House of Commons
Procedure Committee

Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster

Fourth Report of Session 2016–17
Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster

Fourth Report of Session 2016–17

Report, together with appendices and formal minutes relating to the report

Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 14 December 2016
Procedure Committee

The Procedure Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider the practice and procedure of the House in the conduct of public business, and to make recommendations.

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Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 147. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee’s website at www.parliament.uk/proccom and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Martyn Atkins (Clerk), Leoni Kurt (Second Clerk), Jim Lawford (Committee Assistant), and Joanna Nurse (Media Officer).

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List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament
**Summary**

The Procedure Committee has considered a request from Susan Elan Jones MP that the Welsh language be used in the Welsh Grand Committee when that Committee meets at Westminster.

The Committee has considered this request in the context of the provision made by the House in 1996 for the use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee and by other committees of the House when meeting in Wales. This followed a Procedure Committee report which recommended a very limited derogation, in this circumstance, from the rule that the language of proceedings in the UK Parliament is English.

Subsequent Procedure Committee reports, endorsed by the House, have authorised the use of the Welsh language at meetings of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee at Westminster and its use in joint meetings between the Welsh Affairs Committee and committees of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Committee has assessed the feasibility of providing for bilingual meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster. It finds that there is no insurmountable technical bar to the use of both English and Welsh at sittings of the Committee, though additional equipment would have to be hired to allow such a sitting to take place in a Committee room. In addition to the cost of providing a simultaneous interpretation system and interpreters for each meeting, the staff cost to the House would depend on the number of staff in the Official Report team able to work in Welsh to the level required. The Committee finds that the additional outturn cost to the House of such a sitting is unlikely to be less than £1,000, but notes that the cost to the House of the most recent sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales (in October 2011) was estimated at £7,600. Additional one-off costs may also be incurred in work to enable the sound system in operation at Westminster to broadcast over two channels simultaneously.

The Welsh Affairs Committee strongly supports a modification of the 1996 regime to allow the use of Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster. Members of the Panel of Chairs, from which the chairs of the Welsh Grand Committee are drawn, are divided in their views, with more of those responding opposed to the proposal than those in favour. Against the arguments for the desirability of the use of Welsh in Grand Committee are arguments about the general accessibility of Parliamentary proceedings to all, and the desirability of debate between Members in conditions where all, including the Chair and clerk, can immediately and directly understand each other.

The Committee notes the unique status of the Welsh language in the United Kingdom. The arrangements made in 1996 reflect the provision made by the Welsh Language Act 1993 for the use of Welsh in the conduct of public business in Wales. The Committee detects no demand for the use of languages other than English or Welsh in Parliamentary proceedings at Westminster or elsewhere.

The Committee considers that the matter is one which it is proper to put to the House for a decision, on the basis of the information in the Committee’s report. The House may decide that it is content to retain the present arrangements for use of the Welsh language. Alternatively it may wish to authorise a limited extension to present arrangements to allow the use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee. Such a decision could be taken on the basis of a motion brought forward for debate in backbench time.
1 Introduction

This inquiry

1. The Committee has taken up a request by Susan Elan Jones MP to consider whether the use of the Welsh language should be permitted at sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster. Ms Jones raised the matter first at Business Questions on 14 January 2016; since then the matter has been raised in Welsh Grand Committee on 3 February 2016, at Business Questions on 9 June 2016, and in debates on the Wales Bill on 14 June and 5 July 2016.

2. In considering this matter we have been guided by a memorandum from the Clerk of the House, to which is helpfully annexed the text of three reports of predecessor committees on related matters. We have received a memorandum on the technical aspects of transcription of debate from the Editor of the Official Report, and a note from the House’s broadcasting partner, Bbowtie Television, on the provision of simultaneous interpretation facilities. We sought and received observations from the Panel of Chairs and from the Welsh Affairs Committee.
2 Use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary proceedings

The House’s decisions on use of the Welsh language

3. On 5 June 1996 the House resolved that the Welsh language should be permitted in Parliamentary proceedings held in Wales, subject to conditions laid down in the Procedure Committee’s Third Report of Session 1995–96.

4. Uniquely among minority languages in the UK, the Welsh language has a status protected by an Act of Parliament. The Welsh Language Act 1993 “[gives] effect to the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality”.

5. The House’s rules on the use of the Welsh language in its proceedings have subsequently been modified by the approval, as appropriate, of three further Procedure Committee reports (see Box 1). The present regime for the use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary proceedings is as follows:

(1) At Westminster

• *In the Chamber:* English alone may be used. Members have on occasion been allowed to use quotations from another language, but a translation must be provided.

• *In General Committees (including Grand Committees):* the rules of the Chamber apply.

• *In Select Committees:*
  - by prior arrangement, witnesses before select committees may speak Welsh in committee meetings, with simultaneous translation, and Members may question witnesses in Welsh.
  - Welsh may be used in joint meetings of the Welsh Affairs Committee and committees of the National Assembly for Wales held under Standing Order No. 137A.

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14 For an incidental use of Welsh, with translation, see for example HC Deb, 1 March 2016, col 834.
15 Erskine May (24th edition), p 429: for a recent ruling from the Chair see, for example, HC Deb, 1 March 2016, col 859.
16 Sequential interpretation is also used in select committee meetings where evidence is given in foreign languages: Appendix 2, para 8.
17 This reflects the statutory requirement on the Assembly and its committees to treat the English and Welsh languages on an equal basis.
(2) **In Wales**

- **In Grand Committees:** Members of the Welsh Grand Committee may address the Committee in Welsh, and may change from Welsh to English or *vice versa* in the course of the same speech. Simultaneous interpretation from Welsh to English is provided. The Chair has the power to insist that a Member should use one language only and that points of order shall be raised only in English.

- **In Select Committees:** The provisions of the House’s resolution relating to the use of the Welsh language in Grand Committee in Wales apply equally to all meetings of select committees in private and in public in Wales: interpretation may be used when required.

**Box 1: Procedure Committee reports on the use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary proceedings**

- *Use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary proceedings in Wales.* Third Report, Session 1995–96, HC 387. Approved by the House on 5 June 1996. Recommended an affirmation of the general principle that the House’s proceedings should be in English, and recommended the use of Welsh in proceedings in Wales subject to certain conditions.


- *Use of the Welsh language by select committee witnesses.* First Report of Session 2000–01, HC 47. Approved by the House on 5 March 2001. Allowed the use of the Welsh language by select committee witnesses at Westminster under the same conditions as apply to the use of the Welsh language in proceedings in Wales.

- *Joint activities with the National Assembly for Wales,* Third Report, Session 2003–04, HC 582. Approved by the House on 7 June 2004. Allowed the use of Welsh in joint meetings between the Welsh Affairs Committee and committees of the National Assembly under what is now Standing Order No. 137A.

**Use of the Welsh language in Welsh Grand Committee in Wales**

6. The first occasion on which Welsh was used at a sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales was on 30 June 1997 (in Mold). The Welsh Grand Committee held three further sittings in Wales before the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales on 6 May 1999. It has held two such sittings since, the most recent of which took place on 20 October 2011 (in Wrexham).
Box 2: Sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales


—First elections to the National Assembly for Wales, 6 May 1999—

Source: Appendix 2, Annex 2

Arrangements for bilingual sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales

7. Sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales generally take place in chambers made available to the Committee by a local authority. There are typically morning and afternoon sittings, with a suspension for lunch. The average total length of such a sitting, excluding suspensions, has been between four and five hours.  

8. The local authority has typically made no charge for the use of its facilities, but other expenses related to the sitting are borne by the House. For the October 2011 sitting in Wrexham (over five years ago) the total cost to the House was estimated at £7,600. This figure included sound recording and transmission, interpretation, accommodation, subsistence and travel, and a small amount of overtime, together with the costs of an earlier visit to Wrexham by staff to plan the arrangements for the meeting. It did not include Members’ travel costs (which fall to be reimbursed by IPSA) or staff salary costs that would have been incurred anyway. Simultaneous interpretation and audio-visual facilities were provided by the House’s contractor, Westminster Sonus. The figure given above included the cost to the House of hire, transportation, installation and operation of the equipment, which was £4,224. No separate figure was available for the cost of interpretation.

9. The Editor of the Official Report told us that Welsh-speaking Hansard staff attend committee sittings in Wales to log proceedings. English-speaking Hansard staff report (in English) the simultaneous translation from Welsh, which is then checked against the original Welsh by Welsh-speaking Hansard staff. Reports of proceedings are published, in English only, the following day.

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18 Appendix 2, Annex 2.
19 HC Deb, 8 November 2011, col 182W
20 Inclusive of VAT. Figure supplied by the Public Bill Office.
21 Appendix 3, para 2
3 Use of the Welsh language in Grand Committee proceedings at Westminster

Patterns of Westminster sittings

10. The Welsh Grand Committee has sat once in the present Parliament to date. In the last Parliament it sat thirteen times: twelve times at Westminster and once in Wales.

Practical feasibility

11. The memorandums from the Clerk of the House and from the Editor of the Official Report made a number of points regarding the feasibility of arrangements for bilingual sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster, which we set out in turn below.

Staffing

12. The Clerk of the House indicated that, at the time of writing, one Clerk at payband A2 happened to have the relevant procedural expertise and linguistic fluency to advise the Chair of a Grand Committee (whether fluent or not in Welsh) instantly on any issue which might arise from a speech made in the Welsh language. The Editor of the Official Report told us that Hansard employs three Welsh-speaking staff. The Clerk of the House further stated that it was by no means assured that such staff would always be available to clerk or to record bilingual sittings at Westminster, and that the default expectation of the House Service was that staff would rely on simultaneous interpretation, and that points of order and other procedural points would arise in English.

Recording and transcription of proceedings

13. The Editor of the Official Report told us that if Welsh were to be allowed in proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster, Hansard would report each contribution in Welsh as delivered, with a separate translation appended after the contribution. This would represent extra work, because each such contribution would be reported twice. Hansard would nevertheless guarantee to publish the report of proceedings within 72 hours of the sitting and would, subject to the demands of business, aim to publish earlier. Production could be speeded if relevant expertise were available in house, on loan from the Welsh Assembly Service or from specialist staff, and the cost (if any) of such assistance could be absorbed within the normal staff budget.

14. If Hansard had no Welsh-speaking staff, external suppliers would have to be contracted: given the likelihood of a Committee being convened at relatively short notice, the range of likely suppliers of services is limited. The Editor has obtained two quotes for

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22 Stg Co Deb, Welsh Grand Committee, 3 February 2016
23 Appendix 2, annex 2
24 Appendix 2, para 10
25 Appendix 3, para 4
26 Appendix 3, para 3
27 Appendix 3, para 4
the cost of transcription of a four-hour meeting in which half the proceedings (estimated at 9,000 words) would be in Welsh. Including attendance fees, transcription and translation, the estimated additional cost of a report of the contributions made in Welsh is either £1,621 (from a supplier guaranteeing a report in 72 hours) or £2,380 (from a supplier guaranteeing a report within 48 hours).28

Venue and simultaneous interpretation

15. The Clerk of the House indicates that, while the House now has, in the Attlee Suite, soundproof booths and equipment for simultaneous interpretation, this meeting room is often booked up well in advance under arrangements overseen by the Administration Committee.29 That room is in any case not generally used for House proceedings, and the inconvenience caused by disrupting existing bookings in order to schedule a meeting of a grand committee would be considerable.

16. Equipment for simultaneous interpretation would therefore be required in another room—presumably a room on the main Committee Corridor set up for meetings of general committees.30 Bowtie, the House’s broadcasting partner, has indicated that while the cost of the equipment and expertise required for simultaneous interpretation of such a meeting could only be assessed on the basis of a request for a specific quotation, costs generally vary from between £1,200 to £3,000.31 Variable factors affecting the cost are:

- The total number of receivers and headsets required for Members, officials and members of the public following proceedings;
- The number of language channels required;
- The rate charged by interpreters, and the hours of work required;
- Additional complexities, such as issues with the setup of the room or abbreviation of the time required for equipment rigging, testing and rehearsal.

17. The Clerk, in his paper, assumes that the only requirement for interpretation will be from Welsh to English, and that there will be no demand for interpretation from English to Welsh.

Audiovisual output for recording and broadcast

18. The Clerk notes that the audio infrastructure in the Palace of Westminster is mono audio, which restricts the audio recording and output from a committee room to one channel (either Welsh or English). This means that, without additional engineering and equipment, the output would either be entirely in English (original and interpretation from Welsh) or in English alternating with Welsh.32 He stresses the importance of the
broadcast record being both comprehensible and authoritative. He also notes that the
digital audiovisual record (provided through webcasting over parliamentlive.tv) cannot
readily cater for the broadcast of simultaneous interpretation over two channels.\textsuperscript{33}

**Conclusion**

19. Based on the information provided to us by the Clerk of the House and others,
we conclude that there is no insurmountable technical bar to the English and Welsh
languages both being used at sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster.

20. We appreciate that there will be an additional cost to the House arising from provision
for bilingual working. Depending on the availability of appropriately-trained Welsh-
speaking staff in the House Service and the complexity of requirements for simultaneous
interpretation equipment, these costs could range from £1,200 to £5,500 for a four-hour
sitting at Westminster. The estimated outturn of the Committee sitting in Wrexham
in October 2011 was £7,600, of which roughly £4,200 was attributable to the supply of
simultaneous interpretation equipment and services to the venue.

21. The additional cost to the House of a bilingual sitting of the Welsh Grand
Committee at Westminster will not be negligible. Even if as many costs as possible
are absorbed by existing staff budgets, and simultaneous interpretation is provided as
cheaply as possible, it is unlikely that the additional outturn cost of such a sitting will
be less than £1,000. The cost of bilingual sittings away from Westminster can, however,
be relatively high, even when no additional staff cost is entailed.

**Principle and desirability**

22. As the Clerk of the House notes, the recommendation of our predecessors in 1996 to
authorise the use of the Welsh language in certain parliamentary proceedings represented
a highly specific and limited derogation, in closely defined circumstances, to the long-
standing practice and rule that the language of parliamentary proceedings is English.

23. It is immediately apparent from the report of 1996 that our predecessors were very
wary of any derogation from the general rule being interpreted as authority for further
derogations:

\begin{quote}
If there were any suggestion that permitting a small derogation from the
broad principle that English was the language of parliamentary proceedings
would open the floodgates to further derogations, we would not contemplate
recommending to the House any change to current practice.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

That Committee was nevertheless confident that a clear distinction could and had to be
drawn between a minority language which

\begin{quote}
enjoys—as does the Welsh language in Wales—a special statutory status
and those [languages] which, however widely spoken in particular areas or
otherwise supported, do not.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Appendix 2, para 8d
\textsuperscript{34} HC (1995–96) 387, para 2
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
24. The Committee was persuaded, given the statutory provision for the use of the Welsh language in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the views expressed in an earlier debate on an expanded role for the Welsh Grand Committee and evidence given to the Committee, that the case could be made for the “narrow and constrained derogation”, and recommended accordingly.

25. The Clerk of the House observed that there has subsequently been an incremental and slow move to the position where the use of Welsh is permitted in closely defined circumstances, those circumstances being

(1) respect for the spirit of the Welsh Language Act 1993, in allowing the use of Welsh in proceedings in Wales; and

(2) the convenience of those other than Members to be able to communicate in Welsh as their preferred language when participating in select committee proceedings at Westminster.\(^\text{36}\)

26. The Clerk has offered some further observations on underlying issues of principle and practice in parliamentary proceedings:

- debate between members is evidently best undertaken where all members can immediately and directly understand each other, a situation which cannot be achieved through simultaneous interpretation;

- the Chair of a meeting, advised by a Clerk, must be able to enforce the rules of the House: any reliance on interpretation raises the risk that disorderly proceedings may arise and continue unchecked for longer than would otherwise be the case; and

- proceedings are watched and listened to by the public, in the committee room (by a handful) and remotely (by many more): if proceedings are broadcast in a form which is not immediately comprehensible to all watching and listening remotely, the House is not meeting its policies on transparency.\(^\text{37}\)

27. We consulted the Panel of Chairs and the Welsh Affairs Committee on the matter. David T. C. Davies MP, Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, indicated the Committee’s strong support for the present limited bilingual regime, which the Committee in this Parliament has used extensively in oral evidence sessions in public both in Wales and at Westminster.\(^\text{38}\) The Welsh Affairs Committee, noting the absence of an insuperable technical bar to the use of the Welsh language at Westminster, is therefore in favour of allowing the use of Welsh at sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster.

28. The Chairman of Ways and Means, reporting the views of members of the Panel of Chairs, indicated that there was no unanimous view, and that, of those who had responded to an invitation to comment, more were opposed to the proposal than in favour.\(^\text{39}\) Those opposed to the proposal raised the following concerns:

\(^{36}\) Appendix 2, para 8
\(^{37}\) Appendix 2, para 9
\(^{38}\) Appendix 5
\(^{39}\) Appendix 4
• that the principle that the language of the House was English should be observed, and that the Welsh language could be used at Grand Committee sittings in Wales;

• there was a risk that the use of a second language in debate at Westminster would set an unfortunate precedent and would lead to demands for the use of a second language on the floor of the House;

• the likely additional costs would be difficult to justify;

• delays in interpretation could hinder the Chair’s effective discharge of responsibilities; and

• there would be additional challenges for reporting and broadcasting of the sitting.

Those in favour argued that:

• no issues had arisen in the use of simultaneous translation in meetings of the Welsh Affairs Committee at Westminster; and

• the request in respect of the Welsh language was very specific, and other requests would have to be addressed on their own terms.
4 Conclusion

29. We restate unequivocally the principle that English is the language of proceedings in the House of Commons. We recognise and support the rationale for the limited derogation which successive Houses have afforded to the use of the Welsh language in parliamentary proceedings since 1996. The Welsh language has a unique statutory status, granted by an Act of the UK Parliament. There is no pressing case for an overall change to the derogation. We detect no calls for the use of other minority languages in parliamentary proceedings.

30. We have considered carefully the case for a limited modification within the regime established under the 1996 derogation: namely, to allow the use of the Welsh language in Welsh Grand Committee sittings at Westminster. We note that following the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales the frequency of sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales has diminished markedly, and the opportunities to use the Welsh language in proceedings have correspondingly been reduced.

31. We note that, even on the broad estimates we have received, on the worst case scenario the costs of bilingual sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster are likely to be less than half the cost of arranging for sittings of the Committee in Wales—though we do not include in such reckoning any one-off cost of modifications to the House’s audiovisual systems to enable simultaneous broadcasting of two audio channels.

32. Our predecessors accepted the case for a limited derogation from the universal use of English in proceedings to demonstrate a willingness to observe the spirit of the Welsh Language Act 1993 when parliamentary proceedings are taking place in Wales. Since the derogation was first granted, in 1996, the House has agreed to confer several legislative powers on the National Assembly for Wales, and subsequently agreed to confer the competence to make provision for the use of the Welsh language. The significance of enabling the Welsh Assembly to legislate for the use of the Welsh language in Wales should itself not be underestimated.

33. We consider that it is time for the House to revisit the issue of the use of Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee. The House may remain content with the current position, under which the Welsh language may only be used in the Welsh Grand Committee when it sits in Wales. Alternatively, given the unique statutory protection provided for the Welsh language in the UK, the House may consent to the use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee when it sits at Westminster.

34. We consider that it would be appropriate for the House to take a decision on the matter by considering a motion to modify the existing derogation as expressed in the Resolution of 5 June 1996, as amended. Time for such a debate could be allocated by the Backbench Business Committee, on the application of a Member or Members.

35. We make this report to the House for information and to inform any subsequent debate.
Conclusions and recommendations

Use of the Welsh language in Grand Committee proceedings at Westminster

1. Based on the information provided to us by the Clerk of the House and others, we conclude that there is no insurmountable technical bar to the English and Welsh languages both being used at sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster. (Paragraph 19)

2. The additional cost to the House of a bilingual sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster will not be negligible. Even if as many costs as possible are absorbed by existing staff budgets, and simultaneous interpretation is provided as cheaply as possible, it is unlikely that the additional outturn cost of such a sitting will be less than £1,000. The cost of bilingual sittings away from Westminster can, however, be relatively high, even when no additional staff cost is entailed. (Paragraph 21)

Conclusion

3. We restate unequivocally the principle that English is the language of proceedings in the House of Commons. We recognise and support the rationale for the limited derogation which successive Houses have afforded to the use of the Welsh language in parliamentary proceedings since 1996. The Welsh language has a unique statutory status, granted by an Act of the UK Parliament. There is no pressing case for an overall change to the derogation. We detect no calls for the use of other minority languages in parliamentary proceedings. (Paragraph 29)

4. We consider that it is time for the House to revisit the issue of the use of Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee. The House may remain content with the current position, under which the Welsh language may only be used in the Welsh Grand Committee when it sits in Wales. Alternatively, given the unique statutory protection provided for the Welsh language in the UK, the House may consent to the use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee when it sits at Westminster. (Paragraph 33)

5. We consider that it would be appropriate for the House to take a decision on the matter by considering a motion to modify the existing derogation as expressed in the Resolution of 5 June 1996, as amended. Time for such a debate could be allocated by the Backbench Business Committee, on the application of a Member or Members. (Paragraph 34)

6. We make this report to the House for information and to inform any subsequent debate. (Paragraph 35)
Appendix 1: Letter to the Chair of the Committee from Susan Elan Jones MP

During Business Questions on Thursday 14th January, I raised the issue that members of the Welsh Grand Committee are permitted to use only English when the Committee meets in Westminster. When the Committee meets in Wales, members can use either English or Welsh (and of course a translation service is provided).

You may also be aware that the House agreed in 2001 that witnesses before Select Committees are able to give evidence in Welsh.

Further to my question to the Leader of the House and in line with his suggestion, I wish to make representations directly to yourself and the Procedure Committee that the use of Welsh be permitted in sessions of the Welsh Grand Committee when that Committee meets in Westminster. This would be a common sense measure that recognises both of Wales’ official languages.

1 February 2016
Appendix 2: Memorandum from the Clerk of the House

Use of Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster

1. In May 1996 the Procedure Committee reported on the Use of the Welsh Language in Parliamentary Proceedings in Wales. This set out the longstanding rule that the language of proceedings of the House and its committees is English. As my predecessor explained in evidence, proceedings of the House must be comprehensible to all Members and must therefore be in the only language which all Members are assumed to understand. The Resolution of the House of 5 June 1996 agreeing to the Committee's proposals began with noting that “English is and should remain the language of this House”. Twenty years on, that remains the case.

Welsh Grand Committee

2. The Welsh Grand Committee comprises all Members representing Welsh constituencies, together with not more than five other Members nominated by the Committee of Selection. The quorum of the Committee is seven. Any Minister, being a Member of the House, may take part in the deliberations of the Committee and may make a motion, but may not vote or be counted in the quorum (Standing Order No. 102). Its most recent sitting was at Westminster on 3 February 2016, where the matter was raised of the ban on Members speaking Welsh in its proceedings at Westminster.

3. Each sitting of the Committee (which may be held either at Westminster or in Wales) is fixed by an order of the House setting out the date, time and location of the sitting and the business to be transacted at it. A list of Welsh Grand Committee sittings since 1997 is at Annex 2.

4. On the recommendation of a former Procedure Committee, the House gave authority for Members to address the Committee in Welsh, and to change from English to Welsh or vice versa in the course of the same speech, at sittings of the Committee in Wales, with simultaneous interpretation from Welsh to English, subject to the qualifications that the Chair should have power to insist that a Member restrict himself to one language only and, if necessary, to specify which language that should be and that points of order should be raised only in English.

5. The essential issues for the Procedure Committee are well set out in its predecessor Committee's Third Report of 1995–96 (Annex 5). That Committee was swayed by the principle of the Welsh Language Act 1993 that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality. While recognising that the Welsh Language Act 1993 did not apply to

1 Annex 5
2 CJ (1995–96) 390
3 Annex 1
6 CJ (1995–96) 390; ibid (1997–98) 459. The permission also applies to other parliamentary proceedings in Wales, such as meetings of the Welsh Affairs Committee.
Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster

parliamentary proceedings, the Procedure Committee in 1996 was persuaded that there was a good case for this very narrow and constrained derogation from the general rule to be permitted (emphasis added). A subsequent Report by a successor Committee relaxed the operation of the derogation slightly, but did not challenge the restriction of the use of Welsh to sittings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales.

Select committee witnesses at Westminster

6. In 2000, the Procedure Committee agreed to a “sensible and modest” proposal from the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee that witnesses be permitted to speak Welsh in committee meetings at Westminster, with simultaneous translation. The Committee noted such a change would—

- remove the incongruity whereby the Welsh Affairs Committee could operate in Wales in a way that it was not allowed to do at Westminster (something that was difficult to explain to witnesses);
- acknowledge the special status enjoyed by the Welsh language not only as a medium of communication but as a symbol of cultural inheritance—a status which is recognised in law (the Welsh Language Act 1993) in a way which is not the case with any other non-English language spoken in the UK; and
- remove a perverse incentive to spend public money (because under the existing rules the Committee could take evidence as it wished by choosing to meet in Wales rather than London, with the concomitant travel and subsistence costs).

7. Welsh has also been used in joint meetings of the Welsh Affairs Committee and the committees of National Assembly for Wales under Standing Order No. 137A, as the National Assembly is obliged by statute to treat the English and Welsh languages on an equal basis.

Use of Welsh: general

8. Over the past twenty years the House has thus moved incrementally and slowly from a position where English was the only language permitted to one where the use of Welsh is permitted in closely defined circumstances: where

a) parliamentary proceedings are taking place in Wales, out of respect for the spirit of the Welsh Language Act 1993:

b) it is for the convenience of those other than Members to be able to communicate in Welsh as their preferred language: ie witnesses appearing before a select committee whether at Westminster or elsewhere. In those circumstances Members may also ask questions in Welsh.

9 First Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 2000–01, HC 47, paragraph 4 (Annex 2). If simultaneous interpretation is provided to allow witnesses to speak in Welsh, then members of the Committee may also put questions in Welsh.
10 See Third Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 2003–04, HC 582, paragraph 3. No such joint meetings have yet been held at Westminster.
It should be added that evidence is quite frequently given in foreign languages to select committees, through interpreters: recent examples are the oral evidence given to the Home Affairs Committee in its inquiry into the migration crisis.\(^\text{11}\)

9. There are some underlying issues of principle and practice which the Committee might bear in mind:

   a) Debate between Members obviously proceeds best where all Members can immediately and directly understand one another: simultaneous interpretation can assist but not replicate direct communication. Set against that is the possibility that for some Members it is easier to express themselves in Welsh, and it is arguably their choice if something is lost in translation.

   b) The Chair of a debating committee has to enforce the rules of the House, advised by a Clerk: if either or both are dependent on interpretation there is a theoretical risk that disorderly proceedings may occur either unchecked or checked later than would otherwise be the case. I understand there has not to date been any such problem with Welsh Grand Committee debates in Wales where Welsh has been used.

   c) Parliamentary proceedings are recorded: until now proceedings in Welsh have been published in Hansard or as committee evidence in English, based on a transcription of the interpretation. That has not to date given rise to controversy. It is for consideration if there should not also be an official record of a speech as delivered ie in Welsh [see below].

   d) Proceedings are watched and listened to by the public. Simultaneous interpretation can be made available in the room, but not so readily on the digital AV record. Transmission of proceedings parts of which were not comprehensible to all those watching or listening remotely would not sit well with the House's policies on transparency.

   e) There is I believe no demand for reverse interpretation ie English into Welsh, nor any suggestion that Welsh should be used other than in the Welsh Grand. In that respect the current issue is very far from the introduction of a bilingual or multilingual regime in Parliament [as is common in many parliaments], or from affording Welsh equal status with English as the language of Parliament. But the Committee may wish to consider if the small further relaxation sought has implications for, or unintended consequences on, other parliamentary proceedings.

**Staff**

10. We currently have one senior Clerk who has both the procedural expertise and the linguistic fluency to advise the Chair on anything that might arise instantly on a speech made in the Welsh language, and two Hansard reporters who have the necessary fluency in Welsh to report speeches given in Welsh. It is by no means a given that these staff would always be available to clerk or record meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster. Our default expectation is therefore that staff would rely on simultaneous interpretation, and that procedural points would be raised in English.

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\(^{11}\) HC 427: evidence from the Mayor and Deputy Mayors of Calais (in French) on 8 September 2015, and from parliamentarians from Italy (in Italian) and Hungary (in Hungarian) on 26 January 2016.
Transcript in Welsh

11. The Editor of the Official Report could give the Procedure Committee more detailed evidence on the practicalities and costs of producing a verbatim transcript of what is said in Welsh, alongside a translation of those remarks into English. I understand from him that it could lead to some delay in production; require some minor technical adaptations to deal with accents; and involve slight additional cost. One possibility might be to make an arrangement with the National Assembly for assistance with either transcription or translation or both, drawing on their expertise and technical skills. If Welsh were allowed as a language of debate at Westminster I would be more comfortable if the formal record of proceedings were published in both the language as delivered [Welsh] and in English, with the oral simultaneous translation merely an interim aid to debate. That need not of itself require identical arrangements for select committee evidence.

Cost of interpretation and equipment

12. The Attlee Suite in Portcullis House is currently the only meeting room on the estate permanently equipped with sound-proof booths for interpreters. Under arrangements overseen by the Administration Committee, the Attlee Suite is booked up for large events many weeks in advance. As Welsh Grand Committee meetings are scheduled at relatively short notice, it would presumably be prohibitively disruptive to grant the Welsh Grand Committee precedence over booked events in the Attlee Suite, and it is not generally used for parliamentary proceedings. The House’s broadcasting contractor Bowtie has offered an approximate estimate of £3000 for the overall cost of providing simultaneous translation in another room, subject to the caveat that more work would be needed on the detailed costs. A more accurate costing exercise would need to be the subject of a formal quotation.

AV output

13. One issue which needs consideration is that the audio infrastructure in Parliament is mono audio. This means that the room output and recording would, without involving additional engineering and equipment, be provided in either English or Welsh. It would plainly be important that whatever was broadcast was both comprehensible and authoritative. That need not of course affect the decision in principle to be made by the Committee.

Conclusion

14. To extend the permission for Members to speak Welsh in proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee to proceedings at Westminster may seem a small step, but the Procedure Committee will be sensitive to any wider implications of extending to the Welsh language a marginally more formal status in parliamentary proceedings than it currently enjoys.

David Natzler
Clerk of the House
March 2016

Annex 1: Extracts from Hansard

14 January 2016: Business Questions columns 1016–1017

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Welsh Grand Committee meets from time to time. Indeed, I think he appeared in front of it in Wrexham once. He will therefore be aware that any time the Committee meets in Wales, its members may make representations and speak in either English or Welsh. However, when the Committee meets in a Committee Room in this place, its members are permitted to use only English. In view of the fact that there are two official languages in Wales, and that we have a Welsh Grand Committee coming up on 3 February, will the right hon. Gentleman make a commitment that all its members may use either English or Welsh?

Chris Grayling: I will not give the hon. Lady a commitment about that, but she makes a serious point and I will take a look at it. Clearly it is important that that happens in Wales, and I was not aware that it was not possible in this building. I will go and take a look at that for her.

3 February 2016 (morning) Welsh Grand Committee column 3 [Albert Owen in the Chair]

Draft Wales Bill

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Owen. A fortnight ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South raised in the Chamber the issue of the languages permitted in Grand Committee. She rightly pointed out that when this Committee meets in Wales, we can use either of the two beautiful languages of Wales. The Leader of the House said he was unaware that we are confined to one language when we meet in Westminster and said it was a serious point. Have you had any information from the Leader of the House on which languages will be permitted today?

The Chair: The hon. Member knows I have sympathy with the point he raises, but I have had advice that London is not in Wales and the rules have not changed, so the language of this Committee will be English. If Members wish to mention Welsh names or use Welsh phrases, I ask that they do so in English to follow. That is the ruling on the use of the Welsh language.
## Annex 2: Meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Business and matters considered</th>
<th>No. attending¹</th>
<th>Start time/s</th>
<th>End time/s</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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\(^1\) Includes Chair
\(^2\) Sitting suspended because of bomb scare
\(^3\) Technical problem with electricity supply resulting in translation service temporarily suspended
\(^4\) Includes time for suspension for divisions in the House (Hansard)
\(^5\) Includes time for suspension for division in the House
\(^6\) Includes time for suspension for division in the House
\(^7\) Includes time for suspension for division in the House
\(^8\) Includes time for suspension for division in the House
Annex 3: First Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 2000–01, HC 47

The Procedure Committee has agreed to the following Report:—

USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE BY SELECT COMMITTEE WITNESSES

1. In 1996 our predecessor Committee inquired into the use of the Welsh language in parliamentary proceedings in Wales. Its ensuing report noted that the Welsh Affairs Committee had, as long ago as 1981, agreed guidelines to govern the taking of evidence in Welsh at public oral evidence sessions in Wales. Our predecessors endorsed those guidelines, in an amended form, as a basis for any future select committee proceedings in Wales at which Welsh might be used. They further recommended that members of the Welsh Grand Committee should be entitled to address the Committee in Welsh at any meeting of the Committee in Wales; and that simultaneous translation facilities be provided where necessary both for the Welsh Grand and for select committees. These recommendations were approved by the House on 5th June 1996, in the following terms:

That, whilst English is and should remain the language of this House, the use of Welsh be permitted in parliamentary proceedings held in Wales, subject to the conditions set out in the Third Report from the Select Committee on Procedure, Session 1995–96 (House of Commons Paper No. 387).

2. In February 1998 we produced a short report which recommended a variation in the conditions approved by the House, to allow Members to change languages in the course of a speech. This report was approved by the House on 20 March 1998.

3. Hitherto the use of Welsh has only been permitted in parliamentary proceedings within Wales. The Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Mr Martyn Jones MP, has written to us urging that the rules be changed to permit witnesses to speak Welsh in committee meetings at Westminster also, with simultaneous translation. Mr Jones did not consider that his committee would seek to make extensive use of this facility, but he felt it important that first-language Welsh-speakers should be able to use Welsh if they choose either because they feel more comfortable speaking in that language or simply out of pride in the language. He noted that “the current Welsh Language Act was enacted in 1993, and the advent of devolution has given considerable impetus to bilingualism in public affairs even where the provision of Welsh is not a strict legal requirement”.

4. We have given careful consideration to this matter, and believe that Mr Jones has advanced a sensible and modest proposal which should be adopted. We note the following arguments in favour of doing so:—

a) it would remove the incongruity whereby the Welsh Affairs Committee can operate in Wales in a way that it is not allowed to do at Westminster (something that is difficult to explain to witnesses);

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2 Ibid., para 12
3 Ibid., para 13
5 Mr Jones’s letter is printed below as Appendix 1
b) it would acknowledge the special status enjoyed by the Welsh language not only as a medium of communication but as a symbol of cultural inheritance—a status which is recognised in law (the Welsh Language Act 1993) in a way which is not the case with any other non-English language spoken in the UK; and

c) it would remove a perverse incentive to spend public money (because under the existing rules the Committee can take evidence as it wishes by choosing to meet in Wales rather than London, with the concomitant travel and subsistence costs).

5. We sought advice from the Clerk of Committees on the likely costs of providing simultaneous translation at Westminster. This information is given in a note appended to this report. We consider that these are costs which could reasonably be borne by the House in the same way that it bears the costs of other support services for select committees. We also note the point made by the Clerk of Committees, that since the opening of Portcullis House, the House now has dedicated facilities for simultaneous translation which were lacking before.

6. For these reasons we recommend that the House should approve the use of Welsh by select committee witnesses at Westminster, subject to the same conditions as those previously approved by the House in relation to proceedings in Wales.

7. When our successors in the next Parliament review the subject of the procedural consequences of devolution (following up our report made last year), we believe that it would be valuable for them to investigate how the fully bilingual policy adopted by the National Assembly for Wales has worked in practice, and whether there are any implications or lessons for practice at Westminster.

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6 Appendix 2.


FIRST REPORT

The Procedure Committee has agreed to the following Report:-

Use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary Proceedings in Wales

Origin of inquiry

1. On 1st May 1996 our predecessor Committee approved a Report setting out the rules to be observed for the use of the Welsh language at meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales. The most significant of these was that Members should restrict themselves to one language in the course of any one speech, question or intervention. The reason for this restriction was the perceived risk that the problems of attempting subsequently to piece together a mixture of English and Welsh translation without transposing text could cast significant doubt on the ability of staff of the Official Report to produce an accurate report of proceedings.

2. The Welsh Grand Committee met in Wales for the first time at Mold on 30 June 1997. The opportunity to speak in Welsh was widely welcomed, but the view was also expressed that the rule referred to above acted as an undue constraint on Members. The Leader of the House subsequently suggested amending the rule to allow Members to change from one language to another not more than twice in the course of a speech, so that they could (for example) begin in Welsh, continue in English and conclude in Welsh. We agreed to undertake a short inquiry into the practicability of this suggestion.

3. We wrote to all members of the Welsh Grand Committee asking for their views on the proposed change, to the Editor of the Official Report, and to the Shorthand Writer. We then took oral evidence from Rt Hon Barry Jones, MP, Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee, accompanied by Mr Paul Silk, Clerk of the Committee, and from Mr Ian Church, Editor of the Official Report, accompanied by Lorraine Sutherland, Assistant Editor in charge of proceedings at Mold.

Changing language during the course of a speech

4. We received 19 replies to our letter to members of the Welsh Grand Committee. All but one supported the amendment. Three replies suggested that no restriction was needed on the number of times a Member changed from one language to another in the course of a speech, citing the practice in local government in Wales. This raised the possibility of changing the rule to a greater extent than suggested by the Leader of the House in her original letter to us and allowing Members to change from one language to another as and when they wished.

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2 ibid, para 8(b)
3 ibid, Appendix 5, p.xxviii, para 9.
4 Ev. p. 10.
5. In his reply to our original letter, the Editor of the Official Report expressed the opinion that, following experience of the meeting of the Committee in Mold, his staff would be able to cope quite adequately with the change as proposed, provided that the standard of interpretation did not fall below that which was available at Mold. When it was put to him in the course of questioning before the Committee that the rule might be further relaxed so as to allow Members to change from one language to another as many times as they wished, he was able to confirm that, subject to the same caveat as regards the standard of interpretation, such greater flexibility would not impair the ability of his staff to produce an accurate report of proceedings. Ms Sutherland agreed with this. Neither the Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee, nor the Clerk, could see any objection to this greater flexibility being permitted. We therefore recommend that, subject to the conditions set out below, there be no restriction on the use of Welsh in proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales.

**Power of the Chair to direct a Member to use English**

6. At present, the Chair is “empowered to direct any Member to address the Chair in English so that there can be direct communication between the Chair and a Member, particularly where the maintenance of order is concerned”. The Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee suggested that the Chair might be given discretion to require a Member to use one language only, to be used if a Member was trying to disrupt the work of the Committee by swapping languages every few words. We think it unlikely that our recommendation above, if accepted by the House, would be abused in order to disrupt the Committee’s proceedings. However, in order to ensure the good maintenance of order in the Committee at all times, we recommend that the Chairman should have power to insist that a Member restrict himself or herself to one language only, and furthermore, if necessary, to specify which language that should be.

**Interventions**

7. One of the members of the Welsh Grand Committee, in his response to our letter, felt that interventions on non-Welsh speakers such as himself should only be taken in English. Whilst making a speech in English, Members would not necessarily be wearing their headphones, and there is thus some potential for confusion. The Chairman of the Welsh Grand Committee said that, should such a situation occur, he would expect a Member to be able to field the translation of the intervention quite adequately. However, he would be surprised if such a situation arose. Firstly, Members needed to make their point clearly not just within the confines of the Committee, but also beyond. Secondly, good manners would normally suggest that interventions should not be made on a Member in a language in which he or she is not fluent. We agree. If a Member were so discourteous as to intervene

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5 Ev. p. 6.
6 Qq.33, 34, 54, 55, 56, 60.
7 Q.35.
8 Qq.4, 5, 6, 7.
9 HC 387, para 8(c).
10 Q.28.
12 Qq.46, 47, 48.
13 Qq.25, 26, 27.
repeatedly in Welsh when it was inappropriate to do so, we trust that the Chairman would use the powers to direct the use of one language only that we have recommended in paragraph 6 above to require him or her to make the intervention in English.

**Points of order, &c.**

8. We wish to reiterate the rules that points of order and communications with the staff of the Committee should be in English, in order to ensure the smoothest possible running of the Committee.\(^{14}\) We also wish to remind Members of the requirements to give notice of their intention to speak in Welsh, at the latest when called to speak or to put a question, and to table motions and written questions in English.

**Resources**

9. We note that the additional cost arising from the bilingual nature of proceedings at Mold falls well within the amount envisaged by the Clerk of the House in his memorandum to our predecessor Committee in the course of the original inquiry.\(^{15}\) We have been assured that the change in the rules recommended in this Report would not have any cost implications for meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales.\(^{16}\)

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

a) We recommend that there be no restriction on the use of Welsh in proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales, subject to the conditions set out below (paragraph 5).

b) We recommend that the Chairman should have power to insist that a Member restrict himself or herself to one language only, and, if necessary, to specify which language that should be (paragraph 6).

\(^{14}\) Q.28.

\(^{15}\) Ev. p. 5; HC 387, 1995–96, Appendix 8, para 10, p.xxxiii.

\(^{16}\) Qq.58, 59.

Use of the Welsh language in Parliamentary proceedings in Wales

The Procedure Committee has agreed to the following Report:

Origin of inquiry

1. On 11th March 1996 the House gave its approval to new Standing Orders for the Welsh Grand Committee, providing for an expanded role for the Committee. In the course of debate, the view was expressed by a number of Members that speeches in Welsh should be permitted in the Welsh Grand Committee at meetings in Wales. The Leader of the House suggested that the appropriate course would be to ask the Procedure Committee to consider the matter. In subsequent correspondence with the Committee, he emphasised that it was a matter for the House to decide, and that he would give the House an opportunity to take a decision on the basis of a Committee Report. The Shadow Leader of the House supported the proposal that the use of the Welsh language in the proceedings of the Welsh Grand Committee in Wales should be permitted, as did the Chairman of that Committee. We agreed to undertake a swift inquiry, and to expand the subject under consideration to include all parliamentary proceedings in Wales.

2. It should be emphasised that the language of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is English: it has been English for many centuries: and it should in our view remain English. As the Clerk of the House put it in his memorandum, the principle is that—

“any proceedings of the House must be comprehensible to all Members, and must therefore be in the only language all Members are assumed to understand.”

Powerful grounds of public policy must be adduced to justify any derogation from this principle: and no derogation so made should be seen as undermining the basic principle. Were the House to agree to the proposals we set out below for the use of the Welsh language in some parliamentary proceedings in Wales, that could lead eventually to similar demands from those speaking other minority languages, and for demands for Welsh to be permitted at Westminster. But we are confident that a clear distinction can and must be drawn between a minority language which enjoys— as does the Welsh language in Wales — a special statutory status, and those which, however widely spoken in particular areas or otherwise supported, do not. If there were any suggestion that permitting a small derogation from the broad principle that English was the language of parliamentary proceedings would open the floodgates to further derogations, we would not contemplate recommending to the House any change to current practice.

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2 Appendices I and 2, p.xxvi.
3 Appendix 3, p.xxvi: Appendix 4, p.xxvii.
4 Appendix 5, p.xxxii, para 4. For details of past and current practice, see ibid, paras 3 and 16.
Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster

Welsh Language Act 1993

3. The special status of the Welsh language in Wales is enshrined in the Welsh Language Act 1993. It should be noted that the Act does not apply to parliamentary proceedings. Nor does the Act, as is sometimes implied, establish a general principle of equality of status for the two languages, a practice foreign to our law. The Act laid an obligation on specified public bodies to prepare schemes giving effect to the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality, and gave the Welsh Language Board the statutory duty of advising on ways in which effect must be given to that principle. Finally, it may be observed that the schemes to be prepared are to give effect to the principle of equality “so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable.” Should the House decide not to alter its long-standing practice of conducting parliamentary proceedings exclusively in English, wherever they may be held, it need not fear being in breach of any statutory requirement.

General principle

4. As a general principle, we would recommend changes to the long-standing practice of the House only on very good grounds, particularly in such a fundamental matter as the language of proceedings. Having considered the terms of the Welsh Language Act 1993, however, and in the light of the views expressed in the debate on 11th March and in evidence to us, we are persuaded that there is a good case for this very narrow and constrained derogation from the general rule to be permitted. We recommend accordingly that the use of the Welsh language be permitted in parliamentary proceedings in Wales’ subject to the conditions set out below. At the same time, we would welcome the affirmation in a formal Resolution of the House of the general principle that parliamentary proceedings should be in English.

Welsh Grand Committee

Provision of interpretation

5. If the Welsh language is to be used, it is evident that simultaneous interpretation into English will have to be provided, for the benefit of the Chairman, Members of the Committee, officers of the Committee and the staff of the Official Report, and, subject to additional expenditure required being within reasonable limits, to the public. The permanent facilities required for such a service are not as widespread as may be believed, although the Welsh Language Board has stated that “many of the new county authorities are currently considering the provision of permanent facilities as part of their Welsh language schemes.” High quality portable equipment, including earphones, can however readily be hired. The Clerk of the House has advised us that costs of around £2,500 could be anticipated for a typical sitting. On the assumption that only a handful of such sittings each year are envisaged, expenditure on this scale is not excessive.

6. We have considered whether it would be acceptable for the Welsh Grand Committee to meet in Wales in a place where simultaneous interpretation was not available, if, for

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5 Section 5(2).
6 Appendix 9, p.xxxv.
7 Appendix 8, p.xxxiii, para.10.
example, that were explicitly agreed to by the House when asked to agree to a proposed place and time of meeting under Standing Order No. 98G. We consider that Members should be entitled to address the Committee in Welsh at any meeting of the Committee in Wales. Simultaneous interpretation facilities will therefore have to be provided.

7. Interpretation would be from Welsh into English. The Welsh Language Board confirmed in evidence that—

“simultaneous interpretation from English into Welsh is not normally provided, as nearly all Welsh speakers can understand English sufficiently well to follow the proceedings completely.”

We recommend that interpretation be provided only from Welsh to English.

Rules of debate &c.

8. We recommend that the right of Members to address the Committee in the Welsh language be subject to the following conditions—

a) any Members proposing to speak in Welsh should give the Chairman notice in English of their intention to do so, at the latest when called to speak or to put a question; earlier notice would however obviously be helpful to the Chair and all concerned;

b) that Members should restrict themselves to one language in the course of any one speech, question or intervention;

c) that points of order should be raised only in English; the Chairman should be empowered to direct any Member to address the Chair in English so that there can be direct communication between the Chair and a Member particularly where the maintenance of order is concerned; and that all communications with parliamentary officers and staff attending the Committee should be in English.

Privilege

9. The oral interpretation rendered into English of proceedings in Welsh, subsequently transcribed by the Official Report and duly published, will have to be accepted as parliamentary proceedings in every respect. Any response by a non-Welsh speaking Member to what has been said in Welsh will of course be to the interpretation rather than the original words. We would regard the English interpretation of proceedings in Welsh, if
done in good faith as part of proceedings in Parliament and so protected in full by the Bill of Rights.\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, such interpretation should have status equal to that of a Member’s own words for the purposes of the terms under which the Official Report operates.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Papers}

10. There is no need for the production of a Welsh language version of the Order Paper for the Welsh Grand Committee, nor for the official production of a Welsh language Official Report of proceedings. Both the Order Paper and the Official Report are House of Commons papers and designed to be accessible to all Members of the House.\textsuperscript{16} Should some outside body wish to produce Welsh language versions of these documents, however, there is no reason why they should not approach the appropriate House authorities.

\textbf{Official Report}

11. There is no doubt that the introduction of the use of Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee will create particular practical problems for the Official Report. The memorandum from the Editor sets these out and proposes solutions. The House will have to accept that the quality of reported speech will suffer from interpretation, and that the scope for disagreement over the text is enhanced when “the intermediate process of translation is introduced”.\textsuperscript{17} There will also be a 2-hour delay in the normal timetable for publication of the proceedings of a sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee, to allow for the process of validating, in the event of any controversy, the text of speeches originally given in Welsh. We recommend that the Official Report be allocated sufficient contingency funds to enable it to use the occasional services of a Welsh speaker for the validation of the recorded interpretation against the Welsh original, in the event of dispute.

\textbf{Select committees}

12. Select Committees, principally but not exclusively the Welsh Affairs Committee, have in the past held public oral evidence sessions in Wales, and are of course likely to do so in future. In advance of evidence sessions held in the Gwynedd Council Chamber in Caernarfon in February 1981, during which evidence was heard in Welsh, the Welsh Affairs Committee agreed arrangements for the use of the Welsh language in such proceedings.\textsuperscript{18} We consider that these-guidelines could form the basis of any future Select Committee proceedings in Wales at which Welsh might be used, subject to several amendments and clarifications as below:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[a)] Each Select Committee proposing to hold an evidence session in Wales should decide in advance whether or not it is willing to hear oral evidence in Welsh, the presumption being in favour of the use of Welsh by those witnesses who so wish;
  \item[b)] Where a Committee has resolved to permit evidence to be given in Welsh, we consider that the necessary facilities should be provided without requirement for special authorisation;
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{14} See Appendix 8, p.xxxiii, para 13.
\textsuperscript{15} Appendix 5, p.xxvii, para 1(ii) and paras 3–5.
\textsuperscript{16} Appendix 8, p.xxxiii, paras 7 and 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Appendix 5, p.xxvii, para 4.
\textsuperscript{18} See Appendix 7, p.xxix.
c) Translation should be by simultaneous interpretation, rather than consecutive interpretation as in the past. The Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee pointed out that “part of the reason for taking evidence away from Westminster is to hear people in their working environment or in a setting that is directly relevant to the inquiry…” Such locations will of course be fitted with simultaneous translation facilities; but portable equipment can readily be hired.

d) Witnesses and Members should give notice of their intention to speak in Welsh.

e) Witnesses and Members should give notice of their intention to speak in Welsh, the former on the basis of advance inquiry by the Committee, and should not thereafter switch from one language to another except as directed by the Chairman.

f) Members should be permitted to put Questions in Welsh only where simultaneous interpretation facilities are already provided because of Welsh-speaking witnesses.

g) The transcript taken by the shorthand writer will be of the interpretation; there will have to be a tape recording made of the original welsh language evidence for verification when necessary.

h) It should be clearly understood that Members should use English in private deliberation in Committee.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

13. English is and should remain the language of the House of Commons: we would welcome the affirmation of this general principle in a formal Resolution of the House;

a) In the light of the views expressed in the House in the debate on 11th March 1996 and in evidence to us, and the principle enshrined in the Welsh Language Act 1993 that the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality in the conduct of public business in Wales, we recommend that the use of the Welsh language be permitted in parliamentary proceedings held in Wales;

b) Members should be entitled to address the Welsh Grand Committee in Welsh at any meeting of the Committee in Wales, subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 8;

c) Any Select Committee proposing to hold an oral evidence session in Wales should decide in advance if it is willing to hear oral evidence in Welsh, such evidence sessions to be subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 12;

d) Simultaneous interpretation from Welsh to English should be provided for the Welsh Grand Committee and Select Committees; the Official Report and the Shorthand writer may require the occasional services of a Welsh speaker for purposes of verification.
Appendix 3: Memorandum from the Editor of Hansard

1. This note describes current practice in reporting Welsh language contributions to the Welsh Grand Committee and outlines future practice if the change to allowing Welsh at Westminster is made, including estimates of the cost if Hansard had no Welsh-speaking staff.

2. Welsh has hitherto been allowed only in Welsh Grand Committee meetings held in Wales. Welsh-speaking staff attend the committee sitting to log proceedings. English-speaking Hansard staff report the simultaneous translation, which is then checked against the original Welsh by Welsh-speaking Hansard staff. This process slows production, but not significantly. Reports are published next day.

3. If the change to allowing Welsh in Westminster meetings is made, we will report speeches made in Welsh in Welsh, with a translation appended after each such contribution. This represents considerable extra work because each Welsh contribution effectively has to be reported twice, once in the original language and then again in translation.

4. Hansard currently employs three Welsh-speaking staff. The WGC typically sits for four hours in two sessions. If half the contributions were in Welsh, that would create an additional two hours of translation to be done after transcription and only those three staff could do that work. Hansard can guarantee publication within 72 hours, the same time frame as for the production of Select Committee oral evidence, but would still aim to publish earlier than that, depending on the volume of other business being handled and the amount of Welsh spoken.

5. Assistance from the Welsh Assembly or from other Welsh-speaking House staff could help speed production. It would be useful to agree a memorandum of understanding with the Assembly if the change is made and it was willing to provide such assistance. It may also be possible to hire suitably qualified specialist staff who could be fitted into existing production systems for a day or two. Any cost involved would be small and could be absorbed in the normal staff budget.

6. If Hansard had no Welsh-speaking staff, it would be necessary to employ specialist external transcription/translation services. Few such organisations offer both services and are robust enough to cope with the relatively short notice of WGC sittings. Ballpark figures for the cost of a four-hour sitting have been obtained from two organisations:

   Supplier A: £300 per audio hour of transcription and £120 per 1,000 words translation. Turn around time 48 hours.

   Supplier B: £180 per audio hour of transcription and £89 per 1,000 words translation. Turn around time 72 hours.

   If half the proceedings were in Welsh, the word count would be about 9,000. Suppliers would also charge an attendance fee of about £100 to come to log the proceedings. The cost per four-hour meeting would therefore be £2,380 with Supplier A and £1,621 with Supplier B. This does not include the cost of simultaneous translation on the day.
7. Work is under way to enable production and publication systems to handle the common Welsh accented letters ŷ and ŵ automatically. This work will be completed as part of a BAU upgrade to existing systems.

8. Hansard could certainly cope with reporting proceedings in Welsh, either through its own resources or by contracting appropriate external providers.

Alex Newton

Editor, House of Commons Hansard

December 2016
Appendix 4: Letter from the Chairman of Ways and Means, Rt Hon Lindsay Hoyle MP

Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee sitting at Westminster

Thank you for your letter of 26 May. I have, as you requested, sought the views of the Panel on the use of the Welsh language in Welsh Grand Committees at Westminster. I think it would be fair to say that there is no unanimous view among Panel members. The majority of Members who responded to my request were against the proposal. However, a smaller group of Members were in favour.

The objections to the use of Welsh in Welsh Grand Committees held at Westminster were on the grounds of principle and practicalities. Members commented that the House had agreed that its language was English and this principle should be observed. They noted that this differentiated Welsh Grand Committees held in the UK Parliament from those held in Wales, where a bi-lingual approach had been agreed. It was argued that the use of Welsh in Welsh Grand Committees at Westminster would set an unwelcome precedent and open the House up to the use of other languages, or to the use of Welsh in other circumstances (for examples Welsh Questions on the Floor of the House). The feeling among those Members who were against the proposal was that the cost and complexity of the practical arrangements would be difficult to justify, although it was noted that further information about costs and workload would be required in order to make a fully informed decision on this point. One Member noted that the proposal would require the use not only of simultaneous translation in the room for Members, staff and the public, but subtitles or translation for any broadcast version of the meeting. The challenge presented to Hansard was also cited. The practicalities of chairing a debate taking place in Welsh or partly in Welsh were also discussed. While it was noted that translation could assist this, it was also observed that there could be delays and that translation was not the same as understanding directly what was being said.

The smaller group of Members who viewed the proposal favourably noted that Welsh can already be used in the Welsh Affairs Committee at Westminster and that simultaneous translation is provided in these circumstances without any issues occurring. One Member noted that the request was quite specific: for Welsh to be used in the Welsh Grand Committee. This Member argued that if there were comparable requests for the Scottish or Northern Ireland Grand Committees, they could be judged on their own merit. The same Member commented that the issue was about the use of UK languages in the UK Parliament on separate national Grand Committees only and that EVEL had “reduced the role of these nations’ MPs in law-making terms” so the proposal would go “some way in understanding and balancing the differences that EVEL has highlighted”.

You also asked about my personal view. While I have sympathy with colleagues who wish to use Welsh, I have to reflect the views of the Panel, as it is they who chair the Committees, rather than myself.
I hope this summary is useful, but please do let me know if you have further specific questions or I can be of any further assistance to your inquiry.

Rt Hon. Lindsay Hoyle

Chairman of Ways and Means and Deputy Speaker

14 June 2016
Appendix 5: Letter from the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, David T. C. Davies MP

Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee sitting at Westminster

Thank you for your letter dated 26 May 2016. The Welsh Affairs Committee considered your letter at its meeting on Monday, and have asked me to reply.

As you will be aware, in 2000, the Procedure Committee agreed to a “sensible and modest” proposal from one of my predecessors that witnesses be permitted to speak Welsh in select committee meetings at Westminster, with simultaneous translation. This extended the arrangements in place since 1996, whereby Welsh could be spoken in parliamentary proceedings, but only if they took place in Wales.

Our Committee has made use of the ability to conduct proceedings in Welsh. During our recent inquiry into Broadcasting in Wales, the first evidence session was conducted bilingually in Westminster. This was the first Welsh language evidence session this Parliament and we have since taken evidence bilingually, both in Westminster and in Wales. We welcome this practice, and recognise the importance of being able to receive evidence in either Welsh or English. It is with this context that the Committee considered your letter.

At our meeting on Monday, the Committee were in agreement that the use of Welsh should be permitted in the Welsh Grand Committee, when it is sitting at Westminster. We were also reassured by the third paragraph of your letter, that the Clerk of the House has confirmed “there is no insuperable bar … to the use of a second language in a Grand Committee”. I hope that this reply will help to inform the work of your Committee.

David T. C. Davies MP

Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee

8 June 2016
Formal Minutes

Wednesday 14 December 2016

Members present:

Mr Charles Walker, in the Chair
Bob Blackman Helen Goodman
Jenny Chapman Patrick Grady
Nic Dakin Sir Edward Leigh
James Duddridge Mr David Nuttall
Patricia Gibson

Draft Report (Use of the Welsh language in the Welsh Grand Committee at Westminster), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 35 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Several papers were ordered to be appended to the Report as Appendices 1 to 5.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 11 January 2017 at 2.30 pm.]
## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government’s response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2015–16

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<td>Second Report</td>
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<td>(HC 383)</td>
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<td>Fourth Report</td>
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