

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	19 October 2021
TITLE	Highways and Municipal Department Report
PURPOSE	Present information regarding the Department's contribution to advancing and promoting the Welsh language
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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 This report has been prepared in response to the Language Committee's request for information on how the Highways and Municipal Department advances and promotes the Welsh language.

1.2 The Department employs 570 staff with the majority of these being manual workers e.g. litter pickers, street cleaners, recycling center workers and road workers. Most of our workforce are recruited from our local communities. As a result, Welsh is their first language and the medium used to communicate internally and externally with our residents.

1.3 In line with current statistics, over 95% of the Department's staff reach the language designation of their post. While this is very encouraging and reflects the Department's desire to advance and promote the language amongst our staff, it should be pointed out that only 25% of staff have responded to the online survey to date. This is mainly due to the number of frontline staff we have without easy access to work PCs and laptops.

1.4 Improving this response rate is going to be challenging. However, we have already started working with Sion Elwyn Hughes, the Council's Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer, to try and find suitable ways to improve the response. More background on this is given in the table of questions below.

1.5 Due to the nature of the Department's work, we may not be able to have as much influence on the five main priority areas of the Promoting Welsh Language Scheme in Gwynedd as we would like. However, we value and give status to the language and always strive to offer consistent and high quality Welsh language services.

2. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

Issues that members would like to discuss:	Question
<p>Advancement and promotion</p> <p>How do we go beyond providing a bilingual service to increase the opportunities for people to use Welsh in the community, to contribute to the national target of creating a Million speakers, and to the Well-being goal of ensuring that the people of Gwynedd are “Being able to live in a naturally Welsh speaking society”?</p> <p>The Welsh Language Promotion Scheme in Gwynedd can be viewed here:</p> <p>https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/cy/Cyngor/Dogfennau-Cyngor/Strategaethau-a-pholisiau/Cynllun-iaith/Cynllun-Hybu'r-Gymraeg-yng-Ngwynedd-2018-2023.pdf</p> <p>It sets out priorities for promoting the Welsh language in five areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The language of the family, 2. Language of learning, 3. Working language and service, 4. The language of the community 5. Research and Technology 	<p>1. Can you highlight any projects within your department that contribute to one of the Council's language strategy priorities, namely the Promoting the Welsh Language Scheme in Gwynedd?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlike some other Council departments, the Highways and Municipal Department probably does not have specific projects that provide opportunities to increase the use of the Welsh language and increase the number of speakers in our communities. However, the Department raises the awareness of Gwynedd's residents of its services in a number of ways. As well as being clear and concise, we ensure that all our information and publicity material is bilingual with Welsh always given priority over English. Some examples of these are the information leaflets we produce to raise awareness of our recycling service. Examples of these are shown in Appendix 1. • To reinforce our messages and raise our residents' awareness of our services, we also organise public sessions and presentations. One example of this is where our recycling officers visit schools and colleges as well as other local organisations and institutions to explain the benefits of recycling and how we collect and deal with their waste. Most of these sessions are conducted through the medium of Welsh unless officers are aware in advance that the audience will be in English, or partly English, where alternative arrangements will be made. However, arranging these do not come without their problems as set out in 3 below. • In relation to the language within the work place, all our internal instructions, health and safety documents etc are produced bilingually; again, with Welsh taking precedence over English.

Outsourcing and letting third party agreements

How do we ensure that the standard of bilingual service is maintained when outsourcing and contracting?

2. If the department is outsourcing work, can you refer to any good practice, either in imposing conditions or in monitoring to ensure compliance with linguistic conditions?

- We understand the requirements placed upon us under Council policies and relevant legislation to ensure that our services meet the linguistic needs of the local population. Therefore, before going out to tender for any work or service, we discover if the supplier can offer its services bilingually by asking relevant questions in the Pre-qualifying Questionnaire (PQQ). If they are unable to provide satisfactory answers to the questions, then they will not be invited to tender for the work. Example of the questions in the PQQ are shown in **Appendix 2**.
- If a supplier is invited to tender for work, then there is a clause in our tender documents to raise contractors' awareness of the requirements and our expectations of them. A copy of the clause can be found in **Appendix 3**.
- We also ask successful suppliers to sign an agreement that commits them to our language requirements. See **Appendix 4** for an example of the agreement.

Operating bilingually

How do we succeed in implementing the requirements of the Language Policy and Standards?

3. Are there any barriers to your ability as a department to offer a full service in Welsh?

- Many of our manual worker roles require elementary language levels, namely Foundation, Intermediate or Entry. As a result, recruiting staff to these roles is not too problematic. The exception is Meirionnydd where recruiting workers to roles within the waste collection service, although at an elementary level, can be difficult.
- The steps taken in relation to tendering etc. are set out in 2 above. However, there are some tenders that cannot be provided bilingually for the following reasons:

- Many of the Department's tenders and contracts are very technical. As a result, the documentation is considered unsuitable for translation. However, the Department does try to publish the advertisement in Welsh if possible.
 - Due to the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) rules, we can only advertise in English (large schemes or services over a certain price threshold).
 - Time - sometimes there is not enough time to put out tenders within the designated timescale which means there is no time to translate the documentation.
 - Cost - if the internal translation team is too busy to translate the work, then going out to an external translation service can be quite expensive and prohibitive.
- It is worth noting that some national and regional meetings organised by our partners are conducted through the medium of English as the officers only speak English. This in itself does not prevent the issues from being discussed and reaching a conclusion. However, there are times when it is considered that the organisers could have made an effort knowing that they are discussing issues with Gwynedd staff. However, it must be said that most of our partners do make an effort to hold meetings through the medium of Welsh, regardless of the number of participants who speak Welsh.
 - The fact that we are sometimes unable to attract a Welsh audience to our recycling sessions is disappointing. As explained in 1 above, we offer sessions and presentations to raise awareness of our recycling arrangements. We were keen to continue this service during the Covid period and arranged virtual presentations to facilitate it. Such sessions were arranged for new students at Bangor University - one in Welsh and one in English,. However, while many attended the English session, no student attended the Welsh session. It is not known why this happened in a college with a healthy intake of Welsh speakers. However, it has made us wary of organising such sessions in the future.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the percentage of our staff who reach the language designations of their post has been challenging. To date, only 25% of Highways and Municipal staff have responded to the online assessment. However, when it is considered that the Department employs 510 manual workers out of a total of 570 staff, most with limited access to the Council's intranet, it is understandable why the response rate is so low. To this end, the Department has worked closely with Sion Elwyn Hughes to find ways to encourage and facilitate employees who have not yet responded to the assessment. See number 4 below for an explanation of how the Department intends to overcome this.
<p><u>Developing new opportunities</u></p>	<p>4. Do you have ideas for new ways we could be promoting the Welsh language within the county's communities - either in your own services or by working with others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the Welsh language within the Department (this may apply to other departments / services with a high number of frontline workers). <p>It is explained in 4 above that finding the percentage of the Department's staff who reach the language designations of their post has been challenging. To try and overcome this, the Department has worked closely with Sion Elwyn Hughes to seek ways to encourage and facilitate the workforce to respond to the assessment. One possible solution, and one that will be trialled shortly, is to reproduce the existing online assessment in a formal hard copy questionnaire format (not a photocopy) and hand deliver it to relevant employees. To facilitate the process, it was also decided that it would be better to simplify the questionnaire and make it more relevant to our manual workers (although not modified so much that it is not comparable to the current online assessment) . The questionnaire has already been printed by the Council's print room and the employees who require a copy in each service have been identified. The intention now is for the team leaders to distribute the questionnaire to their teams along with a covering letter from the Head of Department and Sion Elwyn.</p>

We understand that this is the first time that the language assessment has been distributed in hard copy format on this scale. It is hoped that this approach will be successful and enable us to find out how many of our staff actually meet the language requirements of their posts. This will then allow us to review our current approach to promoting the language within the Department if necessary.