



Rhodri Glyn Thomas AC/AM

**Comisiynydd y Cynulliad
Assembly Commissioner**

Bethan Jenkins AC/AM
Plaid Cymru Assembly Member – South West Wales
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Dear Bethan

Thank you for your letter of 24 May about the cost of translating Assembly proceedings.

You ask if it is the Commission's intention to carry out an internal investigation to determine whether a member of Commission staff passed information to the Western Mail on this issue. We will not be conducting such an investigation. There are no grounds to suspect that a member of Commission staff disclosed this information and, as you will see from this letter, a figure such as that quoted in the newspaper can be fairly readily derived from information already in the public domain.

When the Commission took the decision earlier this year to re-instate the translation of plenary proceedings, the estimated annual cost was around £100,000. This was based on using a combination of machine translation and human proof reading and editing. It is important to bear in mind that the actual costs incurred reflect a very simple driver - the number of words of English being translated - and so any figures quoted are based on estimates of orders of magnitude rather than

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precise predictions. Our experience so far is that the actual cost is working out higher than anticipated. If the costs seen since January were to continue throughout the year, the total annual cost would be in the region of £120-130,000.

At present, the Commission produces a fully bilingual record of plenary, but not committee, proceedings. The volume of committee and sub-committee proceedings can be up to around three times that of plenary in a typical week. As an illustration, in the week 14 - 18 May, it is estimated that some 240,000 words of English were spoken in committee (around 26.5 hours of committee proceedings). Scaling this figure up would result in an annual cost of up to some £400,000. It is possible that the figures quoted in the Western Mail and by Peter Black were derived from a similar calculation. The cost of pure text translation, as opposed to proof-reading, is higher. If the Commission were to pay for committee proceedings to be translated from scratch, rather than through a combination of machine translation and proof reading, the equivalent estimate of annual cost is likely to be closer to £600,000.

My understanding of the Committee's recommendation at Stage 1 is that it wishes to see full translation of all Assembly proceedings. This is defined by the Government of Wales Act 2006 (s5) as meaning any proceedings of the Assembly and its committees and sub-committees. The total annual cost of full translation of all Assembly proceedings, using machine translation plus proof reading and editing, would therefore be likely to be in excess of half a million pounds.

As far as I am aware, the Committee did not ask for an estimate of the cost of translating all Assembly proceedings prior to the production of its report and, as this work was not part of the Commission's existing budget planning, we had not been working on such estimates ourselves. The Commission would, of course, be happy to provide the Committee with any figures they request, and I hope that putting this information in the public domain at this stage will inform the subsequent debate as the Bill proceeds.

I am copying this letter to Claire Clancy, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Assembly and the other Commissioners.

Yours sincerely

Rhodri Glyn Thomas AC/AM