

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>LANGUAGE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>12 November 2020</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Welsh Language Standards and the Council's Welsh Language Policy</b>
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<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>	A brief report is submitted on the developments over the past six months in regards to the Welsh Language Standards and the Council's Language Policy, including the Annual Report on the Standards, the Commissioner's annual Assurance Report and an update on the intention to review the language policy.  Formal approval is also required for the Annual Report on the Standards

## **Background**

This report is submitted to provide a brief update on work that has been going on over the past few months in respect of the Language Standards and our reporting duties.

Overall, we continue to succeed in complying with the requirements of the Standards, but there are some areas of concern that arise frequently, and certain themes are prevalent in the annual reports, which provides the basis for actions that we can take over the coming months.

We have been proactive in liaising with the Commissioner during the past year, to discuss some issues of importance and concern, such as the barriers we face when commissioning external systems and apps. By having an open conversation, we hope to be able to develop a mutual understanding of what is possible to achieve, and to also receive support from the Commissioner's office to influence external bodies that are sometimes unaware of the status of the language and the Standards' requirements in Wales.

### **1. Annual Report on the Standards**

1.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Language Standards, imposed on the Council under Section 44 of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011, the Council is required to produce and publish an annual report by **30 June** every year, demonstrating how we have ensured compliance with the standards that were imposed on the Council.

1.2 We are required to report a number of things, including the results of any language skills assessments undertaken, the number of posts advertised where Welsh language skills were required, the number of Welsh-medium training events that have been offered to staff, and the number of complaints received by the organisation against the Standards.

1.3 It is also an opportunity to highlight any developments and examples of good practice in implementing the Standards and ensuring Welsh-medium services for the residents of the county.

1.4 The Language Committee is asked to formally approve this report and identify any matters on which they would like further information or discussion.

1.5 The full report can be viewed through this link:

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Documents---Council/Strategies-and-policies/Language-policy/Gwynedd-Council-Welsh-Language-Standards-Annual-Report-2019-2020.pdf>

1.6 The following is a summary of the main points of the report:

- **Challenges:**

One of the greatest challenges we face is how we adapt to using more technology and to ensure not only the language choice and proactive offer, but how we can encourage the residents to use the Welsh language with our services.

- **Developing fields:**

We reported on developmental work in the following fields:

- **Develop a better understanding of people's habits**
- **Use of technology and on-line services**
- **Assessing the impact**
- **Language specifications – mapping the language levels of posts and staff skills**

- **Skills Report:**

A general picture was provided of the Council's situation in terms of the language skills of its staff. As the Committee will be aware, considerable work has been completed in this area with the Language Specifications project, and for the first time we reported by using the data which is gathered on the new Specifications system.

The overall picture for the year looked like this:

Number of staff members (number of people on the Council's payroll), excluding school staff	<b>3,677</b>
Number of staff members assessed thus far	<b>3034</b>
Number who reach the requirements of the post from those assessed	<b>2765 (91.1%)</b>
Number who do not reach the requirements of the post	<b>269 (8.9%)</b>
Number of staff members assessed to have no Welsh language skills (all Council departments)	4

## 2. The Language Commissioner's Assurance Report 2019-20 – Closing the Gap

2.1 Every year, the Welsh Language Commissioner publishes a report which is the result of research, observation and the questioning of focus groups by the officers, who then report their findings on organisations' success in implementing and complying with the Standards.

2.2 The Commissioner will draw conclusions about successes or failures to comply with the Standards based on several things:

- i) The findings of the Commissioner after monitoring complaints and specific cases of non-compliance.
- ii) Opinion surveys and engagement with the public in focus groups
- iii) Observation work, interviews and requests for information and evidence on specific subjects with organisations

2.3 The report does not specifically refer to individual organisations - apart from when it refers to good practices - but rather, it offers an overall picture of how organisations are performing in terms of implementing the standards and what needs to be improved.

2.4 By now, it is clear that certain themes come up consistently in the Commissioner's reports, which forces us to think hard about whether we are doing all we can, and all that we should be doing, in some areas. For example, encouraging people to use the Welsh-medium services is a constant theme by the Commissioner, as well as internal monitoring arrangements and the importance of the standards relating to measuring impact, and how we consider the impact of the Council's decisions on the Welsh language in our communities.

2.5 The Commissioner's assurance report for 2019/20, entitled **Closing the Gap**, was launched in September. The report offers an analysis of organisations' overall performance under four headings: **Provision and promotion of services; Arrangements for compliance; the workforce's capacity; and promoting the Welsh language**. We see that a lot of emphasis is placed on the need to act in two particular areas over the coming months, namely, how organisations attempt to:

- Assess Impact, and;
- Create a shift in the language choice of service users

2.6 The report also referred to the **Promotion Strategies**, noting that it is not clear to the Commissioner how many new activities are being undertaken as a direct result of the promotion strategies - these are activities that are beyond the Council's daily services and which are specifically targeted at promoting the use of the Welsh language. There was also criticism that organisations do not appear to allocate sufficient funding and resources to implementing these strategies and schemes. There was a clear message that organisations must give this careful consideration as they review their strategies for 2021-22 (at a later date for Gwynedd).

### **3. Reviewing the Language Policy**

3.1 Earlier this year, we started looking at possible revisions to the language policy. This step was taken as there was a feeling that there had been major changes in the way that the Council provides services since the current Policy was drawn up in response to the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards. There was a feeling that some parts of the Policy are not firm and clear enough and that it does not cover all the situations that services deal with from day to day. There are no specific clauses, for example, that cover the use of the Welsh language in the Council's IT systems.

3.2 Some changes are therefore proposed as a way of providing clarity on matters where complaints have been received, or where we realise that there is a lack of clarity which leads to inconsistency.

3.3 The changes proposed have been split into two categories -

**Administrative changes;** meaning minor changes to revise the wording, in order to make requirements clearer, or adding clauses that reflect areas of action that are not covered at present, and which do not entail any major change in terms of the operational principle.

**Major / principle changes;** which means that we need further discussions and agreement on how we operate in some contexts. These include areas that are not necessarily covered by the Standards, or where there are opportunities for us as a Council to set new principles, and to ensure that the Council is taking every opportunity to promote the Welsh language.

3.4 We will be submit an item on possible revisions to the Policy at the next meeting of the Language Committee.

### **4. What is sought by the Committee?**

Members of the Committee are asked to consider the contents of this report, and offer any relevant observations or recommendations for prioritising work.