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## LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 12 NOVEMBER 2020

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### PRESENT

**COUNCILLORS:** Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones, Elwyn Jones, Eric M Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Cai Larsen, Eirwyn Williams and Elfed Williams

**OFFICERS:** Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllïan Mair Williams (Workplace Language Development Officer), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Llio Mai Hughes (Welsh Language Promotion Officer) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

**OTHERS INVITED:** Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support) and Edgar Wyn Owen (Council Chair).

### Present for item 7:

Bet Huws (Gwynedd Language Development Officer)  
Ifan Llywelyn (Gwynedd Language Development Officer).  
Dylan Bryn (Welsh Language Development Centre Officer)

### 1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

**RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Elin Walker Jones as Chair of this Committee for the 2020/21 period**

### 2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

**RESOLVED to re-elect Councillor Cai Larsen as Vice-chair of this Committee for the 2020/21 period**

### 3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor John Pughe Roberts

### 4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

### 5. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

### 6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee, held on 20 October 2020, as a true record.

## **7. AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES HELD THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WELSH**

Submitted - a report by the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor summarising the opportunities and challenges that various departments have faced in relation to continuing to implement the language policy due to Covid 19. An update was also provided on various projects that had been delivered despite the situation, in order to promote and increase the use of Welsh in Gwynedd.

It was reported that, in general, everyone noted that the virus had not affected their ability to provide Welsh-medium services, as they had adapted their methods of service provision, and had continued to offer Welsh language services. However, some noted that there was a possibility of missing the informal opportunities to converse in Welsh in the office, on the corridor or in the kitchen, particularly those who did not have an opportunity to speak much Welsh outside the workplace. In response, it was noted that the Welsh Buddy Scheme offered those informal opportunities for Welsh learners to maintain their momentum while working from home as well as additional sessions of on-line training which had been positive.

It was explained that one concern highlighted in the survey was that it was not always possible for staff to contribute in Welsh in external virtual meetings that had been organised by other organisations as they did not use technology that enabled the easy use of simultaneous translation services. It was noted that not all external organisations currently provided a simultaneous translation service for virtual meetings, and some were unwilling to use Zoom due to security concerns.

During the ensuing discussion, the following observations were made by Members:

- That public bodies in Wales were required to provide a Translation service at meetings - that provision was available to do so - and that the Language Commissioner's attention should be drawn to the problem.
- A suggestion to hold a quiz to promote opportunities to practise speaking Welsh
- It would be beneficial to receive information about the number who had attended / contributed to on-line events.
- Put pressure on Microsoft and campaign to include a simultaneous translation resource on Teams (which was favoured by other Councils)
- Welsh was developing as a contemporary, modern medium in technology and used among young people - needed to take advantage of this
- Needed assurance that the 'Track and Trace' service was available in Welsh

In response to the observations, it was noted that the Language Commissioner was aware of the obstacles regarding providing simultaneous translation at meetings. It was noted that a national sub-group had been set up to seek solutions. It was also noted that Gwynedd Council was sharing good practice with Councils and Partnerships to improve the provision if they were not allowed to use Zoom. It was proposed that an update be given on the work of the sub-group at the next meeting.

In response to maintaining momentum with Welsh lessons, it was noted that a 'Cymraeg i Gefnogi' scheme had been established which was very successful.

In response to a question regarding the Arfor county projects and the Government continuing to commit to the scheme, it was reported that the last few months had been a very busy period for the scheme with the projects adapting to accommodate the situation. It was reported that there would be no further commitment from the Government and the Councils would take ownership. It was suggested that an update on the situation be presented at the next meeting.

A vote of thanks was given for the report and to the staff for adapting the provision very effectively over the period.

**RESOLVED:**

- **To accept the report with thanks to the Welsh Language Officers for their work during this time**
- **To write a letter to the Welsh Language Commissioner expressing concern that it is not always possible for Gwynedd Council staff to contribute in Welsh in virtual meetings arranged by outside organisations as they do not provide simultaneous translation service for virtual meetings.**
- **To write a letter to Microsoft encouraging them to provide simultaneous translation via Teams**
- **To receive an update on the work of the National Sub-group which discusses information technology issues at the next meeting.**

## **8. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS AND THE COUNCIL'S LANGUAGE POLICY**

This report was submitted by the Language Advisor providing a brief update on work that had been going on over the past few months in respect of the Language Standards and the reporting duties. It was noted that, overall, the Service continued to be successful in complying with the requirements of the Standards, but there were some areas of concern arising, and definite themes did come up which provided specific work fields. It was reported that the Service had been proactive in liaising with the Commissioner during the past year, for the purposes of discussing some issues of importance and concern, such as the barriers we face when commissioning external systems and apps. It was added that, by having an open conversation, it was hoped to be able to develop a mutual understanding and good collaboration which would have a positive impact when trying to influence external bodies that were sometimes ignorant to the status of the language and the Standards' requirements in Wales - the impact assessment template was an example of this.

Reference was made to the challenges together with the developmental fields and attention was drawn to the skills report which expressed that the percentage able to speak Welsh within the Council was 'very high' with 99.1% meeting the requirements of the post. Further attention was drawn to the Language Commissioner's Assurance Report 2019-20 - Closing the Gap and that the report would be shared with the Members via e-mail. It was noted that it was intended to review the Language Policy in January as some clauses were not strong enough in some fields. It was noted that the work would be split into two categories - administrative changes, which mean minor changes to edit the wording, in order to make the requirements clearer and significant / principle changes which involve the need to discuss and seek agreement to implement in some contexts. It was reported that an item would be presented at the next meeting on the possible amendments to the Policy.

Members expressed their thanks for the report.

During the ensuing discussion, the following observations were made by Members:

- That a Welsh image needed to be conveyed across the Council
- A request for a language complaints report - a questionnaire on salt had been sent out to Highways Department staff in English only
- That the use of social media was having an impact on the early years - a suggestion that this should be investigated

In response to an observation regarding having Welsh as a 'default' on social websites, it was reported that research on the public's use of the website was being carried out by the website team and the communication unit. The Cabinet Member added that this was a technical challenge, but that the number of hits on the Welsh version of the website was encouraging.

In response to a question regarding the impact assessment template, it was noted that every Cabinet decision required an equality assessment with language included as one element of this assessment. It was noted that the Commissioner's Office was developing guidelines which would look specifically at some fields to ensure compliance.

In response to a comment regarding the language capability and the organisation's duty to meet the standard with opportunities available to promote learning Welsh if it was not a requirement of the post, it was noted that the standard reached and surpassed the requirements and that there was a responsibility to protect this.

**RESOLVED to accept the report.**

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

**CHAIR**