

**Seventh meeting of the Cross-party Group on the Welsh
Language**

Minutes of meeting held on 13 May, 2014, 8.15am

1. Introduction by the Chair, Keith Davies AM
2. Apologies
3. Discussion with the Welsh Language Commissioner
4. Questions from the floor
5. Minutes of previous meeting (18 February 2014)
6. Matters to be discussed at next meeting
7. Any other business

Present:

Keith Davies AM

Aled Roberts AM

Suzy Davies AM

Simon Thomas AM

Welsh Language Commissioner, Meri Huws

Gwyn Williams, Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner

Meinir Jones, Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner

Osian Llywelyn, Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner

Catrin Davies, Plaid Cymru Support Staff

Ceri Owen, **Parents for Welsh Medium Education**

Colin Nosworthy, Cymdeithas

Penri Williams, MDG

Elin Wyn, Dyfodol

Rebecca Williams, UCAC

Gill Griffiths, Merched y Wawr

Apologies

Dr Huw Thomas

Dai Williams

Further agenda items

Item 3. Discussion with the Welsh Language Commissioner

The Commissioner provided the Group with an update on the Standards. A Standards Investigation was held between 27 January and 18 April. Its purpose

was to establish what it would be reasonable and commensurate to expect of organisations in the first Round – the Welsh Government, Local Authorities and National Parks. Responses were received from each organisations and from 410 members of the public.

The Commissioner's office is looking at the evidence received to check it against the current Language Schemes in order to establish what they have already achieved, and to ensure that things have not been allowed to slip. It is intended to submit a report at the end of the month which will set out the Commissioner's view in terms of what is reasonable to expect of organizations. The report is expected to propose some additional standards that are not included in the Government's draft document. A formal process is expected to begin at the Assembly in September and a debate and a vote held in the Senedd in October / November.

By the end of November, the first set of Standards is expected to have been through the process which will enable the Commissioner to send a letter setting out the statutory expectations on the organizations by the new year, 2015.

The 150 organizations / institutions listed in Round 2 have not yet received an advance notice letter. The investigation for that round is expected to begin in September 2014, and a series of briefing sessions will be held in June with a view to report to the Government by March 2015. Round 3 will begin in May 2015 and the report will be ready by September 2015. Technically it is possible to hold the 3 investigations before the next Assembly elections in 2017.

The Commissioner stressed that it had been a positive process but it is necessary to be given the proposed timetable for the Regulations to be operational. The organizations and the public need to know this, so the Government needs to decide urgently. In addition, it is necessary to know

when the other Rounds will be discussed on the floor of the chamber and will be applied specifically to organizations. Otherwise, the situation would be unfair to them and to the public in terms of expectations. The Government needs to decide on a timetable otherwise they will create a situation where they are open to a legal challenge.

Round 2: national organizations and Westminster organizations who already have Welsh Language Schemes. Priority will be given to Revenue and Customs and the Crown Prosecution Service who serve and affect the lives of everyone in Wales

Round 3 – include organisations who do not currently have a Welsh Language Scheme at all eg charities and some third sector bodies. Looking at telecommunications at the moment, but have not identified them yet. The Measure states that the organisations must all be named individually, as was the case with bus companies.

The Health Boards and Education Bodies work closely with LAs, and therefore need to ensure that they are working to the same timetable. Although the regional consortia distribute public funds they are not yet legal entities. This raises a number of questions regarding the nature of these bodies beyond the scope of the Standards.

The report on the Health Investigation will be published at the Pierhead on 10 June and will include challenging recommendations in this area. More to follow on this shortly.

It was stressed that they have had to work within statute, and the process, therefore, had been set out already. It must be asked whether that process could be strengthened in any way. The Commissioner welcomes comments

/ suggestions on how to improve and strengthen the consultation process in the next Round.

Item 4. Questions / discussion

Suzy Davies AM: Has the process been challenging?

The Commissioner recognized that the process has led to an element of confusion to some extent, causing some to ask the fundamental question: what is being investigated here? The nature of the standards against which organizations are being affected. It would have been easier if the standards had been published in their final form. She would welcome greater stability in the Standard the next time and anticipates that this will happen during Round 2 and 3 consultations.

Colin Nosworthy expressed the general frustration felt in relation to the process. Nobody was willing to explain the document during the investigation eg briefing session organized by MDG. No date was given for Rounds 4 and 5. What about third parties, given that a third of public funding in Wales is spent in this area?

The Commissioner said that it is not possible to publish dates for Rounds 4 and 5 yet as it would create a bottleneck in the system. Again she acknowledged that there has been some confusion regarding the publication of the draft Standards and holding the investigation at the same time, but she felt that the process itself has worked, as shown by the significant number of responses received. Third parties would be discussed in the Report.

Rebecca Williams said that one of the main frustrations experienced was that no consultation was held on the Standards themselves. What is

happening to the 410 responses from members of the public, and the significant number of responses concerned with the Standards themselves rather than the system of deciding which of them relate to specific organization? Basically, the process was confusing and unsatisfactory. She noted that the DBS (formerly the CRB) had not been named in Round 2 or 3 – why not?

The Commissioner: She accepted this, stating that there was nothing preventing them from adding the DBS. It is possible to strengthen the list eg. the Commissioner had already added the Police. It was confirmed that the LAs are treated as a group and therefore only one report would be produced. Internal discussions were currently taking place on how to use the public's responses and sharing them with the Government. It is very possible that another document will be created separately to provide a summary of responses rather than weaving them through the report in the investigation.

The intention is that the Welsh Government will publish a Standards document that reflects the Round 1 set on order to minimize confusion in Rounds 2 and 3.

Penri Williams stressed that it is vital that members of the public understand the process, and that the process is therefore accessible and transparent. This is necessary in terms of public expectations and ensuring that the Standards empower them. The general feeling was that there was too much emphasis on the process rather than services. He asked whether the LA responses had been positive eg. Newport Council's negative attitude had been given coverage in the media.

The Commissioner: recognized there was scope for improving all aspects of the process. She said that, on the whole, the responses had been quite

positive. The fact that each one had responded was positive in itself. The last thing we want is to work within the two systems, i.e. the Language Schemes and the Standards.

Simon Thomas AC was looking forward to reading both reports (official and unofficial). He felt that a public discussion was needed in order to steer the debate. The Assembly committees will also be anxious to discuss the Standards and they are likely to be brought before two committees, the Constitutional Affairs Committee and the Local Communities Committee. Further changes are sure to be made so there will still be an opportunity to present arguments and press for amendments.

Item 5: The minutes of the last meeting, published on the Assembly website, were agreed.

Item 6: Matters to discuss at the next meeting:

- The Language Standards following publication of the Commissioner's report. The Group agreed that it would be beneficial to discuss this at the Eisteddfod and again, possibly, in the Autumn.
- Review of the Curriculum
- Report by Prof Sioned Davies (Welsh Second Language)
- The Government's Language Strategy

The Group agreed that they should look again at the list of matters which had already been identified but had not been discussed yet.

Item 7: AOB. There was no other business.