
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 26.06.14

Present: Councillor Mair Rowlands (Vice-chair in the chair).

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Elwyn Edwards, Tom Ellis, Alwyn Gruffydd, Siân Gwenllian, Eric Merfyn Jones, Liz Saville Roberts, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Gruffydd Williams and Mandy Williams-Davies.

Officers: Sion Huws (Compliance and Language Manager), Arwel Owen (Senior Housing Manager), Gareth Parri (Housing Options Team Leader), Ruth Richards (Equality and Language Officer), Ifan Llewelyn Jones (Welsh Language Development Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

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

Apologies: Councillors Alan Jones Evans, Gweno Glyn and Dyfrig Jones.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Gweno Glyn as Chair of this committee for 2014/15.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Two names were proposed and seconded for the post of vice-chair, namely Councillor Eirwyn Wailliams and Councillor Mair Rowlands.

Five members voted in favour of Councillor Eirwyn Willaims and five members in favour of Councillor Mair Rowlands. Councillor Eirwyn Williams noted that he was willing to withdraw his name.

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Mair Rowlands as Vice-chair of this committee for 2014/15.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Siân Gwenllian declared an interest in item 8 on the agenda – Social Housing Allocations, because she served on the Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd Management Board.

4. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 4 April 2014 as a true record, subject to the following corrections:-

Item 9 – Language Complaints

Correct the reference to Lôn Gwydryn, Abersoch to read Lôn Gwydryn, Morfa Bychan.

The Note at the end of the minutes regarding the work programme

Correct the last item on the list to read "Changing house names".

Matters arising from the minutes

Item 2 – Matter arising from the minutes of 15 January 2014
Item 2 – Urgent Item – Dealing with Welsh prescriptions

A copy of the Welsh Language Commissioner's letter to the First Minister of Wales was circulated regarding the right to use the Welsh language on prescriptions in Wales which recommended the steps that could be taken by Welsh Ministers under Part 2, Section 4 of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011.

It was noted that the Health Minister had pledged that he would respond to the letter by the end of this term.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER – THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Submitted – the verbal report of the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language, detailing recent development in the field, including:-

- Reporting back from the last meeting of the Workplaces Sub-group which had been established under Hunaniaith;
- The presence of Hunaniaith and Gwynedd Council at the Urdd Eisteddfod and the events attended during the week;
- Specific meetings regarding developing software to track the development of the Language Charter;
- An informal meeting with the Chairman of the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to discuss the use of the language by staff;
- Discussions on the concerns regarding the lack of Welsh language provision for former soldiers.

A paper was distributed to members following the meeting of the Language Delivery Panel on 25 June, detailing the activities, the progress thus far and the pledges to be achieved during 2014/15 with regard to the Gwynedd Primary Schools Welsh Language Charter Project and the Communities Promoting the Welsh Language Project. Referring to the work of tracking the Language Charter, the Cabinet Member noted that although a specific experiment in Ysgol Pen y Bryn, Bethesda had shown progress in the children's use of the Welsh language over a period, he was extremely disappointed that so few children in the county listened to the radio and watched TV in Welsh and the vast majority of children used Facebook and Twitter almost entirely through the medium of English. He noted that he would provide a further update to the committee following the next Language Delivery Panel.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6. SOCIAL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

Submitted – a report and PowerPoint presentation by the Senior Housing Manager and the Housing Options Team Leader on the Common Housing Allocation Policy and Social Housing Allocation in Gwynedd. The Common Housing Allocation Register was detailed, along with the Policy, the legal framework, the partnership work, the role of the Housing Options Team and the definition of local connection (including statutory considerations), fact and figures along with a series of messages to close.

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

- (1) Concern was expressed that it appeared that outsiders could have priority over local people for social housing in the rural communities of the county. These people could come from socially harder areas and could influence the nature of small estates in the county and challenge the indigenous Welsh speakers.
- (2) It was regrettable that language had not been included as one of the characteristics safeguarded by law against all types of discrimination under the Welsh Government Code of Guidance on Allocating Houses and Homelessness. It was explained that language was associated with ethnicity, which was one of the characteristics and, therefore, there could be no discrimination on the basis of language. It was argued that Welsh speakers in Wales were not an ethnic minority and it was emphasised that there was a need to challenge the legal framework.
- (3) It was noted that very often problems arose when tenancies were exchanged and it was explained that this was a statutory right of any public tenant in Wales and England, subject to complying with special requirements noted in the Housing Act 1985. It was enquired whether it was within the Assembly's power to revisit this legislation as the housing field had now been devolved to Wales. It was reported that Housing was a matter that had been devolved and it would be possible to press for change. However, this issue had not been addressed in the Housing Act that was going through the statutory process at the moment. The homelessness service considered local connection when providing services but any person from any area had the right to ask to be included on the housing register.
- (4) Concern was expressed regarding the welfare of those incomers who were sent to rural communities far from services and family networks. Although these applicants could reach the top of the list in terms of points if there was no local demand for properties, allocating them in rural areas could lead to tensions and the situation was not ideal for them, let alone the communities. It was explained that the applicants' rights to choose the areas where they wished to live had to be accepted and respected and that allocations were more likely for hard to let properties or properties where local applicants had no priority points. However, the housing associations were becoming more proactive and were fostering a relationship with prospective tenants before signing them up and were looking increasingly at the social side also.
- (5) It was emphasised that any planning permission granted for a social housing development in a rural community should include a 106 agreement restricting the occupancy of those houses to local people.
- (6) It was noted that there had been empty houses in Deiniolen for some time although there were a number of local people on the waiting list and the Housing Options Team were asked to put pressure on Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd (CCG) to move the process forward sooner to release the properties. It was explained that the function of the Housing Options Team was not to put pressure on CCG to manage their stock as they were an independent company and body, but the Team collaborated closely with CCG so that a speedy response could be given once the waiting lists were to hand. Also, CCG had given an explanation for keeping the houses vacant for renovation work and that had to be accepted.
- (7) It was questioned whether Nefyn as a community was an urban or rural area in respect of the rural allocations policy and it was suggested that there could be a discussion regarding this.
- (8) Referring to the Localism Act 2011, which was operational in England, it was noted that England was far ahead of Wales in terms of safeguarding communities. It was explained that this act had not been enacted in Wales and perhaps legislation was needed for this to happen.
- (9) It was noted, although there was a perception that communities were being drowned by outsiders, it was heartening to understand that 91.41% of current applications that had been registered with the Housing Options Team had a local connection with Gwynedd. Despite this, the language was in decline in the county's communities

and it was obvious that the local connection was no longer sufficient to safeguard the language and there had to be a language condition. Guidance was sought on how to challenge the Code to place more emphasis in terms of the local connection and that the Welsh language was a condition in planning and housing matters. It was explained that persuading the Assembly to revisit the code was quite challenging but it would be possible to correspond with them noting the members' observations and concerns and raising questions regarding the current Code.

The officers were thanked for the presentation.

RESOLVED that the officers of the Housing Service correspond with the Assembly, noting the members' observations and concerns and calling for:-

- (a) Adding language to the characteristics that are safeguarded by law against all types of discrimination under the Welsh Government's Code of Guidance on Allocation of Houses and Homelessness.**
- (b) Introducing legislation to extend the Localism Act so that it is enacted in Wales.**

7. GWYNEDD COUNCIL'S LANGUAGE SCHEME - MONITORING REPORT 2013-14

Submitted – the draft Monitoring Report 2013/14 and members were invited to submit observations and approve the report prior to it being submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Referring to the Language Skills of Staff, the Equality and Language Officer noted that there were more figures to be included in the report for Social Services and that 94% of staff in the department were Welsh speakers.

During the ensuing discussion it was noted:-

- (1) The problem was in Meirionnydd and specifically in Dolgellau Leisure Centre which was very obvious from the report.
- (2) The report was a baseline which could be built upon. There was room for improvement in some areas but the committee's hands were tied until the Language Standards were published.
- (3) It was enquired whether the Language Charter could be tailored for Youth Clubs.
- (4) An observation was made on the details of figures for Welsh speakers in the Social Services Department (submitted during the meeting). It was explained that there would be figures available for the various functions within Social Services in due course and they would also be submitted to the Language Commissioner; they would also be continuously monitored as part of the 'More than Just Words' structure.

RESOLVED to approve the report and submit it to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

8. UPDATE ON LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Submitted - for information, the report of the Language and Equality Officer, noting:-

- (1) The Welsh Language Commissioner had published a Standards Report which noted the conclusions of the Standards Investigation and had produced an advice document for Welsh Ministers, summarising the comments received from the public and interested groups on the proposed Standards.
- (2) It was anticipated that the regulations would come into force in November 2014.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

9. THE LANGUAGE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer requesting the committee to approve the work programme for 2014-15.

A feeling of frustration was expressed that the Language Committee had no power and there was no follow-up to the discussions. A wish for the committee to be more proactive and pioneering was expressed, rather than being accepting of everything and to promote the language rather than trying to protect it every time. It was suggested that rather than listening to presentations and asking questions only, the committee should have a discussion and summarise the messages at the end and consider establishing a sub-group to examine the matter in more detail. It was also suggested that the committee could do more of their general work at working group level as it was difficult to delve deeply into issues in a full committee. However, it was emphasised that there was a need to ensure sufficient capacity to undertake the work properly.

It was noted that matters on the draft work programme involved the status of the language only and there was a need to address those matters that were crucial for the future of the Welsh language, such as housing, planning, the economy etc. The programme did not refer to reporting back on any matter.

There was a discussion on establishing a sub-group without delay to examine the field of social housing allocations as a result of receiving a presentation on the issue under item 6 above but it was suggested that it was premature to do so before receiving the legal guidance that had been requested and before ensuring the capacity to undertake the work. It was noted that the Communities Scrutiny Committee was also investigating this field and it was proposed that a group from this committee met the Communities Scrutiny Committee to discuss the issue.

RESOLVED

(a) To approve the following work programme and to add to it as required.

23/10/14	29/01/15	23/04/15	June 2014
Welsh Language Commissioner's report on Standards Inquiry	Update on Language Standards	Update on Language Standards	Update on Language Standards
The Welsh Language Commissioner's response to our Annual Monitoring Report	Third party use of Council resources	Update on Hunaniaith /Gwynedd's Language Strategy	House and Street Name Policy
Language support for businesses	Departmental Presentation	Departmental Presentation	Departmental Presentation
Departmental Presentation	Language Complaints	Language Complaints	Language Complaints
Language Complaints			

--	--	--	--

- (b) **To invite the Language Commissioner to provide a presentation to a special meeting of the Language Committee following the publication of the Language Standards.**
- (c) **That the Compliance and Language Manager asks the Strategic and Improvement Department if they have the capacity to support investigations into specific fields by sub-groups of the Language Committee.**

10. MYNYDDOEDD PAWB CAMPAIGN

Resolved - the report of the Language Development Officer requesting the committee to:-

- (1) Submit their observations at the request of Mynyddoedd Pawb for support to their campaign to safeguard Welsh place names.
- (2) Consider contacting the organisers of the campaign to express the support of this committee to those aims.

It was noted that sometimes the Council used English versions of place names and it was explained that whilst there was a need for the Council to acknowledge English names to ensure consistency with the Post Office list, the Language Scheme was clear that only the Welsh version was used by the Council.

RESOLVED

- (a) **To refer the matter to the full Council to give political strength to the campaign.**
- (b) **To contact Community Councils to remind them that it is important for them to give their support to the campaign.**
- (c) **To nominate the Chair and Vice-chair of the Language Committee to be present at the next Conference of Mynyddoedd Pawb.**

11. HOUSE NAMES

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer. She noted that there had been 137 cases of changing house names in Gwynedd in 2012, with two changing from Welsh to English and nine changing from English to Welsh. A similar pattern had been seen in 2013, with 118 cases of changing house names – one changing from Welsh to English and 13 changing from English to Welsh. Therefore, the trend was more towards changing from English to Welsh than conversely but it was a matter for Gwynedd Consultancy to keep an eye on.

RESOLVED to note the report.

12. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – report of the Equality and Language Officer detailing the latest language complaints to hand.

Concern was expressed that the same issues raised their heads time after time and that people felt that there was no need for them to do anything save for apologising. The Council had no other methods of ensuring that the language received its due respect from staff and it was enquired how the Council could act in a proactive manner that promoted the language, rather than having to listen to apologies all the time. It was agreed to include any ideas on the work programme for discussion.

RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 1.00pm.