



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**WRITTEN STATEMENT
BY
THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

TITLE **Holding Religious Ceremonies as part of the Official Proceedings of Local Authorities in Wales**

DATE **6 August 2013**

BY **Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Local Government and Government Business**

The freedom to hold religious beliefs and to exercise those views through holding religious ceremonies is enshrined in human rights legislation. Here in Wales, there has been a long standing and established tradition of both religious observance and tolerance. We have a proud history as a country where people of many cultures and religions have lived side by side for generations, enriching the life of the whole nation. The Welsh Government continues to be committed to promoting good relations and an understanding among all faith communities in Wales, including people of no faith.

The general power of competence does not apply to Councils in Wales. There has been a perception this has, in some way, disadvantaged Councils in Wales, in their ability to hold prayers as part of their official business. It has been seen, by some, as a matter which needs rectifying through legislation. The Welsh Government considers this to be misleading and does not intend to bring forward legislation on this point. If there are restrictions to how Councils may approach this matter, they arise from the general legal requirements as to equality and non-discrimination, not from any apparent limit on the Councils' statutory powers.

In the view of the Welsh Government, it is a matter for a Local Authority to consider on competent legal advice, whether the circumstances in its individual case make it appropriate to hold prayers as part of a formal meeting. Generally speaking, there is nothing to prevent like-minded Councillors from saying prayers – or sharing a moment of quiet reflection – immediately before moving on to official business, rather than as a formal part of business or in a way as to affect the formal business.

The Welsh Government is not able to give advice to cover the very specific individual circumstances in which these issues will arise for consideration. Most Councils in Wales have already made practical and workable arrangements and we are confident

that giving appropriate consideration to the rights of their Members and constituents, all may now do so.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep Members informed. Should Members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Assembly returns, I would be happy to do so.