

Rt.Hon Carwyn Jones AM
First Minister

22 January 2016

Dear First Minister

Welsh Government draft budget proposals, 2016–17

Thank you for attending the Committee on 13 January 2016 to answer questions on the Welsh Government's draft budget proposals for 2016–17 specifically in relation to the Welsh language.

The Committee would like to draw your attention to the matters set out below, and looks forward to receiving your response in due course.

1. Expenditure and prioritisation

Funding for the Welsh language has again been reduced in the Government's draft budget, from £27.2 million in 2015–16 to £25.6 million in 2016–17. This represents, as you will be aware, a reduction of 5.9% (or 7.5% in real terms).

This reduction is more stark when seen in the context of an overall increase in revenue funding for Welsh Government departments in 2016–17; an increase of £121 million when compared with the 2015–16 baseline¹.

The Welsh Government has a clear responsibility both to maintain vitality in, and encourage the growth of, the Welsh language. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved when the Government continues to withdraw vital financial support in this area. As we discussed during our recent meeting, the development of a naturally bilingual society will be greatly impaired if the Government continues to prioritise other policy areas over the Welsh language when making budgetary

¹ Or an increase of £94.3 million compared with the 2015-16 first supplementary budget



decisions. Expenditure on the language should reflect the ambitions in the Programme for Government for a language that is “thriving”. We do not believe that this has been achieved in this draft budget.

Overall, specific funding for Welsh language programmes represents less than 0.18% of the total funding² allocated to Welsh Government departments in 2016–17. We were, therefore, surprised at the depth of the cut, given that this is an area of relatively low expenditure. We are also concerned that this relatively deep cut is likely to have a disproportionately large impact on the future of the language.

We note your decision to allocate £1.2 million to “cushion the impact of reductions on Welsh language funding”.

- i. Could you clarify whether this will be included in the baseline for next year’s draft budget?

More generally, we have a query about some of the figures provided in your paper about the budget for the Welsh language and those provided by the Minister for Education and Skills in his [paper](#) to the Children, Young People and Education Committee. In your paper, you state that the Welsh Language BEL for the 2016–17 draft budget will be £3,913,000; the Minister states that the BEL will be £3,964,000. You also state that the Welsh Language Commissioner BEL will be £3,051,000; the Minister states it will be £3,000,000.

- ii. Could you clarify which is the correct allocation?

Welsh language centres

We note the Government’s decision to reduce the funding for programmes such as Welsh for Adults in order to focus on other measures to strengthen the language in the community, particularly the establishment of ten language centres.

During our meeting, you told us that arrangements are in place for the centres to share good practice, and that you expect each centre to report annually on its progress. You have agreed to share a copy of these reports with us, and we look forward to receiving them.

In advance of this, we are particularly interested in hearing from you about:

² Capital and Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limits



- iii. the specific outcomes that the Welsh Government expects from these centres in order to establish whether the decision to re-prioritise funding was beneficial for the language.

2. Impact Assessments

We remain concerned about the need to better assess the impact of budget decisions on the Welsh language across Ministerial portfolios. We raised this matter with you last year and, in your recent written evidence, you told us that “steps have been taken in the preparation of the [2016–17] draft budget (...) to ensure that the Welsh language is appropriately considered”. You also told us that in reducing the overall budget for the Welsh language, the Government had “sought (...) to ensure that where cuts have been made they do not have an impact on what is being done on the ground”. Further, we note that guidance has been issued to every department about the use of language impact assessments when preparing their draft budgets.

We were, therefore, disappointed that information still has not been provided about the work undertaken across departments to assess the impact of funding decisions on the language, the results of those assessments or how they have influenced the various funding decisions. Neither is this information included in the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment, which refers only to the £1.2 million additional allocation for the language and the positive impact on the language resulting from the overall increase in schools funding.

In addition, we were very concerned by your statement that “whilst we have individual language assessments in terms of individual policies and programmes, it’s difficult to provide an overall assessment [of the impact of the budget cuts]”.

- i. We seek an undertaking from you that future SIAs will contain the information outlined above, as well as an assessment of the cumulative impact of funding decisions on the Welsh language.
- ii. We also seek an undertaking from you to publish all relevant documents so that they can be subjected to external scrutiny.

3. Bwrw Mlaen

Following our scrutiny of the draft budget last year, we wrote to you about the need to see more detailed information about the evidence used when



reprioritising funding from programmes such as Welsh for Adults. We also asked for more information on the specific outcomes that you expected from this reprioritisation and the Bwrw Mlaen strategy.

We note that Bangor University was commissioned by the Government to research the use of Welsh as a community language and that this was intended to contribute to your understanding of the success of Bwrw Mlaen's implementation. We were disappointed that you did not also task the University with evaluating the effectiveness of Welsh Government funded programmes to facilitate the use of Welsh or assessing the value for money of these programmes.

We note from your evidence that Bwrw Mlaen was a "specific scheme for a specific time" (...) "designed to make sure that there was funding available for [the 10 language centres] placed strategically around Wales." However, given that the Welsh language BEL (which funds Bwrw Mlaen) faces a 25.6% cash reduction in the draft budget:

- i. what steps do you have in place to evaluate the impact of this reduction, particularly as the Bangor University research did not consider the value for money or effectiveness of the Welsh Government's funded programmes in this area?
- ii. do you intend to commission separate research on this matter?

4. Welsh Language Commissioner's budget

As part of the Welsh Government's 2016–17 draft budget, the Welsh Language Commissioner faces a reduction of £339,000 in her budget, equating to 10% in cash terms. Whilst this is significant in itself, it is even more so when viewed in the context of the previous years' reductions; 8% in 2015–16 and 10% in 2014–15.

When she came before the Committee at the end of last year, the Commissioner told us that, having lost almost a quarter of her income over the past four years, "another cut, over the coming years, and in the next year, is going to be (...) disastrous, in terms of the implementation of the Welsh language Measure."

She told us that the next two years will be "incredibly important" as regards the implementation of the Measure and the standards to be introduced under it,



particularly as it will involve around 250 bodies being brought under the new system during that period.

We note the allocation of an additional £150,000 to the Commissioner's office as part of the 2015–16 financial year, and that this is intended to mitigate the 2016–17 budget reductions. Even allowing for this, the overall reductions in the Commissioner's office over the last few years make it difficult to see how the delivery of the important work of her office in relation to standards will not be hampered.

As part of your evidence, you told us that you anticipate the additional £150,000 will be used during the 2015–16 financial year, as it was intended to assist with the extra work to be undertaken on the standards. We discussed this briefly during the meeting, but could you confirm:

- i. whether there is any flexibility here, in light of the Commissioner's statement to us about the importance of the next *two* years in implementing the Measure?
- ii. do you have any plans to make a similar additional allocation to the Commissioner in 2016–17 for this purpose?

5. Education

Welsh medium education strategy

Following last year's budget scrutiny, we wrote to you to express concerns about the impact of funding reductions on the delivery of the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium education strategy.

We note that, in the 2016–17 draft budget, funding for the Welsh in education BEL increases slightly by £82,000, but that this has been achieved by the transfer of £825,000 from the Welsh language BEL. After this has been accounted for, the effect is a £743,000 reduction. In her evidence to the Finance Committee (7 January 2016), the Finance Minister states that the purpose of this transfer is to “develop a more strategic approach to language acquisition for 0–4 age group”. You told us that the transfer was “more or less an administrative difference” and that the Government wanted to ensure that money was allocated to areas where it could be spent more effectively.



Can you provide us with details of:

- i. the rationale for the transfer between BELs and any schemes or initiatives that will be negatively affected
- ii. the specific outcomes that you expect to arise as a result of the transfer into the Welsh in education BEL.
- iii. the impact of the £743,000 reduction in the Welsh in Education BEL, once the transfer in is accounted for.

Twf

You have described the Twf project as a key preventative spend programme, “part of the Welsh Government’s main intervention in the field of language transmission in the family, considered by experts as one of the two most important areas of language planning (...)”.

We were, therefore, surprised to see that a decision had been taken to reduce the budget allocation for the Twf project in 2016–17 by £0.2 million. We note your evidence that the project is being re–contracted at the end of March, and that this will provide an opportunity to make efficiency savings in “back office” operations without impacting negatively on service delivery.

- iv. What arrangements are in place to measure the impact of the budget reduction in this area, in light of your statement that such a reduction will not involve cutting back on the level of service?

Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

We welcome the work undertaken by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (CCC) to broaden the range of higher education subjects that can be studied through the medium of Welsh. We are concerned, however, about the impact of the £20 million reduction in the funding available to HEFCW to allocate to HE institutions, and the potential impact on the CCC and its ability to continue this work.

During our meeting, we heard from your official that the Welsh Government will provide a “strong steer” to HEFCW, via the remit letter, encouraging it to continue prioritising funding for the CCC, but that ultimately this decision will be a matter for HEFCW.



- v. We seek an assurance from you that, included in this steer, will be a strong statement that future funding decisions taken by HEFCW should not impact disproportionately on the Welsh language.

Flying Start

During our meeting, we briefly discussed the adequacy of Welsh-medium Flying Start provision to feed into Welsh-medium schools. It would seem to be more likely that children who access Welsh-medium Flying Start schemes will continue their education through the medium of Welsh, thus contributing to the Welsh Government's aim of a thriving language and a naturally bilingual society.

With this in mind, we would be grateful for details of the specific actions being taken by the Welsh Government to evaluate—

- vi. whether there are sufficient Welsh-medium Flying Start places to satisfy demand, and
- vii. whether the current Welsh-medium Flying Start provision is sufficient to enable the Government to meet its own objectives for Welsh-medium education in later age-groups.

6. Welsh Books Council

During the meeting, we discussed our concerns about the impact on the language of the proposed 10.6% budget reductions for the Welsh Books Council. We welcome the recent [announcement](#) by the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism that funding for the Council will not be reduced in this draft budget.

Yours sincerely



Christine Chapman AM

Chair

cc. **Jocelyn Davies AM**, Chair, Finance Committee; **Ann Jones AM**, Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

