

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 17/01/19

Present:

Councillors: Alan Jones Evans, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Charles Wyn Jones, Elwyn Jones, Eric M. Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Cai Larsen, Eirwyn Williams and Elfed Wyn Williams.

Officers: Gwenllian Mair Williams (Welsh Language Services Manager), Annes Siôn (Member Support Officer), Rhonwen Jones (Member Support Officer)

Others invited: Councillor Edgar Wyn Owen (Vice-chair of the Council)

For items 7 and 8: Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department)

1. APOLOGIES

Cabinet Members and officers were welcomed to the meeting.
Apologies were received from Cllr Elin Walker Jones and Nia Jeffreys, the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 18 October, 2018 as a true record.

5. REPORT BY CABINET MEMBER FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE

The Welsh Language Services Manager submitted the report in the absence of the Cabinet Member. It was noted that it had been a quiet period with promotion plans ongoing. It was stated that the Welsh Language Promotion plan was developing well and that an update would soon be brought before the Language Committee.

Attention was drawn to the 'Common Voice Cymraeg' plan that was currently being developed. It was noted that the plan was an attempt to create free data to identify voices, so that machines could understand what you tell them in order to respond. It was added that a campaign would be held in March to encourage people to contribute to the plan, the more variety of voices the machine received, the better it would be able to interpret them.

It was confirmed that Hunanlaith had received a grant for the next two years and that a draft work programme had been created. It was reiterated that discussions were being held with Welsh Government in order to professionalise the field.

6. THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONERS ASSURANCE REPORT 2017/18 - MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Submitted - the report noting that another census would be conducted in two years. It was noted that the report had been submitted at the previous meeting but that a summary was required and a discussion held on the relevant features for Gwynedd. It was stated that the Welsh Language Commissioner published a report every year that was the subject of research by its officers on the successes of organisations in implementing and complying with Welsh language standards. It was added that they published the reports in order to offer an independent opinion to inform Welsh speakers, to draw the attention of organisations to successful practices and to provide evidence for politicians. It was stated that this report was a report on 2017/18, noting that development work had now been undertaken.

It was explained that the report highlighted three main challenges for organisations as noted below:

- Develop their provision in order to ensure that Welsh services were available and of good quality, and that they did not treat the Welsh language less favourably than English
- Improve understanding of the reasons for users' decisions, and take positive steps to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh language services
- Give detailed and strategic consideration on how to increase opportunities to use Welsh.

The Welsh Language Services Manager stated that the report raised many points of interest, but that she would focus on three recommendations for organisations.

Recommendation 1 - Although user experiences were still improving, it was noted that consistency was required in order to give people faith that services were always available through the medium of Welsh, and that Welsh would not be treated less favourably than English. It was stated that Technology was the matter in question and that many developments had been seen after a survey on the self-service machines had been undertaken. However, although this was positive, it was reiterated that care needed to be taken with new apps to ensure that both languages worked. It was added that there was a need to look into creating apps ourselves rather than attempting to modify some that were already available in English.

Recommendation 2 - It was noted that the recommendation was for organisations to encourage the use of Welsh language services, make them easy to use, and to understand users' real experiences. It was stated that this recommendation had been discussed on more than one occasion, and that the evidence submitted did not raise any new concerns. It was noted there was a need to think about a way of dealing with the barriers. It was added that some Council departments had attempted to make more use of clear Welsh and to reduce the use of more technical words.

Forms were discussed noting that research in Bangor had shown that only half of participants had chosen to complete forms through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that it raised the question whether there was a need to create bilingual forms,

and to consider simple steps to change this. It was noted that the national report specified that people would be 'very likely to make a job application in Welsh if Welsh is essential' for the post. However, it was noted that a high number of job applications in Gwynedd were being submitted through the medium of English. It was added that this was the case although a level of Welsh was essential for every post. In looking at the use of Welsh at public meetings, it was stated that the standards noted it was possible to contribute through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that Council policy noted that all Meetings were held through the medium of Welsh. It was stated that this needed to be highlighted to the Language Commissioner.

Recommendation 3 - it was noted that the recommendation was the need for organisations to give strategic and detailed consideration to increasing the use of Welsh when making policy decisions, and in terms of the internal operating language. It was noted there was a need to assess the Council system of assessing impact as the standards required organisations to consider how a decision could be implemented in a way that led to positive effects on the Welsh language. By examining work undertaken through grants and contracts, it was acknowledged that work needed to be done in this field. It was added that it was a priority.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was stated that the report showed enthusiasm in the field, but that over 60% of respondents who were part of the data did not use the language as a result of confidence-related reasons. It was stated that there was a need to address this and increase confidence. There was also a question regarding sample size and the people questioned and a discussion was held on how scientifically accurate was the sample.
- A discussion was held on starting conversations in Welsh, enquiring whether or not this happened in all locations within the Council, including Leisure Centres. It was noted that work had been done and that all staff members were expected to start conversations through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that exercises might need to be undertaken to see whether or not this occurred in every location. It was added that verbal use of the Welsh language was seen on all job descriptions.
- Job applications were discussed noting that it may be an idea to include a section to demonstrate Welsh writing skills as part of the Council's Application Form.
- When examining the forms, it was stated that information needed to be collected to consider creating bilingual forms. It was added that an understanding of how to use, understand and develop data needed to be ensured initially. The need to put a programme together on how to collect information was stated.
- When discussing the Standards' requirement for Gwynedd Council to 'consider how a decision can be implemented in a way that leads to positive effects on the Welsh language', it was noted that the Council should be much better at doing this. It was stated that the Council undertook impact assessments which identified the linguistic risks but people might take this field for granted. It was noted that Gwynedd residents may entrust members to ensure that the Welsh language received precedence. The need for the Council to undertake additional steps to ensure that the Welsh language was a priority was noted and to be more proactive.

- It was stated there was an increase in the number of posts where Welsh-speakers were required - and it was enquired what the department was doing to share this message with school pupils. It was noted that Hunanlaith was undertaking regular work with young people, but it was noted that it was a field where they examined how information was shared and a further discussion was needed on the field.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

7. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

The report was submitted noting that the Head of Education Department would go through the seven outcomes that were part of the Strategic Plan in order to have a discussion on the fields.

Outcome 1 - More seven year old children educated through the medium of Welsh. The Head of Education Department stated that the target of 99.1% was a totally ambitious target and that the actual percentage was 97.9%. It was noted that one of the reasons for not reaching the target was children who were latecomers with no Welsh. It was added that one school in the Bangor catchment area had more linguistic independence as it was a religious school. Following new appointments to the school, it was noted that changes had been seen in the school's attitude towards the language.

Outcome 2 - More learners continuing to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from primary to secondary school. It was noted that the percentage was low and was 83.4% compared with the target of 84.7%. It was stated that this was because of one secondary school in Bangor. It was stated that work was being undertaken with the school and that substantial improvement had been seen with an increase in the number of pupils using Welsh as their first language.

Outcomes 3 and 4 - More students aged 14-16 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh and More learners aged 14-19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in Schools, Colleges and through Work-based Learning. It was noted that there was encouraging data for the 14-19 pathway. It was noted that it was difficult to give a full quantification of how many sat their examinations through the medium of Welsh. In 2016-17, it was noted that 79% had registered to sit GCSE Welsh First Language. It was noted that the department continued to work with the schools to ensure conditional courses through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 5 - More learners with higher skills in Welsh. It was noted that the first target - namely that 77.2% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieved A* Grades in GCSE was a challenging target. It was stated that Gwynedd's percentage was higher than the percentage of many counties. It was stated there had been a drop in percentages this year which corresponded with the national drop in results. It was expressed that the results of this outcome corresponded with the county's investment in immersing young people in the language.

Outcome 6 – Welsh-medium Provision for Learners with Additional Learning Needs. It was noted that no targets were available for additional learning needs provision and that this was a result of the fact that bilingual provision was available for all pupils.

Outcome 7 - Workforce Planning and Continuous Professional Development. It was

noted that this was a matter that had been raised specifically on a regional level. The reason being as a high quality workforce needed to be ensured in order to reach the target of a million Welsh speakers. It was stated that the skills of teachers needed to be improved and that schools needed to lead on increasing the use of Welsh. When the Secondary Language Charter and schools was discussed, it was noted that Ysgol Friars and Tywyn had been very proactive and had contributed much more towards the discussion. In Ysgol Tywyn, it was stated that exceptionally good work had been completed and that the Welsh language had trickled into the community through the plan.

Observations arising from the discussion

- It was enquired about the use of the language with parents who home schooled their children. On a national level, it was noted that the number of parents who home schooled their children had increased but that they continued to be a very low percentage.
- The Bangor catchment area was discussed in particular as re-structuring work was afoot, and it was enquired whether it would make a difference in terms of language for the religious school. As part of the re-structuring work it was stated that the children would tend to move to two other schools in Penrhosgarnedd.
- A discussion was held on the reduction in the number of children who were assessed through the medium of Welsh by Key Stage 3 - it was noted that the reason for this was one Secondary School in Bangor.
- It was noted that it would be a good idea to invite staff and pupils from Ysgol Tywyn to a meeting of the Welsh Language Committee to discuss how the Secondary Language Charter had gone further and had been able to change attitudes towards the language within the community. It was stated that the good practices within Ysgol Tywyn needed to be noted so that it would be possible to disseminate them to other schools across the county.
- It was discussed whether or not it would be possible to network with schools across Wales and not Gwynedd alone, as perhaps there was a need to share the county's good practices across Wales. It was stated that good practices were being shared on a regional level through GwE.
- It was noted that good work was being undertaken in schools and that statistics were exceptionally good. It was stated that Ysgol Dolbadarn had been graded as excellent in the five fields, and was one of two schools throughout Wales that had been graded as excellent in the field.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

8. RESTRUCTURING OF THE LANGUAGE CENTRES

The Head of Education Department submitted information on the re-structuring of the Language Centres in Gwynedd. In accordance with correct procedure, the Head of Education emphasised that we would only be briefing today. It was noted that four options for consideration had been discussed following consultative processes between the Human Resources Department, Education staff, direct staff and the Union in October 2018.

It was noted that a consultative discussion had taken place in October 2018 to respond to the department's financial position for 2019/20 which anticipated a deficit of £96,000. It was noted that the Education service could not justify the cost of providing match funding.

It was noted that the best way forward, without causing a defective cut to teaching standards and to protect the workplace, was to employ two people for every centre. The current framework and employment structure of the Language Centres was examined questioning the best way to proceed. With inflation in the salaries and pensions of employed workers already, it was stated that cost effectiveness would be considered prior to implementing any cuts; the four options by the department were expanded upon. Before submitting the options, it was emphasised that the service had examined the budgetary aspect, the impact on the standard of teaching Welsh, and ensuring safety within the centres (i.e. a minimum of two people for every centre).

The following options were outlined:

Option 1:

- Close one Primary Language Centre.
- Increase the capacity of every Language Centre to 19 learners.
- A staffing structure of a Leader and a Teacher at every Language Centre.

Option 2:

- Every Language Centre to remain open.
- The capacity of the Dolgellau Language Centre increased to 16. The capacity of every other Language Centre to remain the same.
- A staffing structure of a Leader and a Teacher at every Language Centre.

Option 3:

- Every Language Centre to remain open.
- The capacity of the Dolgellau Language Centre increased to 16. The capacity of every other Language Centre to remain the same.
- One Leader for all Primary Language Centres, a staffing structure of a Teacher and an Assistant at every Language Centre (where the Leader is not based).
- A staffing structure of a Leader and an Assistant at the Secondary Language Centre

Option 4:

- Every Language Centre to remain open.
- The capacity of the Dolgellau Language Centre increased to 16. The capacity of every other Language Centre to remain the same.
- One Leader for all Primary and Secondary Language Centres, a staffing structure of a Teacher and an Assistant at every Language Centre (where the Leader is not based).

Observations were received from Members and a reference was made to the objection to the options provided by the Education service. Concern was noted about the quality of the education if one of the above options would have to be chosen. Members felt that

they would prefer to hold a further discussion with teachers regarding the options. In response, the Head of Education Department noted that legal discussions had been held with teachers in accordance with requirements.

It was explained that the item would be put before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 24 January 2019.

DECISION

The report was accepted.

9. COMPLAINTS AND INVESTIGATIONS

The item was submitted noting that there was no written report. It was stated that a full report would be included at the next meeting. It was explained that the main item for discussion was staff's out-of-office messages, internal messages in particular, as all members were now included as Council staff. It was noted that a complaint had been raised that all out-of-office messages sent internally were in Welsh only. It was questioned whether or not they should be bilingual; it was resolved that it needed to remain in Welsh only and to explain to the member who had raised the matter.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.35 pm

CHAIRMAN