

Bethan Jenkins AM
Chair of the Culture, Welsh Language and
Communications Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay

6 June 2017

Dear Bethan,

National Assembly for Wales Official Languages Scheme

Thank you for your letter dated 31 May 2017, and may I thank the members of the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee for your willingness to contribute to the scrutiny of the Assembly Commission's Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Assembly. May I also thank you for your warm welcome and kind words about the support offered to Assembly Members to work in the official language of their choice. As indicated during the session, we will be considering all comments made during the consultation, and will amend the draft Scheme accordingly before the new Scheme is debated and adopted.

You requested further information on a number of areas, which I will address in the order they are listed in your letter.



Further Information

Accessibility of the Assembly's website for visually impaired people.

Jeremy Miles raised an interesting point which I agreed to look into. Screen reader software is used by individual users who require it and may be purchased by users to enable them to access any website. We have explored this issue with our ICT and Diversity and Inclusion teams, and established that the voices used in the screen reader software alluded to by Jeremy Miles do not always work well in the Welsh language, as he mentioned during the discussion. However, in recognition of this difficulty, and the fact that some users will wish to use screen reader software to read text in the language of their choice and across any website, the Welsh Government and the RNIB have funded a project to develop synthetic voices specifically for use with Welsh language text. These voices are available to download free of charge. It is hoped that companies and organisations will use those voices in the development of text to voice software. The Assembly Commission will certainly encourage our partners to use this technology in any future developments.

Support and training for Microsoft Translator users

The Microsoft Translator facility is available to all Assembly Member, Support Staff and Commission Staff. When the provision was launched in 2014, we provided an extensive training programme for users over the following months. Following the election in 2016, further training was offered and taken up as part of the induction process. We will make this offer again as part of the professional development programme and raise awareness the facility on an ongoing basis. Officials will also work with the Members' Liaison and Professional Development Team to provide appropriate additional training for users.

Improvement Targets

As you note in your letter, the Assembly Commission is not persuaded that the use of quantitative targets is an appropriate way to achieve our ambition of being a truly bilingual organisation. The Scheme builds on the significant improvements made in the Fourth Assembly, outlines the steps that we will take and the areas



that we will focus upon in order to realise that ambition in full by 2021. We believe that delivering each of our themes by the end of the Fifth Assembly will lead us towards that ambition. The Assembly Commission believes that the annual plenary debate gives all Assembly Members an opportunity to scrutinise its work on implementing and progressing the objectives of the Official Languages Scheme. The Members' satisfaction survey provides us with annual feedback on our bilingual services and enables us to address any particular concerns raised directly with the Member or their office. We also receive feedback through official and unofficial channels regarding the services provided. Assembly Commission officials meet other organisations across Wales to exchange best practice, with Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg to discuss progress and to exchange ideas, and we would be happy to meet with any other organisations wishing to establish a similar relationship. We would welcome scrutiny from your Committee as part of the annual reporting cycle should you feel that this would afford you additional reassurance.

Recruitment Issues

I was pleased to hear the positive comments from your Committee Members regarding the potential move to a new fluency framework. I wish to take this opportunity to clarify the Assembly Commission's intentions in terms of the timescale and implementation of the new framework. It will in fact be based on a 5 point scale with the lowest point – level 1 –described as 'basic linguistic courtesy'. This would entail being able to recognise, pronounce and use familiar phrases and names, such as Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru correctly, and to understand basic texts such as simple e-mails.

The Assembly Commission will establish a working group with membership including staff networks and trade union representatives to ensure that the proposed system is fit for purpose.

Under the new system, the language skills level for any new posts, or any vacancies will automatically be set at 'basic linguistic courtesy' unless the Service Language Plan, agreed by the Head of Service requires a higher level. The new framework will provide a descriptor of the skills required for each level, and




factors such as the number of bilingual staff in each team, and the type of work undertaken by those individual teams will be factors in determining skill levels for all posts.

Existing staff will not be required to acquire any additional language skills should they wish to remain in their current post, although training and support will be available for any existing staff wishing to do so. However, should they apply for a vacant or new post, they will be required to demonstrate the language skills level associated with that post.

Please find attached the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which has been assessed by an external equalities organisation acting as a 'critical friend'. Feedback was extremely positive and a couple of additional action points have emerged for us to consider once we start planning implementation. As a measure of good practice, the Commission's intention is to publish all its EQIAs once they have been reviewed. The attached copy is therefore provided in the spirit of openness and may I ask that it is not published at this stage. Our intention is to maintain the EQIA as a 'living' document that will be reviewed at regular intervals.

On behalf of the Assembly Commission may I thank the Committee for its robust scrutiny of the draft Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Assembly. I look forward to continuing our relationship for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely,



Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg / We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

