

Y Gwir Anrh/Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AC/AM
Prif Weinidog Cymru/First Minister of Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
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Christine Chapman AM
Chair, Communities, Equalities and Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

1st February 2016

Dear Christine

I am writing in response to your letter of 22 January 2016 further to my attendance at the Committee on 13 January to answer questions about the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2016-17 in relation to the Welsh language. Your letter raises a number of issues, which I will deal with in turn.

1. Expenditure and prioritisation

As I explained to the Committee on 13 January, the Welsh Government's budget has been cut significantly since 2010 and will continue to reduce in real terms. While we did receive a small cash increase to our Budget in the Spending Review, demand for services and cost pressures are growing faster and we cannot continue to fund the full range of services on the same scale or basis. We have had to make difficult decisions in many areas in order to prioritise the services that people rely on most, while doing as much as we can to mitigate the effects of the cuts to our budget in other areas.

We remain committed to securing the future of the language and, against the challenging backdrop explained above, have limited the overall reduction of the total Welsh Language Budget to 5.9% in 2016-17 by allocating £1.2 million to support Welsh in the Community from reserves. We are prioritising all activity on increasing the use of Welsh. Funding alone however does not ensure that the language continues to thrive, and we will continue to work closely with partner organisations to secure a strong foundation for the language in the future.

With regard to the specific question on whether the £1.2 million will be included in the baseline for next year's draft budget, the budget proposals published on 8 December reflect our spending priorities for 2016-17. Spending decisions for the remainder of the Spending Review period will be a matter for the next administration. It is my expectation that the budget proposals published for 2017-18 and beyond in the autumn will provide a full reconciliation of any adjustments to MEG baselines.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

With regard to the minor discrepancy between the BEL allocations included in my evidence paper, and the paper submitted by the Minister for Education and Skills to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, I can confirm that the correct allocations to the Welsh Language BEL and the Welsh Language Commissioner's BEL are the allocations included in my evidence paper. The discrepancy was due to an administrative error.

Welsh language centres

Turning to the Welsh language centres funded in 2014-15 and 2015-16 through capital funding, the outcomes the Welsh Government expects from the centres differ according to the circumstances of each centre. The centres funded bring partners together to provide a local hub to host numerous activities, social, educational and economic. As part of the funding conditions, we have requested a closing report be presented no later than 18 months after beneficiaries receive the funds in order to assess the success of the centres. Those reports will address the aims and objectives of the project; how the goals and objectives will contribute to the goals and strategic areas of our Welsh language strategy, 'A living language: a language for living' and the policy 'Bwrw Mlaen'; evidence of achievements (including evidence gathered from stakeholders and beneficiaries, where applicable); self assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the project; and lessons learned in undertaking the project.

2. Impact Assessments

We are clear that our support for the Welsh language extends much wider than the specific £25.6 million Welsh language budget, and that departments across the Welsh Government have a crucial role to play. In addition to spend on the Welsh language which is mainstreamed in core public services such as health, social care and education, we provide specific support to the Welsh language in a number of areas. For example, support for the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to improve Welsh medium higher education provision, funding for Mudiad Meithrin to support children and families, support for Cam wrth Gam training for Welsh-medium early years practitioners, support to the Welsh language publishing industry through the Welsh Books Council, and the promotion of the use of Welsh in business through Business Wales.

The SIIA is cast at a strategic level, and impact assessments of spending decisions relating to individual Ministerial portfolios are undertaken by the relevant area. Indeed impact assessments of portfolio spending plans were covered through subject committees' scrutiny of budgets. This reflects a two stage budget process which this committee has recommended and is in line with feedback from the Budget Advisory Group for Equality (BAGE) and reflecting recommendations of the Finance Committee's Inquiry into Best Practice Budget Procedures.

While we are committed to improving our approach to impact assessment, it is not the purpose of the SIIA to include detailed individual assessments. Welsh Language Impact Assessments are undertaken on all policy and legislative proposals taken forward. In recent years, the mainstreaming of Welsh Language issues into policy and programme delivery has meant services are developed and made available on a bilingual basis.

In line with this commitment we have asked the Public Policy Institute for Wales to look at how the Welsh Government might improve its use of impact assessments. This work will look at current practice in Wales, and examine best practice from around the world to provide advice on how the impact assessment process could be enhanced.

By taking an integrated approach grounded in evidence and evaluation we have developed a wider understanding of the cross-cutting pressures that exist across key service areas, in line with our key priorities, while targeting funding at those who need it most. This has enabled us to gain a broader understanding of the overall impact of spending decisions on key service provision through taking a holistic view of public service delivery in Wales.

From the outset of our Budget preparations this approach has enabled us to consider the impacts on protected groups on a wider basis than in the past, looking at delivery areas rather than Ministerial portfolios. We have considered long-term impacts, assessed opportunities for prevention, taken an integrated and collaborative approach to understanding impacts; and committed to involving people in the decisions that affect them.

Having been in operation for fifteen months, we are currently revising the Welsh Language Policy Impact Assessments to include more specific questions on expenditure on the Welsh language in policy areas. The aim of this is to better understand how much is spent on Welsh in relation to specific programmes, and the subsequent impact on the language.

3. Bwrw Mlaen

In response to your queries regarding Bwrw Mlaen, it is important to be clear that the funding for Welsh language centres, as mentioned above, was capital funding in 2014-15 and 2015-16, which was separate to the overall Welsh language budget and funded through the Strategic Investment BEL. There was also a £150k fund in 2014-15 and £300k fund in 2015-16 within the Welsh Language BEL designed to stimulate innovative projects to promote the language across Wales. This was a time-limited fund, which will come to an end this year.

As I explained at the Committee, it is important to consider the Welsh language budget in its entirety. We have limited the reduction to the Welsh language budget to 5.9% overall, and as I explained at the Committee, this reduction includes projects which were due to end. There is a close inter-relationship between activities funded under the Welsh Language BEL and those funded under the Welsh in Education BEL. There has been a £825k transfer between both budget lines to ensure that the different programmes that we have in the two areas have better linkages to ensure a more effective continuum. For example, the budget for Twf has transferred from the Welsh Language budget line to the Welsh in Education budget line. It reflects the objective to increase the number of 7 year old children receiving Welsh medium education.

In terms of value for money and effectiveness, these considerations are always an integral element of all our grant schemes. I would also acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to place a specific financial value on efforts to promote the use of Welsh, given the complex mix of factors that can influence language use, and the need for a combination of interventions or conditions to bring about change.

4. Welsh Language Commissioner's budget

As stated in the letter to the Welsh Language Commissioner, the purpose of the additional one-off £150k I have allocated to the Commissioner in the current financial year it is to alleviate the pressure of preparing for standards implementation during 2015-16. Any flexibility for the Welsh Language Commissioner in relation to funding is set out in the framework agreement between the Commissioner and the Welsh Government.

5. Education

Welsh-medium Education Strategy

I have explained under the Bwrw Mlaen heading above the rationale for transferring funding for certain activities between the Welsh Language and Welsh in Education BELs.

The £740k reduction to the Welsh in Education BEL will be achieved by reducing spend on the Welsh for Adults programme by £500k and the Twf project by £200k. The remaining £40k is achieved from savings made in the delivery of the Welsh language diagnostic tool.

The establishment of the new Welsh for Adults National Entity last year has led to a sea change in the way the area is administered, leading to efficiency savings which should reduce the impact of the cut. We are confident that this will help to protect front line services.

The difficult decisions made in this area have enabled us to protect areas which supported the statutory education sector, such as practitioner training and the development of Welsh-medium teaching resources.

Twf

The present Twf contract comes to an end in March 2016. The project will be recontracted and modified in response to new requirements in the field, and this gives us the opportunity to reconsider how the service is provided in order to make efficiency savings. For instance, marketing activity in relation to the new “Twf – Cymraeg i Blant” contract will become part of the Welsh Language Division’s remit, in order to reduce expenditure and ensure the work is central to our plans to market the Welsh language. Monitoring arrangements for the new contract will be established following contract award.

Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol has made some real and tangible progress in improving Welsh medium higher education provision since its establishment in 2011. It is important that the activities of the Coleg continue to be supported at a level which maintains the current momentum. Ultimately it is for HEFCW to determine how it allocates its resources in line with Welsh Government priorities. The Ministerial remit letter to be sent to HEFCW in early in 2016 will provide a strong steer to encourage HEFCW to continue to support the Coleg and Welsh-medium learning within the higher education sector at a level which maintains the current momentum.

Flying Start

All local authorities must set out in their Flying Start plans the arrangements they have made in relation to the provision of Welsh-medium and/or bilingual childcare, where parents have expressed a preference. Each Local Authority’s performance against this commitment is closely monitored. The latest year (2014-15) for which data is available indicates that local authorities met 96% of requests for childcare through the medium of Welsh in Flying Start settings.

The Flying Start strategic guidance continues to make it clear that local authorities must put in place arrangements to meet the preference of parents for Welsh-medium and/or bilingual provision.

Flying Start is an early years programme for children aged 0 to under 4. At age 2-3 children are offered free part time childcare. The Welsh-medium Education Strategy targets relate to pupils aged 7. While these are two separate issues, we appreciate that the Welsh language Flying Start provision will contribute to the wider Welsh language commitment. However, significant increases in parental preference and resultant Welsh-medium Flying Start provision would not significantly affect the Welsh Government's ability to reach its target for 25% of 7 year olds to be educated through the medium of Welsh.

Welsh language provision remains an integral part of Flying Start and the Welsh Government has always placed a requirement on local authorities to respond to parental choice and to deliver Welsh medium provision where required. The Welsh Government encourages local authorities to ensure that arrangements are in place to meet the preference of parents for Welsh-medium and/or bilingual provision and to proactively offer Welsh language provision.

6. Welsh Books Council

The budget settlement for the Welsh Government has been difficult and budget reductions have had to be made in a number of areas. These decisions are not taken lightly. However, we have listened very carefully to the publishing sector, in particular taking into account the implications in terms of the Welsh language, and I am pleased we are able to remove the reduction in this instance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carwyn Jones', written in a cursive style.

CARWYN JONES