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## LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 13 OCTOBER 2025

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### PRESENT:

**Councillors:** Menna Baines (Chair) and Meryl Roberts (Vice-chair)

Rhys Tudur, Menna Baines, Alan Jones Evans, Olaf Cai Larsen, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Jina Gwyrfai, Gwynfor Owen, Elfed Williams, Gwilym Jones, Hefin Underwood, Beth Lawton and Anne Lloyd Jones.

**Officers:** Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Nia Lewis (Language Adviser) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- Item 5: Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment) and Carwyn Meredydd (Senior Executive Officer)
- Item 6: Ffion Madog Evans (Assistant Head of Finance Department - Accountancy and Pensions) and Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head of Information Technology)
- Item 7: Steffan Jones (Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC) and Sion Arwel Jones (Business Development Manager)

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Beca Brown.

### 2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

### 3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

### 4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 23 June 2025 as a true record.

### 5. REPORT BY THE ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS REALISING THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033

The report was presented by the Head of the Environment Department and the Senior Executive Officer. They referred briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded that the department included a range of front-line services and came into contact with the public regularly through fields such as waste and recycling, transportation, planning and public protection. Reassurances were given that every effort had been made to ensure that these services were delivered in the customer's language of choice, ensuring that the services are available through the medium of Welsh.

It was reported that the Department was leading on the Council Plan project of preparing a new Local Development Plan, which is a priority within the 2023-28 Council Plan (A Green Gwynedd). Similarly, it was noted that the Planning Policy Team was monitoring the Joint Local Development Plan 2011-26 and regularly prepared Supplementary Planning Guidance. It was emphasised that Planning Policy PS1, which related to the Welsh language and culture, is central to these Planning and Guidance. Pride was expressed that this provision went further than the Welsh Government's statutory requirements on the Welsh language, sharing an example that the requirements and guidance on Welsh language assessments and statements within the field were in more detail than what is expected nationally.

Attention was drawn that Cyngor Gwynedd was the first local authority in Wales to introduce the Article 4 direction, noting that it was a tool to ensure that houses in Gwynedd were available to residents and that the Welsh language was being supported. It was acknowledged that the direction was currently facing challenges, but that it continued to be operational.

It was highlighted that the Building Control Service was responsible for naming streets and naming and numbering properties. Assurances were given that the service was taking a proactive approach to highlight the historical and cultural significance of Welsh names on properties, although it was acknowledged that they had no powers to refuse applications unless names were duplicated or if the choice of name was inappropriate. It was reported that 113 applications had been received to change or register property names and that 88% of the names registered were Welsh names. Furthermore, pride was expressed that 18 property owners had changed the name of their property from English back into Welsh following discussions with the Service. Likewise, reference was made to the Planning Service where a planning condition was imposed on 54 new businesses and 110 new houses to ensure that they were named in Welsh.

Following a request by committee members, an update was provided on the 'Tir a Môr' bilingual education pack led by the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation team. Pride was expressed that hard copies of the pack had been distributed to every primary school in Gwynedd since the Department submitted their previous report to this Committee. It was elaborated that the Special Area of Conservation team were also working to produce a bilingual magazine, 'O Dan y Don', to raise awareness of the area's unique marine environment and promote the use of Welsh alongside the English.

An update was given that the Department had been working on providing necessary training in Gwynedd primary and secondary schools. Pride was expressed that around 3,500 children had received general training on road safety through the medium of Welsh. It was elaborated that around 800 pupils had received cycling training.

Pride was expressed that the Department had collaborated with historians in the Bethesda area, the local community, as well as the Council's Archives Service, to set a bilingual timeline near 'Coeden Meurig' to commemorate historically important events that had happened in Dyffryn Ogwen over the 500 years since the tree had been planted. It was elaborated that another display board had been installed to emphasise the significance of the tree and the plants and animals nearby, noting that the public's response to the project had been very positive.

It was reported that 93% of the Department's staff had completed their language self-assessment and that 89% of those staff members reached the language designation of their job. It was considered that the confidence of individuals about their linguistic skills was a factor that affected this result, as some staff members downplayed their skills. However, it was ensured that the Department was taking every opportunity for staff members to attend training and practice their Welsh skills.

Gratitude was expressed for the support of the Council's Information Technology service, which had been collaborating with the Environment Department to ensure that Welsh versions of some software programmes were available in Welsh, where that was not possible previously. It was explained that several of the systems of the waste service and route planning systems were only available in English as they were specialist systems and were produced outside Wales, but this collaboration with the Information Technology service had been approved for the Council to offer the software in Welsh for the public.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

In response to an enquiry about introducing a project like the 'Coeden Meurig' notice board in Bethesda in other areas of Gwynedd, the Head of Department confirmed that he would be happy to collaborate with other communities to develop such schemes. However, it was emphasised that this project had been funded with grant money and therefore, funding options would need to be considered when considering any further projects. In response to further enquiries about collaborating with nature reserves to carry out such projects, the Head of Department explained that this would be more challenging to deliver as the Council did not manage the land.

In response to an enquiry about how the Department ensured that the Welsh language was given fair consideration when drawing up the Local Development Plan, the Head of Department gave assurances that every effort was being made to ensure that the Welsh language was central to the Plan. It was explained that a Working Group had been established to develop the Plan and that most of the conversations being held were associated with the language in order to ensure that they were robust in all aspects of it.

A comment was received that it was considered that many of the officers of the Waste and Recycling Service in the Meirionnydd area were non-Welsh-speaking and that there was general negativity towards the service's work in the area, asking the service what work was progressing to change the public's mindset towards the work in order to attract people to follow a career within the service. In response to the comments, the Head of Department acknowledged that there had been challenges within this service in the past but now the public's satisfaction was much higher and that the number of complaints brought to the Department's attention had reduced substantially. It was elaborated that new technology that had been installed on the lorries could be beneficial to respond to complaints, such as cameras showing the condition of the streets and recycling equipment following collections from the service's staff. It was emphasised that the Department was not aware of any linguistic difficulties within the service, explaining that regular visits were being carried out around the county and that not many staff members needed the translation equipment on offer as a part of those visits. It was elaborated that work was progressing to gain staff members' confidence to use Welsh more often and ensure that staff members continued to work within the service as a part of their career path.

In response to an enquiry on the preparedness of home owners to change the name of their property to a Welsh name, the Head of Department confirmed that home owners were eager to have a Welsh name in most cases. It was explained that the process of encouraging owners to change house names was simple, where officers held discussions to explain the significance of the Welsh names and any historical link they had. It was noted that the owners tended to like the Welsh names once they understood their meaning and chose to use them. It was emphasised that the Department did not have the powers to force Welsh names on houses but that this encouragement was adequate at present.

In response to an enquiry as to whether the Department arranged for simultaneous translation equipment to be available in advance when arranging road safety training, the Head of Department confirmed that the training for children was held through the medium of Welsh.

However, it was explained that work was done in advance when arranging training for adults on every occasion, in order to ensure that simultaneous translation equipment was available for anyone who wished to attend but did not understand Welsh.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

**To accept the report, noting the observations received during the discussion.**

### **6. REPORT BY THE FINANCE DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS REALISING THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033.**

The report was presented by the Assistant Head of Finance - Accountancy and Pensions, and the Assistant Head of Information Technology. They referred briefly to the following main points:

Members were reminded that the Department implemented the Cyngor Gwynedd Digital Plan 2023/2028 by encompassing 29 projects in order to be a 'Digital Council'. Specific attention was drawn to the Organisational Management System, which assisted the payroll and human resources systems, which had now reached the procurement system. Pride was expressed that the Department had gone beyond the expectations of linguistic measures when undertaking the procurement procedure for this system. It was explained that 26 questions relating to the Welsh language were included within the process, which was substantially higher than the Gwynedd and national standard procurement arrangements.

It was highlighted that artificial intelligence was a major technical development at present. It was explained that a pilot was currently being held to assess the strength and accuracy of the Microsoft 'Copilot' software, which was an artificial intelligence resource. Attention was drawn to the fact that this could not be done in the past as it was not available in Welsh.

An update was given that the Council's phone systems had now been updated. It was explained that the phone systems had now been installed on the computers of staff members and the default had been set as Welsh, in the software that allowed this, on all of the Council's corporate computers, as well as all computers in Gwynedd schools. Pride was expressed that this system was innovative, and that the Council had been able to sell this software for external use.

It was reported that Audit Wales was auditing the accounts of Cyngor Gwynedd, North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Gwynedd Harbours, Pensions and GwE, with the cooperation of the Finance Department which had developed and administered those accounts. Pride was expressed that meetings with Audit Wales officers were still being conducted through the medium of Welsh. Members were reminded that challenges had arisen when trying to hold discussions with them in Welsh in the past; however, pride was expressed that those difficulties had led to the development of training plans within the organisation in order to ensure that more Welsh speakers were available to carry out audits.

Attention was drawn to the Council's Trainee and Apprenticeships plan, confirming that the department had taken advantage of this plan this year by appointing two professional trainees as well as four new apprentices. It was detailed that those individuals worked in the field of pensions, taxation and benefits, and were an important recruitment source to meet the needs of the department by offering a strong career pathway. Pride was expressed that Tomos Pritchard, who was an apprentice in the accountancy service, had received an invitation to represent the Council on a panel at the Welsh Language Commissioner's conference in Cardiff, which would be discussing the use of Welsh in the workplace. Pride was also

expressed that this opportunity had emerged to share his experiences with other apprentices, and the importance of speaking Welsh in the workplace.

It was expressed that the Pensions Service had introduced a new self-service system for the pension fund in April 2024. It was noted that the Gwynedd Pension Fund was the first fund in Wales to upgrade to this new site. Unfortunately, this meant that there was no Welsh version of it available at the time; however, the service has been working a lot with the providers to ensure that a Welsh version of the site will be forthcoming. Reference was made to an innovative development as a part of this self-service system, namely an avatar which detailed the annual pension statement of the individual. It was confirmed that a Welsh avatar had been developed, which shared information simply and explicitly for users. A video clip was shared of the avatar, explaining sections of the annual statements during the meeting so that Members could see this new technology in practice.

Pride was expressed that the Department promoted Welsh nationally as other Pension Funds upgraded to the self-service system. It was confirmed that the Pension Funds of Powys, Torfaen, Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taf used the site, noting that it was expected for more Funds to upgrade over the coming months. It was explained that an ongoing effort was being made to introduce extra items to the self-service site, as well as technological work to improve how the avatar pronounced Welsh terms. It was added that the Pension Fund had received positive feedback following the success of their stall at the 2023 National Eisteddfod in Boduan, and that further positive feedback had been received as the Fund shared a stall with the Clwyd Pension Fund at the National Eisteddfod in Wrexham this year. Attention was drawn to the fact that most people were non-Welsh-speaking in the Clwyd Pension Fund, hoping that this collaboration would lead to a greater use of Welsh in that fund. Also, it was reported that the Pension Service officers had provided a dictionary of Welsh terms to the Local Government Association and HM Tax Inspectors to ensure that they used those terms.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

In response to a query about perceptions of the pilot in practice on the work of Microsoft Copilot on the Council's Information Technology systems, the Assistant Head - Information Technology confirmed that full results were not available at this time. However, it was explained that a trial of the software had been carried out in the past and that the transcript of virtual meetings developed in Welsh through the system at that time was very poor. Nevertheless, it was confirmed that the initial results of the pilot suggested that the software had developed a lot recently and that the Welsh transcripts being developed from virtual meetings within the software was much more accurate.

It was asked whether the Council was proactive when selling software being used by other organisations and Councils, and whether there was an income for the Council from selling these products. It was explained that specific promotion work was done on educational software developed by Cynnal; before this service was transferred to the Finance Department. It was confirmed that these, such as the 'on-line IDP' programme had been promoted and sold to other counties. Nevertheless, attention was drawn that the promotion of other software, such as a system to track fleet vehicles, had not come to fruition as other Counties had not shown much interest in purchasing it. However, it was noted that there was more interest in this type of software by now. Attention was drawn to the fact that there was more interest in software if it was promoted by other councils, instead of through Cyngor Gwynedd promotion.

In response to an enquiry as to whether there was any conflict within systems as artificial intelligence software was integrated into the Council's current systems, it was confirmed that the development of artificial intelligence had received specific attention within the Cyngor Gwynedd Digital Plan. It was explained that a temporary budget had been identified to

appoint a staff member to lead on this field and ensure that it was embedded accurately and securely within the Council's system.

The members expressed their thanks for the report, congratulating the department on their innovative work.

## **RESOLVED**

**To accept the report, noting the observations received during the discussion.**

### **7. REPORT BY THE HIGHWAYS, ENGINEERING AND YGC DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS REALISING THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033**

The report was presented by the Head of Highways, Engineering and YGC and the Business Development Manager. They referred briefly to the following main points:

It was reported that the department was leading on three of the Council Plan projects at present, namely Clean and Tidy Communities, Acting on flood risks and Extending opportunities for play and socialising for children and young people in the County.

It was reported that 11 smart benches had been installed in Gwynedd this year. It was explained that these benches could report nearby local history, by working with well-known individuals such as Cafi Wyn, Rhys Iorwerth, Guto Dafydd, Gwyneth Glyn, Manon Steffan Ros and Cedron Sion. Pride was expressed that this project was innovative as it was a new method of sharing local history through the medium of Welsh. Attention was drawn to the fact that the benches had been installed in Bangor, Caernarfon, Pwllheli, Cricieth, Tywyn and Porthmadog.

Members were reminded that Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd was being run as a commercial entity, confirming that the new Business Plan had been launched in April this year, which would be valid for the next five years. Assurances were given that this business plan was developed and disseminated through the medium of Welsh. It was elaborated that improving staff's language skills was a goal during this period, by providing Welsh education and training. The Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd recruitment video that would be shared on social media soon, was shared.

It was confirmed that the department was collaborating with local businesses and sub-contractors on a regular basis, sharing an example that the Environment Category Team had held an event in Tŷ Gwyrddfai in Penygroes with the cooperation of the Council's other departments, Adra Cyf Housing Association, as well as other companies. Similarly, it was noted that the Department was attending job fairs and events to engage with the people of Gwynedd, by holding face-to-face conversations on the opportunities of the company and the benefits of working for an organisation with a Welsh workforce.

The Finance Department and the Information Technology service were thanked for developing a system to manage the Council's Fleet through the medium of Welsh, as it assisted with the process of ordering materials, recording work, managing drivers, conducting a maintenance programme and keeping vehicle details. It was noted that this programme was Welsh and had been sold to other authorities, as noted previously during a previous item at this meeting.

An update was given that the Department was in the process of updating the fleet vehicles to be electric vehicles, and it was noted that 88 electric vehicles were in the fleet at present. It was acknowledged that using electric vehicles continued to be a new experience for Council staff members and therefore a Welsh video '*Sut i ddefnyddio cerbydau trydan*' (How to use

electric vehicles), was being developed by the Department to assist staff members when using the vehicle and charging it.

It was detailed that the Department employed 433 staff members and that 265 (61.2%) had achieved their language self-assessment. It was emphasised that the other 149 staff members were front-line workers, and the managers had completed the self-assessment on their behalf. It was confirmed that only 19 staff members had not achieved any type of language assessment at present. Pride was expressed that 96.9% of the Department's staff members reached the language designation of their job, noting that work was being done to offer Welsh training for the 13 staff members who did not reach the relevant language designation for their job.

It was acknowledged that some systems used by the Department were English only, ensuring that every effort was being made to ensure that they were translated to Welsh in the future for the benefit of the staff members and the public.

Pride was expressed that the Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd service had an Investors in People accreditation, taking pride in the fact that the survey could be carried out to receive the accreditation through the medium of Welsh.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

It was considered that the number of staff who had completed the language self-assessment was very low, asking the officers for further information on this matter. In response to the considerations, the Head of Department explained that this derived from the fact that many staff members in the department were front-line workers, and they did not have a Council computer by virtue of their post, meaning that they did not have access to the assessment. The Business Development Manager elaborated that work was progressing to ensure that the Manager of those staff members who did not have access to the assessment completed them with them, on their behalf. The Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer confirmed that the comments presented by the Manager during language assessments could be a fairer reflection of the staff's actual linguistic position, as individual tended to lack confidence in their linguistic skills when self-assessing.

The Department was praised for promoting their work in various ways, considering that the recruitment campaigns had been successful. In response, the Head of Department confirmed that several exciting jobs had been advertised recently. It was noted that the Department's main challenge was to attract people back to Gwynedd to work, because of the presumption that no specialist jobs were available here. Pride was expressed that the Department had managed to offer specialist jobs and attract people back to the area and raise the profile of the Department and Ymgynghoriaeth Gwynedd as a local employer. It was hoped that the recruitment video that would be shared on social media soon would be an added boost to this aim in the future, confirming that the Department offered jobs and apprenticeships. Likewise, the Business Development Manager confirmed that the Department had promoted the Department's work to over 40 students with the assistance of MSParc recently and that work experience students were regularly accepted to learn more about what the Department was achieving.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

**To accept the report, noting the observations received during the discussion.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.25am.

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**CHAIR**