# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TITLE**  | **Preparing for a Welsh Language Bill** |
| **DATE**  | **31 January 2017** |
| **BY**  | **Alun Davies AM, Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language** |

The First Minister and I have already announced that it is our intention to consider amending the Welsh Language Measure 2011. The Measure gives official status for the language, establishes the Welsh Language Commissioner, creates a framework for the standards regime and gives freedom to the people of Wales to use the language. The Measure was a milestone in the history of the Welsh language, and the standards are unique and innovative minority language legislation.

Five years have elapsed since the passing of the Measure. This is the right time to consider the lessons learned to date and, where and if appropriate, to make improvements and changes. In a period of financial pressures, we must ensure that scarce public resources are used to improve Welsh language services and that any potentially bureaucratic burdens are as light as possible. Where a body has failed to meet a standard, I think it is important that the remedial regime leads to progress and improvement and not blame. We must consider whether the balance between the regulation of public services and supporting the Welsh language through activities to promote and facilitate its use is correct. It is incumbent on Welsh Ministers to use public funds in the most effective way possible in order to increase the *use* of Welsh, if we are to achieve the ambition of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

I intend to publish a White Paper for consultation on provision for a new Welsh Language Bill in sufficient time to hold a public discussion over the summer. Today, I am starting a period of early informal engagement with partners and stakeholders in order to collect initial evidence for that White Paper. The main issues I want people and bodies to consider are:

        What is your experience or opinion of the standards regime? I would like to hear in particular about the processes of setting and enforcing standards, and your experience of implementing or preparing to implement the standards within your organisation.

        The Welsh Language Commissioner’s role includes regulatory functions and responsibilities for promoting and facilitating use of the language. Is the balance right?

        What is your experience or opinion on the current arrangements for promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language. In particular I would like to hear your views on who should be responsible for promoting the Welsh language, whilst keeping in mind the confusion that may arise where a number of bodies are operating in the same field.

My officials will arrange a small number of workshops with representatives of bodies which fall under the standards regime or are about to come the standards regime.

Regardless of any improvements that may be proposed in the White Paper and in a Welsh language Bill in due course, legislation takes time to make and implement. Therefore it is important to confirm that the rolling programme of making and setting standards will continue.

Today Members of the National Assembly for Wales approved Regulations which extend the Welsh language standards to further and higher education institutions. This is another important step to ensure that quality Welsh language services are available in all parts of the public services in Wales. The purpose of the standards is to support the people of Wales to live their lives through the medium of Welsh, and I encourage everybody to take advantage of the services they guarantee. It is also another step in the direction of million of Welsh speakers.