

Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM

Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism

Welsh Government

15 March 2019

Dear Dafydd,

### **Funding support for community radio**

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee has received correspondence from community radio providers regarding their concerns that the changes to the Ofcom requirements for locally produced content have adversely affected news output in Wales.

For instance, Mike Lewis, Station Director of Radio Tircoed has written to me to say:

The announcement this week by the major commercial radio networks that locally produced shows such as those provided by Swansea Sound and The Wave will now have their local news element cutback to a bare minimum. [means] Local presenters will lose their jobs, editors and technicians will also suffer...

The Bauer Media Group that owns both The Wave and Swansea sound have no interest in the non-commercial benefits of providing these stations with any real local content. Surely this is not in line with Welsh Assembly policy.

We share their concerns, and as this topic is one we have been closely involved with for the past twelve months, I hope you will forgive the length of this letter.

### **Committee representations to Ofcom**

As a Committee we responded to Ofcom's consultation on their guidelines twice in 2018. In our second letter we wrote:

... reducing the number of approved areas is in our view likely to have a detrimental impact on some communities and lead to a greater centralisation of production. We are particularly concerned that if production moves out of rural, Welsh-speaking areas it could have a detrimental impact on the volume of Welsh language content: a matter of considerable concern for Welsh-speaking audiences who are already inadequately served by the commercial radio market.

... We continue to have concerns that as well as the economic and social impact of job losses, removing the boundary between South East and South West Wales could potentially reduce the extent to which radio stations are embedded in – and reflect – the areas to which they broadcast, leading to a further homogenisation of content.

I know that you also responded to Ofcom with similar concerns, emphasising to them that the effect of relaxing rules on local content production would have a greater impact in Wales ‘considering the weakness of the print media in Wales and the lack of coverage of Welsh affairs in UK newspapers’.

Please can you update the Committee on any representations you have made to the UK Government or Ofcom since the revised guidelines on local content have been published?

### **Community Radio Fund**

Last year we published a report on our inquiry into radio in Wales, ‘[Tuning in](#)’, in which we discussed the challenges facing community radio and the Welsh Government’s support via the Community Radio Fund. Our report said:

We noted the considerable success claimed for the Welsh Government’s Community Radio fund, which was wound up in 2013-14. We believe that the time has come to reassess this decision and to reintroduce specific funding in this area. There may also be synergies between Community Radio, hospital radio and hyperlocal news providers and any funding source might help address all areas.

We would also like the Welsh Government to publish its evaluation of the success of the previous fund, so that there is an evidence base to inform future policy and the development of a new fund.

You accepted our recommendation that the Welsh Government should ‘publish its evaluation of the Community Radio fund and, drawing on any lessons learned, consider introducing a new fund, taking account of any synergies between Community Radio and other hyperlocal news providers.’

Your [response](#) to the Committee said:

A review of the Welsh Government’s Community Radio Fund was undertaken and is already available on the Welsh Government website<sup>1</sup>...

We would need to consider any proposals to re-establish the Fund in line with other competing priorities. A compelling case would need to be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gov.wales/docs/drah/publications/120724commradiofundreviewen.pdf>

made that a new Fund would significantly add value to the availability and impact of community radio across Wales.

We understand that there are many competing priorities for funding in your portfolio. However, Committee Members agree that the severity of the impact of decisions by commercial radio providers in response to the revised localness guidelines requires mitigating action from the Welsh Government.

The Committee is agreed that we are now revising our report recommendation to say that the Welsh Government **should immediately reinstate a fund to support Community Radio.**

Your own review of the Community Radio Fund highlights the value of this funding. Among many positive conclusions, the review said:

Support from the Community Radio Fund in terms of posts and running costs enabled the stations to run effectively and focus on the delivery of the social gains to their communities required by their licences. The posts and persons recruited to fill them provided key skills and expertise to develop the stations, helped the stations to generate further on-going income, for example, from increased advertising sales, trained volunteers and established links between the stations and their local communities.

Please can you respond to our revised recommendation to reinstate a Community Radio Fund?

### **Welsh Government advertising**

In our report we also recommended ‘the Welsh Government should place more government advertising, particularly public information campaigns, with Community Radio stations and provide guidance to other public sector bodies in Wales to draw their attention to the possibilities of using the sector more.’

You accepted this recommendation and told us:

Agencies... often look for alternative ways of engaging with the community radio sector. For example, by providing information about a campaign when it launches and seeking support on air - this is the approach that has been taken for the recent Parenting. Give it Time campaign. We recognise that a potential revenue stream for the sector is not being exploited to the fullest.

The Welsh Government has commissioned its own report covering audience reach in order to establish figures for the sector. This will be re-circulated to agencies on the Welsh Government roster and both agencies and communication staff within the Welsh Government will be reminded of the need to consider ways of engaging with community radio stations to work on campaigns as appropriate. This includes thinking more

creatively about how the community radio sector can be involved in paid-for campaign work.

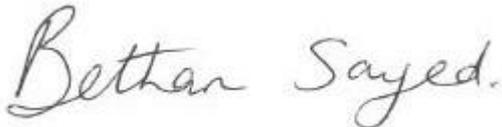
Thank you for setting out the actions the Welsh Government is taking to encourage the agencies on its roster make better use of community radio. We would like to be updated on the success of this approach.

Please can you provide the Committee with a list of the agencies which have engaged with community radio stations, a description of their engagement and the value of advertising which has been placed by the Welsh Government for the past twelve months?

I know you will agree that urgent action should be taken to support community radio in Wales. Your review of the Community Radio Fund, your written response to our inquiry and your evidence to us at our meeting on 26 April 2018, all support the conclusions we came to as to the value of Community Radio for the people of Wales.

Please can you respond to the three questions highlighted in this letter by 5 **April** so that we can inform our stakeholders who are extremely concerned about impending job losses in this sector?

Yours sincerely,



Bethan Sayed

**Chair of the Committee**

Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas AC/AM  
Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth  
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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8 April 2019

Annwyl Bethan,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 15 March in relation to radio in Wales. I will respond to the three specific questions highlighted in your letter.

***Please can you update the Committee on any representations you have made to the UK Government or Ofcom since the revised guidelines on local content have been published?***

The Welsh Government has not written to Ofcom specifically on this issue since the changes to its localness guidelines were announced in 2018. However, Ofcom was already well aware of the Welsh Government's position, which was that that we did not wish to see further relaxation or removal of the current localness rules on commercial radio. This was made clear in our evidence to the Committee's inquiry into radio in Wales, which we referred to in our response to Ofcom's draft annual plan in February this year.

On 13 March, Welsh Government officials attended Ofcom's event on the future of radio in Wales and reiterated our position. On 19 March, I met with Ofcom's Director for Wales and again made our position clear on this issue.

Ofcom Wales has noted in discussions with the Welsh Government - and in its final Annual Plan for 2019 published on 25 March - that it currently does not have the necessary powers to protect linguistic content by incorporating language specific programming obligations into licences for local television, commercial and community radio stations. This is a matter for the UK Government to consider and we would encourage it to do so.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

***Please can you respond to our revised recommendation to reinstate a Community Radio Fund?***

We naturally appreciate the challenges facing the community radio sector in Wales. We note the comments that the Committee has received from some community radio stations referring to the importance of the Welsh Government's Community Radio Fund. I am pleased that the majority of stations that received support previously have continued to broadcast. However, our position in relation to re-establishing the Fund has not changed and this would need to be considered in line with other competing priorities. A compelling case would need to be made that a new Fund would significantly add value to the availability and impact of community radio across Wales, especially as stations in Wales are already able to apply for funding from the Community Radio Fund operated by Ofcom. Ofcom Wales officials confirmed during our recent meeting that it was already publicising the availability of its fund to the relevant community radio stations and will continue to do so.

***Please can you provide the Committee with a list of the agencies which have engaged with community radio stations, a description of their engagement and the value of advertising which has been placed by the Welsh Government for the past twelve months?***

The marketing and communications agencies on the Welsh Government's Framework tender to deliver campaign work across all government portfolios. No central record is available for the total work that involves community radio stations across all the policy departments. However, recent examples include the Jobs Growth Wales campaign on Radio Cardiff, and the Superfast Broadband campaign on BGfm and GTFM.

It is planned to use community radio stations in relation to the Positive Parenting and Valleys Taskforce campaigns, and they have been identified as an advertising platform in the recently issued brief for the Minimum Alcohol Price and Organ Donation campaigns.

However, as suggested, we have already written to all agencies reminding them to include community radio stations when developing media plans for all Welsh Government campaigns. This can either be as part of the advertising mix or through suitable creative involvement of the stations, whichever is judged to provide the best audience engagement.

In addition, from now on, agencies have been asked to provide details of the engagement along with advertising value to the Framework manager. This will enable us, moving forward, to provide details and values, as you request.

We are also in the process of organising a meeting between the Welsh Government, our media buyers and the community stations to further develop relationships and opportunities.

Yours sincerely,



**Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas AC/AM**

Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth  
Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism