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Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
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19 November 2014

Dear Christine

### **Welsh Government draft budget proposals, 2015-16**

I am writing in response to your letter dated 29 October which details points raised by the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee following a meeting I attended on 23 October 2014.

I will respond to the matters raised in the order they appear in the letter.

#### **1. Reprioritisation of budgets**

You have asked for more detailed information about the evidence used to reprioritise budgets for the Welsh language. *Bwrw Mlaen* was informed by a number of developments occurring following the publication of our strategy *A Living Language: A Language for Living* in 2012. As I stated in my appearance before the Committee the evidence collected during and before *Y Gynhadledd Fawr* did form part of the evidence used to inform decisions. The event, the forum and the activities beforehand provided us with a great deal of valuable feedback and information from not only those directly involved in language planning but from the people who use the language and care about its future.

Leading up to *Y Gynhadledd Fawr* a great deal of evidence was collected during a number of activities that took place between May and June 2013 to gather public opinion, this included evidence from:

- Over 400 people attending 21 local discussion groups throughout Wales
- Over two thousand responses from individuals to an online survey
- And over 160 guests at *Y Gynhadledd Fawr* in Aberystwyth on 4 July 2013 representing a general cross-section of different interests and stakeholders

The main messages from *Y Gynhadledd Fawr* were about the need for purposeful action to strengthen the link between the economy and the language; the need to ensure that we build on the successes in the education system; improving the provision for teaching Welsh

in English medium schools; strengthening the link between schools, the community and the workplace; and the need to promote the value of Welsh in order to increase its status socially and in the workplace. I believe that *Bwrw Mlaen* sets us on the right track to address these issues.

Information about the factors influencing Welsh speakers' behaviours and perceptions around the language was obtained through research jointly commissioned by Welsh Government, S4C and BBC Wales, undertaken by Beaufort Research and published in August 2013 (Exploring Welsh speakers' language use in their daily lives). The study found that the majority of those questioned would welcome the opportunity to do more in Welsh, with a lack of confidence to use Welsh and a (mostly unrealised) fear of being judged identified as barriers.

The Review of the Mentrau Iaith, Language Action Plans and the Aman Tawe Language Promotion Scheme (January 2014) undertaken by Cardiff University on behalf of Welsh Government provides a series of recommendations that have informed some of the priorities set out in *Bwrw Mlaen*, including those relating to developing a more holistic approach to language planning and community development.

Over the past year and a half we also saw the publication of number of reports and policy reviews including:

The publication of policy reviews on:

- Welsh-speaking Communities
- Economic Development and the Welsh language
- Teaching of Welsh as a second language
- Welsh for Adults
- the National Eisteddfod.

This evidence as well as advice from officials and practitioners experienced in the field informed the drafting of *Bwrw Mlaen* as well as the subsequent reprioritisation of budgets.

Regarding timeframes, *Bwrw Mlaen* is focussed on delivery over 3 years, bringing us to the end of the lifespan of our Welsh language strategy, 'A Language for Living: A Living Language'. An annual action plan and annual report will be published for 2015-16 in line with the Government of Wales Act section 78 in due course.

The Welsh Government's effectiveness in implementing some of the elements included in *Bwrw Mlaen* will be included in the proposed research and evaluation programme as outlined in the Welsh Language Strategy Evaluation Framework (February 2013). A research study designed to improve our understanding of the factors that facilitate linguistic vitality in the community has been highlighted as a priority for 2014-15, with further studies to be undertaken in future years, as funding for research activity is given further consideration in the context of broader commitments.

Data about Welsh language use in informal and formal contexts will also become available through the Welsh Language Use Survey 2013-15, commissioned jointly by the Welsh Government and the Welsh Language Commissioner. This information will contribute to our assessment of the effectiveness of the policy interventions designed to facilitate the use of the language. It is expected for data from the first year of the Survey to be published shortly.

## **2. The Welsh language in mainstream budgets and 3. Impact Assessments**

The Welsh Government is currently developing its programme of mainstreaming the Welsh language in evaluation and research across policy areas. This involves including an assessment of the effectiveness of programmes in addressing specific Welsh language needs or priorities (for example through the evaluation of the Communities First Programme, and Welsh language skills capacity and use in ESF-funded programmes). Findings from these and other evaluations are intended to inform our understanding of how, and to what extent, our interventions and programmes impact on the Welsh language.

Recently developed Welsh language impact assessments will ensure that the position of the Welsh language is considered in budget decisions, which will in turn help us identify spending on the Welsh language in budgets not directly linked to the language.

Last year, we set out our intention to continue on our improvement journey by moving towards a more integrated approach to the impact assessment of this Budget. To this end, we have taken some important steps this year in the preparation of the Strategic Integration Impact Assessment (SIIA) to consider not only equality and socio-economic disadvantage but also looking at children's right and Welsh Language. All Ministers have considered the impact of their spending decisions on the Welsh language and the SIIA provides a clear account of the Government's key decisions. In developing our future budget plans, we will look closely at ways we can further improve this information, including considering carefully the feedback from this year's scrutiny and on-going discussions at the Budget Advisory Group for Equality

As I stated to the Committee, from 2015-16, in line with the duties imposed in due course under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 ('Measure'), there will be a statutory obligation to consider the effect on the Welsh language when making policy decisions as well as to actively promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. Work is already well underway in preparation for implementing the proposed new Welsh Language Standards.

#### **4. Welsh language Standards**

I note the point on considering costs in regard to compliance with Welsh language standards. Organisations required to comply with standards will be required to meet any costs of doing so from their mainstream budgets. This was the assumption made during the passage of the Welsh Language 1993 Act through Parliament in relation to Welsh Language Scheme compliance.

Policy development does not stop during an economic downturn. We need to take action now and work together with our partners in all sectors to safeguard the Welsh language for future generations. The need to take action to protect, promote and facilitate the use of Welsh remains an urgent priority.

We published a consultation on the Regulations to make standards on 7 November 2014. We will consider all comments thoroughly, and will reflect all comments regarding implementation costs when we update the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). The updated RIA, which will also include evidence collected from a consultation on the proposed standards in Spring 2014, will be published in the Explanatory Memorandum that will accompany the Regulations when they are tabled before the Assembly in March 2015.

Regarding the outcomes expected, the standards have been drafted with the aim of:

- improving the services Welsh-speakers can expect to receive from organisations in Welsh
- increasing the use people make of Welsh-language services making it clear to organisations what they need to do in terms of the Welsh language

- ensuring that there is an appropriate degree of consistency in terms of the duties placed on bodies in the same sectors

We can expect organisations to offer and provide Welsh Language Services to the general public in a more coordinated, systematic way. It is expected that the successful implementation of standards will raise the demand for Welsh language services as public confidence in organisation's ability to deal with all manner of services grows. The Standards will also be enforceable in a way that Welsh language schemes were not, with penalties for non-compliance.

## **5. Welsh Language Commissioner's budget**

The allocation of the Commissioner's budget was discussed extensively during the Measure's passage through the National Assembly of Wales. Given that the Commissioner is appointed by the First Minister, it follows that the Commissioner should be funded by the Welsh Government. The Measure places a duty upon the Commissioner to prepare an estimate of the income and expenses of the Commissioner's office for each financial year (other than the first), and submit the estimate to the Welsh Ministers. The Welsh Ministers, in turn, must examine the estimate submitted to them and lay that estimate before the National Assembly for Wales. This provides transparency with regard to the Welsh Assembly Government's funding of the Commissioner's office.

The Measure also dictates, in relation to her status, that when exercising functions in relation to the Commissioner, the Welsh Ministers must have regard to the fact that it is desirable to ensure that the Commissioner is under as few constraints as reasonably possible in determining her activities, timetables, and priorities.

Both the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Older People's Commissioner for Wales are funded in this way.

Regarding the submission of the Annual Report, as the Welsh Government was part of the Commissioner's standards investigation, detailed information had been provided to her. Officials also met with the Commissioner on 9 October to discuss the report. Moving forward, the Welsh language standards as drafted specify a date for submitting future annual reports.

## **6. Welsh in Education budget**

There is an overall reduction of £0.6 million to the Welsh in Education budget in 2015-16, primarily as a result of a reduction of £500,000 to the Welsh in Education Grant. The remaining £100,000 is made up of minimal reductions to resource commissioning, planning and research, communications and marketing budgets within the Welsh in Education Budget Expenditure Line. The remaining £5.13 million allocated to the Welsh in Education Grant is being transferred from the Welsh in Education Budget Expenditure Line to the Education Standards Action as part of the process of establishing the proposed Education/School Improvement Grant – a number of grants are being amalgamated, with the aim of providing one simplified outcome focused funding stream for schools worth over £140 million for 2015 16. Activities currently funded via the Welsh in Education Grant will continue to be provided as part of a wider programme of activities, and raising standards of Welsh language teaching and learning is one of the key outcomes of the new grant. Spending plans for the grant will be scrutinised to ensure its establishment does not adversely impact on the support available to schools.

It is important to note that the Welsh in Education Grant (£5.63m in 2014-15), and the contribution that will be made in future by the proposed Education/School Improvement Grant, forms only part of the support offered by the Welsh Government in order to

implement the Welsh medium Education Strategy. Many activities funded through the remainder of the Welsh in Education Budget Expenditure Line (£18.599m in 2015-16), as well as countless other mainstreamed activities across DfES, all contribute to the delivery of the Strategy. Whilst the changes outlined above may have an impact on some activities, these are considered as minor in the context of overall expenditure.

The Welsh Government has specifically required planning processes and, where appropriate, surveys of parental demand for Welsh-medium education to be addressed in Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). Under the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013, Welsh Ministers have powers to require local authorities, in certain prescribed circumstances, to conduct a Welsh-medium education assessment. The Regulations also set out the questions and supporting information which must be included in such an assessment. Local authorities are required to review their WESPs annually. Ministers will be considering the revised Plans which emerge from the review process and will decide whether and, if so, how to use the powers to require a Welsh medium education assessment.

The Welsh Government's effectiveness in delivering the outcomes of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy will also be assessed in the light of performance against the Programme for Government's outcome indicators for the Welsh language ('Percentage of pupils aged 5 at the start of the academic year that speak Welsh fluently at home', and 'Percentage of people able to speak, read and write in Welsh').

## **7. Planning (Wales) Bill**

The Practice Guidance which issued in support of TAN 20 was only published in June and so it is still relatively early to gauge the extent to which it is currently being. In July this year a dissemination event was held in respect of the Guidance which was well attended by authorities across Wales, so we know that they are aware of it. Through our routine scrutiny of Local Development Plans (LDP) we will continue to seek to ensure that LDPs are based on robust evidence including the Practice guidance for TAN 20.

I believe that the current policy as set out in Planning Policy Wales and TAN 20 provides a robust framework for the consideration of the Welsh language in the planning system. Our policy requires Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to undertake an assessment of the importance of the language at the start of the plan making process and to ensure that where the evidence supports, that the language becomes part of the fabric of the LDP. By taking a strategic approach to planning and the Welsh language LPAs can shape the future development of their areas to support the language. The Planning Inspectorate are fully aware of the Welsh Government's policy and apply it as necessary when considering LDPs or Planning appeals.

Yours sincerely



**CARWYN JONES**