

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>LANGUAGE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>November 2020</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>An overview of the impact of Covid 19 on services and activities held through the medium of Welsh</b>
<b>AUTHOR:</b>	<b>Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor</b>
<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>To provide information to Committee members about the impact of Covid-19 on Welsh-medium services and projects that promote the Welsh language.</b>

## **1. Background**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to summarise the opportunities and challenges that various departments have faced in relation to continuing to implement the language policy due to Covid-19, and to provide an update on various projects that have been delivered despite the situation, in order to promote and increase the use of the Welsh language in Gwynedd.

## **2. A survey of the impact of Covid-19 on the ability to continue to offer Welsh language services and to implement the language policy.**

- 2.1. To ascertain whether the Covid-19 crisis affected the Council's ability to continue to offer services in Welsh and to implement the Welsh language policy, a basic survey was sent to each department.
- 2.2. In general, everyone noted that the virus had not affected their ability to provide Welsh medium services, as they had adapted their methods of service provision, and had continued to offer Welsh language services. However, some noted that their staff missed the informal opportunities to converse in Welsh in the office, particularly those who did not have an opportunity to speak much Welsh outside the workplace.
- 2.3. It is obvious that the pandemic and the subsequent shift towards more online training provision has been positive, and had offered new opportunities for Gwynedd Council staff to learn and develop their Welsh. The crisis provided an opportunity to commission lessons that would not have been possible prior to the pandemic. For example, two cohorts of learners at two different levels received online lessons provided by North Welsh North West – lessons that had been very difficult to arrange face-to-face prior to the pandemic due to working patterns and the availability of tutors. The change to online learning has also assisted greater numbers of staff (especially staff working shifts) to attend Welsh lessons or training as it offers more flexibility and less travelling to a teaching location.

- 2.4. It was noted that the lack of informal contact between officers, such as in the office, on the corridor or in the kitchen, had possibly slowed the development of some individuals, as the same opportunities were not available at home to practice their Welsh skills. There is no evidence to support this, but our Welsh Buddy Scheme offers those informal opportunities for Welsh learners to maintain their momentum while working from home.
- 2.5. One concern highlighted in the survey was that it was not always possible for staff to contribute in Welsh in external virtual meetings organised by other organisations as they did not use technology that enabled the easy use of simultaneous translation services. All external organisations do not currently provide a simultaneous translation service for virtual meetings, and some are unwilling to use Zoom due to security concerns. As a Council we have worked with a number of partners to share our experiences of providing a simultaneous translation service virtually, to assist them to offer such a service.
- 2.6. During the months in question, extensive use was made of the Council's website, and it is pleasing to note that the use of the Welsh homepage was higher than the English page.

Welsh	English
January: 27,457	January: 19,781
May: 19,303	May: 18,122
September: 26,376	September: 23,166

- 2.7. The Welsh Language Commissioner made a request for information about the impact of Covid- 19 on the Council's ability to continue to offer services in Welsh and relevant information was submitted, based on our internal survey. A request was also received from Bangor University to encourage staff to complete a questionnaire about the influence of working from home on the Welsh language.

### **3. Update on the progress of projects that promote the Welsh language**

Work has continued on a number of projects that promote the Welsh language despite the crisis.

#### **3.1. Language Specifications**

Over the past few months, the Project Board has been meeting regularly and work has continued regardless of the crisis. During this period, we have:

- Commissioned online lessons for Access and Intermediate levels for two sets of learners in Byw'n lach between May and July, in order to help them achieve the Language Specification for their posts.
- There are currently two other ongoing commissions, which are available to all Council staff
- Assessments from Council staff are still being collected, consideration has been given to arrangements for assessing new staff, and work is ongoing to implement the next steps.
- Develop and publish a Language Skills system in collaboration with the IT Service, that retains a record of staff language skills, allows managers and staff to see the results of their self-assessments, and enables us to run reports to interpret the data and respond

appropriately, in addition to reporting in accordance with the Language Standards and internal procedures.

### **3.2. Arfor**

Although there were concerns at the beginning of the period that the county's Arfor plans would have to be postponed, the past months have in reality been extremely busy.

#### **3.2.1. *Enterprising Communities Challenge***

Grants had already been distributed to three projects: Partneriaeth Ogwen, Canolfan Henblas and Menter y Plu, with each of them having either continued with their plans or adapted them to face the challenges of the pandemic. The Canolfan Henblas project has been completed, and we will produce a story about it over the coming weeks.

#### **3.2.2. *Support for Enterprise***

Again, there was concern that a change of direction would be required with this grant, with the pressure to maintain businesses increasing, if not exceeding the need to provide a boost to new businesses during this period. However, it was confirmed that businesses such as Becws Islyn, that had already received offer letters, would continue with their plans. Applications are still being accepted, and work continues to discuss projects for establishing and extending businesses. We will release information about business success stories in Pen Llŷn that are linked to the ARFOR Programme and the LEADER Rural Programme over coming months.

The panel has met on four occasions since April to discuss applications, and it was decided to be more flexible with the type of applications that were accepted, to ensure that there were opportunities for people to establish businesses and gain full-time employment, in addition to expanding businesses to offer new employment opportunities. The number and quality of applications that have been received were very positive, and all the available grant funding has been allocated. We are eager to help more businesses to apply for additional funding from the Council to support the project and a bid has also been submitted to the Government for capital funding that will enable us to extend the fund.

Until the beginning of the lockdown period, the fund had received over a hundred initial enquiries, approximately 70 businesses had progressed to submitting a Declaration of Interest Form, 22 had applied and 19 had accepted an offer. This number has naturally increased by now, and we will provide a further update to the Committee at the beginning of the year.

#### **3.2.3. *Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050***

This plan has seen the greatest change over this period, but its success has been notable. The original intention was to provide opportunities for young people to become influencers and work in partnership with local companies. Due to the restrictions, the direction of this scheme had to be changed completely, and the scheme has been re-launched by Menter Môn, with an emphasis on offering a grant to motivate young people to create and implement business ideas. The young people have been sharing their stories on social media. There are plans in the pipeline to develop Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050 across the four ARFOR counties.

### 3.2.4. Ffiws

Although the space in Porthmadog had to close during the lockdown period, videos and workshops were shared over social media. When the space was re-opened, people were invited to attend one-to-one sessions. We are considering the idea of developing Ffiws space in other areas of Gwynedd over the next few months.

### 3.2.5. Cross-cutting Work

The ARFOR Strategic Plan Interim Report has been completed by Wavehill company, and the evaluation work will begin imminently. The work of responding to the interim report has already started. More details will be available in the new year. During the next few weeks we will launch the ARFOR Bwrlwm work, and will identify businesses that are role models in their use of the Welsh language, and how they can influence others.

## 3.3. Hunaniaith (Gwynedd's Language Initiative)

- 3.3.1. As a result of the pandemic, Hunaniaith officers have made huge adjustments in relation to the way they promote the Welsh language. As face-to-face working in the community is impossible, new skills have been learnt, and different methods of operating have been trialled. We developed our presence on social media, and online activities were provided for the first time through various platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Kahoot, and a new website was created. This meant that more activities than usual were held. During the past six months, 139 activities were held, which is a substantial increase compared to the previous two years.

	2018 – 2019 (12 months)	2019 – 2020 (12 months)	April – September 2020 (6 months)
<b>Total activities</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>141</b>

- 3.3.2. A variety of activities were provided for families, children and young people and adults, including learners. These included quizzes, a virtual pub, videos of scientific experiments for children to try at home, art workshops, song writing workshops, performances from artists, a digital pack to help voluntary groups hold virtual meetings, and joint lectures with local societies. A summary of the main projects can be found in **appendix 1**. Once again this year, freelance workers were commissioned to hold a number of activities to show the commercial opportunities that exist, and to ensure that activities such as these are sustainable in our communities in future.

### 3.3.3. Specific projects

One of Hunaniaith's pilot projects has been developed into a national Halloween competition for Mentrau Iaith Cymru. As part of the Halloween celebrations, attention has been drawn to Gwyn ap Nudd, a prominent figure in relation to the Day of the Dead in Celtic mythology, and a 3d skull decorating competition for children and young people has been held. A video, telling the story of Gwyn ap Nudd and Welsh traditional Halloween traditions, has been produced in conjunction with the storyteller Gwilym Morus-Baird, which can be seen on Hunaniaith's You Tube channel - <https://youtu.be/64bVHxY0-ck>. The project has received attention in the press and media.

- 3.3.4. A new family festival, Gŵyl Nantiaith, was held jointly with Canolfan Nant Gwrtheyrn at the end of October. The event was held over Facebook and Zoom, and broadcast through a specific channel on the new AMAM online platform that promotes Welsh events and events that promote the Welsh language. The event was very successful, with a number of attendees. We hope to hold the festival again in future.
- 3.3.5. We have also continued to provide support and advice to community groups and influence their use of the Welsh language. There was collaboration with the Facebook page **Wayne Keeps You Smiling (Bala)**, a campaign run by Wayne Evans and Ceri Owen to raise people's spirits and raise money for local good causes during the Coronavirus restrictions between March and July 2020. At the beginning of the lockdown period, one of Wayne's most popular activities was visiting families in Bala's housing estates dressed as Batman, while maintaining a safe distance. The communication on the page and in person was in English only, with "Batman" sharing birthday greetings etc. Wayne has lived in Bala throughout his life, and although he understands Welsh quite well, he is unwilling to speak it because of a lack of practice, that has subsequently led to a lack of confidence in using it.
- 3.3.6. Hunaniaith identified an opportunity to collaborate and also to reinvigorate and raise awareness of one of the town's most well-known legends, the story of Ceridwen. With Ceri dressed as Ceridwen, and Wayne as her husband, Tegid Foel, a week's activities and performances were arranged, tailored to be suitable for bilingual families and people of all ages: including visits, sketches on the Facebook page, colouring sheets and limerick competitions. Many followers heard Wayne speaking Welsh for the first time, and he received warm praise and support that has led to an increase in his use of the language and his confidence.
- 3.3.7. The Bangor language centre development officer collaborated with Menter Iaith Bangor to commission Learn Welsh North West to collaborate with six individuals who were part of a national pilot project to target reluctant Welsh speakers. Six online lessons were held by a Welsh Tutor, and they were set weekly homework tasks and information was shared about Welsh-medium community activities and events.
- 3.3.8. In spite of Covid-19 it is hoped that it will be possible to hold Ysgol Tryfan and the Urdd's Outdoor Project. This project has worked intensively with a small cohort of young people, to see whether it is possible to influence language patterns and habits through regular intervention and by raising awareness of local Welsh-medium employment opportunities. The project is led, under commission, by the Urdd's Outdoor Activity Service. It includes outdoor activities for 15 young people and introduces them to new activities, local history and geography as well as raising awareness about employment opportunities in a growth area locally, all through the medium of Welsh.
- 3.3.9. Hunaniaith also continues to collaborate with key partners such as the Youth Service, the Education Department, the Economy and Community Department, Cymraeg for Kids, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai, Menter Iaith Bangor, Theatr Derek Williams, Llŷn Maritime Museum, Menter Fachwen, Partneriaeth Ogwen, and the other language initiatives throughout Wales.

3.3.10. In March, Hunaniaith published a questionnaire to gauge the public's views about what should be done to promote and champion the Welsh language in the county, and what should be prioritised as part of the language initiative's future work programme. The consultation period ended at the end of June. The results showed that the majority of respondents believed that young people and learners should be prioritised.

Hunaniaith has also assisted the Government with a community survey to examine the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions on volunteering through the medium of Welsh and on community groups in Wales that promote and use the Welsh language.

**3.4. Interactive map of Welsh medium activities**

The language unit, in conjunction with the information technology team, has been collaborating on the development of an interactive map and live database on the Council's website to provide information about Welsh medium activities throughout the county. Anyone who provides activities through the medium of Welsh can register themselves.

**4. Recommendation**

Recommended that the committee accepts and notes the report.