

MEETING	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
DATE	14 January 2016
TITLE	The Council's Language Standards and Policy
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn
AUTHOR	Arwel E Jones (Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery)
PWRPAS YR ADRODDIAD	To submit an update and a draft policy for the committee's attention

The Background in terms of the Language Standards

1. At the moment, the Council's statutory commitments with regard to the Welsh Language are summarised in the Council's statutory Language Plan but, as members of the Language Committee will be aware, the system of language plans is coming to an end with the introduction of the new Language Standards from 1 April, 2016.
2. From that point, we will be reporting annually on our Language Standards rather than a language plan.
3. As a Council, we had an opportunity to submit observations on the draft Standards presented by the Language Commissioner and a number of observations were submitted. Throughout, the Council's emphasis was one of expressing general support for the Language Standards and to the effort to ensure consistency and the use of the language across all Welsh councils.
4. Of course, our situation is different to most of the Welsh councils, since our current arrangements mean that Welsh is the language of our internal administration and is used naturally in the daily work of the Council.
5. As a result, since the Council already conforms with most of the Standards, we did not foresee a major problem, although there were some administrative implications in recording some details related to some of the Standards.
6. In response to the observations we submitted, the Commissioner did reduce the burden on us by removing 14 of the draft Standards on which we were consulted when our final Standards were published.
7. Having had an opportunity to look at the final Standards (a copy of which are attached as Appendix 2), and, since some of the more troublesome of the draft

Standards have been removed, the intention is not to appeal against any of the Standards placed upon us.

The Need for a Policy

8. Standard 98 asks us to “develop a policy on using Welsh internally for the purpose of promoting and facilitating the use of the language”
9. In essence, the Standards set a minimum for the provision of Welsh and the fact is that that minimum is too low to address the Council’s ambition for the Welsh Language in several fields. During the discussion on the draft Standards, it was emphasised several times that we did not want them to weaken the Council’s current position.
10. Therefore, we have concluded that we need more than an internal policy document that will address the Council’s ambition for the Welsh Language in all our services.
11. It will then be possible to use this policy as evidence to confirm the implementation of some of the Standards in the Council’s work.
12. A draft policy is appended as Appendix 2 to this paper. The policy document as submitted is an update of the current Language Plan and, therefore, there are not many changes of substance here.
13. However, some issues do merit specific attention and guidance on them is sought before proceeding to develop the policy further.

Policy Considerations

14. The first question of principle is the issue of language “choice” or “need”. In several places in the Standards and in the previous Language Plan, there are references to “language of choice” of the user. The “language of choice” is not always consistent with the Council’s wish to promote the use of Welsh. The draft policy therefore emphasises the need to deal with someone through the medium of Welsh and goes further than simply offering a choice.
15. The draft document also updates the content of the Language Plan in terms of the visibility of the Welsh Language even to non Welsh speakers who choose to read the English content. The main change is in the area of Information Technology, where the policy notes that it will be easy to move backwards and forwards from Welsh to English pages on the Website.

16. The document refers to the need to mainstream the Welsh language and a number of the Standards in the policy field require us to evidence this. This could lead to the need to document some things in a way that we have not done in the past to show our conformance with the Policy Standards. Creating a system simply to satisfy the requirements of regulators does not really add value for the people of Gwynedd, and is contrary to the principles of Ffordd Gwynedd. The committee's views are sought as to how we should address those requirements.

Recommendation

17. The Language Committee's observations are sought on the appended draft document before its submission to the full Council for adoption.