
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 15.01.14

Present: Councillor Liz Saville Roberts (Chair).

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

Officers: Sion Huws (Compliance and Language Manager), Debbie Anne Williams Jones (Democratic Services Manager), Dewi R.Jones (Head of Education Department), Bethan Eleri Roberts (Education Quality Improvement Officer), Sharon Warnes (External Consultant), Geraint Owen (Senior Human Resources Manager) and Ioan Hughes (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Observer: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language).

Venue

On short notice, it was decided to hold the meeting in Siambr Arfon rather than Ystafell Glyder Fawr. The Chair also referred to arrangements which were being made for holding meetings of this committee consistently on the same day of the week during next year.

Apologies: Councillors Gweno Glyn, Tom Ellis, Dyfrig Jones and Gruffydd Williams.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. URGENT ITEM – Dealing with a Welsh prescription

This item was not included on the agenda; however, the Chair agreed that it could be discussed as an urgent item under Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 because she was of the opinion that the matter should be discussed urgently.

A member referred to an incident in the chemist of the Morrisons company in Bangor recently when a prescription had been refused to be dealt with because it had been written in Welsh.

The member knew of a doctor who used the Welsh language when providing prescriptions 30 years ago and the member emphasised that the attitude of Morrisons was unacceptable. It was suggested that information should be sought regarding the Health Board's Language Policy.

However, it was explained that questioning the policy of another body was not within the Language Committee's authority and it would be more logical to contact the Language Commissioner to express the Committee's concern.

In response to the observations, the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language noted that it would be more useful for him to express the Language Committee's dissatisfaction rather than seeking information regarding the Language Policy of the Health Board.

Resolved unanimously that the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language will write to the Language Commissioner and to Morrisons expressing the Language Committee's dissatisfaction regarding the way in which the Welsh prescription was refused in the company's chemist in Bangor.

3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 10 October, 2013 as a true record, subject to amending the wording of item 1 in the Welsh version so that it read:

'Penderfynwyd ethol y Cyngorydd Gweno Glyn yn is-gadeirydd y pwyllgor hwn am 2013/14'.

4. LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer, noting that it was expected for all Welsh Local Authorities and National Parks to undertake a Standards Investigation in accordance with the statement made by the Language Commissioner.

The Standards Investigation would commence on 27 January 2014 and the process, in the form of a questionnaire, would take 12 weeks.

It was explained that Language Standards were different to Language Plans and were imposed on an organisation rather than agreed upon. The Language Commissioner anticipated that every relevant body would implement the standards within two years.

Members noted that Gwynedd Council had already achieved the aim in terms of the standards but efforts should be made to take it a step further and certainly there should be no stepping back.

Members were also eager to respond positively to any changes.

RESOLVED to accept the report for information.

5. DEPARTMENTAL PRESENTATION – HUMAN RESOURCES

Submitted - the report of the Senior Human Resources Manager on 'Recruitment and Appointment and Language Training Statistics' and background papers were circulated amongst members.

During the presentation the following points were raised:

- i) The workforce was important in promoting the Welsh language;
- ii) The number of Welsh speakers in the workforce of Gwynedd Council was increasing;
- iii) Gwynedd Council underlined the importance of using the Welsh language when collaborating with other authorities and bodies.

In terms of statistics, it was noted that 397 job advertisements in Gwynedd Council had been published between October 2012 and September 2013. Of these, 26 had to be re-advertised but it was emphasised that the Welsh language requirement was not the reason for the re-advertisement.

The following were elaborated upon:

- Staff receiving language training;
- Level of language training.

Specific attention was drawn to the fact that 54 Council staff received language training and that 31 of these were from the Social Services, Housing and Leisure Department. It was considered that the workforce of leisure centres were prominent amongst this number.

In response to observations made by members, reference was made to a group established to respond to the Strategic Framework published by the Welsh Government to promote the use of the Welsh language in the field of health and care specifically. It was noted that this underlined the work undertaken by the Council to promote the Welsh language.

During the ensuing discussion the following points were highlighted:

- that it was fair to convey the desire to introduce general training, such as training for chairs, through the medium of Welsh;
- efforts to appoint external providers with the ability to provide training through the medium of Welsh in various fields had proved successful;
- that training in the field of 'mindfulness' which was now available in Welsh was an example of this;
- that the clause which noted that the ability to speak Welsh as 'essential' was included in every job advertisement within the Council;
- lack of confidence caused some employees to choose not to speak Welsh although they had the ability to do so;
- work was in the pipe line to deal with this by holding a training session;
- the above efforts had already proved successful with an example of this being the provision of relevant training in leisure centre activities terminology;
- a high percentage of those appointed to permanent posts received language training and were willing to take full advantage of the follow-up offered;
- the tendency of some to speak English during a telephone conversation could be a further example of lack of confidence and there was an opportunity here to provide training;
- a work programme had been established for the future in accordance with the Language Framework.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

6. GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S DRAFT LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2014-2017

Submitted – the report of the Democratic Services Manager and the external consultant.

It was explained that Hunaniaith was responsible for setting the strategic direction to promote the Welsh language in Gwynedd. One of the commitments in the Hunaniaith work programme for 2013/14 was to draw-up the Gwynedd Language Strategy 2014 - 2017 and a Draft Operational Plan.

A consultant had been commissioned to deal with this work and jointly with Hunaniaith they had identified the following six strategic fields which were to be included in the draft document.

- The Family
- Children and Young People
- Communities
- Welsh language Service Provision
- The Workplace
- Infrastructure

The Language Committee was duty bound to fulfil a consultative role on language promotion strategies within the county. As a result, the Draft Strategy was submitted to the committee to provide an opportunity for members to voice their opinions.

The content of the Draft Strategy was elaborated upon and the six fields were dealt with individually. Reference was made specifically to the importance of the 'infrastructure' with the close relationship between the economy, housing and the Welsh language being noted.

It was noted that children and young people were the ambassadors for the future and that this was associated with the need to raise awareness of and market the Welsh language. In relation to this, the importance was noted of ensuring that there were opportunities for young people since the loss of young people meant the loss of jobs and consequently the language and economy would suffer.

7. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2017

Submitted – the report of the Head of Education Department, outlining the work undertaken by Gwynedd Council since 1996 in relation to issues dealing specifically with the Welsh language in Education.

The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act (2013) became law in Wales on 4 March 2013. The Act placed a statutory duty on local authorities to prepare and introduce a Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. This was the first time for these plans to become statutory and the arrangements would be implemented from 1 April 2014 for a period of three years up to March 2017.

The Head of Department elaborated on this and explained that the Welsh in education Strategic Plan would be a means whereby the Welsh Government could monitor the way in which local authorities responded to the need to implement the objectives of the Strategy and contribute towards them through:

- ensuring that every step of local authority education process included full consideration of Welsh-medium education;
- extending Welsh-medium education provision where a need was identified on the basis of improved planning;
- ensuring the delivery of Welsh-medium support services on the basis of consortia;
- improving standards and extending the use of Welsh by children and young people;
- demonstrating progress against the specific targets in the Welsh Medium Education Strategy.

Reference was made to the aim of the Strategic Plan and attention was drawn to the objective of being able to demonstrate clear progress over three years in each local authority and consortium area towards achieving the Strategy's targets.

It was reported that the focal point of the Plans were the targets contained in the Strategy and it was expected for authorities to report annually on their progress against the following targets:

- More seven year old children being taught through the medium of Welsh as a percentage of the Year 2 cohort;
- More learners continuing to improve their language skills when transferring from primary to secondary school;
- More learners studying for qualification through the medium of Welsh;
- More learners aged 16-19 studying Welsh and subjects through the medium of Welsh;

- More learners with improved skills in Welsh.

A draft copy of the Gwynedd Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2014-17 was submitted for the attention of the members.

The Head of Education Department guided the members through the draft copy and it was noted that the Education Department's ambitious aim was "*...ensure that all pupils in the county have the appropriate linguistic skills in Welsh and English, in order to enable them to be full members of the bilingual society they are part of.*"

Following a thorough review of the Strategic Plan 2013 -14, it was agreed that the Statutory Strategic Plan (2014-17) would focus on the following aspects in terms of Welsh as a language and as a teaching medium and to set them as clear objectives for the three year work programme of the Council:-

- Setting a firm foundation for the Welsh language during nursery and early years education. (98.6% of seven year old children educated through the medium of Welsh);
- 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);
- Ensuring progression in the Welsh language as a subject and as a teaching medium from KS3 to KS4.
- Strengthen implementation in the areas/ schools where data indicated the need to equip headteachers and train the workforce to fully achieve the Scheme's objective;
- Strengthen the use of language cohorts as a progression planning tool in secondary schools;
- Develop the Welsh Baccalaureate at levels 1, 2 and 3 in the secondary schools;
- Confirm implementation of the Language Charter in each of our primary schools giving due attention to workforce training by developing medium methodology elements;
- Promote the use of Welsh as the social language of young people at our secondary schools by establishing and developing a scheme similar to the primary schools' Language Charter.

Should this be successfully achieved during the next three years, it was anticipated that the whole education system could contribute towards the development of Welsh (language and medium) and quality of education and experiences of children and young people of Gwynedd. The Head of Education Department underlined the importance of this.

Information was submitted regarding the Operational Plan and the relevant outcomes, namely:

- Outcome 1 - More seven year old children educated through the medium of Welsh;
- Outcome 2 - More learners continuing to improve their language skills when transferring from primary to secondary school;
- Outcome 3 - More learners aged 14-16 years old studying for qualification through the medium of Welsh;
- Outcome 4 – More learners aged 16-19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools, colleges and work-based learning;
- Outcome 5 - More learners with higher skills in Welsh;
- Outcome 6 – Welsh-medium provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs;
- Outcome 7 – Workforce planning and Continuous Professional Development.

It was noted that Outcome 2 was a field needing particular attention. It was explained that Gwynedd did not define secondary schools according to language categories as it was the same expectation in relation to the Language Policy, namely to provide all students in the county with an opportunity to be confidently bilingual.

There was an exception to this in Bangor, since two secondary schools, namely Ysgol Tryfan and Ysgol Friars, shared the same catchment area. There was a general expectation for both schools to offer a continuation of Welsh as a First Language in KS3 for those pupils gaining a Level 3+ at the end of KS2. A difference was seen between the cross –subject provision of the two schools. In Ysgol Tryfan, all the subjects were offered through the medium of Welsh but the long-term expectation in Ysgol Friars was to ensure that sections of the curriculum were available bilingually.

It was noted that encouraging Ysgol Friars to move more towards the target would be one of the priorities of the Strategic Plan and the main field for discussion in the catchment area of both schools and how best to influence this positively.

It was confirmed that steps had already been taken in order to ensure this, such as teaching Welsh to members of staff.

Reference was made to the need to ensure that co-operative occupational courses funded through the Learning Pathways grant were available in Welsh/bilingually. Only in very exceptional cases was consideration given to supporting courses available in one language only.

In terms of post 16 courses, reference was made to the need to establish a framework of indicators for bilingualism so that the provision, including occupational courses, was monitored and gaps identified in Welsh medium provision. It was noted that the importance of this was to create a workforce for the future.

In response to an enquiry, it was noted that examination papers were being submitted in Welsh and English so that it was possible for pupils / students to choose which language to use. It was added that the language used would depend to some extent on the previous experience in school internal examinations etc.

An indicator could be included to ascertain which language was being used.

A member noted that problems could arise at times as it was easier to use English and getting information from websites was an example of this. However, the member welcomed the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan as a means of strengthening the Welsh language.

It was also confirmed that promoting the use of other languages was being considered.

At the end of the discussion the Gwynedd Language Charter pamphlet was distributed amongst members.

RESOLVED to accept the report and note the observations made so that the draft version can be submitted to the Government.

8. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer, referring to complaints received during October and November 2013.

There was a call for relevant reports regarding language complaints to be more detailed in future. It was noted that only an outline of the complaints and responses were currently being submitted and more detailed information would be useful in order for the Language Committee to be able to work effectively.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the need to receive more detailed information within the reports in future.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.30pm.