



Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

Investigation under Section 17 of the Welsh Language Act 1993

Cabinet Office

The Welsh Language Commissioner's report and recommendations issued
under section 19 of the Welsh Language Act 1993

Reference YCI002



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Background

The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner, an independent body established by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. This entails raising awareness of the official status of the Welsh language in Wales by imposing standards on organisations and reviewing and investigating compliance with the Measure and the Welsh Language Act 1993. This, in turn, will lead to the establishment of rights for Welsh speakers.

Two principles will underpin the work:

- In Wales, the Welsh language should be treated no less favourably than the English language
- Persons in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of the Welsh language if they choose to do so

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Foreword

This investigation report is issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner (the Commissioner) in accordance with section 19 of the Welsh Language Act 1993 (the Act) following the transferral of relevant functions under the Act to the Commissioner through a series of statutory instruments.

Part II Welsh Language Act 1993

○ Compliance with schemes – Investigations

An investigation is held into the possible failure of a public body to implement its language scheme under section 17 of the Act:

17.- (1) Where it appears to the Board¹, whether on a complaint made to it under section 18 below or otherwise, that a public body may have failed to carry out a scheme approved by the Board, the Board may conduct an investigation in order to ascertain whether there has been a failure.

(2) The procedure for conducting an investigation under this section shall be such as the Board considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case, and in particular an investigation may be conducted in private.

○ Compliance with schemes – Complaints of non-compliance

Section 18 of the Act applies when an individual submits a complaint regarding a public body's failure to implement its language scheme:

18. – (1) This section applies where –

(a) a written complaint is made to the Board by a person who claims to have been directly affected by a failure of a public body to carry out a scheme approved by the Board,

(b) the complaint is made within the period of twelve months beginning with the day on which the complainant first knew of the matters alleged in the complaint, and

(c) the Board is satisfied that the complainant has brought the matter complained of to the notice of the public body concerned and that that body has had a reasonable opportunity to consider it and to respond.

(2) Where this section applies, the Board shall either investigate that complaint under section 17 above or shall send to the complainant a statement of its reasons for not doing so.

¹ The Welsh Language Board was abolished on 31 March 2012 and investigatory power was transferred to the Welsh Language Commissioner on 1 April 2012. Any reference to the Board in this foreword equates to a reference to the Commissioner.

○ Compliance with schemes – Reports on investigations

A report is to be produced under section 19 of the Act based on the findings of the investigation:

19. – Where the Board undertakes an investigation under section 1, above, it shall send a report of the results of the investigation to the public body concerned, to the Secretary of State² and, where the investigation is conducted on a complaint made under section 17 above, to the complainant.

(2) Where the Board considers that it would be appropriate for a report of the results of an investigation to be published, either in the form of the report made under subsection (1) above or in some other form, the Board may arrange for publication in such manner as it thinks fit.

(3) Where on completing an investigation the Board is satisfied that the public body concerned has failed to carry out the scheme, the Board may include in its report recommendations as to action to be taken by the public body in order to remedy the failure or to avoid future failures.

○ Compliance with schemes – Directions by Secretary of State

If, following the publication of a report, the Commissioner believes that a public body has failed to implement the actions recommended by the Commissioner, the Commissioner may refer the matter to the Minister responsible for the Welsh language:

20. – If at any time it appears to the Board that a public body has failed to take any action recommended in a report under section 1 above, the Board may refer the matter to the Secretary of State.

(2) If on a reference under this section the Secretary of State is satisfied, after considering any representations made to him by the Board and by the public body concerned, that the body has failed to take any action recommended in the report, he may give such directions to the public body as he considers appropriate.

(3) Any directions given by the Secretary of State under subsection (2) above shall be enforceable, on an application made by him, by mandamus.

²Following the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, reports under section 19 of the Act are sent to the Welsh Government Minister responsible for the Welsh language.

1 Context

- 1.1 The Cabinet Office has a Welsh language scheme prepared under Section 21 of the Welsh Language Act 1993 (the Act). The language scheme was approved on 12 September 2019.
- 1.2 The language scheme states that the Cabinet Office has adopted the principle that, in the conduct of its public business in Wales, it will treat the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality. The scheme states how the Cabinet Office will apply that principle when delivering services to the public.
- 1.3 The main purpose of this report is to draw conclusions, based on the evidence gathered, on the Cabinet Office's compliance with specific clauses of its Welsh language scheme. The report does not draw conclusions regarding the Cabinet Office's general performance with regard to compliance with its language scheme.
- 1.4 This is my first investigation under section 17 of the Act in relation to the Cabinet Office. I wish to thank the Cabinet Office for its co-operation during the investigation.

2 Basis of the investigation

2.1 This investigation was opened on the Commissioner's initiative. The Commissioner received two enquiries from members of the public which raised doubts about the Cabinet Office's compliance with its language scheme.

2.2 The enquiry related to English-language cell broadcasting technology.

The Background

2.3 The Cabinet Office conducted an emergency alert test via text messaging across the UK for the first time in 2023. At that time, the cell broadcasting for mobile phones in Wales was bilingual. There was a problem with part of the message in Welsh as one word had been incorrectly auto-corrected. This led to negative press coverage.

2.4 Officers from the Cabinet Office contacted the Commissioner on 7 July 2025 to provide background details on the next emergency alert, which was due to take place in September 2025. Discussions had already taken place between the Cabinet Office and the Welsh Government.

2.5 The Cabinet Office confirmed that a technical problem had been identified in the 2023 test where some mobile phones had not received the emergency alert. It was noted that the possible reason for this was that an English-only message had to be sent out to England, Scotland and Northern Ireland and then a bilingual message to Wales around a minute and a half later.

2.6 The Cabinet Office's proposal therefore for the message in September 2025 was to send a single English-only message, with a link for more information and to view the message in Welsh.

2.7 The Deputy Commissioner sent a response on 7 July 2025 requesting further information regarding the technical problems. He drew the Cabinet Office's attention to the clear commitment in the organisation's language scheme to communicate bilingually when promoting events in Wales or communicating with a large number of people in Wales. He requested a meeting in order to discuss the matter further.

2.8 A meeting was held on 17 July 2025 with officers from the Cabinet Office, the Welsh Government and the Commissioner at which the requirements under the Welsh language scheme were again confirmed. It was noted at the meeting that other countries have adopted bilingual communication methods for emergency messaging, using various systems and technology to ensure inclusive communication.

2.9 A further email was received from the Cabinet Office on 22 July 2025 confirming what was discussed at the meeting. It was also confirmed that the intention was to continue with the English-only message with a link to more information or to view the message in Welsh.

2.10 The Deputy Commissioner sent a further email on 29 July 2025 stressing that the Commissioner could not agree with the suggested approach, as that procedure would place an additional burden on Welsh speakers to access essential information.

2.11 The emergency alert was sent on 7 September 2025 at 3pm, in English, according to the approach set out in 2.6 above.

3 The investigation

- 3.1 Following the sending of the emergency alert on 7 September, we decided to exercise our powers under section 17 of the Act to conduct an investigation to establish whether there had been a failure by the Cabinet Office to carry out the language scheme.
- 3.2 On 25 September 2025 a letter was sent to the Cabinet Office explaining the subject and structure of the investigation and asking questions for the purpose of gathering information. It was explained that the investigation would consider compliance with the following clauses of the Welsh language scheme:

Written Correspondence

7. The Cabinet Office will write bilingually:

- *When providing invitations and notices publicising public events in Wales*
- *when producing papers & reports following public meetings in Wales*
- *when conducting public surveys in Wales*
- *when the same correspondence is sent to a large number of people in Wales*

- 3.3 It was noted that the investigation would be conducted in private by the Investigation and Enforcement team, and that it would include the following steps:
1. Receive information and evidence from the Cabinet Office by 23 October 2025.
 2. Undertake a desktop analysis of the information and consider whether any further information is required, for example by meeting with Cabinet Office officers.
 3. Prepare a draft report on the investigation's findings and give the Cabinet Office an opportunity to check its facts.
 4. Send a copy of the final report to the Cabinet Officer and the Minister responsible for the Welsh language.
 5. Publish the final report.

This report considers Cabinet Office compliance with specific clauses in its Welsh language scheme. It is based on information and evidence received from the Cabinet Office in a letter dated 23 October 2025 along with previous correspondence between the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Cabinet Office.

4 The evidence

Consideration 1:

There were grounds to believe that the Cabinet Office had not fulfilled the following clauses in its Welsh language scheme:

Written Correspondence

7. The Cabinet Office will write bilingually:

- *When providing invitations and notices publicising public events in Wales*
- *when producing papers & reports following public meetings in Wales*
- *when conducting public surveys in Wales*
- *when the same correspondence is sent to a large number of people in Wales*

- 4.1 In order to comply with the above clauses as set out in the language scheme, the Cabinet Office must send correspondence bilingually to people in Wales where the same correspondence is sent to a large number of people.
- 4.2 Residents in Wales received an emergency alert test message, in the form of correspondence, in English only on 7 September 2025 at 3pm.
- 4.3 A letter was sent to the Cabinet Office on 25 September 2025 requesting information and evidence regarding the grounds for suspicion against it.
- 4.4 A response was received via email on 23 October 2025. The response noted that issues had arisen with the first test when sending two separate messages: one network (Three UK) failed to deliver the alert, and there was a minor error in the Welsh version sent on the other networks. The Cabinet Office explained that the main issue was a technical one as the systems were not able to deal with multiple messages at once.
- 4.5 Following this issue, the Cabinet Office said that it had held meetings with senior representatives from the Three network to discuss the matter, and assurances were received that this would not be a problem again in the future.
- 4.6 For future testing, it stated that the advice from the Government's Digital Service was to send a single message or have a significant gap between messages. It explained that the second test in 2025 was a greater success, with around 95% of devices receiving the alert compared to 80% in 2023.
- 4.7 In its evidence, the Cabinet Office stated that communication challenges and the need for a simple and consistent campaign were the reason for not sending a separate message for Wales.



- 4.8 The Cabinet Office was concerned about the accuracy of alerts to people near the Welsh border, as cell masts may lead to alerts crossing regional borders. It explained that sending two separate messages (see above) could have resulted in duplication for those in England close to the Welsh border. To avoid this, the Cabinet Office proposed a single UK-wide message with the Welsh element in it and a link to GOV.UK for the full Welsh version, as follows:

Visit gov.uk/alerts for more information or to view this message in Welsh.

Ewch i gov.uk/alerts am ragor o wybodaeth neu i weld y neges hon yn y Gymraeg.

Additional Information included on gov.uk/alerts

Dyma brawf o Rybuddion Brys, gwasanaeth llywodraeth y DU a fydd yn eich rhybuddio os oes argyfwng sy'n peryglu bywyd gerllaw. Does dim angen i chi wneud dim. Mewn argyfwng go iawn, dilynwch y cyfarwyddiadau yn y rhybudd i'ch cadw chi ac eraill yn ddiogel. Dewch o hyd i gyngor syml ac effeithiol ar sut i baratoi ar gyfer argyfyngau yn gov.uk/prepare . Ewch i gov.uk/alerts am ragor o wybodaeth neu i weld y neges hon yn y Gymraeg.

Sent by the UK government at 3:00pm on Sunday 7 September 2025.

- 4.9 It added that the success of the communication campaign was the simplicity of the message, and that without it the same level of engagement would not have been achieved. It claimed that this approach reduces the technical risk and ensures that Welsh speakers can access the full message.
- 4.10 The Cabinet Office stated it had planned to introduce multilingual alerts based on the language settings of the device, but that the costs of contractual updates were significantly higher, and therefore it was decided not to implement them. It explained that existing alerts are limited to 500 characters for full visibility, with the absolute maximum of 1,395 characters, although longer messages may be truncated. It stressed that keeping messages concise is essential for accessibility and clarity.
- 4.11 The Cabinet Office added that the need to provide multilingual alerts has been included in the statement of requirements (SOR), which they will be required to implement under new contracts commencing April 2026.
- 4.12 It noted that the Emergency Alerts Oversight Board had approved the test messages, which include the Welsh Government, nevertheless it was the Cabinet Office's decision to send the message in English only. It explained that decisions on the use of language in emergencies are made on a case-by-case basis: bilingual if practical, or English-only if detailed instructions are required. During Storm Darragh in

December 2024, it stated that it had sent a bilingual message within the character limit, and received no complaints.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 This report provides an opinion on the Cabinet Office's compliance with its Welsh language scheme. In the face of the available evidence, it is concluded that the Cabinet Office has failed to comply with clause 7 of the language scheme.

Conclusion 1: Written Correspondence

There were grounds to believe that the Cabinet Office had failed to comply with the following clauses of its Welsh language scheme:

Written Correspondence

7. The Cabinet Office will write bilingually:

- *When providing invitations and notices publicising public events in Wales*
- *when producing papers & reports following public meetings in Wales*
- *when conducting public surveys in Wales*
- *when the same correspondence is sent to a large number of people in Wales*

- 5.2 The emergency alert test message was not sent bilingually. This is contrary to the wording of the clauses in the language scheme which clearly state:

The Cabinet Office will write bilingually:

- *When providing invitations and notices publicising public events in Wales*
- *when the same correspondence is sent to a large number of people in Wales*

- 5.3 In its evidence, the Cabinet Office stated that communication challenges and the need for a simple and consistent campaign were the reasons for not sending a separate message for Wales.
- 5.4 It stated that it wanted people to "*see the full message*" and that sending a bilingual message to Wales, and English to other UK countries would be confusing for those living along the border.
- 5.5 The response does not address the arrangements or systems that led to the failure in this case. While the failure is acknowledged, the Cabinet Office does not set out any steps to ensure that a similar situation does not arise again. It was noted that decisions on the use of language in emergencies are made on a case-by-case basis, which highlights the risk that a failure to comply with this clause could occur again.
- 5.6 Despite discussions between the Commissioner's officers and Cabinet Office officers, and efforts to highlight the fact that sending the emergency alert test message in English only did not comply with the requirements of the language scheme, the message was sent in English.

5.7 The Cabinet Office therefore appears to have been aware that it was acting contrary to its Welsh language scheme when sending the message on 7 September 2025.

Based on the above, I am of the opinion that the Cabinet Office has failed to implement clause 7 of its language scheme.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Based on the findings of this investigation, I am of the opinion that the Cabinet Office should act in accordance with the following recommendations provided under section 19 of the Act:

Recommendation 1

The Cabinet Office should include the requirement to provide multilingual alerts, as it has indicated, in the statement of requirements (SOR) that they will implement under new contracts from April 2026.

Recommendation 2

The Cabinet Office should submit a detailed plan for delivering the work of enabling the sending of emergency text messages bilingually to people in Wales.

Recommendation 3

The Cabinet Office should always consider the Welsh language when sending correspondence:

- to a number of people in Wales
- in providing invitations and publicity notices

Timetable: A summary report on the implementation of these recommendations should be submitted within 6 months.