
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: TUESDAY, 23 APRIL 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Llio Elenid Owen, Rhys Tudur, Jina Gwyrfai, Gwynfor Owen, Alan Jones Evans, Elfed Williams, Anne Lloyd Jones, Peter Thomas and Hefin Underwood.

Officers: Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Nia Haf Lewis (Language Adviser), Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Item 5: Dafydd Gibbard (Chief Executive) and Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Services).

Item 6: Sioned Eirian Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department).

Item 7: Iwan Hywel (Menter Iaith Gwynedd Principal Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Olaf Cai Larsen and Menna Baines, Geraint Owen (Corporate Director) and Bet Huws (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer).

Councillor Sasha Williams was thanked for her contribution to the Committee over the past two years. Councillor Rhys Tudur was welcomed as a new Member of the Committee.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn for Item 7 as he had collaborated with Menter Iaith Gwynedd during the last year. It was not a prejudicial interest and therefore he did not withdraw from the meeting.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 30 January 2024 as a true record.

5. LEADERSHIP TEAM AND LEGAL SERVICES WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN

The report was submitted by the Chief Executive and the Head of Legal Services. Attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

It was emphasised that the Leadership Team stood firmly on the use of the Welsh language whilst not compromising, as it set a precedent for the rest of the Council. Frustration was expressed that no sufficient Welsh facilities were used in meetings held by the Welsh Government by elaborating that discussions were frequently held in English. It was confirmed that Cyngor Gwynedd led on ensuring that sufficient facilities were used in meetings and because of this, attention was drawn to the letter that was sent to the Welsh Language Minister at the Welsh Government to declare the Leadership Team's concern regarding the present situation.

It was reported that the Leadership Team and the Council collaborated with many national and regional bodies. The members were ensured that officers encouraged those bodies to try and reflect Cyngor Gwynedd's language policy and to promote an internal use of the Welsh language. An example of this was shared namely that the Corporate Director and the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser were members of the Steering Group that was established by the Welsh Language Commissioner to develop policy models to increase the use of the Welsh Language within public bodies in Wales. It was explained that the Group, which included representatives from many establishments, allowed Council officers to share experiences such as language policy development, recruiting methods, the Council's internal use of the Welsh language, training and encouragement offered to staff to develop their confidence in the Welsh language. It was emphasised that there was representation from the Council on the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board by noting that the Board had been working on a project regarding recent workforce recruiting matters to attract Welsh-speaking staff. It was also mentioned that the Council collaborated with Menter Iaith Gwynedd (Language Initiative) to develop projects.

It was explained that the Statutory Director (Social Services) had specific responsibilities in terms of promoting the use of the Welsh language within the care sector. It was explained that it was expected for each local authority and Health Board in Wales, to appoint a senior leader as a 'champion' of the Welsh Language as part of the 'More Than Just Words' work programme and confirming that the Statutory Director (Social Services) undertakes that role in Gwynedd. It was confirmed that it was a requirement in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 for the 'champion' to ensure pro-active use of the Welsh language for it to be available without the user having to ask for it. It was emphasised that this was customary within Cyngor Gwynedd since many years and that the Director used his role as a 'champion' and 'More Than Just Words' Chair to assist others to be pro-active in the Welsh Language. It was emphasised that he had also been a judge on the Social Care Wales national awards on the use of the Welsh language in the care sector recently.

It was acknowledged that the use of English within information technology had been a challenge for the Council in the past years. However, there was pride that most Council staff who used computers as part of their jobs, did that with Welsh language software on their devices. It was detailed that this enabled officers to work on e-mails, Microsoft Office and more through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that this change was one that had been a cause for concern for some staff members, but those staff were happy with the software after they got used to it.

It was reported that the Legal Service was a team of 25 officers who worked in the legal field, elections, supporting the coroner as well as propriety duties associated with the Standards Committee and the role of the Monitoring Officer.

It was confirmed that the Legal Services promoted the Welsh language through providing service to many main regional establishments and providing constitutional support for them as part of Cyngor Gwynedd's role as the Host Authority. It was detailed that the Council used its representation within these regional establishments to hold meetings and prepare bilingual documentation and prioritise the Welsh language.

It was explained that the legal service also supported officers of the election service, through responding to new legislations continuously by updating policies. It was noted that the Council drew the attention of the government and other bodies towards any Welsh language need that was deficient to ensure that provision of the Welsh language was available in all aspects of the work where possible.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the legal service's recruiting situation had improved recently as they had succeeded to attract qualified officers who possessed Welsh language skills. It was emphasised that the service had also been involved in the Cynllun Yfory programme and apprentices to teach necessary skills to new young officers and providing legal services bilingually for the future. It was acknowledged that the service used temporary workers occasionally who did not possess Welsh language skills. It was emphasised that they were employed for a short period when specific expertise was needed as the Council officers did not have that expertise. It was noted that the service moved away from using temporary workers because of recruiting successes but it was unlikely that they would stop being used entirely due to the nature of the work that the service involved.

Gratitude was expressed for the report and for ensuring that the Council led on linguistic matters nationally.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Economy and Community Department, and attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

Attention was drawn to the Arfor project by noting that Cyngor Gwynedd took a leading role on the project's Board. It was explained that the Board was in the process of evaluating the impact of the projects on areas and residents to receive a budget in the future. The committee was reminded that the Arfor project was funded up to the end of the 2024-25 financial year therefore it was important to work on trying to currently receive financial commitment for the future. It was confirmed that important collaboration was happening between Arfor regional counties, namely Anglesey, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire.

It was reported that the Department had succeeded to attract funding by the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, by confirming that a grant fund for businesses was available from this budget in addition to the Arfor project. It was explained that the terms and conditions that were developed through the Arfor project had been included for businesses' applications for funding through the Shared Prosperity Fund too. It was explained that this meant that companies needed to highlight the use of the Welsh language as part of their business as well as sharing how the company promoted the Welsh language, whilst they made an application for funding. As a result, it was noted that 79 businesses from Gwynedd had completed the Welsh Language Commissioner's 'Welsh Language Offer' assessment during 2023/24 and 12 of the companies had already secured the accreditation. It was acknowledged that the same encouragement would not be available when business grants were not available. However, it was emphasised that work was underway to be able to offer support for small businesses to obtain the accreditation by the Welsh Language Commissioner. It was reiterated that the hope was that the companies would take the opportunity to apply for a 'Welsh Language Offer' accreditation voluntarily in the future, but it was noted that there was no way for the Department to compel them. Disappointment was expressed that Gwynedd was the only county in the north that had set this condition on business grant applications through the Shared Prosperity Fund.

It was confirmed that the Department had launched the Gwynedd and Eryri Plan 2035 which was a Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan for the area, formed jointly with Eryri National Park Authority. It was reminded that one of the plan's clear priorities would be to promote local ownership and to develop opportunities to highlight the Welsh language, our culture and heritage. It was emphasised that work was underway to monitor the impact that the plan had on this priority at present. It was emphasised that this priority had been included as a clause and that the department had agreed to support events, to ensure that the event fulfilled those cultural and language requirements.

It was explained that the Department had adopted a new measure within the marketing and events tourism field, namely 'Percentage of the County's residents who believe that tourism has a positive influence on the Welsh language and culture of Wales'. It was noted that this new measure was included in an annual questionnaire for Gwynedd residents. It was explained that the hope was to collect data from the questionnaire to measure the impact of the work done within the field. It was anticipated that this was the best method of receiving positive responses as it enabled communities to commit as much or as little as they wished. It was emphasised that the measure had been trialled by the Council on behalf of the Welsh Government last year and it was hoped that other counties would incorporate the measure in the future.

In response to an enquiry on how to collaborate with holiday businesses, holiday lets and caravan parks to ensure that the language was prominent in their culture, the Head of Department confirmed that interesting work was underway to encourage businesses to be Welsh language ambassadors. It was confirmed that this was work that had been adopted within the new Visitor Economy Plan and it was required for the ambassadors to be aware of culture and language as well as respecting the landscape and the environment. Hope was expressed that this would strengthen the language as visitors would see the Welsh language clearly when they would visit the area. It was emphasised that the plan had been trialled within Eryri National Park and that positive results were received therefore the hope was that this plan would be successful across the whole of Gwynedd, and to share an information package with businesses.

It was reported that the Department continued to support companies and establishments within the museums and arts field by noting that the language and cultural impact was something that got attention whilst going forward to support them. There was also reference to the Slate Landscape of North West Wales project. It was elaborated that the department collaborated with Bangor University on a long-term plan, and a great deal of time would pass before seeing the plan's changes and impact. It was explained that stimulating the interest of volunteers who possessed Welsh language skills could be a challenge for the Department. It was acknowledged that this was a problem that raised concern for many years and that it was a bigger challenge in some specific areas within the county. It was emphasised that the Department supported those areas by offering more volunteering opportunities through various plans jointly with schools and colleges to stimulate the interest of Welsh speakers to volunteer. An example was shared of where these plans were successful such as Storiel in Bangor where there were more Welsh speaking volunteers by now.

Examples were shared of how Gwynedd libraries contributed towards promoting the Welsh language as well as providing a bilingual service. It was emphasised that the activities held in the libraries were very popular amongst Gwynedd residents and it was detailed that there was positive feedback from non-Welsh speaking attendees of the way that the local library promoted the Welsh language effectively. It was mentioned that the libraries service was available bilingually across the county, but it was acknowledged that some sessions were held where it was not possible to have all of the resources through the medium of Welsh occasionally. It was explained that the Department was aware of the problem and considered that the challenge would arise in some areas where the number of Welsh speaking volunteers

were low. It was emphasised that the Department tried to support everyone who wished to hold activities within the libraries to be able to do so bilingually. It was confirmed that the Council's language policy ensured that no activities were conducted in English only, while acknowledging that some elements were not held through the medium of Welsh on rare occasions.

It was reported that there was an increase in the number of the department's staff who had completed a language self-assessment, emphasising that 96.65% of the department's staff had reached the language designations of their jobs. It was noted that this has increased from the 93% that was reported in 2023. It was confirmed that the Department had faced challenges whilst trying to employ temporary beaches and marine officers in the summer and had had to appoint non-Welsh speaking teams and individuals in the past. It was elaborated that the challenge that arose from this was that they were not employed with the Council for a long enough period to be immersed in the language. It was emphasised that the Marine Manager took actions to ensure that officers spoke Welsh with each other and customers on every opportunity.

It was detailed that financial matters were a barrier that currently faced the Department. It was explained that an extensive proportion of the Department's work was dependent on grants and that was a good way of setting language conditions within the County. It was emphasised that regular public cultural events played an important role whilst people practised their language skills publicly especially if they did not have any other way of doing so. It was acknowledged that ensuring service or events' continuation when various grants came to an end could be challenging to the Department especially considering general financial challenges that currently faced the Council. It was emphasised that the Department continued to target grant funding regularly to ensure support for communities for the future.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF MENTER IAITH GWYNEDD

The report was presented by Menter Iaith Gwynedd's Principal Officer. Reference was made to the following main points:

The members were reminded that the initiative had now discarded the name 'Hunaniaith' by re-branding with the name 'Menter Iaith Gwynedd' and that the initiative was registered as a not-for-profit company with Companies House under the leadership of four voluntary directors. It was elaborated that the initiative's primary purpose was to increase opportunities for people to use the Welsh language in all aspects of their lives and in all communities in Gwynedd.

It was explained that one staff member of the Enterprise had left to work with another department within Cyngor Gwynedd. It was acknowledged that this vacant job had currently not been filled to facilitate the process of externalising from the Council. It was noted that Cyngor Gwynedd assisted to employ a new officer within the Meirionnydd area for 2024/25.

It was explained that the initiative would become independent from April 2025, with the three current initiative officers continuing to be employed by the initiative, as well as the new officer in the Meirionnydd area. It was acknowledged that there had been a delay in this outsourcing transition, but it was explained that this had been due to pension commitment complexities for officers. It was emphasised that the Project Board met regularly with the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal Services to resolve the difficulties that arose.

It was reported on the campaign that was being initiated in May that focused on people who had moved to the area and learned the Welsh language, by sharing case studies stories on how individuals had succeeded to nurture a feeling of belonging to Gwynedd communities. It was elaborated that there was a second plan in the pipeline with support from 'Gareth yr Orangutang' to explain the history of the Welsh language to young people and share ideas on how to use technology in Welsh, by emphasising that what was important was making use of the language, not worrying about any mistakes made.

An update was given that the initiative had been supporting immersion centres to support families. It was explained that officers provided digital presentations to all parents of the immersion centres' attendees every term. In response to the challenges that the educators had after being in immersion centres and returning to school, it was confirmed that the initiative had commissioned an author to create a production with the children's input before performing to the parents. It was emphasised that the initiative would own the production therefore there would be a way to recreate this scheme in other areas as required. An idea was shared that the initiative could use examples of families who had fostered the Welsh language following these schemes to inspire others in the future.

There was pride that the initiative had received very positive feedback to a gig that was held recently in secondary schools. It was explained that Tara Bandito went around to hold well-being sessions and to share information about girls in music before performing a gig in the afternoon with the Skylark band. Feedback was shared from one school that a pupil had been watching clips of the artists independently, when they attended a free lesson in the days following the performance, suggesting that children and young people would be attracted to modern Welsh culture when they were presented with it. It was noted that this event was held in six secondary schools in Gwynedd.

It was reported that the initiative had joint-funded a community post with support from the Urdd and Cyngor Gwynedd's Youth Department. It was explained that it was a specific post to establish new Urdd 'aelwydydd' (youth clubs) within communities with the intention of targeting year 7 and 8 secondary pupils. It was confirmed that new 'aelwydydd' had opened in Caernarfon and in Felinheli as well as Urdd clubs in schools such as Ardudwy. Details were given on the Urdd Ardudwy club, by noting that many of the children did not come from Welsh speaking homes but they had started to attend the 'aelwyd' as it became more popular. Cadi Roberts was thanked for her work within this field. It was confirmed that the intention for the future was to ensure that volunteers came forward to assist the 'aelwydydd' regularly so that they could run without an employed officer being present every time. The hope was to attract volunteers by focusing on specific areas, attempting to ensure that enough people were helping so that volunteers did not feel that it was burdensome.

Reference was made to Llwyfan Llŷn as the initiative had supported this scheme when it started following Covid-19. It was confirmed that the group met weekly in Sarn Mellteyrn. It was reported that this scheme was an example of how the initiative could support communities when there was a gap to be seen in the community and build it to be self-sufficient within communities without being dependent on the initiative as it developed. It was hoped that this success would be seen with Theatr Derek Williams in Bala as the initiative collaborated with them to re-establish the drama club.

Meirion Owen, the initiative's officer in the Bangor area was thanked for organising St David's Day events in Bangor this year. It was emphasised that the initiative had arranged many events as well as a parade by ensuring that many businesses and establishments collaborated with each other. It was elaborated that many sessions for learners were being held regularly in Bangor and it was emphasised that there was positive feedback beyond these sessions.

It was explained that the initiative collaborated with the North Wales Africa Society as the Society expanded when more families moved to Bangor with mature students who attended Bangor

University. It was noted that a series of 'Croeso i'r Gymraeg' events had been organised for members of the Society and similar sessions for Adfer service users in the area. It was explained that these sessions were being used as an initial introduction to the language and it was hoped that the attendees would wish to receive formal Welsh lessons in the future.

It was acknowledged that an extensive proportion of the initiative's work focused on specific areas such as Llŷn, Bangor-Ogwen, Penllyn and Bala. It was explained that this was intentional so as to work on a local level to create a difference that could be evidenced. It was emphasised that the purpose of the initiative was to 'Promote and Encourage the Welsh language across the whole of Gwynedd' and the intention was to outsource to increase capacity to enable the initiative to focus on all areas in Gwynedd.

It was agreed that there was a need to collaborate with young people who were about to leave secondary schools to encourage them to use the Welsh language more regularly. It was explained that one challenge was that all of the social media material was English and that influenced them. It was emphasised that the initiative had been working on many schemes such as the 'Dydd Miwsig Cymru' (Welsh Language Music Day) competition to encourage older young people to use the Welsh language. Detail was provided on an exciting scheme with MSparc with new software for video games that ensured that users could speak Welsh with each other whilst they played on their devices.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.45pm.

CHAIR