



Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
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Christine Chapman AM
Chair
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales

6 January 2016

Dear Christine

Evidence session on the Annual Report - further questions

Thank you for your letter dated 17 December following my appearance in front of the Communities Committee last month.

Your letter raised some further questions which the members did not have time to discuss during the session. I shall answer these questions in the order that they were raised.

- 1. The Government's response to the Commissioner's report, "*My Language, My Health: the Welsh Language Commissioner's Inquiry into the Welsh Language in Primary Care*"** - on 17 December, I received an update from the Minister for Health and Social Services on how the Government has implemented the recommendations in the report. My officers are currently considering the response and I have a meeting with the Minister on 6 January to discuss this further.
- 2. Local Government Bill, establishing a Welsh Language Task and Finish group in Local Government administration and economic development** - if local government reorganisation were to take place, experience shows that good practice in terms of the Welsh language needs to be established from the start. Forming new authorities would provide an opportunity to establish a new culture and new working practices which promote the Welsh language from the beginning. This would require detailed planning and robust guidance. Thus far, my officers and I have held constructive discussions with the Minister for Public Services and civil servants and I welcome the establishment of the Task and Finish Group. I look

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forward to receiving more information on the Group's work. In the meantime, I have written to the Minister for Public Services and to Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, who has been appointed chair of the Group, declaring my willingness to provide advice and support as required.

3. **Revising TAN20 following the passing of the Wales Planning Act 2015** - including references to the Welsh language in the Planning Act was an important step and it ensured that the Welsh language was given statutory status in planning procedures for the first time. In order to ensure that the requirements of the Act are met, it is crucial that national policy and the guidance provided to planning authorities by the Government are revised to reflect the Act. I explained that whilst giving evidence during the scrutiny process of the Act. The Government has started consultation on the proposed changes to TAN20 this week. My officers will consider these changes in the coming weeks and I will then respond to the consultation. I expect the revised TAN20 to provide full guidance on how to meet the new Welsh language requirements in the Act. In addition, and in order to ensure that the Welsh language is treated appropriately and consistently within the planning procedure, the new TAN needs to provide a methodology which enables planning authorities to assess the impact of their development plans and individual developments on the Welsh language, as is required under the Act. At first glance, I have doubts whether the new TAN meets this requirement.
4. **The provision within the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 in terms of interfering with the freedom to use Welsh** - as I explained during the evidence session, this part of the Measure is a new concept and only a small number of incidents have been reported so far. It may be useful to re-examine the criteria in due course, in order to ensure clarity for those wishing to ask the Commissioner to investigate a case. I do not currently feel that there is sufficient evidence to enable me to form definite conclusions on this issue. In accordance with the expectations of section 119 of the Welsh Language Measure, I will continue to consider the sufficiency and appropriateness of this part of the Measure and, if it becomes clear that this part of the Measure needs to be revised, I will comment accordingly in my annual reports.
5. **The Welsh Government's draft budget in relation to the Welsh language** - I have experienced cuts to my budget over the past two years, with further cuts planned for the next financial year. Compared with a budget of £4,100,000 for 2013-14, cuts of £410,000 (10%) were experienced in 2014-15 and a cut of £300,000 (8%) in 2015-16. Although the Welsh Government's draft budget does not specifically identify what the budget for 2016-17 will be, I received a letter from the First Minister on 23 December informing me of another cut of 10%. This would mean a further cut of £339,000, leaving an annual budget of £3,051,000. That means that the organization will have experienced financial cuts of 26% in 3 years (32% in real terms with inflation). In order to mitigate the impact of the cuts, the First Minister noted in his letter that an additional £150,000 would be available for 2015-



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16, in order to enable me to plan and prepare for the challenging rolling programme which will be introduced in relation to the Welsh language standards.

I trust that this response addresses the Committee's additional questions. You are welcome to contact me if you wish to discuss any other issue.

Yours sincerely,

Meri Huws
The Welsh Language Commissioner