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Bilingual Services

1.0 Purpose and summary

1.1 At its meeting on 14 July 2011 the Commission was invited to consider the way forward for its provision of bilingual services to the Assembly and the public. It agreed:

- a. to consult on a draft Official Languages Bill (the Bill) and Bilingual Services Scheme (the Scheme); and
- b. to provide, under the Scheme, a fully bilingual Record of Plenary Proceedings (provided a sustainable arrangement for doing so, at a reasonable long-term cost, could be found).

1.2 This paper provides an update for the Commission on progress made regarding:

- a. the public consultation on the Bill and Scheme, and
- b. the feasibility of a professional translator using machine translation to facilitate the production of a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Commission is invited to note the progress regarding the public consultation exercise on the Bill and Scheme and further exploratory work conducted in relation to provide a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings.

3.0 Discussion

Public Consultation on the (Draft) National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill and Draft Bilingual Services Scheme

- 3.1 The public consultation on the draft National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages Bill and the draft Bilingual Services Scheme) was launched at the National Eisteddfod on 3 August 2011. Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM and Keith Bush delivered a presentation and hosted a question and answer session at the Societies' pavilion, which was attended by 20 people, including representatives from Cymdeithas yr Iaith, the Welsh Language Board, the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters and the media.
- 3.2 The launch was publicised widely by the Welsh language media and coverage was positive. Media follow-up work focused on ensuring the public and media understood that any use of machine based translation would be coupled with expert proof-reading and quality assurance.
- 3.3 Since the launch, a video by Keith Bush, based on his presentation at the Eisteddfod and during the three workshops referred to below has been made available on the Assembly's website as an information aid to anyone interested in responding to the consultation. The Western Mail also carried a thought piece by Keith Bush on the Official Languages Bill on 28 September (Annex A).
- 3.4 In addition, three workshops were held w/c 26 September in three locations:
- 26 September 09:30-11:30 – National Assembly for Wales, Colwyn Bay;
 - 26 September 15:00-17:00 – National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth;
 - 28 September, 09:30-11:30 – Pierhead, Cardiff Bay,
- entitled “Law making and bilingual services at the National Assembly”.
- 3.5 Although the focus of the workshops was on encouraging those attending to make full, considered, written responses to the consultation, some common themes and questions emerged, including:

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- the need for the Assembly to give a strong lead on bilingual services;
- Monitoring and compliance – would there be an effective mechanism for ensuring that the Commission is adhering to its scheme?;
- impact assessment – should there be a legal duty for non-Governmental legislation introduced into the Assembly to be accompanied by a formal assessment of its impact on the Welsh language (as will be the case with Government proposed legislation under proposed standards imposed under the Welsh Language Measure 2011)?;
- does the fact that the Scheme is to be known as the “Bilingual Services Scheme” (as opposed to the “Official Languages Scheme”) imply that the Scheme will be limited in its scope and will not relate to the full range of Assembly activities?;
- what does “truly bilingual” mean?; and
- should there be, on the face of the Bill (i.e. not just in the Scheme) a requirement for a fully bilingual translation of the Record of Proceedings?

3.6 Workshops are also being arranged for Assembly staff to give them an opportunity to ask questions, make comments and consider the impact of the draft scheme on service delivery. A meeting with the Unions will take place at the earliest opportunity as will a drop in session for support staff.

3.7 The pre-legislative consultation period concluded on 14 October. Responses will be analysed and any proposals for revisions to the Bill and Scheme formulated. These will then be presented to the Commission in November, so that it can consider final versions of the proposals, with a view to formal introduction of the Bill and laying of the draft Scheme before the Assembly in early December.

3.8 It is now expected that the date for the Bill becoming law and the Scheme coming into force is likely to be June 2012 (although there may be some scope for acceleration).

Update on the feasibility of using web-based machine translation and translation software for producing a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings

3.9 At its meeting on 14 July, the Commission agreed in principle to reinstate a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings provided that the arrangement was sustainable in the long term and demonstrated good value for money. Officials were asked to explore the option of using Google Translate, a machine-based translation system coupled with proof-reading by a professional translator for quality control to achieve this.

3.10 Over the period July-September, Assembly translators tested two online machine-based translation systems, both manufactured by Google – Google Translate (Translate) and Google Translate Toolkit (Toolkit).

3.11 Both systems help the reader to understand the general content of a foreign language text. Neither delivers fully accurate translations. The initial result in terms of quality of translation and the speed of translation are the same for both systems.

3.12 In addition, Toolkit:

- offers the ability to share documents online with others to edit and review prior to publication;
- offers the option of adding the corrected translation to the corpus of text used by the application to translate all documents, effectively enhancing the corpus for the future benefit of all other users;
- allows the user to upload a complete document, regardless of word count, whereas Google Translate has a word limit of 5000 per session; and
- can be enhanced by “plugging in” other technologies such as translation memory software applications e.g. the WordfastPro package, recently acquired by the Translation and Reporting Service.

3.13 It is too early to be precise about the full potential of such a system, but it may produce efficiencies in translation requirements of all descriptions.

- 3.14 Both systems are currently free to users, though Commissioners will recall that Google announced plans to charge for the Translate service as early as December 2011. Following the July meeting, we contacted Google for clarification on pricing structures and timescales, but no response has been received to date. We are confident however, following discussion with the Welsh Language Board, that Google has no intention to charge for Toolkit. We understand that the introduction of a charging structure for Translate is Google's response to significant abuse of their system which was incrementally damaging the reputation of the system, and ultimately Google itself.
- 3.15 Over recess, a pilot exercise to establish if Toolkit could provide a feasible alternative to previous arrangements for a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings was undertaken.
- 3.16 Based on our results, we calculate that the approximate annual costs for producing a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings, making use of a combination of machine translation and manual editing, will be no more than £100k.
- 3.17 At a meeting on 3 October attended by Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, Assembly staff and officials from the Welsh Language Board, we were informed that the Board is commissioning an independent report on the efficiency, cost and quality of the results produced by the leading machine translation systems, including Google and those developed by Canolfan Bedwyr inter alia. The findings will inform our understanding of how the Commission could provide a sustainable solution for producing a fully bilingual Record of Proceedings at a reasonable cost. We aim to conclude the exploratory work by the beginning of November and present recommendations for the Commission's consideration at its November meeting.