



## Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission

# Official Languages Scheme 2017 – 2021

### 1.0 Purpose and summary

- 1.1 This paper contains proposals for the Assembly Commission's new Official Languages Scheme for the Fifth Assembly for the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee. It also seeks the Committee's comments on the new Scheme and the annual report which will bring about the closure of the existing Scheme which will remain until the new Scheme is approved by the Assembly in Plenary.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to consider and comment upon:

- the draft of our Official Languages Scheme (Annex A) following internal and external consultation and approval by the Assembly Commission;
- the draft annual report (Annex B) prior to laying it for consideration in Plenary to effect the closure of the current Official Languages Scheme.

### 3.0 Background to the National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Act and the Official Languages Scheme

- 3.1 The National Assembly for Wales (Official Languages) Bill was unanimously approved by the Assembly on 3 October 2012. The Act makes provision about the use of English and Welsh in proceedings of the National Assembly for Wales and in the discharge of the functions of the Assembly Commission. The Act's principal objective is to place a statutory duty on the National Assembly for Wales and the Assembly Commission to treat Welsh and English as our official languages and on the basis of equality.

3.2 The Act places a duty on the Commission to adopt and publish an Official Languages Scheme specifying the measures it will take in order to comply with its duties as outlined in the Act. Amongst other things, the Scheme must include provision about:

- simultaneous interpretation;
- the publication of documents in both official languages, subject to any exceptions identified in the Scheme;
- public engagement with Assembly proceedings, and other functions of the Assembly and of the Assembly Commission;
- practical measures to foster and continually improve freedom of choice of official language;
- the setting of targets and timescales relating to implementation of the Scheme;
- the allocation of responsibilities for implementing the Scheme;
- objective means of measuring progress in implementing the Scheme;
- a strategy for ensuring that the staff of the Assembly have, collectively, the language skills necessary to enable the Scheme to be implemented, and
- provision relating to the receipt, investigation and consideration of complaints of failures to give effect to provisions of the Scheme.

3.3 The Assembly Commission must also, in respect of each financial year, lay before the Assembly a report setting out how the Commission has given effect to the Scheme i.e. whether and to what degree the services referred to in the Scheme have been provided, and if applicable, the reasons why the Commission has not provided any of these services. The final Annual Report for the existing Scheme is attached at Annex B. The Committee is asked to note the content of the report which will be formatted and include photographs and images to illustrate some of the highlights.

#### **4.0 Consultation**

4.1 Consultation has taken place on the draft Scheme in November 2016, and the views of consultees have helped shape the draft Official Languages Scheme that has been approved by the Assembly Commission and is now before the Committee for consideration.

Throughout the consultation the draft Scheme was available on the Assembly website, and as required by the Act, we specifically consulted with:

- Assembly Members via Email and drop-in sessions.
- the Assembly's Management Board, Trade Union Side, our Workplace Equality Networks, a notice on the staff intranet, drop-in sessions and through a cascading system via our Official Language Scheme co-ordinators, to staff in all service areas.
- interested parties – Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg, the Welsh Language Commissioner, Welsh Government, the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters, Dyfodol yr Iaith (Future of the Language).

#### 4.2 A summary of the responses is provided below.

External responses to consultation have been generally supportive, acknowledging the progress made to date. Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg shared some concerns that the Scheme does not go far enough and made specific suggestions on targets that should be set for internal administration and increasing the levels of fluent Welsh speakers in the organisation.

Responses from internal consultation have also been generally supportive. The system of Contact Buddies has been largely welcomed by Members and their staff as a step forward to enhancing Member services.

Amongst Commission staff there were a mixture of views. Some felt that the draft Scheme is a step forward building on the foundations laid in the first Scheme, and others felt that the Scheme did not go far enough. The main area of concern for staff is the introduction of language skills levels for all new posts and, in particular, setting a basic linguistic courtesy level as a minimum for all posts. This was reflected in the comments received, although other staff members felt that the bar was set too low.

In parallel with the Scheme, we have also been working on an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that the proposal to introduce a minimum requirement of at least a basic linguistic courtesy in job adverts does

not jeopardise job applications from people with diverse backgrounds. This has identified a number of actions that will enhance our recruitment pages and indicate that we are an employer that is diverse in nature and welcomes applicants from all our communities.

Having considered consultation responses in the round and made some alterations to various parts of the draft Scheme, the version now before the Committee, having been approved by the Assembly Commission, represents a step up in terms of service delivery and a balanced approach in order to take us towards achieving our ambitions.

## **5.0 Discussion**

5.1 The new draft Scheme builds on the Assembly's bilingual culture since its inception in 1999. Successive schemes have set out the standards to which we are held to account. Developments introduced under the 2012 Act and its Scheme took us further forward in terms of bilingual service provision and the treatment of both languages on the basis of equality. We also introduced the principle of proactively enabling Assembly Members, their support staff and the public to work or engage with us in their official language of choice. Those developments and the cultural changes that have emerged, place us in an even stronger position when compared to many public sector bodies in Wales. Highlights include:

- the implementation of the global Welsh model for Microsoft Translator which has introduced efficiencies into our Translation and Reporting Service and enabled non-Welsh speaking users to get a gist translation of Welsh only correspondence facilitating a quicker reply to correspondence;
- bespoke briefing documents, reflecting the individual language choices of Members, and glossaries of Welsh technical terms for Bills and inquiries are now provided across Committees enabling Members to work more easily in the language of their choice;
- a bilingual skills strategy which has enabled Commission staff to improve the planning and delivery of bilingual services based on an assessment of existing skill levels, improved language planning to ensure that bilingual capacity is at the right level and in the right places. In addition to this we have developed an in-house

Language Skills Team providing a full range of support for beginners to fluent Welsh speakers who wish to gain more confidence or improve their grammar and written Welsh;

- building on our international reputation as a bilingual parliamentary institution and our work with Microsoft Translator and its availability world-wide, we provide numerous presentations to conferences and organisations on the way that technology has transformed the way we work bilingually and on our approach to Welsh learning;
- the development and introduction of lanyards for Welsh speakers and learners has led to a change in ethos by encouraging Welsh to be spoken and used naturally and proactively on and around the Assembly estate;
- the availability of our HR policies and on-line system in Welsh and increased bilingual capacity within the HR team ensures that performance management, grievance, recruitment, discipline and other HR functions are proactively offered and facilitated in either language; and
- targets, priorities and other operational improvements identified in the 2013–2016 Scheme have now been built in to our service standards for the new Scheme. We will continue to be held to account for these in the annual reporting cycle through its consideration in Plenary.

## **6.0 Themes and targets for the new Scheme**

6.1 The structure of the draft Scheme is set out in a similar way to the existing Scheme as it easily identifies groups of service users and the standards they can expect from us:

- a) Our ambition
- b) Our Service Standards
  - for Assembly Members and their staff
  - for communicating and engaging with the people of Wales
  - for our staff
- c) Themes for the duration of the Scheme

d) Arrangements for monitoring and reporting

6.2 Building on the platform we have developed and our achievements under the existing Scheme and the further development of our bilingual working culture, we believe that there is still more to do to enable us to achieve our ambition of becoming a truly bilingual organisation by 2021. With this in mind, we have refined our ambition statement to draw out our desires to continuously improve our bilingual services as well as the proactive encouragement, facilitation and naturalisation of working bilingually. The following ambition is therefore proposed as the strategic driver for draft Scheme until 2021:

“Our ambition is to be a truly bilingual organisation where Assembly Members, the public and staff can choose to work or communicate naturally in either or both of our official languages, where the use of both languages is proactively encouraged and facilitated, and where our exemplary bilingual services are continuously improving.”

6.3 To support the delivery of this ambition, we have developed five themes which would enable us to confidently describe ourselves as a truly bilingual organisation by 2021. These themes and the specific actions required to support them are described in more detail on pages 33 – 38 of the draft Scheme. However, they are provided in summary form below:

- **Recruitment** – Supported by guidance for candidates and recruitment managers, we propose to adopt an approach where all posts advertised by the Assembly Commission will require at least a basic level of Welsh language skills (basic linguistic courtesy) on appointment or a commitment to gain those skills during the induction process. We will develop a more sophisticated method of determining the fluency levels required for posts being advertised and describe the language requirements in the job advert as we move away from a binary approach of “Welsh essential” or “Welsh desirable” which has not always facilitated the recruitment of bilingual capacity where it is needed. These arrangements have been piloted for a number of recruitment schemes so that a system

can be implemented by summer 2018. Changes will also be supported by on-line resources for potential applicants.

- **Language Skills** – The Commission remains committed to the development or improvement of individuals' language skills. Our in-house Language Skills Team is now in place and we are seeing more learners, improvers and fluent Welsh speakers than ever before. We aim to provide much greater focus on learning Welsh for the workplace, set targets for learners and recognise achievements. Progress for learners will be mapped and feed more formally into consideration about bilingual capacity within service areas. A much greater emphasis will be placed on providing bespoke or specific learning for Assembly Members and certain groups of Commission staff, such as the Security team, where classroom training is impractical. Given the range of interventions proposed, we hope to see our learners use their Welsh language skills proactively around the estate and in our formal proceedings.
- **Language Planning** – Introduced across all service areas during the lifetime of the existing Scheme, language plans have been an effective tool enabling service heads to better consider their existing bilingual capacity, any additional needs required in terms of their service delivery and to build these into recruitment schemes. Building on the plans in place, we propose a more robust system to track the skills development of our Welsh learners, build them into our annual capacity planning rounds and report on progress. During the life of this Scheme, and in the light of the proposals for recruitment, language skills development and language planning, we will review our Bilingual Skills Strategy to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.
- **Assembly Proceedings** – Great progress has been made to ensure that Assembly Members can engage in the language of their choice by providing a range of bilingual materials which facilitate preparation in their preferred language prior to their participation in Plenary or Committee business. We aim to develop an enhanced understanding of Members' needs and preferences, effectively feeding that input into integrated committee teams and develop

bespoke language skills training, according to need and learning styles, to further support and embed bilingual working.

- **Developing the bilingual ethos of the organisation** – While acknowledging the progress made to develop the bilingual ethos of the organisation, a range of actions have been identified to ensure we achieve our ambition by 2021. To enable proactive use of Welsh by visitors and those who engage with us on line, we will make it easier for them to identify Welsh speakers, in particular with our Security service, so that Welsh can be used from the outset. A newly produced video is now being made available to all recent and new entrants to enhance awareness and their understanding of our culture, expectations, the role of their Scheme co-ordinator and how to access assistance. We intend to enhance publicity around our successes, participation in language-related initiatives and promote them externally in addition to exploiting the opportunities that lie ahead in terms of digital engagement platforms and language technology.

## **7.0 Next Stages**

- 7.1 Following the Committee's consideration of the recommendations in paragraph 2, our intention is to lay the draft Scheme before the Assembly and formally adopt it following discussion in Plenary before the summer recess.