

Introduction

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales. The three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within a policy framework that is underpinned by a commitment to local democracy and accountability. In doing so it must satisfy the priorities of our members and ensure that local public services are at the forefront of the debate on developing devolution in Wales and the communities we serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's inquiry: *Supporting and Promoting the Welsh Language: An inquiry into the legislative, policy and wider context*. The post legislative scrutiny of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 – to assess the perceived successes and limitations of the legislation, and the impact and effectiveness of Welsh Language standards in improving and increasing access to Welsh language services, is particularly welcome.

Background

4. While the WLGA supports authorities in the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards, it does not collate information on the implementation of the Standards by individual authorities. Those public bodies that are subject to the Welsh Language Standards are required to produce and publish an

Annual Report, although the format is not prescribed and so each would need to be looked at in some detail to determine how those organisations have responded to the requirements placed on them under their Welsh Language Standards.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

5. The WLGA and its member local authorities supported the introduction of the Measure and the principles underpinning its wider aims. Similarly, local authorities supported the Welsh Language Standards, which were derived from the Measure, since they came into force but there were some concerns and anxieties at the outset.
6. There was some scepticism about whether *or not* the Standards would have the desired or intended impact. Authorities supported the principles of:
 - Improving the services Welsh speakers can expect to receive in Welsh from organisation;
 - Increase the use people make of Welsh language services;
 - Making it clear to organisations what they needed to do in relation to the Welsh language; and
 - Ensuring that there is an appropriate degree of consistency in terms of duties placed on bodies in the same sectors.
7. There were also concerns about costs and the value for money of the investment required to meet the Standards. For these reasons authorities felt initially that existing Welsh language schemes, provided for by the Welsh Language Act 1993, were a more effective and proportionate mechanism for delivering the intended aims.

8. Throughout this period there was a strong consensus within local government on the importance on sustaining and building on the good will towards the welsh language across Wales; recognising the linguistic, cultural, socio-economic and financial differences between local authorities and the need to be reasonable and proportionate in progressing shared priorities.
9. The Welsh Language Standards are very wide ranging and detailed, and implementing them hasn't always been easy but collectively local government has worked with the Welsh Language Commissioner and her Office to resolve problems and find solutions. The WLGA and individual authorities have engaged in a very constructive relationship with the Welsh Language Commissioner since the Standards came into force.
10. More generally, local government and the WLGA have supported successive Welsh Governments, in their strategic approaches to the Welsh language.
11. A living language: a language for living – Welsh language strategy 2012 to 2017 was greeted very positively by local government as was the Cymraeg 2050 target of creating 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. The continued support given to the National Eisteddfod and the Urdd Eisteddfod through the WLGA's innovative funding partnership is one example of this on-going commitment.
12. Local authorities also support the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium Education Strategy and are committed to the continuing growth of Welsh-medium and Welsh language education. This has been evident most recently with the completion of the latest round of WESPs by the 22 authorities and the continuing partnership between local and central government through the 21st Century Schools and Education Programme and other schools' capital investment. Local authorities have been producing WESPs since 2011 and they provide a useful framework for councils in the planning of their welsh-medium education provision.

13. The Association believes in retaining the current consensus on the Welsh Language, keeping it out of the realm of party politics and firmly focussing on practical measures to increase its use, rather than creating a legalistic framework that focuses on compliance in the abstract. The WLGA supports all efforts to increase the quality of provision and the opportunities for individuals to speak and access services in Welsh in their daily lives.

Conclusion

14. Local government and the WLGA have embraced fully the aims and the ethos of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, despite the service delivery challenges of the Welsh Language Standards and the difficult financial context. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and looks forward to seeing the outcomes of this work.