
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: TUESDAY, 30 JANUARY 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Jina Gwyrfai, Peter Thomas, Elfed Williams, Menna Baines, Llio Elenid Owen and Meryl Roberts

Officers: Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Nia Haf Lewis (Language Adviser), Bet Huws (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Iwan Hywel (Hunaniaith Principal Officer) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Item 5: Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head of Education Department: Corporate Services), Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head of Education Department: Secondary) and Rhys Meredydd Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System).

Item 6: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department).

Item 7: Hedd Morlais Glyn Tomos (Assistant Head of Housing and Property Department), Lowri Cadwaladr Roberts (Assistant Head of Housing and Property Department) and Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Senior Executive Officer - Housing and Property Department).

Item 8: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department) and Siôn Arwel Jones (Business Development Manager, Highways, Engineering and YGC Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Sasha Williams, Alan Jones Evans and Olaf Cai Larsen.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 24 October 2023 as a true record.

5. THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN

The report was submitted by the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System, in the absence of the Head of Education Department. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

A report was given on a number of events held by the department in order to raise the status of the Welsh language when enabling children and pupils to use the Welsh language at their schools and in the community. It was explained that the department had implemented a number of projects as part of the Welsh Government's Language Charter. It was explained that the Charter's new framework was part of new Welsh Government programmes which aim to increase the use of Welsh amongst children and young people.

It was confirmed that the Department shared this ambition of increasing the use of the Welsh language. It was noted that money was being allocated to every catchment area within the County to arrange activities to encourage the use of Welsh. It was noted that one of the conditions when allocating the money was that activities were being arranged for primary and secondary pupils to ensure that the Welsh language continued to be used as the pupils transferred to the secondary schools. It was emphasised that targeting this cohort of children was necessary to ensure that appealing and positive experiences in the secondary schools took place naturally through the medium of Welsh.

An update was shared of catchment area activities to draw attention to the opportunities that children and young people from all areas of Gwynedd were receiving.

It was explained that Language Forums were being established in every secondary school in Gwynedd which led on the Secondary Language Strategy and the importance of being bilingual was emphasised. It was detailed that the Forums were also holding Hybu Balchder mewn Cymreictod (Promoting Pride in Welshness) sessions.

It was reported that there had been an increase in the number of young people who chose to study and obtain qualifications or an acknowledged accreditation through the medium of Welsh. Attention was drawn to the figures below that had been gathered from the results of the Year 11 cohort in Gwynedd secondary schools at the end of the 2023 summer period:

- 71.7% of Year 11 pupils studied at least 3 KS4 subjects through the medium of Welsh as well as a Welsh First Language GCSE.
- 67.8% of Year 11 pupils studied at least 5 KS4 subjects through the medium of Welsh as well as a Welsh First Language GCSE.
- 87.1% of Year 11 pupils sat a GCSE Welsh First Language examination.

The Assistant Head of the Education Department: Secondary elaborated that this figure of 67.8% was relatively stable but it was acknowledged that it was necessary to increase the number of pupils who study at least 5 KS4 subjects through the medium of Welsh as well as a Welsh First Language GCSE. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that this was a challenging process as the statistic included transitional school pupils.

Information was provided on the pupils' language cohort, including transitional age pupils. Reassurance was given that the department was collaborating regularly with language coordinators in every catchment area in order to collect the linguistic data of Year 2, 6 and 9 pupils to ensure that they made linguistic progress within the curriculum.

Attention was drawn to the language designations of department staff and an analysis was provided of staff assessments based on the Language Designations Framework. It was acknowledged that the department had room for improvement, by ensuring access to the self-assessment for all department staff, to identify those who need support. It was explained that the department's main barrier in this field was reaching those staff members who did not have

the technological equipment to complete this questionnaire electronically. It was noted that the department was working to promote the importance of the language designations among staff. It was confirmed that the department was collaborating with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to ensure that staff members were confident in their linguistic ability. It was elaborated that a spreadsheet of staff members who had not completed the self-assessment, or needed assistance to reach the language designation of their job, was being shared with the appropriate officer on a regular basis. The Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer was thanked for advertising courses and training that was available to assist them.

It was noted that the department was working to overcome recruitment difficulties in the catering and cleaning field. It was emphasised that this work was very important and an appreciation was expressed to all staff for working to ensure that the schools were clean and safe throughout the pandemic, as well as preparing food packages. It was considered that the recruitment challenges were more intense in rural areas of the County but it was hoped that the challenge would be resolved soon.

Reference was made to the 'Research and Technology' priority within the Gwynedd Language Strategy, detailing the Aberwla virtual resource. It was explained that it was an innovative virtual world to assist learners who attended immersion centres to practice linguistic patterns and vocabulary. It was noted that this resource had been developed with the assistance of the Welsh Government's late immersion revenue grant funding.

In response to an enquiry, the Assistant Head of Education: Secondary confirmed that 42 students had studied and completed A Level Welsh First Language examinations during the summer 2023. It was noted that only the pupils of the 7 secondary schools with an A Level provision had been included in this statistic and it did not include any colleges in the County. It was reported that this number of pupils was higher than the numbers who had studied the subject in 2022 and was equivalent to a quarter of all Welsh First Language A Level course pupils in Wales in 2023. It was noted that officers were collaborating with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to promote the course and attract pupils to complete it.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

The report was submitted by the Head of the Environment Department, and he highlighted the following main points in brief:

Reference was made to a number of projects that the department was working on to promote the Welsh language, including; collaborating with Menter Iaith Gwynedd and the process of establishing an independent entity, place name project and collaborating with schools to develop a spoken place names map and Prosiect 15. It was noted that the department had supported apprentices to qualify through the medium of Welsh and influence the further education sector to hold Welsh-medium sessions for students.

It was confirmed that an amended Language Policy had been adopted in October 2022 and the new Language Strategy had been adopted in December 2023. It was explained that the Language Policy was being promoted to staff in various ways, including meetings with the heads of department. In addition, messages are being shared with staff via the Council's intranet site, messages and the weekly bulletin.

It was noted that information about training for staff and staff designation details were being included in the report and the department was offering additional development opportunities, such as Cadernid Iaith training, which would be available to staff in the future. It was explained that this was an addition to the Language Awareness training that already existed. With the training, it was hoped that individuals would feel more confident and more certain of their language and less prepared to turn to English in circumstances where there was no need to do so.

It was reported by Ben, the Menter Iaith Officer, that they were prepared to work in partnership with anyone who was eager to do so in order to promote the Welsh language, with the main emphasis being placed on the Menter's priority fields. Specific attention was drawn to a project being developed jointly with M-Sparc, the Urdd and the National Eisteddfod to create a Welsh video game platform, funded by ARFOR.

It was acknowledged that the department had had to prioritise work recently and therefore, the work of developing a Welsh Events Map had not progressed in the past months. It was noted that the hope was to attract partners to help promote the map in order to populate it with more events. It was confirmed that this would happen in the coming months.

During the discussion, many Members expressed concern about the use of English names on OS maps recently. In response to this concern, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that the Council had held meetings with the OS in the past but that the Council had no influence over their actions, because anyone could contact the company to propose names for the maps. It was elaborated that the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support could send a letter to the OS, expressing the Committee's disappointment and concern. A request was made by the Chair for the Cabinet Member to formally send a letter to the company.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

- 1. To accept the report and note the observations received.**
- 2. It was agreed to ask the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support to send a letter to the OS company to voice the committee's concern regarding the use of English rather than Welsh names on various locations on their maps.**

7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HOUSING AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

The report was submitted by the Assistant Head of Housing and Property. Reference was made to the following main points:

Members were reminded that the department sustained a mix of front line, corporate and commercial services and reassurance was given that they could deliver the department's duties bilingually, and that respecting the customer's language of choice was essential.

Members were reminded that the department had held a number of events throughout the National Eisteddfod week in 2023. It was noted that events had been held on the theme of 'Gwynedd Glyd' and raised awareness of the Council's housing plans in order to address the existing housing crisis, and that around 60% of the County's population had been priced out of the local market at the moment. It was considered that these sessions had been beneficial, considering that shift and migration was a huge challenge to the department and the Welsh language in Gwynedd.

It was reported that the main plans could be seen in the department's Housing Action Plan. It was explained that 30 operational and strategic projects had been included in the plan, with a vision for their development for the next 6 years. Attention was drawn to the residential element grant in

community regeneration plans. It was explained that it was a grant provided to communities to develop additional living units.

It was confirmed that 96% of the department's staff met the language designations of their job, with 60% of those staff reaching higher levels than the linguistic requirements of their jobs. It was detailed that 85% of all department staff had completed a linguistic self-assessment following the head's ongoing encouragement. Members were reminded that this was a 6% increase of all department staff.

It was emphasised that learning opportunities were considered within the department for staff. It was noted that officers supported staff who lacked confidence in their linguistic skills. The fact that many staff members in the department had voluntarily completed linguistic training outside work was something to celebrate. It was noted that the department had identified a challenge for some of the Council's staff as they followed a hybrid working arrangement. It was considered that working from home on some days reduced the opportunities that Welsh learners had to practice their linguistic skills. It was emphasised that the department ensured that every opportunity was given to relevant staff to practice their Welsh and that this was a consideration for the future as the new hybrid working arrangements came into force in April 2024.

It was mentioned that the department set a condition that the service and support providers had to speak Welsh in relation to Service Level Agreements. Examples seen at Tŷ Adferiad, Porthmadog, as well as sites in Bangor, were shared.

Frustration was shared at the lack of Welsh or bilingual resources in the field of housing. Members were reassured that the department was placing pressure on the Welsh Government to address this. It was detailed that many regional and national discussions were currently held in English, with no priority given to the Welsh language. It was confirmed that the department would welcome a change in order to see meetings being held through the medium of Welsh, with simultaneous translation and bilingual documents provided. Reassurance was given that the department's discussions with partners and housing associations in Gwynedd were held in Welsh, with translation available if required.

In response to an enquiry on the First Time Buyer Empty House Grants, it was explained that an amendment had been made to the plan, which meant that empty houses that used to be second homes were eligible for the grant. It was noted that 1 grant application had been completed following this amendment and that another 5 applications were in the process of being assessed.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC Department. Reference was made to the following main points:

It was explained that the department produced a Highways, Engineering and YGC Newsletter, as well as a YGC Bulletin, on a regular basis. It was confirmed that these promoted the use of Welsh in the department because they were circulated in Welsh only. Reassurance was given that efforts were being made so that every member of staff received it, and by printing hard copies for any member of staff who did not use computer equipment.

It was reported that the department had received good feedback as they attended national events such as the National Eisteddfod in Boduan and the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells. It was noted that the department's hope, in these events this year, was to educate young people about the work that the department undertakes.

Reference was made to some of the challenges faced by the department, such as English-only documentation when contacting partners and associated companies. Nevertheless, pride was expressed that one of YGC's engineers had been appointed as a mentor for the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) and gave support to the Gwynedd, Môn and Conwy councils on their work.

An example was shared of an error made by a contractor recently where no bilingual signs had been used in a development work site. It was confirmed that the department had assisted with translations of the signs and a swift solution was found to the situation. It was emphasised that the department would monitor the use of bilingual signs very closely in the future following this incident. It was explained that notices could be given to contractors and reduce the amount payable to them when this occurred. It was acknowledged that such difficulties were likely to arise when using out-of-county contractors, but it was explained that the department used specific frameworks to identify contractors in order to ensure quality and value for money. It was emphasised that local frameworks were in place, but out-of-county contractors must be used from time to time when the service was not available in Gwynedd.

It was confirmed that the department had established a new fleet service system. It was explained that the system assisted to track vehicles and manage assets. It was noted that Welsh appeared first on the system. It was explained that this system was being used by other stakeholders such as UK Highways and the trunk road agent.

It was reported that the department employed 507 members of staff (120 in the 7GC service and 387 in the rest of the department), with a number of employees not using computers in their day-to-day work. It was noted that the department had simplified the on-line assessment and had also distributed a paper version to ensure that manual workers completed the assessment. It was explained that this was a factor which assisted the department to increase the response level in the self-assessment, and that 95.63% of the department's staff had now completed it.

Pride was expressed at the success of a series of videos developed for social media which explained the duties of various services in the department. It was noted that these videos had been shared bilingually for all residents to be aware of the department's work. It was confirmed that these videos had been a huge success and had raised morale within the teams. It was noted that the department was happy and eager for other departments to produce similar videos if they wished.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.55am.

CHAIR