
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 16.04.13

Present: Councillor Liz Saville Roberts (Chair);
Councillor Gweno Glyn (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Dyfrig Jones, Eric M.Jones, Gareth Thomas, Gruffydd Williams, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams and Mandy Williams-Davies.

Officers: Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Dilys Phillips (Head of Democracy and Legal Department – for item 5 only), Dewi R. Jones (Head of Education Department), Sion Huws (Compliance and Language Manager), Debbie Anne Jones (Welsh Language Officer), Gwenno Williams (Senior Operational Manager), Keira Hendry (Leisure Assistant – Penllyn Leisure Centre, Bala) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Observer: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care).

Apologies: Councillors Mair Rowlands and Thomas G. Ellis.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

2. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 17 January 2013 as a true record, subject to replacing the word 'gwaed' with 'gwae' at the end of the third point of the discussion on item 4 – '2011 Census: First Results on the Welsh Language.'

3. THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE

a) Submitted – the report of the Monitoring Officer referring to how responsibilities for language matters were divided between the full Council and the Cabinet.

It was explained that the Cabinet system meant that the responsibility for supervising the implementation of Gwynedd Council's Language Plan was part of the Council's function and that it had been delegated to this Committee. The work of creating a strategy and promoting the language belonged with the Cabinet Member for Customer Care.

When the language Committee had been established a year ago, its terms of reference was adopted by the Council. However, there would be an opportunity to review them at the Council's Annual Meeting held on 2 May, 2013.

As a possible change, it was recommended that the Language Committee could operate as a consultative committee on Welsh language promotion strategies within the County, making recommendations to the Cabinet as required.

As part of its powers and terms of reference, it was noted that the Language Committee should consider its work programme for the coming year.

b) A member emphasised that the Welsh language was a core matter for the Council, and he felt that this Committee could not act to protect the language and to prevent further deterioration should the recommendations be accepted.

He added that the Customer Care department already had a myriad of duties and that it would not be reasonable to add the Welsh language to the responsibilities of the Department.

c) In response, the Monitoring Officer explained that language matters would not be transferred to the Customer Care Department. Rather, the suggested change would mean that the Language Committee's terms of reference would be strengthened by operating as a consultative body making recommendations to the Cabinet.

During the ensuing discussion, the following main points were noted:-

- There would be a need to discuss how the additional task would be undertaken should the recommendation be approved;
- There was an opportunity to strengthen the role of the Language Committee in promoting the development of the Welsh language.
- The Cabinet Member could disregard the Committee's recommendations and ideas;
- That we should allow for the opportunity of operating as a consultative body on Welsh language promotion strategies in Gwynedd.

ch) An amendment was proposed noting that the Language Committee should operate as a consultative body on Welsh language promotion strategies within the County, but that it should make recommendations to the full Council rather than to the Cabinet.

d) The Monitoring Officer noted that this was a legal matter. Therefore, the amendment would be unconstitutional.

dd) In response, the proposer noted that there was a need to challenge the act at times. However, on the casting vote of the Chair, the proposal fell.

RESOLVED that this Committee:

a) recommends to the full Council on 2 May that the following clause be added to the Committee's terms of reference:-

'Act as a consultative body on strategies to promote the Welsh language within the County and to make recommendations to the Cabinet as required.'

b) considers its work programme for the coming year in light of its powers and terms of reference.

c) writes to the appropriate person at the Welsh Government to ask for changes to be introduced to the act in relation to transferring all responsibilities for language matters from the Cabinet to the Council.

4. REPORT ON THE SUCCESS OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL LEISURE CENTRES LANGUAGE CHAMPIONS PROJECT

Submitted – the report of the Senior Operational Manager, and also present at the meeting was Keira Handry, one of the Language Champions, who worked as a leisure assistant at Penllyn Leisure Centre, Bala.

It was noted that training had been provided for 13 Gwynedd Leisure Centre Language Champions as part of the Bilingual Workplaces Scheme.

She expanded on the matter and referred specifically to the following matters:-

- The core responsibilities of the Language Champions;
- Advantages of Language Champions for the Workforce;
- Advantages of Language Champions for the Council;
- Steps taken by the Operational Unit.

It was added that the work undertaken through the medium of Welsh as part of the leisure centres' activities was constantly growing. Sending Welsh language e-mails was an obvious example of this.

In light of this, the leisure assistant noted that workers were ready to attempt to deal with such new tasks, and she believed that it was essential for the trainers at the centres to be able to speak Welsh, as not all children could understand English.

During the ensuing discussion, the following main points were noted:-

- That the improvement witnessed in Penllyn Leisure Centre was to be welcomed and there was room to congratulate the workforce;
- That difficulties continued to exist in relation to the Bangor, Dolgellau and Tywyn leisure centres;
- Consideration should be given to including a condition and having a trial period in relation to learning Welsh, when making appointments, and there was a need for the Committee to monitor the development;
- In light of the success with the leisure centres, other departments within the Council could be targeted;
- There were difficulties at times when training adults in fitness rooms, however efforts were being made.

Keira Hendry was congratulated on her success in learning Welsh and a member referred to her ability in discussing numbers when using the language.

Specific reference was made to the football activities held by Kickit, and concern was expressed regarding their failure in using the Welsh language.

It was explained that the activity was held at schools, rather than at leisure centres, and that the Council was not directly responsible for it.

It was agreed that consideration had to be given to contracts with specific conditions in terms of using the Welsh language when those from outside used Council assets.

RESOLVED:

a) To note the content of the report.

b) That further information be submitted in relation to the use of the Welsh language at the Bangor, Dolgellau and Tywyn leisure centres.

c) That the following matters are included with this Committee's work programme:

i) to consider rights relating to imposing conditions on contracts or encouraging those from outside to use the Welsh language when using Council assets.

ii) to consider rights regarding setting conditions in relation to learning the Welsh language and imposing trial periods when appointing;

iii) to look at other departments within the Council in turn, in relation to the use of the Welsh language, following the success of the Language Champions scheme at the leisure centres.

5. 2011 CENSUS: SEMINAR ON THE SITUATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN GWYNEDD

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer by the Welsh Language Officer. Reference was made to a seminar held on 20 March, 2013 to discuss the response to the 2011 Census on a local level in relation to the Welsh language.

It was explained that the seminar had created an opportunity to hold discussions for Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd. In light of the discussions, it was seen that the following themes were apparent in the three areas:-

- Use of the language and the confidence to use it;
- In and out-migration patterns;
- The role of schools and education in promoting the language;
- Housing and planning matters;
- Raising awareness of the Welsh language;
- Influencing other bodies.

In relation to the next steps to be taken, an emphasis was placed on the need to consistently analyse the data that was released by the Census, and it was noted that the members were a crucial part of this process. It was also noted that the members had a key role to play within their own wards as promoters of the Welsh language.

During the ensuing discussion, the following main points were noted:-

- That the Welsh language was essential in all schools in Wales;
- That some schools in Gwynedd used the English language in order to attract pupils, and therefore they did not operate in accordance with Council policy;
- That members could knock on doors in their wards in order to gather information regarding local housing needs;
- That the bedroom tax was a cause for concern as some of the larger houses would be left empty and people from outside would come in to the area to live in them;
- That the 106 Condition imposed with planning permissions posed a lot of difficulties for many in relation to getting a mortgage;
- The Council did not have a plan to assist those who wished to build their own homes.

Iwan Trefor Jones, the Corporate Director noted that the Council's Unitary Development Plan was a central matter to be considered as it was linked to housing needs, the language plan and creating developments for the future.

The importance of maintaining contact with the Plan was noted and that this should be included within the work programme of this Committee.

RESOLVED to accept the report for information and to note the need to pursue the discussions on a local level and to agree on a role for the councillors.

6. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer by the Compliance and Language Manager.

Reference was made to complaints made against the Council and against other bodies during January, February and March of 2013.

A member expressed his dissatisfaction as references were made numerous times to departments within the Council apologising or stating the need to wait for a response. He emphasised that this was not good enough and noted that a message should be sent to the departments often in order to ensure that they looked at the way in which they undertook their administrative responsibilities.

It was agreed that it would be beneficial for the Compliance and Language Manager, along with the Chair to provide a letter to be sent to all Council departments noting the importance of complying with the Language Policy.

Iwan Trefor Jones, the Corporate Director suggested that performance indicators could be put in place to provide an opportunity for this Committee to obtain evidence of what was being done to promote the Welsh language. It was noted that this could be part of the Committee's work programme and it was agreed that it could reprimand and commend as required.

RESOLVED:

a) To note the content of the report.

b) That the Compliance and Language Manager, along with the Chair, will provide a letter to be sent to all Council departments noting the importance of complying with the Language Policy.

c) That consideration should be given to the possibility of having performance indicators, for monitoring the Council departments' efforts to comply with the Language Policy.

7. REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF PUPILS AT THE LANGUAGE CENTRES

Submitted - the report of the Head of Education Department.

The Head of Department led the members through the report and explained that the aim of the Language Centres was to provide an intensive Welsh language course to enable incomers to assimilate with the bilingual society and fully participate in bilingual educational experiences.

By now, there were four primary centres and one secondary centre in Gwynedd. This was totally unique in Wales, and the Head of Department expanded on the success highlighted when the pupils returned to their schools and communities.

It was noted that 1056 primary pupils and 358 secondary pupils had attended the centres between 2005 and October 2012. Reference was also made to the appropriate follow up that was offered and to the good links that existed between the schools and the centres.

It was added that the after-care strategy which existed at the primary centres had been developed during the autumn term of 2009. It had been introduced to primary school head teachers and had been in operation since spring term 2010.

There had been significant development in September 2012 when a second teacher had been appointed to a permanent post at the Secondary Language Centre. In light of the appointment, it would be possible to further develop the implementation of the after-care programmes for pupils by offering guidance to secondary schools as required. Consequently, along with the fact that the pupils attended the Secondary Centre for half a term, the Head of Department noted that the after-care for secondary pupils was much more refined.

He added that more intensive after-care could not be provided for primary pupils due to lack of resources.

Information was submitted regarding the percentage of pupils who followed Welsh as a first language after they transferred to the secondary sector (2010-2012). The details of the centres were available individually and it was agreed that they were very positive. In terms of the Maesincla Language Centre, information was submitted in two parts with the first part relating to the children who did not attend Ysgol Friars, and the second relating to children who did attend Ysgol Friars.

The Head of Department referred specifically to recent developments relating to Ysgol Friars. He drew attention to the aims set as part of the three year work programme within Gwynedd Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2013-2014 and underlined the following:-

- Ensuring progression in the Welsh language as a subject and as a teaching medium from KS2 to KS3. (**100%** of learners continuing to improve their language skills when transferring from primary to secondary school).
- Strengthening action in the areas/establishments/schools where data showed the need.

In addition to this he emphasised that the councillors had a specific role and he referred to important work that Councillor Mair Rowlands had instigated at Ysgol Friars by establishing a language sub-panel there. It had been arranged for the sub-panel to meet for the first time this week.

The Head of Education Department noted that this work was an example of what councillors could achieve and the way in which they could be part of the contact between schools and language centres.

He added that Estyn had referred to the excellent work of the Language Centres following the recent inspection.

During the ensuing discussion, the work undertaken in relation to Ysgol Friars was welcomed.

It was noted that additional resources were needed in order to intensify the after-care programme which existed at the Primary Centres. It was suggested that a report could be prepared on the progress of the appointment of the second teacher to the Secondary Language Centre. It was added that the information could be of value by seeking to secure resources for Primary Centres after-care.

It was agreed that this was a field that could be added to the Language Committee work programme.

RESOLVED:

a) To accept the report and to thank the Head of Education Department and the workforce for their service.

b) That a progress report is submitted in a year's time on the work in light of the appointment of the second teacher to the Secondary Language Centre.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.25pm.