



'Police boss ballot must be bilingual'

By **MATTHEW GEORGE**
Parliamentary Correspondent

POLICE election candidate Tal Michael last night urged Ministers to move fast to ensure ballot papers are in Welsh as well as English.

There are fears time is running out to get legislation through Parliament for bilingual forms for the November 15 elections for Police & Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

If the Welsh Forms Order is not agreed, then Welsh cannot legally be included on the ballot papers – but under previous legislation it could also be unlawful if they are not bilingual.

Mr Michael is Labour candidate in North Wales, a former chief executive of North Wales Police Authority, and a Welsh speaker. He has raised the issue with Home Office Minister Damien Green, who is in charge of the elections and assured him he was seeking a solution. And he wants new Welsh Secretary David Jones,

Time's running out to make it legal – candidate

Clwyd West MP, to lobby Mr Green over its importance.

The Commons sits next Monday and Tuesday, and then goes into recess until October 15 because of the party conferences.

Mr Michael told the Daily Post: "It is important that this issue is resolved in the next few days while Parliament is still sitting. We understand the documentation is ready, it just needs a Minister's signature and agreement of Parliament."



Police commissioner hopeful Tal Michael

Returning officers needed to get the ballot papers printed and being told they might have to wait until the day that postal votes must be distributed was simply not good enough.

"I can see that this might be

embarrassing for the Minister but David Jones needs to make sure his colleagues understand that this is a requirement in Wales so get on with it."

Labour Clwyd South MP Susan Elan Jones has tabled a series of Parliamentary Questions, after Mr Michael alerted her to the problem.

She told the Daily Post: "It is truly unbelievable that Wales Office Ministers did not spot this beforehand."

"Wales is a modern, bilingual nation and anything less than a fully bilingual election will be unacceptable."

"I am asking questions of new Welsh Secretary David Jones so he can explain what went wrong and answer the very valid questions many of us have of what he will be doing to put the situation right."

She has asked why a Welsh Forms Order was not laid before Parliament at least six months before the election, what action the Wales Office is taking, and what discussions Mr Jones has had with the Home Office.

The Wales Office referred enquiries to the Home Office, whose spokesman said: "Home Office officials are working urgently to ensure legislation is in place to allow bilingual forms in Wales."

The Electoral Commission warned this week the Order had not yet been made, and without clarity returning officers could not finalise printing requirements for poll cards, postal voting statements and polling station notices. The first ballot papers would be issued to postal voters on October 31 and without the order would only be in English.

"While we recognise that Parliament is ultimately responsible for approving this legislation, the UK Government must give assurance to those administering these elections, and voters, that the ballot papers to be used in Wales at the elections in November will be bilingual," a Commission statement said.

Editorial

Welsh should never be an oversight

ONCE again we are having to report on what seems to be an oversight when it comes to the use of the Welsh Language in official documents.

This time it is the ballot papers for the election of Police and Crime Commissioners, which unless swift action is taken may not be available in both Welsh and English.

Apart from the concerns not having the papers available in Welsh may be illegal, we have to simply ask the question 'how can this happen?'

DAILY POST OUR VIEW

Surely by now organisations know about the need for bilingual services so to simply put this down as an oversight is just not acceptable.

There are people and organisations working too hard to protect and ensure our language grows, for instances like this to be allowed to

simply pass.

Some may find arguments sparked by this unnecessary but unless issues are highlighted, stands are taken, and action called for then how does that reflect on our own opinions of the Welsh language?

If we let something like this slip through the net it is a very serious precedent to set, and one that could have serious consequences in the long term.

The simple fact is that documents of this nature, when being used in Wales,

should include the Welsh language.

Welsh should not be overlooked and it is down to us to hold to account those not including the language.

It is shame that an issue such as the election of Police & Crime Commissioners has found publicity in this way but it needs to be resolved quickly and efficiently and ensure the Welsh language is represented on the papers.

Let's just hope we are not having to report again on instances like this too often.