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## LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 9 FEBRUARY 2026

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### PRESENT:

**Councillors:** Menna Baines (Chair)

Anne Lloyd Jones, Jina Gwyrfai, Gwilym Jones, Beth Lawton, Elfed Williams, Beca Brown, Rhys Tudur, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn and Cai Larsen.

**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).

**Others invited:** Councillor Llio Elenid Owen (Cabinet Member for Corporate and Legal Services and the Welsh Language).

### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Item 5: Siwan Llwyd Roberts (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System) and Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head - Education Services).

Item 6: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department) and Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Senior Operational Officer, Housing and Property Department).

### 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Meryl Roberts (Vice-chair), Alan Jones-Evans, Hefin Underwood and Gwynfor Owen.

### 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 13 October 2025, as a true record.

### 5. REPORT OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033

The report was submitted by the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System and the Assistant Head of Education Services. They referred briefly to the following main points:

It was explained that this report was a summary of the Gwynedd Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) that had been submitted to Welsh Government in July 2025, with further updates.

Attention was drawn to the Gwynedd Education Language Policy, confirming that the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 placed a statutory duty on the Government, Local Authorities and schools to plan to increase the Welsh-medium education provision. It was explained that the act did not come fully into force until around 2030. It was noted that the intention of the Education Department and the Council was to be proactive to ensure that the requirements of the legislation were met.

It was explained that a public consultation was being undertaken on a draft of the Gwynedd Education Language Policy, following a comprehensive consultation by Meirion Prys Jones during 2024/25. It was detailed that engagement sessions had been carried out with school Headteachers, pupils, parents, language forums, language organisations, representatives of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and representatives from the Welsh Language Commissioner, to steer the Policy development. It was confirmed that a draft of that Policy had been submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 December 2025. It was noted that this draft Policy had been approved as an exemplar Policy and the public consultation was applauded. Attention was drawn to the fact that the period of public consultation had commenced since January 2026, and it was noted that it would conclude on 25 February 2026. Furthermore, it was noted that a further report would be submitted to the Cabinet to present feedback from the public consultation and ask for a decision on whether the new-look Gwynedd Education Language Policy should be adopted before it was shared to Governing Bodies, before September 2026.

Pride was expressed that approximately 99% of primary school teachers and approximately 89% of secondary school teachers felt confident to teach through the medium of Welsh. However, it was noted that the Council had been collaborating with Learn Welsh North West to ensure that staff at transitional schools (Ysgol Friars - Bangor, Our Lady's School - Bangor, and Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn), received additional support to assist teachers to feel confident to teach through the medium of Welsh by receiving support from a tutor, once a fortnight. Pride was expressed that 17 staff and pupils from Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn had already taken advantage of this provision, confirming that work was being done to establish the post of Welsh Language Tutor for the site in future.

It was reported that work was being done to look at the social use of Welsh amongst young people. It was noted that the Council received a Welsh Language Grant every year from the Government and that it was used to promote Welsh-medium activities beyond the classroom and outside school hours. The work of the Youth Service was elaborated upon, emphasising that it was key in this area. Attention was drawn to events that were taking place in collaboration with the Language Charter and Welsh Language Grant. It was noted that focus was being placed on practical and social events such as parades, transition sessions and gigs. It was explained that locations such as Pontio and Nant Gwrtheyrn were used to facilitate the activities. Pride was expressed that there was much more interest in the Book Contest than had been seen over recent years. It was elaborated that teams from schools across Gwynedd were participating in it this year.

It was confirmed that the Department was collaborating with other entities such as Menter Iaith Gwynedd to ensure that projects such as the 'Language Heroes' continued. It was noted that it was being held at Ysgol Abererch and Ysgol Ffridd y Llyn this year.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Department was also working with theatre companies such as Arad Goch, who were preparing performances of 'Natur' by Morgan Elwy in the coming weeks. It was also noted that the Department continued to work with Cwmni'r Frân Wen.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

The Department was thanked for their work at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn, noting that difficulties had been experienced to appoint teachers who were able to speak Welsh. It was explained that only around 4% of the pupils came from Welsh-speaking homes, but the community was positive about what was going on at the school. In response, the Head of the Immersion Education System gave thanks and said that it was encouraging to see the confidence of the teachers and pupils growing and noted that this was the main need; it was not learning the language from scratch. It was also noted that there was a good relationship with the Immersion Centre in the area.

Attention was drawn to the Gwynedd Yfory project, which extended play and socialising opportunities for children and young people in Gwynedd, and it was suggested whether it should be considered that more than one Youth Officer needed to be appointed. It was also noted that there were gaps in the provision in the Llŷn and south Meirionnydd areas, emphasising the need to ensure that the provision was in the County's rural areas, and not just in the areas with the highest population density. In response to the observations, the Head of Immersion Education System confirmed that there was an intention to expand this service's staffing structure. It was explained that it was hoped that this would be done by assessing the number of contributions and using this as evidence to submit to the Welsh Government to highlight the need for further investment in Gwynedd. It was noted that £20,000 was provided by the Welsh Government annually for this provision and it was hoped that this would increase in the future to attract new Welsh speakers and nurture what already existed in Gwynedd's Welsh communities. In response to a further enquiry, it was confirmed that 21,305 participations were associated with the project's activities over the last year, confirming that this figure included individuals who had attended more than one event. Furthermore, the Assistant Head of Education Services emphasised that this report was a partial picture of the services available, as it detailed the work of the Education Department. Attention was drawn to third sector organisations that provided valuable opportunities for children and young people such as Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Wales Young Farmers Clubs.

In response to an enquiry about how to measure the success of provisions which ensured that the Welsh language was used socially, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion System confirmed that several forums shared young people's views about the Welsh language. Attention was drawn to the Youth Forum, which discussed the views and aspirations of young people and the Gwynedd Language Forum Young People Sub-group. Furthermore, it was confirmed that there was an expectation for the Council to report on the views of young people on the social use of Welsh within the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. It was also noted that pupils completed a self-assessment within the schools which noted social use of the language, such as when using social media or listening to music. It was acknowledged that the Department could not contact the pupils' homes to ask them about the use of Welsh there without the schools' support. The Assistant Head of Education Services elaborated that modifying social customs was not a task that could be achieved in the short-term, and she welcomed any resource received to address the issue. The concept of conducting research occasionally to measure the success of these efforts was considered.

It was noted that 11% of Gwynedd secondary school teachers did not feel confident to teach through the medium of Welsh. It was reiterated that this figure was a high proportion of the County's secondary teachers, and it was asked whether these teachers worked in the transitional schools or across the county. Pride was expressed that several support sources were available for the teachers to feel confident to teach in Welsh, asking whether it was possible to measure their attainment with this provision as their confidence increased. In response to the observations, the Head of the Immersion Education System noted that it was not possible to confirm which schools the teachers in question came from, but the information would be circulated to Members when it was timely to do so. The type of courses being held to boost confidence with Welsh were detailed and that they were being offered in cooperation with Canolfan Bedwyr and Learn Welsh North West, and they responded to the individual needs and specific situations within the Transitional Schools. It was noted that future reports

would include details on the development of this provision and definitive data on the development of teacher confidence to teach through the medium of Welsh.

In response to the enquiries and investigations being carried out on the social use of Welsh, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor noted that the WISERD Language Network had recently been re-established by Welsh Universities. It was confirmed that the Universities were eager to collaborate with Local Authorities to provide input on the type of information they wanted to be collected and that there was contact with policy practitioners in local authorities.

In response, to see whether there was an intention to establish more Urdd community aelwydydd as a result of the news that the Urdd Eisteddfod would be coming to Eryri in 2028, the Assistant Head of Education Services confirmed that 5 community aelwydydd were currently operational. It was acknowledged that increasing this number was a substantial challenge due to the requirement for volunteers to sustain them. However, it was noted that it was not possible to elaborate on the proposal to extend the number of community aelwydydd, or the number attending them, as it was a provision that was supported by the Urdd.

The intention of the Council and Education Department to be proactive to comply with the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025, was supported. Attention was drawn to the fact that the Department had plans to extend the Welsh language amongst native speakers, and details of those plans were sought. In response, the Head of the Education Immersion System confirmed that the Department was collaborating with Agored Cymru, which gave older children access to practical experiences in their communities, through the medium of Welsh. It was explained that this plan gave them the opportunity to speak Welsh naturally and socially with a Welsh workforce. It was noted that Agored Cymru was holding sessions that ran in parallel with practical GCSE courses, boosting confidence in the language and ensuring that it was spoken in the workplace. Reference was also made to an exciting plan in collaboration with the Adnodd company, who were looking to ensure language strength, access to comprehensible and quality standards, whilst also being ambitious when considering future possibilities.

A reminder was given that officers had reported that staffing levels within the educational psychology service were concerning in 2025, and it was asked whether the situation continued to be challenging. In response, the Head of the Immersion Education System confirmed that unfortunately this concern remained. However, it was noted that trainee psychologists had been appointed, in the hope that these concerns would be mitigated in the near future, once they qualified as registered psychologists. It was emphasised that this was a national concern, and the Welsh Government was aware of the gap in this provision. The hope was that more educational psychologists would be trained with support from Bangor University, as the qualification would be offered there, instead of at Cardiff University only.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

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

### **6. REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033.**

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

It was reported that over 11,300 local individuals had received help and support in various ways as a result of the Department's Housing Action Plan. It was noted that this support included grants, Council tax exemptions to renovate empty houses, loans through the Homebuy Scheme, supported accommodation via homelessness schemes or grants to make adaptations to the houses of disabled individuals, so that they could continue to live at home independently.

Attention was drawn to the Empty Homes Scheme, which addressed bringing homes back into use by supporting owners to bring houses to an acceptable living standard whilst also keeping residents in their communities. It was noted that 128 grants had been given to buyers with a local connection to the houses, emphasising that the total number of houses coming back into use was 321. It was emphasised that several people taking advantage of this scheme were local first-time buyers, and the Scheme allowed them to stay in their communities.

It was explained that an impact assessment on equality characteristics, the Welsh language and the Socio-Economic duty was being completed on the Housing Action Plan. Pride was expressed as the Plan was having a positive impact on every equality characteristic and the Welsh language as it increased the number and range of houses within the County for the needs of various communities. It was elaborated that the Plan was having a positive impact on the Welsh language as it helped a high percentage of Gwynedd residents, who had been priced out of the housing market, to have access to affordable homes, loans, grants or tax relief. It was reported that the data gathered by estate agents confirm that an average of 95% of new social housing estate residents can speak Welsh. It was elaborated that these estates include 26% more Welsh speakers than the electoral ward where it is located, and 31% higher than the percentage of Welsh speakers in the County.

Reference was made to plans which addressed the increase of housing supply for local people and to assist individuals to deal with the cost-of-energy crisis and fuel poverty.

Looking ahead to the 2026/27 financial year, it was noted that the Department wished to update the Welsh language impact assessment in the Common Housing Allocation Policy, as a result of new legislation that comes into force in the Homelessness field, in line with the Welsh Government's timeframe to publish that legislation. It was also explained that the department intended to take every opportunity to assist the local people of Gwynedd to access affordable homes and continue to receive data on the linguistic ability of new tenants on social housing estates.

Pride was expressed that the new on-line portal was being completed by an external company to give individuals access to application forms for social housing or updates on live applications, on-line, for the first time ever. It was emphasised that this portal was convenient for anyone who wished to fill-in an on-line form or needed information outside normal working hours. It was emphasised that discussions were being held regularly with the company to ensure that this portal was available completely bilingually. It was noted that paper and phone processes continued to be available to anyone who did not have access or was uncomfortable to complete on-line forms.

An update was provided that the Department had procured a new system in November 2025 to extract data on individuals' language choice, for the purpose of being able to contact people. It was explained that this data could not be extracted from the previous system. Details were provided that 855 Housing Options applicants had asked the Department to correspond in Welsh, and 805 had asked for English correspondence. Similarly, it was noted that 95 individuals who had contacted the Homelessness unit had asked for correspondence through the medium of Welsh, 254 in English and 2 in another language. It was emphasised that any initial correspondence was sent bilingually, with the Welsh language first, in an attempt to encourage and promote the use of the language when possible. It was ensured

that this was also the case about information that was shared on social media and all other forms of correspondence used by the Department.

It was reported that 95.8% of Department staff had received a language self-assessment or an assessment from their line manager, up to December 2025. It was confirmed that 95.6% of these reached the Language Designations of their jobs.

It was mentioned that the Department had received acknowledgement and praise from the Language Commissioner's Office in relation to the Housing Allocation Policy. It was explained that the Commissioner was glad to see that the Policy placed strong emphasis on local connection at Gwynedd level and community level, as it was a way of assisting to strengthen the Welsh language, with evidence to support that. Pride was expressed that the Department's Housing Allocation Policy was considered as good practice for other authorities to emulate, confirming that the Commissioner was preparing a blog that would be published on their website soon to detail the issue.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

In response to an enquiry about guidelines to be followed to fill empty social housing after their owners left, the Head of Housing and Property Department confirmed that this was the responsibility of the housing associations and that it did not fall under the Department's function.

The Department was congratulated on the work they did to ensure that local residents had local homes. However, it was noted that around a third of Gwynedd communities could not speak Welsh and therefore a local individual did not necessarily mean that it was an individual with Welsh language skills. It was asked why the Department did not ask individuals whether they were able to speak Welsh as a part of the implementation of the Housing Action Plan. In response, the Head of Department explained that the Department had to adhere to the statutory housing allocation rules. It was reiterated that the questions being asked by the Department had to be specific for the housing need, emphasising that the language did not affect your housing needs and therefore applicants could not be asked that question. However, it was confirmed that housing associations could ask about individuals' linguistic skills as the house had already been let by then and no response provided by the individuals would affect tenants.

A request was made that housing associations provided more details in their data to confirm how many adults in their houses were able to speak Welsh, as well as how many children who were able to speak Welsh, to obtain a full picture.

In response to a request for an update of the legal advice the Department received as guidance to include a linguistic condition as a part of the process of allocating social housing, the Head of Housing and Property Department noted that the Cabinet Member had already provided an update at a Cabinet meeting. It was noted that the link to watch that discussion would be shared with Members.

In response to an enquiry on how the Department adapted the Welsh language equality impact assessment, the Head of Department reported that a public assessment was being done in collaboration with the Department's partners, following advice from the Welsh Language Commissioner to do so. It was emphasised that this assessment was a full assessment of the Housing Allocation Policy that would be completed whilst the amendments were made to the policy. It was confirmed that Members would have an opportunity to submit their views and comments as a part of the consultation on that policy. In response to a further enquiry, it was believed that the Housing Allocation Policy protected the Welsh language and that there was a need to ensure that any changes to it complied with all legislation, whilst also being firm and positive when protecting the Welsh language.

The plans in the pipeline to bring empty houses back into use were detailed, and the Department was asked whether they were of the opinion that approving 128 was equivalent to the need, was more than what was expected, or whether they expected the demand for this plan to be higher. It was also asked whether they had received any feedback from the individuals who had benefited from the plan. Reference was made to changes to the plan, which enabled all types of house buyers to benefit from it, asking whether a high proportion of the grants had been approved to landlords. In response to the considerations, the Head of Department confirmed that no complaints had come to hand for this plan, and anyone who wished to provide feedback was encouraged to do so. It was noted that a financial bid had been submitted by the Department to fund the jobs of additional empty homes officers because an increase had been seen in the number of applications. Similarly, it was explained that an additional 3 officers had been appointed to assist with enforcement matters which related to empty houses which caused difficulties within communities, explaining that one of the empty homes officers collaborated with the enforcement officers to bridge the provision. It was reported that only the people who went to live in the houses after they were brought back into use were eligible for this plan, confirming that landlords were not eligible as a result. It was also mentioned that the Department had asked for a proportion of the increase seen in council tax had been earmarked to a new plan that would bring empty houses back into use to help with the homelessness situation within the county.

In response to an enquiry, the Head of Department confirmed that all correspondence was in line with the Council's Language Policy. It was reported that the first correspondence was sent bilingually, with all other further correspondence sent in the individual's chosen language, except for any statutory correspondence. It was confirmed that the Department did not ask individuals again about their chosen language for correspondence after the first time, in line with the implementation of the Language Policy.

Attention was drawn to the fact that a vast number of homeless individuals wished to receive correspondence in English, and it was asked whether this was because many of these individuals derived from areas outside the county. In response, the Head of Department reported that there was no link between the correspondence figures and where the homeless individuals derived from. It was noted that the majority of homeless people in the county derived from Gwynedd, with a small percentage having come to the county to escape from domestic abuse, and there was a statutory duty on the Department to look after them.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

## **RESOLVED**

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

### **7. REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033.**

The report was submitted by the Democracy and Language Service Manager in the absence of the Head of Department. They referred briefly to the following main points:

A reminder was given that the Department contributed to the work of developing policies, strategies and projects which promoted the use of Welsh in work areas, services, communities and workforce development as a part of the Welsh Language Strategy 2023-2033.

It was noted that the department had integrated the Welsh language into key policies and continued to do so. It was confirmed that emphasis was placed on ensuring that services for

the public and staff were available bilingually, with Welsh prioritised in phone systems, websites, social media, training and internal communications. It was elaborated that research provided evidence to steer decisions, and that specific projects promoted the use of Welsh amongst young people, businesses and communities.

Pride was expressed that the workforce's language skills was a priority for the Department, noting that there were training plans, support for apprentices and projects to teach Welsh to the workforce, with further support provided to those individuals who worked within the care field. It was confirmed that enterprises were in place which focused on increasing staff confidence in using the Welsh language. Attention was drawn to the fact that the report evidenced the high language skill levels of the Corporate Support Department.

It was acknowledged that the Department faced challenges and barriers when providing and promoting Welsh-medium services. Reference was made to some specific challenges such as the lack of a Welsh-medium provision by some key partners such as the police and the WLGA, national procurement and tendering systems which did not support the Welsh language adequately and social media technology. Specific attention was drawn to a barrier within the field of birth and death registration, noting that legislative restrictions restricted the ability to be able to complete a registration in Welsh only.

It was noted that the Department intended within the next year, to develop a guide to assess the impact on the Welsh language so that staff use it on major projects. It was also noted that other plans included Welsh Technology training promotion and raising staff awareness of the offer available to assist them. It was emphasised that the work in the language training field continued and that the Department also continued to collaborate with the General Registration Office to improve the Welsh provision offered.

During the discussion, the following observations were made:

Attention was drawn to the fact that Galw Gwynedd systems ask service users whether they want to continue to use Welsh services on many occasions, although the user had already noted their language of choice. In response to the enquiry, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor noted that the Officers were not aware that this question was being asked, and she confirmed that they would hold discussions with the service to ensure that this will not happen in the future.

In response to an enquiry about whether customer mobility assessments for receiving Blue Badges was completed in Welsh until the customer asks for an English assessment, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that the Welsh language was used first, until the customers noted that their language of choice was English.

In response to an enquiry, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that the Office for National Statistics now continued with the census and confirmed that another census was in the pipeline. It was noted that this census was in a consultation period at present. It was confirmed that the Council had provided input to that consultation, asking the Office for National Statistics to ensure that more questions relating to the Welsh language were being asked.

Reference was made to the 'language use survey pilot' which showed that 71.8% of the sample observed chose Welsh-medium services when using some of the Council's front-line services. In response to a question about whether there were plans in the pipeline to expand this pilot, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that it was hoped that this would happen. It was also reiterated that new interventions were operational as a result of the survey, such as the development of simple posters, with a spoken feel, to encourage people to use their Welsh language skills. It was noted that work was progressing in an attempt to simplify the language being used, such as in forms on the Council's website to promote the

use of Welsh. Attention was drawn to the fact that the number of people who used the Welsh language in leisure centres and libraries was higher than users at the Galw Gwynedd call centre, and therefore, further research would be carried out to address this. It was emphasised that there was a need to ensure that attention was given to digital aspects of this work, as more Council services were becoming digital over time. Pride was expressed that this survey evidenced that Council staff were proactive with the Welsh language. The Democracy and Language Service Manager elaborated that the long-term Clear Communication project addressed some of these matters, as it looked at Council services to see whether they could be adapted to communicate effectively and clearly without degrading the language or services.

Concern was expressed that challenges remained with the General Registration Office to improve the Welsh provision. A request was made to the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Legal and Welsh Language to correspond with the Office on behalf of the Committee, to express this discontent and ask them to put steps in place for this in the future by adding a Welsh-medium provision.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

### **RESOLVED**

- **To accept the report, noting the observations received during the discussion.**
- **To request that the Cabinet Member for Corporate and Legal Services and the Welsh Language corresponds with the General Registration Office on behalf of the Committee, to express discontent that it is not possible to register in Welsh and ask them to put steps in place to change this.**

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

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**CHAIR**