

# Agenda – Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee

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Meeting Venue:

Committee meeting via Zoom

Meeting date: 12 May 2020

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

**Manon George**

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

[SeneddCWLC@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddCWLC@senedd.wales)

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## (9:30 – 10:00) Informal meeting

In accordance with Standing Order 34.19, the Chair has determined that the public are excluded from the Committee's meeting in order to protect public health. This meeting will be broadcast live on [www.senedd.tv](http://www.senedd.tv).

## 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

## 2 COVID-19: Evidence session with the Welsh Government

(10:00– 11:00)

(Pages 1 – 12)

Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas – Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism

Jason Thomas – Director for Culture, Tourism and Sport

## 3 Papers to note

### 3.1 Correspondence with BBC

(Pages 13 – 16)

### 3.2 Correspondence from Wales Community Radio Network

(Page 17)

### 3.3 Correspondence with Media Wales

(Pages 18 – 20)

### 3.4 Briefing from BBC Cymru Wales

(Pages 21 – 23)



- 4 **Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting**
  
- 5 **Inquiry into the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on culture, the creative industries, heritage and sport: agree terms of reference**  
(11:00-11:05) (Pages 24 - 25)

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**Ken MacQuarrie**

Director of BBC Nations and Regions

**cc. Rhodri Talfan Davies**

Director of BBC Cymru Wales

31 March 2020

Dear Ken,

**BBC Breakfast and news bulletins from Wales**

Within the National Assembly for Wales, the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee is responsible for oversight of the BBC's delivery of its remit in Wales.

It has come to the Committee's attention that from Monday 30 March there will be no news bulletins from Wales during the Breakfast show on BBC One.

I am concerned about the impact of this decision on the people of Wales. The regional news bulletins during the Breakfast show are currently an important means of informing people about issues which affect them. The demographic that watch Breakfast may not necessarily be the same demographic that watch evening news programmes. Therefore, without a news bulletin from Wales during Breakfast, there is a risk that people will not receive sufficient information about Coronavirus in Wales.

I appreciate that the BBC is under significant pressure at the moment. However, it is vitally important during these unprecedented times that people in Wales continue to receive Wales specific news and information. I therefore ask you to reconsider the BBC's decision not to show bulletins from Wales at Breakfast.

If people from Wales are to receive their news from a UK network bulletin instead, it is crucial that these bulletins reflect the devolved nature of many of the government responses to the pandemic. For example, as health is devolved, the widely reported call for NHS volunteers to apply through the GoodSAM app is only relevant to England. Similarly, business rates relief schemes, which are crucial to the survival of many small business, are devolved to Wales. Never has it been more important for

people in Wales to receive clear and accurate information about the reality of devolved governance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Mary Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small flourish at the end.

Helen Mary Jones AM

**Chair of the Committee**



Email to: Helen Mary Jones AM, National Assembly for Wales,  
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee  
SeneddCWLC@assembly.wales

Cc: Rhodri Talfan Davies; Non Tudur Williams  
Rhodri.Davies@bbc.co.uk  
NonTudur.Williams@bbc.co.uk

16 April 2020

Dear Helen

Thank you for your correspondence from the 31 March 2020 regarding the local BBC Breakfast bulletins during the current pandemic.

May I reassure you that decisions like this – while only a temporary measure - aren't taken lightly, but the current situation means we have to adapt and respond like never before. And while it's a privilege to play our part in responding to this national and global emergency, the operational challenges we currently face are immense and we have to focus resources carefully and where they will have maximum impact.

For that reason, it may be useful if I explain the background to this decision and why it was taken.

As you rightly acknowledge these are unprecedented times and as a result, audiences are tuning into our news, radio and online services in their numbers for the most up to date information. In fact, around 750,000 viewers are tuning into *BBC Wales Today* every day across the three main bulletins – lunchtime, early and late evening. But at this difficult time BBC Wales – along with the rest of the BBC - is balancing two priorities, that of a duty of care towards staff and delivering its responsibilities as the national broadcaster.

It's worth noting that, despite the current lockdown and higher levels of staff absence due to self-isolation and illness, BBC Wales's teams continue to deliver over 14 hours of weekday news for *BBC Wales Today*, *Newyddion* for S4C, BBC Wales News Online, BBC Cymru Fyw, BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru. That level of programming is testament to the commitment shown, not just by the editorial staff but those working in production, technology and operations who continue to work from our broadcast bases, while the majority of colleagues are now working from home.



Therefore, the decision to pause our local service to television audiences at breakfast in the nations and regions of the UK was taken in order to safeguard staffing for our peak-time TV services, that attract much bigger audiences and to reduce the unprecedented strain on our teams and facilities.

I would also add that, overall, BBC Wales has extended its news coverage during this period - not reduced it. For example, both *Post Cyntaf* on Radio Cymru and Gareth Lewis in Drivetime on Radio Wales have been extended by half an hour and an hour respectively each day. BBC One Wales is also broadcasting the Welsh Government's daily press conference at 12.30pm every day.

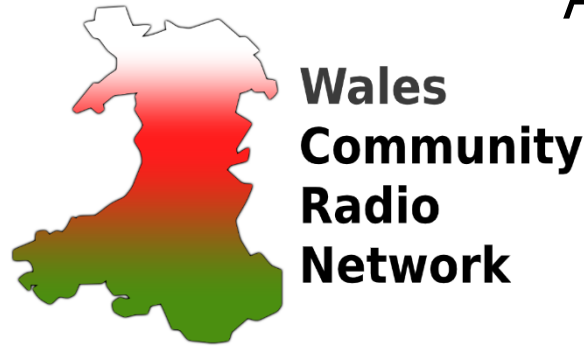
I hope this goes some way to address the points and concerns you raise.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ken MacQuarrie'.

**Ken MacQuarrie**

Director, BBC Nations & Regions



Dear Assembly Member,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Welsh Community Radio Network, a newly formed organisation which will represent Community Radio stations in Wales, both publicly and to Government.

We write to you for the first time, in what are unprecedented times. Many of the stations across Wales have had to reduce services, with volunteers and staff self or social isolating, putting a major drain on stations.

Despite this, the majority are able to continue a regular service, with local, friendly voices providing entertainment and delivering huge community benefit, through the sharing of information and news. We have already heard of stations losing advertising during this crisis and we are concerned about the long term impact it could have on the sector within their communities.

These services provide volunteering opportunities to hundreds across Wales and with many stations now worrying about balancing the books, whilst keeping their services on air, it's vital that support is provided now before it's too late.

Speaking to stations, there is a worry about wages, rent and outgoings, including their OFCOM annual fees which are due this month will be paid, as advertisers cut their advertising campaigns daily.

As a sector, we are calling on the Welsh and UK Government to offer a helping hand to these Stations, which are a vital source of news and information, not just during these difficult times, but every day of the year.

Yours sincerely,

**Nathan Spackman**

Bro Radio

**Steve Johnson**

University of South Wales

On behalf of and representing:

BGFM, Bro Radio, Calon FM, GTFM, Mon FM, Radio Cardiff, Radio Tircoed, Radio Glan Clwyd, Rhondda Radio, Tudno FM



7 April 2020

Helen Mary Jones AM  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

Dear Helen,

I hope you're keeping safe and well in these extraordinary times. I wanted to write to brief and reassure you about the cost reduction measures you may have seen announced yesterday by Reach plc, and their impact on our operations here at Media Wales.

Across our group, which as I'm sure you know publishes the Mirror, the Express, the Daily Record and regional titles including the Manchester Evening News and Liverpool Echo alongside our Welsh titles, around 20% of the workforce was furloughed yesterday. In addition, all staff were asked to take a pay cut of 10%, with the board and senior team taking 20%. Those on furlough will have their pay topped up by 10% so they are not financially disadvantaged compared to those colleagues who have been able to continue in their roles.

Asking hard-working colleagues to step back from the crucial work of keeping the public informed about the coronavirus pandemic in their areas, as well as producing other content allowing for much-needed diversion from the relentless news agenda, made me desperately sad. At Media Wales, we pride ourselves on the products and audiences that we've built. Asking people to leave that work behind, albeit temporarily, was a difficult task for us all.

The last few weeks have demonstrated the crucial role regional and local publishers like us play in keeping the public informed about the matters that affect their lives. With many unable to get to shops to buy newspapers, our online traffic - driven largely by our live updates and informational content about the pandemic - has increased by around 70% since the outbreak began. People need what we do more than ever before. But it's becoming harder and harder to do it, thanks to a perfect storm of market conditions.

Since lockdown began, our sales teams across the UK have been conducting an audit of our local advertisers. At the last count, 70% were not currently trading, and the vast majority of the rest were cutting down significantly or entirely on their advertising spend. Circulation revenue is still a huge contributor to our revenues, but thousands of our readers are not currently able or willing to visit shops to buy their newspapers. Online, the UK's biggest brands have taken the decision - for reasons best known to themselves - to block their adverts from appearing next to content with any kind of connection to the outbreak.

I'm sure you can imagine the cumulative effect these three factors are having on a sector that was already challenged in normal times, and can see how they've made announcements like yesterday's inevitable.

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Nonetheless, we remain more committed to our readers and brands than ever before. The appetite for the challenge that our staff have shown throughout this - from shifting our entire office-based operation to working from home in 24 hours to forming new modes of communication while working remotely - has been inspiring. And while we will have to cut our cloth accordingly to take into account our mitigation measures - including reducing the pagination of our titles and printing earlier to deal with press site staff shortages - I am confident in our ability to minimise the impact of this on the service we provide our readers.

While the financial situation we're experiencing is largely the result of the measures introduced to tackle the pandemic, there are some steps I'd urge you to take to help us protect local news during the outbreak and beyond it:

- Encourage agencies to place coronavirus-related public information campaigns in regional and local publishers. I was encouraged last month to see Public Health Wales run a campaign through our channels to inform readers about key messaging - more of this from more organisations would be enormously valuable, and I believe the trusted nature of our brands provides the perfect vehicle for this important messaging.
- Lobby the Welsh Government - as well as the UK Government and devolved administrations on behalf of the wider industry - to extend the business rates holiday introduced for retail, hospitality and leisure to include news publishers, in respect to the crucial public service we are providing at this time.
- Ask local authorities to continue to use local publishers to display public notices, which remain a crucial line of revenue for us and businesses like us.
- Help change the negative narrative around the regional media, which now more than ever risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. In a world where rumour and conspiracy theories abound like never before, our industry remains a pillar of trusted, verified news that we all should be encouraging people to access. I hope you will agree from your dealings with my staff that they are responsible, professional and diligent individuals, and the news service we produce as a team is a result of that.

Like many businesses, we are under unprecedented pressure from the economic crisis that this pandemic has created. Your support for other sectors of the economy has been heartening - please help support us in the same way.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Rowland  
Editor in Chief, Media Wales  
Editor, WalesOnline

**Paul Rowland**

Editor in Chief, Media Wales

20 April 2020

Dear Paul,

**Media Wales and COVID-19**


Thank you for your letter dated 7 April.

I agree that regional and local publishers play a crucial role in keeping the public informed during the pandemic and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all at Media Wales for your hard work and commitment in these difficult times.

Given the decline of local newspapers in recent years, I fully appreciate the additional challenges that you are facing as a business as a result of reductions in advertising and circulation revenues.

Over the next months the Committee will be scrutinising the Welsh Government's approach to managing the impact of Covid-19. During our discussions, we will ask the Welsh Government how it can improve its support for news journalism in Wales including the advertisement of statutory notices. A key consideration in our scrutiny will be the importance of a well-resourced local media in Wales to provide clear and accurate news and information in these unprecedented times. We will also be writing to our counterpart Committee in the House of Commons asking it to discuss with the UK Government what support it can provide for the local media sector, both during the pandemic and on an ongoing basis.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Mary Jones AM

**Chair of the Committee**

# Agenda Item 3.4

## **Briefing note for the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee BBC Cymru Wales' package of support for the creative industries**

### **Support for the independent production sector**

On 6 April, BBC Cymru Wales announced a special package of support to assist independent production companies in Wales working with the broadcaster during the Coronavirus crisis. Aiming to support the sector during the current Coronavirus crisis it complemented proposals introduced by BBC network television to support independent producers across the UK.

The packaged included:

- A new BBC Wales commissioning round looking for TV and radio programmes reflecting life during the current crisis and beyond.
- A doubling of the BBC Small Indie Fund (from £1m to £2m) - managed by BBC Content - to support smaller independent companies across the UK, who are most vulnerable at this time. BBC Wales and BBC network television commissioners will work together to identify suitable companies.
- A one-off BBC Wales fund to turbo-charge TV development projects such as drama and comedy with an eye on future schedules beyond 2020
- A radio development fund to support new programme ideas across BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru which can be turned around quickly for broadcast over the next few months.
- New short-form commissioning opportunities for BBC Wales' social media platforms aimed at educating and entertaining audiences - particularly those under 45 years of age.
- Increased investment in BBC Wales' archive content for BBC iPlayer by acquiring programming from partners in the sector. The aim is to introduce a substantial archive of great Welsh content to iPlayer over the coming weeks and months.
- A commitment by BBC Wales and network television to work closely with production companies on current projects which have been disrupted, to find supportive solutions wherever possible. This will include being flexible around delivery, and varying cash flow as appropriate on a title-by-title basis

BBC Wales is also working in partnership with the Welsh Government's Creative Wales unit to identify opportunities for collaboration in supporting the wider sector.

Following the commissioning call for TV, radio and online, this week we announced independent companies will produce over 30 new programmes for BBC One Wales, BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru to be broadcast before the end of September. They include:

- On BBC One Wales, Carol Vordeman will host a brand new four-part show every Thursday evening on BBC One Wales at 7.30pm. *The Great Indoors* will see Carol joined by a host of guests to steer viewers through the best and most uplifting stories in Wales. The production – a first for BBC Wales - is a collaboration

between a range of independent production companies including BBC Studios, Boom Cymru, Marmalade TV, One Tribe, Hall Of Mirrors, Darlun and Yeti.

- On Monday evening (BBC One Wales at 9pm) the spotlight will be firmly on the Royal Gwent Hospital and staff at the Critical Care Unit for *Critical: Coronavirus in Intensive Care* – a powerful documentary made by Folk Films and filmed entirely by NHS staff on mobile phones and small cameras, giving viewers rare access to the Intensive Care Unit.
- The hit TV comedy, *The Tourist Trap* will take to the airwaves for a one-off special *The Tourist Trap: The Stay at Home Radio Special* on 22 June on BBC Radio Wales. Sally Phillips is joined by comedians Elis James, Mike Bubbins, Tudur Owen and Sarah Breese as once again WOW Wales, the ill-fated tourism agency takes on the quest to stop tourists visiting Wales. (Produced by The Comedy Unit)
- A special programme for Mental Health Awareness Week, *The Mind Shed* on BBC Radio Wales on 19 May will be looking at how social distancing and self-isolating are affecting our mental health with men, in particular at risk. (Produced by One Tribe)
- On BBC Radio Cymru, Dylan Ebenezer will host a new panel show, the *Ynys yr Hunan-Ynyswyr* (Island of Isolationists) as he invites two guests to compete for the luxury of staying on the island with him, based on their choice of books, music and films. (Produced by Rondo Media)
- And in a first for the Radio Cymru, Jon Gower will be inviting listeners to submit their ideas and create a crowd-produced daily novel in the style of a soap opera for our times, every day on the *Aled Hughes programme*. (Produced by Cwmni Unigryw)

## Supporting the wider creative industries

Since entering the lockdown phase, the following partnerships and initiatives have been introduced:

- BBC Wales and BBC Arts are broadcast partners for National Theatre Wales' Network initiative – a new digital programme of opportunities for theatre makers, delivered in partnership with two of Wales's leading theatre organisations, Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru and Sherman Theatre – and developed in response to impact of COVID-19 lockdown
- BBC Radio Cymru and BBC Cymru Fyw are also working in partnership with Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru on their Creu Ar-Lein (Create On-Line) programme bringing a selection of Micro Plays to digital platforms.
- A partnership between BBC Radio Wales and The Machynlleth Comedy Festival saw the festival – which as cancelled as a result of the current crisis – brought to life on radio with a range of programmes over the first weekend in May
- The Urdd announced a new kind of Eisteddfod – Eisteddfod-T - following the cancellation of this year's youth festival in Denbighshire. The Eisteddfod-with-a-difference will broadcast its final rounds on specially scheduled programmes on BBC Radio Cymru. With festivals and outdoor shows cancelled the length and breadth of Wales, we're pleased to be working with partners, such as the Urdd

and Machynlleth Comedy Festival to bring people closer together at a time when many feel isolated and alone, as well as create national moments of celebration.

- Horizons/Gorwelion – the music project funded by the Arts Council of Wales and BBC Cymru Wales has been supporting musicians the length and breadth of the country by streaming live music from the intimate setting of living rooms to an ever growing audience on social media platforms. The initiative has only been possible, due to the projects existing connections with the industry.
- BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales – while the orchestra and chorus may not be packing out the concert halls, the players and staff have been creating engaging, uplifting and unique digital content to keep audiences entertained during lockdown. Orchestra members are taking part in online education initiatives, digital music events, and fun video strands. And on Thursday, 7 May they'll be working - from home - with bass-baritone, Bryn Terfel to bring a rousing new digital version of the anthem Men of Harlech to the airwaves of BBC Radio Cymru and BBC Radio Wales.

# Agenda Item 5

By virtue of paragraph(s) vii of Standing Order 17.42

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