

**LANGUAGE COMMITTEE**  
**22 June 2021**  
**10.00 am**

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**PRESENT**

**COUNCILLORS:** Beca Brown, Elwyn Edwards, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elwyn Jones, Eric M Jones, Kevin M Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Cai Larsen, John Pughe Roberts and Elfed Williams.

**OFFICERS:** Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Gwennllian Mair Williams (Language Advisor), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Lowri Evans, Sioned Mai Jones and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officers).

**OTHERS INVITED:** Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support) and Councillor Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education)

**Present for item 7:**

Rhion Glyn (Senior Business Manager, Adults, Health and Well-being Department)

**Present for item 8:**

Marian Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

**Present for item 11:**

Debbie Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Rhian Parry Jones (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer), Sian Eirug (Language Strategy Co-ordinator – Secondary)

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

**RESOLVED**

To elect Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd as Chair for the year 2021/22.

**2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

**RESOLVED**

To elect Councillor Judith Humphreys as Vice-chair for the year 2021/22.

**3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Alan Evans, Councillor Eirwyn Williams, and Aled Davies (Head of Adults, Health and Well-being Department).

**4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST**

No declarations of personal interest were received.

**5. URGENT ITEMS**

No urgent items were received.

**6. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 29 April 2021 as a true record.

**7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT**

The report by the Senior Business Manager – Adults, Health and Well-being was presented, which highlighted the steps taken within the department to promote the Welsh language.

Attention was drawn to the department's priorities as follows:

- Integrate services by collaborating with partners such as Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. It was added that this would change the way of working, ensuring better use of resources.
- It was noted that Council staff complied with the Council's Language Policy, however, there were challenges with partners who had a different language policy to that of the Council.
- Barriers and challenges were highlighted, with examples such as language use when recording users' notes.
- Although staff language skills in the Council reached the required designation, there was no information regarding partners' staff language skills.

- More work was needed when commissioning services since the department relied on the independent/private sector that was not accountable to the Council's language standards and expectations.
- The challenges were discussed including staff recruitment and retention, and the solutions such as promoting career paths within the field.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- Members thanked the officer for the report and enquired whether the figure of 79% for staff who reached the language designation had an impact on Gwynedd residents and their choice to receive services through the medium of Welsh.
- They asked to what degree did the Health Board's language policy prevent Gwynedd Council from offering a bilingual provision, and subsequent to this they asked whether there was any mapping of the language skills of the Health Board's staff?
- A member expressed pride that users' experience was given precedence within the service.
- Members enquired about the views of Social Services inspectors regarding the use of the Welsh language within the department.

In response, the following was noted:

- The challenge of securing staff who have Welsh language skills was greater in some areas, however, overall, the figure for staff who have no Welsh language skills was very low.
- Ensuring the use of Welsh was proving most difficult within the office and when recording notes on the system, as these were shared with external colleagues.
- Discussions were taking place between the Language Advisor and the Health Board in order to map staff language skills.
- One recent challenge had been securing *on-line meetings* in Welsh, as other bodies did not use the same software.
- A next step for the department would be to identify the workforce's language skills and who required training. The officer explained that this would provide an opportunity to work jointly with providers who needed assistance in this regard.
- The department was required to report annually on language skills, and the Health Board also collected data around language skills and updated them regularly. However, as the methods were not comparative it was not possible to compare data sets.

**RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and to note the observations received.**

**8. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES**

The report by the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department was presented, and she highlighted the steps taken within the department to promote the Welsh language.

She added that the service included elements of Social Services, the Supporting Families Team, Early and Nursery Years, and the Youth and Justice services. She explained that all parts of the service had extensive responsibilities.

Attention was drawn to the department's priorities as follows:

- Advance and promote and early years services by working together with Hunaniaith.
- Encourage employees to use and improve their language skills, and provide resources and support to childminders.
- Support the 'Croesi'r Bont' scheme for immersing nursery aged children in the language – she noted that 11 cylchoedd (pre-school settings) in the County had been supported by the scheme to date.
- Provide support to parents – on-line 'clwb cwtsh' sessions, 35 individuals.
- Provide support to children and vulnerable young people to ensure that the language needs of all children have been taken into account.
- She explained that although language was a factor in considering care and support packages, some children came into care because of severe risks or needs, where an out-of-county placement was essential. She added that although it was not possible to ensure the language choice in this case, the Social Workers addressed the language requirements by keeping contact over the phone and providing resources in their placement.
- She shared with the committee that 91% of the department's workforce reached the language designation, and she provided an example of the Youth Justice Service Manager who had strived to learn the language and was now fluent.
- They ensured that third party contracts contained language skills, with the exception of some individual contracts relating to out-of-county placements.
- She expressed that there were challenges with recruiting Social Workers, which led to recruiting non-Welsh speaking social workers to ensure service provision and to ensure that statutory safeguarding duties are met.
- The translation unit was thanked for all their support in ensuring that virtual meetings had continued in Welsh.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- A member enquired what were the department's plans for coping with the challenges such as recruiting Welsh speaking staff and offering a proactive language choice?
- They asked whether there was anything the department could do jointly with the secondary education sector to address the recruitment problem?
- How common was the situation of Welsh speaking children being placed with non-Welsh speaking foster parents?
- A member asked what were the criteria for a cylch meithrin to be a part of the Croesi'r Bont scheme, since only 11 cylchoedd had been noted.
- The members thanked the department for all their hard work, and expressed that their passion towards safeguarding the children of Gwynedd and the Welsh language was inspiring. They also thanked the Head of Department in particular for describing the pressure and stress that staff have faced, and for explaining the situation regarding the shortage of social workers.
- They enquired whether there were fewer Welsh-speaking people fostering or adopting, and what were the obstacles.

- Concern was expressed regarding Welsh youths in prison not being able to speak Welsh. A member proposed writing a letter to the Children and Young People Commissioner from the language committee to try to ensure fairness in the situation.

In response, the following was noted:

- The staffing situation existed partly as staff had been moving jobs internally, because the last year had been exceptional in terms of job pressure. She added that these staff members moved to less high-pressure roles. She explained that this left gaps, which was concerning since the recruitment of bilingual staff was proving challenging.
- In response to a question regarding promoting a Social Work career, it was explained that young people tended to complete their degree and then gained experience in the field, and then followed a M.A. Social Work course. She supported looking into promoting Social Work as a career.
- There were no challenges in terms of recruiting workers fresh from the courses; the challenge lay in recruiting experienced staff.
- Many of the carers/prospective foster parents were bilingual, however, she added that it was not always possible to ensure this.
- There was a commitment with workers locally to conduct meetings in Welsh, with the use of translation for non-Welsh speakers.
- In response to a question about the profile of prospective foster carers/adopters, she stated that this was down to personal choice, but a promotion campaign did take place regularly.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and to note the observations received.**

### **9. CONSULTATION: NATIONAL POLICY ON WELSH LINGUISTIC INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Language Advisor presented the Welsh Government's consultation document, noting that the Council's language officers were preparing a response. She added that this provided the Committee members with an opportunity to offer comments to feed into the officers' response.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- A member asked whether there would be contact with the Language Planning Unit in Bangor University, in order to receive observations from world-renown experts.
- The priority was language use if we are to reach a million Welsh speakers, infrastructure was an academic subject
- A member enquired whether there was reference to the 'Ap Geiriaduron' app within the document.

In response:-

- The officer noted that since this was a Welsh Government document, it was not the Council's place to seek observations from the University.
- She explained that the document referred to a number of resources including the Ap Geiriaduron, and explained that one of the proposals was the creation of a single interface to be able to access all the resources.

**RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and to note the observations received.**

**10. THE WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS: ANNUAL REPORT**

The Language Advisor presented the annual report. She explained that the report detailed the Council's compliance with the Commissioner's language standards, and that comments were required on this draft document.

She proceeded to explain what exactly must be included in the document, such as:

- Complaints
- The number of staff who possess Welsh language skills
- The number of staff who have attended specific training courses in Welsh
- The number of posts advertised which included an essential Welsh language designation

She explained that this could be used as an opportunity to highlight the Council's good practices and how it had overcome the challenges that emerged during the past year, for example, successes in the translation field which led the way in terms of simultaneous translation at virtual committee meetings.

The Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer reiterated this, noting that Welsh language lessons were as busy as ever and had continued on-line. He referred once again to the example of the Youth Justice Service Manager who had carried on learning Welsh, and as a consequence had developed his skills substantially.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- Congratulations were expressed to the translation team for adapting to providing simultaneous translation virtually.
- A member commented that residents should be encouraged to communicate in Welsh with the Council, by changing the Council's image to be less official. They added that people used the Welsh language when they contacted councillors, but not with the officers.
- A member queried whether only four complaints had been received, and asked for an explanation why it was so low.

In response:

- It was explained that the Public Services Board was looking at language use within receptions and face-to-face services, however, the focus was on the internal operation of staff arrangements and not on whether the public used the Welsh language.
- It was noted that the Language Commissioner was exploring how greater use of the language amongst the public could be encouraged.
- In response, it was noted that only complaints against the Council's standards or policies were reported to the language committee, which was why only four complaints were noted.

**RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and to note the observations received.**

**11. THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION – STRATEGIC PLAN AND THE IMMERSION SYSTEM**

**i) Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032**

The report by the Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer was presented – she shared information with the Committee about the draft plan as part of the informal consultation.

She explained that this was a new chapter in terms of planning the Welsh language in education, and that the updated strategic plan would be operational from September 2022 onwards. She added that the most reliable model for creating Welsh speakers was immersion in the Welsh language through the education system, which was the aim of the Government's strategy; Cymraeg 2050: A Million Welsh Speakers.

The vision of the Cabinet Member for Education together with the vision of the Head of Education Department were shared. The seven outcomes of the new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan for the next ten years were discussed, along with the timetable for the consultation.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- A member commented on the need to extend the boundaries of the Welsh language beyond the classroom so that children continued to use it, and they asked how the Education Department could do this.
- It was noted that only two subjects through the medium of Welsh was very low, and were there plans to increase this?
- A member expressed that designated Welsh-medium schools were needed.

- The members gave thanks for the presentation. It was recognised that Gwynedd led the way in Welsh-medium education provision, however, concern was expressed that a high proportion of children who followed their education through Welsh decreased in KS4.
- A member enquired what the Council could do in a situation where the governing body did not share the same values in respect of education provision?

In response, the following was noted:

- The document would become statutory in September 2022.
- The need to secure more teachers who were confident to teach through the medium of Welsh to stem the number of pupils who chose to study subjects through the medium of English in KS4 and beyond.
- The two subjects were only the minimum requirement in schools that currently offered no subjects at all.
- A need to raise awareness of the value of bilingualism amongst non-Welsh speaking parents, and that Welsh was not learned at the expense of English.
- If schools were identified as causing concern in respect of the Welsh-medium provision, there were actions in place to educate the Governors about their provision.
- It was added that this aspect was discussed regularly in meetings and was part of our Governors' training.
- Research was undertaken to ensure that we knew in advance in what language the course would be taught if the pupil was moving from KS4 to a further education college.

**ii) Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022-2032: A new vision for the Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond**

The Head of Education Department provided a foreword, noting that he welcomed the opportunity to bring the item before the Language Committee as it was such an important item.

The report by the Education Corporate Services Manager was presented, who referred to the vision of the Cabinet Member for Education. She also presented the objectives for realising the vision.

She proceeded to explain to the committee exactly what the new provision of immersion education would involve, and also how they intended to fund it, namely through the EIG grant, the Education Department and also funding from the schools themselves.

Members were invited to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- Members welcomed the news that Bangor was receiving an immersion education unit, and were encouraged to see a primary and secondary unit being provided there.
- A member enquired how often the children would be able to access the Language Centres.

- They sought clarity around the staffing structure, what the ratio of teachers to children would be in the new centres, and what would be the role of the classroom assistant.
- They expressed pride in the Council for its pioneering approach in providing substantial investment to enable us to expand the number of sites available, since the south Meirionnydd area in particular faced significant challenges with regard to the Welsh language.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the aim for the learners to attend school for one day a week as this could lead to establishing English-speaking customs amongst peers that could then continue for the rest of the relationship. As a result, the member noted that they did not support the vision.
- What was the situation in terms of monitoring to identify the changes taking place?

In response:

- The officer noted that under the new system, children would be admitted at the start of every term for a period of 8-10 weeks. She added that blended learning would take place before they reached the site.
- She explained that there was a need to work through the details since the corporate system noted that employment matters were a matter for individual departments.
- As with any service, the department would review the service continuously in terms of quality assurance, and if the evidence indicated that improvements or adjustments were required, then measures would be put in place to ensure that.

**RESOLVED:**

**To accept the report and to note the observations received.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 13.15pm.

**CHAIR**