
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 19/10/21

Present: Elin Walker Jones (Chair)
Olaf Cai Larsen (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Alan Jones Evans, Aled Ll. Evans, Beca Brown, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Mary Humphreys and Elfed Williams

OFFICERS: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Llywela Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllïan Mair Williams (Language Adviser), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Llio Mai Hughes (Welsh Language Promotion Officer), Ffion Bryn Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO PRESENT:

Item 5 : Steffan Jones (Head of Highways and Municipal).

Item 6: Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment).

Item 7: Dafydd Edwards (Head of Finance Department), Huw Ynyr (Assistant Head - Information Technology).

Item 9: Meirion MacIntyre Huws (Protection of Native Place Names Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elwyn Jones, Kevin M Jones, John Pughe Roberts and Eirwyn Williams

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 22 June 2021 as a true record, subject to an addition to point 11.2, noting that a member had expressed disappointment that the schools had not been able to maintain the Language Centres.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HIGHWAYS AND MUNICIPAL

The report was presented by the Head of Highways and Municipal Department. Attention was drawn to the challenge of staff being unable to respond to the Welsh Language staff self-assessment survey as they did not have easy access to personal computers. It was

added that the department was working with the Learning and Development officer to try to find suitable ways of improving the response.

Attention was also drawn to the following points:

- All the apprenticeships in the department were offered through the medium of Welsh, and that Welsh language advertisements for these opportunities were being broadcast on television.
- A desire was expressed to develop more Welsh terminology within the departments, to ensure that they were used by the workforce, and to arrange language training for the staff.
- It was hoped to encourage more use of Welsh among staff, particularly in areas such as Meirionnydd where less Welsh was used. It was emphasised that this was a priority in order to enable front-line staff to provide the best example of language use to the residents of Gwynedd.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- How representative were the participants who responded to the survey? It was noted that there were arrangements to examine the survey to ensure that it was straightforward, and therefore it was hoped it would attract wider participation. It was also asked how likely Welsh-speaking individuals were to complete it in English. It was explained that there was no way of checking this.
- A question was asked about how often external translators were used. It was explained that external companies were not used as the service used the Council's in-house translation service, and the challenge of increasing the use of Welsh language terminology among staff was noted.
- A question was asked about the usual arrangements if it was necessary to employ a non-Welsh-speaker. It was confirmed that suitable training would be offered. It was also explained that support and training were offered to existing staff who were lacking confidence in their use of Welsh.

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of the Environment Department. An amendment to the report was noted, namely that 67.8% of the Department had completed the Welsh language assessment, and that 93% of those who responded achieved the language designation of their post. He referred to the following points in the report:

- It was difficult to recruit individuals with the correct expertise to work in the field of planning and public protection. He explained that inclusion courses were being arranged to assist with this.
- The ability to work virtually had changed the department's working methods, and a number of staff had left the department to apply for posts in other locations. However, it was noted that virtual working also meant that the Council was able to attract prospective employees. It was identified that training and investment was needed to encourage officers to remain in their posts.
- It was noted that there was a need to develop the field of recruitment and to create and maintain links with schools and colleges as things returned to usual

following the COVID period.

- It was explained that there were language difficulties when documents were created between the department and external companies, and a need to ensure that there was no misinterpretation between the Welsh and English.
- It was emphasised that many companies operated voluntarily on the department's recommendations to secure Welsh names for developments although there was no enforcing legislation.

An opportunity was given for committee members to ask further questions -

- Why had a number of staff left the department, and what was the reason? A request was also made for an update on changes within the department. It was noted that investment was being made in staff training in the department in order to develop them further. He added that there had been a long period of stability over recent years, but the changes to working methods during the pandemic had provided individuals with opportunities beyond the Council.
- A question was asked about whether it was intended to forge a link with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol or schools and colleges to encourage young people to apply for the posts available within Gwynedd Council. Recruitment had been highlighted as a field that required development, but unfortunately the plans had been held back by the pandemic, and it was hoped that they could be re-instated soon. However, it was explained that a great deal of work had been done to promote posts locally.
- A question was asked about whether it was intended to develop Welsh terminology within the department. It was explained that the matter of terminology was difficult and that the service was required to offer a bilingual invitation to tender. The need to be careful with agreements and contracts was noted, to ensure that there was no misinterpretation between both languages. Consequently, the department had received legal advice to submit agreements and contracts in one language, and that the language could therefore vary between companies.
- Disappointment was expressed that there was no law to ensure that native Welsh names used locally were prioritised, but it was emphasised that the department encouraged the use of Welsh, and that a high percentage of companies accepted the Language Unit's recommendations.

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: FINANCE

The report was presented by the Head of Finance Department, and he referred briefly to the main following points:

- Over the years the department had developed from being principally English in its working practices to having a high percentage of staff with Welsh language skills.
- It was noted that the department was unique in its production of accounts through the medium of Welsh, translated into English, unlike any other Council.
- Reference was made to front-line staff within the department who communicated with the public, and that they met the linguistic requirements.

- Cymraeg Clir materials were used in order to simplify the vocabulary used within the department's work so that lay people could understand. The Head added that other councils were replicating this work to standardise terminology, and the department had worked with Canolfan Bedwyr to ensure that correct wording was used.
- It was added that the department had been innovative in its use of Zoom to facilitate the use of Welsh in external meetings, for example to ensure that pension fund meetings were conducted bilingually to a high standard. He added that the Ffordd Gwynedd principles were also being implemented.
- He noted that virtual systems had protected the bilingual arrangements and that the department had lobbied Microsoft by writing a letter to request the adoption of a system that included a simultaneous translation facility. However, in the absence of this, it had been possible to deliver this easily through Zoom.
- The Assistant Head - Information Technology added further information about the web language systems that had been used successfully in schools in the past.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

- Thanks were expressed for the interesting report, and a question was asked about the likelihood of translation provision in joint meetings with external organisations.
- A member noted that he was surprised that there was no translation facility in Teams as Microsoft was a world-wide company and asked why it was not offered.
- A question was asked about whether Gwynedd Council was in a position to insist that there was translation provision and facilities in order to increase the use of Welsh in meetings.
- It was asked whether a response had been received to the letter sent to Microsoft.
- The discussions with the departments were welcomed, as it was a good opportunity for them to self-evaluate the situation of the Welsh language when producing their reports. He added that the financial challenges were highlighted as they reported back to the Language Committee.
- It was asked whether it was time to examine the Committee's priorities for the future.

In response, the Head of Finance Department noted:

- There was very little Welsh used in meetings held with officers from across Wales. However, in public meetings there was always a translation facility available.
- Microsoft had focused on mechanical translation and had not split its audio channel in Teams in two to enable simultaneous translation as happened with Zoom. He added that Microsoft was in the process of doing this.
- The Language adviser noted that simultaneous translation was discussed in the Welsh Language Commissioner's assurance report that was appended to today's agenda. He added that the Commissioner was pressurising the Authorities to

ensure that provision was available.

- He answered that no response had been received from Microsoft, however as the provision was in the pipeline, there was no purpose in sending further correspondence.
- The Democracy and Language Manager added that there had been significant collaboration internally and regionally to influence other authorities to increase their use.
- In addition, it was noted that the translation services were far easier to arrange virtually, and the work of the translation team had subsequently increased.
- He agreed that examining priorities would help to steer the direction of further meetings.

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. STEPPING FORWARD: THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER'S ASSURANCE REPORT

The Language Adviser presented the report for information. It was noted that the report related to the Commissioner's findings of National language practices over the past year, due to Covid.

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

9. WELSH PLACENAMES REPORT

The report was presented by the Project Officer and the Language Adviser.

It was noted that in April 2018, a report was submitted to the Language Committee outlining the Council's responsibilities and powers in the field of place names. It was explained that the report was the result of research undertaken in response to concerns by Committee members at the time regarding the Anglicization of names or coining new names for geographical features and houses. Due to barriers such as Covid, the project had been unable to proceed until September of this year, when a project officer had been appointed to begin the work. It was noted that this plan was now one of the Council's improvement priorities, and had therefore received additional funding to accelerate the plan.

It was expressed that there was no clarity on the arrangements relating to changing names and re-naming houses and streets. It was emphasised that this was mainly due to the need to modernise legislation and policies to ensure that the Welsh language was given precedence when naming houses and businesses.

It was explained that this scheme provided an opportunity for departments within the Council to collaborate, and an initial meeting to establish a Project Group had been held. It was noted that it would be possible to proceed with definite arrangements that would meet the demand for clarity in this area. It was reported that work would be undertaken with schools and the public to attract long-term interest in the scheme.

It was identified that there was scope to collaborate with Town and Community Councils to see what steps had been taken previously, or what needed to be done in the

communities.

Members were given the opportunity to ask further questions:

- How easy was it to contact and communicate with businesses and housing associations? It was noted that they were in the process of developing an information form for businesses and housing associations that would provide clear information on the process of naming houses and businesses. The Council had limited influence in relation to the third sector, although the desire to develop a relationship in the field was noted, in order to be able to exert further influence.
- Attention was drawn to the success of Llanystumdwy Community Council in relation to erecting name signs on bridges and near rivers within the area, and whether this scheme could be expanded in conjunction with the Environment department. It was agreed that a discussion with the department was required, and that plans such as these should be continued.
- A question was asked about the role of Councillors in supporting this scheme, and it was noted that regular meetings would be held with Councillors, and updates shared. It was noted that this would be an opportunity for Councillors to challenge the performance of the scheme and to share their own ideas.

DECISION

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 1pm and concluded at 3:20pm

CHAIRMAN