



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: Developing a Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health and Social Services

Date: 9 March 2011

By: Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Social Services

I would like to inform Assembly Members that I have decided to develop a Strategic Framework for Welsh language services within health and social services. The Framework confirms the Government's commitment to strengthen Welsh language services to service users and their families.

As Chair of the Ministerial Task-group, established to strengthen Welsh language provision within both sectors, I am pleased to say that the situation is slowly improving. The two sectors are making efforts to respond to users' language choice and to meeting their statutory requirements. However I believe that not enough is being done to consider users' language needs as an integral part of the care planning and service delivery process.

A large number of service users are vulnerable and giving them the responsibility of asking for services through the medium of Welsh is unfair and indeed can contribute to their anxiety. It is the responsibility of the NHS and Social Services to deliver appropriate services, which of course includes meeting users' linguistic needs. Only by doing this can they provide care that is safe and effective.

The fact that most Welsh speakers can speak English, does not change the fact that they need to receive care through the medium of Welsh, so that they can express their concerns, discuss very personal issues, or express themselves effectively. It is essential that service providers understand that for

many people being able to receive services through the medium of Welsh is a care need, not just an issue of individual language choice.

Therefore I want to ensure that steps are taken by both services to ensure that language needs are mainstreamed into care plans – particularly within mental health services, learning disability services, children and older people's services.

Although progress has been made during recent years, I am conscious that much remains to be done. It is evident that services are patchy, and all too often it is a matter of luck whether service users receive care through the medium of Welsh.

In order to tackle this, the Health Minister and I have decided to develop a Strategic Framework for Welsh language services within health and social services, which will hopefully strengthen provision and ensure effective partnership working across the two sectors. The focus for the work will be on developing front line services, in order to improve the experience of users and their families.

I am very pleased that discussions with the NHS confirmed the need for a strategy and that the Association of Directors of Social Services and the WLGA support this action.

I have therefore established a Steering Group to take this work forward and in particular to:

- develop a three year strategic framework, focusing on strengthening front line services, in order to improve users experience
- review the role of the Assembly Government in ensuring the development of Welsh language services within the two sectors

The steering group is chaired by an independent person, Mr Graham Williams, and the membership drawn from the NHS, social services, a service user, partners and academia .

I have asked the group to develop the strategic framework by early next year, with a view to implementing it from April 2012 onwards.

The framework will provide a focus for the two services to look again at how they mainstream, Welsh language considerations into care planning and service delivery on a day to day basis, in order to provide effective and safe care for Welsh speaking users.

This work is very timely in view of the requirements of the new Welsh Language Measure and the new regulatory system which will be introduced by the Welsh Language Commissioner.