planning consideration. At the moment, there is an element of theorising in relation to what the language impact will be with a large gap in information.

The relationship with the National Development Framework. There is a danger of establishing a system that is too clumsy. There are also concerns in relation to capacity/ resource to fulfil the ambition.

Is there room to assimilate local expectations and variations? Will the use of local variation be abandoned?

Preparing a National Development Framework. There is a need to look at establishing a new category of planning applications. Executive leadership or centralisation of power?

It was suggested that there is a need to establish Strategic Development Plans (SDP) that will address strategic issues beyond local issues, for example, housing supply, transport, waste.

It could be argued that Swansea, Cardiff and the A5 corridor fall within this compass, but does the rest of Wales? Do the rural areas of Wales fall outside of the SDPs? Should the language be a strategic planning consideration?

What happens if the local community wants to go in another direction, for example, especially in relation to linguistic considerations?

The planning system in Wales is an inherited one. It is a system for England and Wales. Therefore, language issues, to all extent and purposes, have been tacked on at the end.

Language issues are therefore not in legislation and do not penetrate through to all other elements of the system: planning system/guidelines/circulars.

TAN 20. The 2000 Act is weak and the present one is not much better. Some aspects are helpful, but, generally, it creates significant frustration. There is acknowledgement of the language, in relation to the need to hold language impact assessments, but there is neither clarity nor instruction on how to do so.

As a result, there are various means of assessing the impact on language. Therefore, it has a very limited influence.

There is a desire to see housing provision for local needs to support the Welsh language and its communities. There is political appetite to give people the opportunity to stay in the areas where they were born.

The element regarding housing figures must be questioned. There is doubt as to whether the language is given fair consideration by local authorities. Local knowledge about linguistic decline is secondary to Government instructions.

The system of allocating housing figures is very rigid. They are based on figures that are at least two or three years old and they set policy direction for the next 15 years to the future. The system does not allow flexibility to start lower and to increase, if there is a need to do so.

Does the planning system have the influence that people believe that it has? Social change is also a large factor that creates more demand for houses, for example, family breakdowns and people living to an older age. Perhaps in-migration is less of a factor than we suspect.

Could the system be slowed down to respond to recent developments, for example, the 2011 census data?

Officers and civil servants have unsatisfactory attitudes towards the Welsh language.

These considerations need a Welsh flavour to them and that is what is lost under the present system.

Where next? Such a fundamental change is a once in a generation event. There is a real opportunity here. The Bill is starting on its legislative journey and comes before the AMs three more times later this year.

There is a gap between the system itself and the instructions on how to use the system effectively. There is a feeling that local authorities do not have the necessary tools, but the expectations remain to be huge. There is a need to mainstream from top to bottom in order to enable them to make a difference; that must start in the Act itself, and then through the regulations and all the policy and guidance documents.

There are merits to keeping the system as it is, but in terms of linguistic aspects and commitment to the language, a different system is needed. Wales is a different country, with different needs.

The document must be objective and must recognise Wales's needs today. The principle of sustainable development with Welsh at the highest level has not been integrated through the whole system.

**Item 6:** It was agreed that it would now be beneficial to combine a further discussion on the Planning Bill with the Inquiry into the Standards as the topics of discussion in the next meeting.

**Item 7:** It was agreed in principle to set up a video link and to hold meetings outside the Assembly. It was also agreed that Tuesday or Wednesday mornings would be best to ensure that AMs can attend.

**Item 8:** Any other business. No matters arising.

