
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 04.04.14

Present: Councillor Liz Saville Roberts (Chair).

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

Officers: Gwenno Williams (Senior Executive Manager, Social Services, Housing and Leisure Department), Sion Huws (Compliance and Language Manager), Gwenan Ellis Jones (Welsh Language Charter Coordinator), Bethan Roberts (Education Quality Improvement Officer), Ruth Richards (Equality and Language Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

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

Apologies: Councillors Gweno Glyn, Dyfrig Jones and Mandy Williams-Davies.

Welcome was extended to Councillor Eddie Dogan, who was present to observe the meeting along with Rhys Parri, a student from Bangor University who was on work experience with the Council.

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 15 January, 2014 as a true record, subject to noting that it had been decided to ask the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language to give a report at every meeting of the Language Committee.

Matters arising from the minutes

Item 2 – Urgent Item – Dealing with a Welsh prescription

Copies of correspondence between the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language, the Health Board and the Morrisons company were distributed following an incident at the pharmacy in Morrisons, Bangor when a prescription had been refused because it had been written in Welsh.

The Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language noted that although the observations of the Morrisons company did not correspond with a number of facts he had heard from others, those observations had to be accepted as facts. However, he was of the opinion that the Health Board's letter was idle talk and was incomprehensible and believed that he should return to the Health Board to ask when a number of the points referred to in the last two paragraphs would happen. He added that it was the role of the Language Commissioner to deal with such matters and the Equality and Language Officer had sent copies of the responses by the Morrisons company and the Health Board to her, but had not received a response thus far.

Concern was expressed that staff were not monitored in such situations and that they tended to do things on their own and breach the rules. As other examples of this, reference was made to the use of an English only questionnaire in a doctor's surgery (the nurse asked the patients the questions in Welsh and translated the answers and noted them down in English on the form, although Welsh language forms were available) and paying-in slips were only available in English on the counters in banks. This was an on-going battle and was completely unacceptable.

RESOLVED to give the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language the right to write back to the Health Board to enquire about the timescale for the developments referred to in their letter and that the Equality and Language Officer contacts the Language Commissioner again to request an update.

Item 7 – The Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan 2014-2017

It was noted that it was unclear what the significance of the sentence “*Only in very exceptional cases will consideration be given to supporting courses that are available in one language only*” (second paragraph, page 6) was, and the Member Support and Scrutiny Officer agreed to ask the department for a further explanation.

5. UPDATE ON THE LANGUAGE CHAMPIONS SCHEME AND THE USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE AT BANGOR, TYWYN AND DOLGELLAU LEISURE CENTRES

Submitted – a verbal update by the Senior Executive Manager, Social Services, Housing and Leisure Department on the Language Champions Scheme and the use of the Welsh language at Bangor, Tywyn and Dolgellau Leisure Centres.

She noted the following:-

- (1) Each of the leisure centres had a manager who was a Language Champion.
- (2) Since she had last reported, the situation had improved at the Bangor and Tywyn Centres. 11 out of the 30 members of staff at Bangor were attending lessons and attempting to speak more Welsh, and more Welsh was also being spoken at the Tywyn Centre, where the manager could now follow the discussion through the medium of Welsh in meetings.
- (3) Problems continued at the Dolgellau Leisure Centre. Some staff lacked confidence or were reluctant to use the Welsh language, despite efforts to persuade them to at least greet customers in Welsh.
- (4) People who went on courses did succeed, and she referred to two recent examples of this, namely Caroline Jackson (Blaenau Ffestiniog Swimming Pool) who had won the Learner of the Year Award and Tracey Ann Linton (Frondeg, Caernarfon) who had come second.
- (5) The department was pressing on staff who were reluctant to use the Welsh language that the next step could possibly be to discipline them, as they were breaching the language policy.
- (6) She believed that the Language Champions Scheme was very valuable, and there was consideration to establishing a similar scheme in the county's residential homes.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- (1) It was suggested that a customer questionnaire should be distributed at all the leisure centres to obtain feedback from the users.
- (2) In response to an enquiry, the Senior Executive Manager noted that the Welsh language was not essential for these posts, but every effort was made to appoint

Welsh speakers. Most of the staff were local people who had received their education in the county's schools through the medium of Welsh, but yet they were reluctant to use the language. It was suggested that the Welsh language should be essential for these posts, and that this element should be examined. The Council should also be clear what its expectations were when appointing people.

- (3) It was emphasised that people's attitudes could be changed, not only in the leisure centres, but across the Council, and it was suggested that the Language Charter could be amended to foster this new attitude amongst staff.
- (4) The Chair noted that there would be a report to the next meeting in June on More than Words, namely an appendix to the Language Scheme on the use of the Welsh language in residential homes and through the external services as well. She welcomed the aim to establish a Language Champions Scheme in the residential homes and she noted that disciplinary steps were also important. She welcomed the idea of having a questionnaire and added that there was a need to look at the policy with respect to advertising posts. She was of the opinion that the Welsh language should be essential for these types of jobs and it should be made clear to people in interviews what the Council's expectations were in terms of the language.
- (5) She emphasised that every member of the Council's staff should be a language champion and adopt the right attitude in favour of the Welsh language, and give priority to the Welsh language in their work.
- (6) It was noted that non-Welsh speaking people moved in to community houses, and there was no purpose having a Welsh council with no one speaking the language in the outside world.

Referring to a complaint (under item 9 on the agenda) regarding the failure to provide a first-contact Welsh response on four separate occasions at Dolgellau Leisure Centre, the Senior Executive Manager noted that she had been given to understand that the officer in question had attended Welsh lessons two years ago and that she had been encouraged to attend further lessons. The department was also looking at changing the working method at the centre and had considered different options with the Human Resources Department.

The Chair noted that the Council had a duty to be a respectful employer to its staff and their needs, but it also had a duty to provide a bilingual service to the public.

The Senior Executive Manager was thanked for her update.

6. PUPILS' PROGRESS AT THE LANGUAGE CENTRES

Submitted – the report of the Head of Education Department on pupils' progress at the Language Centres together with a presentation from the Language Charter Coordinator on levelling pupils' oracy, who showed examples of the different levels, which was the result of the work of the Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy Language Centres.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their observations. During the discussion the following main matters were highlighted:-

- (1) It was emphasised that this scheme was one of the great successes of the nation, and the children's incredible progress in a matter of weeks was evidence of the staff's enthusiasm and commitment to this endless task.
- (2) A request was made to record the fact that between 5,000 and 10,000 children had gone through the language centres since they were established in 1984, which showed how different the situation would have been without the centres' contribution.

- (3) The importance of monitoring the children after they had left the centre and returned to their schools was emphasised. In response, the Language Charter Coordinator agreed that monitoring was essential to the continuation of the good work, and she gave details of the aftercare plan for teachers.
- (4) A member noted the importance of tracking the children throughout their time at school in order to see what their attainments were e.g. in Welsh GCSE and A level, and through which medium the pupils studied their GCSE and post-16 subjects.
- (5) In response to an enquiry, the Language Charter Coordinator confirmed that there was a 5-6 week assimilation course for parents, to correspond with their children's course, and that 15 parents had attended the course this year to date.
- (6) In response to an enquiry, the Language Charter Coordinator explained that it was recommended very strongly that immigrants attended the language centres, or otherwise, they could not cope in a mainstream class.
- (7) In response to an observation that information from the Census would offer a baseline for the work, the Language Charter Coordinator noted that every child in Gwynedd had completed an on-line questionnaire of their use of the language. The results of the survey would be published on 28 April and Gwynedd would be the first council to know what children's habits were in terms of language use.
- (8) It was noted that there was a risk for these children to associate the Welsh language with schools and teachers, rather than the real world outside the school walls.
- (9) The Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language was asked to give an update to the committee on developments regarding the Language Strategy and the Census.

The Chair noted that the Council could take pride in the sweeping success of this scheme and she thanked the Language Charter Coordinator for her detailed and interesting presentation.

7. SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION

Submitted – a verbal update by the Chair of the Sustainable Procurement Scrutiny Investigation Group, namely Councillor Mair Rowlands.

She elaborated on the background of the investigation and noted that the final draft report for the investigation had been submitted to the Cabinet Member for the Economy at the Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 27 March. She explained that one of the recommendations of the investigation referred to the position of the Welsh language, namely:-

“A review should be undertaken of the use of the Welsh language within procurement arrangements in the context of the *Awarding public services contracts and the Welsh language* document and any recommendations should be included in the new Procurement Strategy and Sustainable Procurement Policy and arrangements developed to monitor compliance.”

She noted that there was a role for the Language Committee to ensure that the Council's language standards and requirements were duly addressed in this field, and the investigation group, which would continue, could also look into the field and keep an eye on this.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Investigation Group was thanked for her thorough work.

A member enquired what percentage of contracts complied with the document. The Chair of the Scrutiny Investigation Group agreed to make enquiries.

It was suggested that a copy of the document be sent to Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER'S STANDARDS INVESTIGATION

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer giving details of the Welsh Language Commissioner's Standards Investigation, suggesting a series of comments that could be noted under the 'Further Comments' section of the questionnaire.

The report was warmly received and members agreed with the suggested comments.

RESOLVED to note the comments below under the 'Further Comments' section of the questionnaire:-

- **The Council would appreciate reassurance that the Standards represent a basic requirement, and requests confirmation of the Commissioner's support to any organisation wishing to work and develop beyond the Standard's core requirements.**
- **We will ask that the Commissioner considers the role of an Authority such as Gwynedd in relation to partnership, regional and any other joint provision arrangements. The Council's aim is to ensure that collaboration arrangements never lead to any deterioration in language provision. Again, we would appreciate the encouragement to aim higher than the Standards, and the support to continue to influence our partners' provision.**
- **We note in the Questionnaire that we failed to reach every Standard due to other organisations' failure. The Language Committee will already be aware of many examples of this; the effort to get Welsh Swimming Certificates and Cremation Forms, for instance.**
- **Some of the Record Keeping Standards may prove to be problematic. Since Welsh is the default language when the public contact us, it would be impractical to count each contact made through the medium of Welsh. Since we are aiming for 100% compliance in relation to this, it is difficult to see how such detailed records would add value.**

9. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer giving details of the latest language complaints to hand involving the Council, partners or third party organisations.

A member noted that he had a complaint regarding the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust and he was asked to pass on the complaint to the Equality and Language Officer to be discussed at the next meeting.

Referring to a complaint that the Planning Department used the English version of an address in correspondence, it was noted that an English version did not exist for the road in question. It was also noted that the Planning Department had used 'Ffordd y Traeth' for 'Lôn Gwydryn' in Welsh (*Beach Road*), Abersoch and 'Ffordd y Capel' for 'Stryd Wesla' in Welsh (*Chapel Street*), Porthmadog.

Referring to a complaint regarding incorrect language in an e-mail from a member of Council staff, it was emphasised that it was important that officers had the confidence to use the Welsh language, and that they should not be criticised for making the effort to correspond through the medium of Welsh. On the other hand, it was noted that some level of standard must also be maintained.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

At the end of the meeting, a request was made to place the following items on the committee's work programme:-

- The situation of the Welsh language in the context of allocating social housing;
- Support from the Council to businesses;
- Changing old house names.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 11.55am.