
WELSH LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 25 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Alwyn Gruffydd (Chair)
Judith Humphreys (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Beca Brown, Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Aled Ll. Evans, Eric M. Jones, Cai Larsen, John Pughe Roberts and Elfed Williams

OFFICERS:- Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Llywela Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllian Mair Williams (Language Adviser), Llio Mai Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer). Ffion Bryn Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Item 5: Cllr Cemlyn Williams (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Jackson (Head of Education Department), Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Officer), Rhian Jones (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer)

Item 6: Cllr Nia Jeffreys (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support), Geraint Owen (Head of Corporate Support Department),

Item 7: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Senior Executive Officer - Housing)

Item 9: Emyr Edwards (Research and Information Manager), Lowri Morton (Senior Research and Analytics Officer) and Nia Jones (Senior Research and Analytics Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was received from Councillor Elin Walker Jones

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 19 October, 2021 as a true record subject to including Councillor Eric M Jones as present at the meeting.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Submitted - a report by the Cabinet Member for Education, Councillor Cemlyn Williams, providing details on the Education Department's contribution to the implementation of the Language Policy and Welsh Language Promotion Plan in Gwynedd. He took advantage

of the opportunity to outline some of the Education Department's highlights along with the future challenges it faced.

Attention was drawn to the "Immersion Education System towards 2032 and beyond" and an investment of £1.1 million of Welsh Government Welsh-medium education capital funding to establish new immersion education sites in Tywyn and Bangor, as well as improving existing facilities in Porthmadog. Reference was made to the innovative and ambitious digital learning strategy which aimed to provide laptops and/or digital devices to all pupils and teachers in the county to ensure easy access to work at school and at home. The Head of the Education Department reiterated that the hope was to configure the devices in Welsh which would enable the children to communicate with their families and friends in Welsh and would encourage them to use the Welsh language on social media.

In the context of some of the challenges, concern was expressed that the standard of the Welsh language and social language skills were deteriorating in some areas during the pandemic. This was considered inevitable maybe, as there was less contact between pupils and their teachers / assistants, despite a consistent effort from schools to maintain contact with pupils in an attempt to regain ground. Reference was made to the challenge of recruiting staff with suitable qualifications to enable the provision of Welsh language services / education and also to the lack of language therapists and education psychologists that, albeit a national concern, was seen to be worse in Gwynedd due to the need for a bilingual service. It was reiterated that there were regular discussions with the Welsh Government to seek to mitigate the problem.

Thanks were expressed for the report.

Committee members were given an opportunity to ask further questions - and the Education Officers answered these.

Would it be possible to work proactively by seeking to change the career paths of teaching staff, (by funding relevant training schemes) to become education psychologists?

The Education Department had been proactive locally in an attempt to recruit education psychologists. The bursaries had been a success. Another proposal was to seek to develop interest through a post-16 provision and to target aspects of apprenticeship in the field.

Reference was made to the fact that the percentage use of the Welsh language as a first language in the foundation phase in Gwynedd was higher than in any other county in Wales, but there was a decline at the end of year 9. It was asked whether the decline was general across the County or was it specific to some locations only?

It appeared that when pupils chose their GCSE subjects and their career paths at the end of Year 9 that a vast majority of them chose subjects taught through the medium of English. There was no evidence to substantiate the opinion, nevertheless this was the case. It was noted that schools, with the support of the Education Department, promoted the Welsh language and encouraged pupils to continue with Welsh medium education. It was noted that the Education Department collaborated with Canolfan Bedwyr in Bangor to seek to ensure that training and Welsh language digital resources were available to facilitate access for teachers and pupils to KS4 and KS5 subjects. Discussions were also being held with the Examination Board

Were children assessed as first language, second language or based on the medium of their education? Who chose to assess a child as a first language speaker at the end of

year 9? Was this the school's choice or the parents' choice?

It was expected that pupils on level 3 or higher by the end of the primary phase were assessed as first language pupils and were tracked and assessed at the end of key stage 3 in the same way. It was suggested that the decline mentioned above may be based on the way in which some schools interpreted the language policy - it was reiterated that the Government had reviewed the language designation procedure within schools and it was suggested that the new procedure for language designation may lead to an increase in the percentage.

Would the language immersion centres offer flexibility? What would be the balance between in-person learning and on-line learning? Would there be additional opportunities available on-line for pupils to converse informally given that it was the oral element that had suffered during the pandemic? How would this be sold to the parents?

The service and the new procedure would have the advantage of being able to reach more children with different methods through a combination of live sessions and face to face sessions. The workforce would be much more mobile and it was anticipated that it would be possible to target children with different cognitive abilities and group them better according to their merits and staff strengths. The system would also look at language improvement and improving specific skills rather than targeting newcomers only.

The Education Department had been very successful in persuading parents by highlighting and emphasising the advantages of bilingual skills, identity, culture, opportunities and economic advantages

How many Gwynedd teachers were non-Welsh speaking? Was there an opportunity for them to attend the Language Centres? Were there some subjects that were worse?

The Education Department saw a difference in teachers' ability to use the Welsh language and collaborated with Canolfan Bedwyr and GwE to find new teacher training courses with Welsh learning units to ensure confidence from the outset

That the number of non-Welsh teachers who did not have the ability to teach in Welsh was very low. There were others who were learning the language but did not have the confidence to use it publicly. It was noted that the Department dealt with teachers' needs in some specific schools. It was reported that a significant increase was seen in teachers coming forward to volunteer to ask for support to improve Welsh language skills

Traditionally, there was a shortage in the science and mathematics subjects, however, the Department was working with Bangor University to seek to include this aspect as part of the course

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

Submitted - the report of Councillor Nia Jeffreys, Cabinet Member for Corporate Support. It was noted that the Welsh language was one of the Department's main priorities and attention was drawn to some of the Department's main projects (Apprenticeships Project, Native Welsh Place Names Project, Jobs Advertising and the Development of

Hunaniaith) along with the background work carried out by the Procurement Team. It was explained that pioneering work had been carried out in the Equality field to develop an integrated impact assessment template that set out the linguistic considerations within Equality impact assessments, and that this development had been adopted by the remaining five authorities in North Wales. This work was congratulated. It was explained that the department was prioritising recruiting more bilingual staff, especially in the legal department.

The Head of Corporate Support Department reiterated that all staff within the Department worked through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that the Welsh Language Unit was part of the Department and following the Cabinet's decision, it was intended to appoint a Principal Language Officer to lead Hunaniaith and develop it to be an independent entity outside the Council in future.

It was explained that Keeping the Benefit Local Scheme had been developed to include 'social value' as part of the considerations for business contracts. Consequently, it was noted that developing Welsh language skills was included in contracts between the Council and external companies.

In the field of Job Advertising, it was noted that work had been done jointly with the Welsh Language Commissioner to be able to receive DBS forms in Welsh (rather than in English only) along with similar work to encourage issuing Welsh-only certificates in Wales along with bilingual certificates if registered in England.

It was emphasised that all apprentices joining the Council had agreed to invest in the Welsh language.

Appreciation for the virtual translation work provided over Zoom was expressed. It was explained that the Council had been required to use Zoom in order to provide translation services, although TEAMS was the formal resource used by the Council for virtual communication on a daily basis. The Translation Unit had now succeeded to adapt and train to provide the service on-line on Zoom.

It was noted that the Council had been collaborating with the IOSH body to use its resources in staff training sessions, specifically within Health and Safety. It was said that all of the resources had been provided in English in the past, but that the Council had pressed for permission to translate the resources to ensure that our staff could complete the work in Welsh.

Members were reminded that the Department was continuing to share its monthly Welsh language Tips to remind staff of various Welsh language grammar rules and that enabling services through the medium of Welsh and English was one of the main priorities of 'Workforce planning'.

Attention was drawn to an advertisement by Bangor University for a student to complete PhD research in the public use of Welsh language services in a public organisation. It was explained that Gwynedd Council would collaborate on the project and that the research evidence would be gathered through the Council.

Observations arising from the ensuing discussion:

- It was asked if there was concern that there was not enough emphasis on attaining Welsh language qualifications for pupils within education. It was explained that the Council emphasised the importance of bilingualism within careers. It was noted that many were attracted to opportunities such as the apprenticeships as they were offered entirely bilingually. Attention was drawn to the work Hunaniaith had been doing with 16 to 18 year old pupils to identify the

importance of the Welsh language in the workplace. One of the ways they had done this was by holding an annual conference jointly with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and invited individuals such as Nikki Pilkington to explain the advantages that had derived from using the Welsh language.

- They asked for confirmation whether Hunaniaith would operate outside the Council someday. It was explained that this was not likely in the short-term but this was the aim and the wish in the long-term.
- It was asked whether job advertisements should be amended to alleviate people's concerns about their ability in Welsh. It was noted that this was being addressed.
- It was asked whether there was room to develop a forum or meeting for organisations to discuss current recruitment concerns? It was explained that workforce planning would be included in the Council Plan, and consequently there would be further opportunities to consider this. It was noted that there was collaboration with Coleg Cymraeg to encourage contact between organisations and it was hoped there would be discussions to identify current difficulties across the organisations.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HOUSING AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Submitted - the report of the Head of Housing and Property Department who explained briefly that the Department included a mix of front-line services which dealt with a number of customers and stakeholders who, in turn, required bilingual services and respect towards their chosen language (beyond Welsh and English in some circumstances)

It was highlighted that the Department prioritised compliance with the Council's Welsh Language Policy and its ability to offer services in Welsh to service users be it internally or externally. It was reported that according to the latest Language Designations Quarterly Report that 95% of Department staff reached or exceeded the Language Designations of their posts, which was slightly higher than the Council average of 92%.

In discussing some of the Department's highlights it was noted that with a number of projects, the Department was seeking to keep people in their homes, locally and by doing this they were strengthening the Welsh language in those communities. Attention was drawn also to the use of the Language in Construction Contracts - although English was used to gain access to the wider market, there were clauses within the contracts noting that any signs, information boards or circulars should be bilingual and that English only signs were not permitted. If the project was to include a public consultation, it was explained that contractors were expected to hold them in Welsh/bilingually or, if this was not possible, to provide representatives who were Welsh-speakers or to provide a translator. Reference was also made to the need for high value tenders to provide a Social Benefits Response.

It was noted that staff had attended language refresher courses and that more had been arranged for the future and it was intended to develop more specific training in Welsh in the field of Housing (most of the training took place in English). Although this did not obstruct or prevent our ability to operate, the main aim was to introduce the training in Welsh, or bilingually.

Thanks were expressed for the report.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations.

Did the Housing Department intend to build its own community housing or purchase terraced housing stock in urban areas to remove them from the market / private rented housing situation which led to the use of Airbnb or houses of multiple occupancy?

The Department focussed on open market housing and empty homes, but was now looking to purchase terraced housing for the use of local people. It was intended to purchase houses, however, the housing market at the moment was 'hot' and the Department had had to put measures in place to respond quickly to the market. It was reiterated that interest had been expressed in a number of houses that were for sale, and that one had been purchased so far.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION: WELSH LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES HOUSING SCHEME

Submitted by the Language Adviser - documents for information relating to Welsh Government's consultation on the Welsh Language Communities Housing Scheme. It was explained that the consultation offered steps to seek to address the current housing situation and derived from the findings of Simon Brookes' report in 2021. It was noted there was an opportunity for the Committee to submit comments that would be added to the Language Unit's response to the Consultation.

Concerns were highlighted,

- that the consultation on the impact of the pandemic on Welsh speaking community groups, that was referred to in the consultation, had been held during the pandemic and therefore it was considered that its true impact was yet to be apparent. It was proposed that a more recent consultation was needed to provide a more complete picture.
- community enterprises were under a lot of pressure and were reliant on volunteers as they were a contact point for a number of people in the community.

Observations arising from the ensuing discussion:

- It was asked whether there was any data about how community groups / community enterprises survived during the COVID period. It was noted that the Language Unit did not have data relating to a specific period.
- The consultation was welcomed, but concern was expressed about the pressure and increasing expectations placed on social enterprises and that collaborative support was needed specifically for less established community enterprises as there was a concern that these would be forgotten.
- It was emphasised there was a need to be able to prove the local need, and it was local enterprises that could often best identify that need. Attention was drawn to good practice in terms of part-ownership in the Llanuwchllyn area and it was noted that there was a need to collaborate with social enterprises to ascertain the genuine need for housing. The need to seek further explanation from the Government about its intentions in relation to the strategy of reaching a million Welsh-speakers and how it intended to create jobs was needed. It was further asked if maintaining jobs in Welsh-speaking areas was part of these plans.

- It was also suggested there was a need to be able to act immediately following the recommendations of this consultation and the recent consultation on Planning matters, rather than having to wait until the next LDP was published,
- Concern was expressed that the Government could be slow in processing the policies on converting general homes to holiday homes and there was a need for this to be resolved as soon as possible
- It was asked whether it could be possible to add language awareness in education as part of the 'general contribution question' section expressing that this was a major consideration within Welsh-speaking communities.
- It was noted that the Commission and the Government should lead by example and ask the remainder of the authorities in Wales to use the Welsh language as its main language of internal administration.
- It was noted that it was crucial that the right foundations were set for the Pilot Work in Llŷn, and that local people and councillors should contribute and be involved in the process to ensure local accountability as it was essential to have the local voice to have a real understanding of the situation.
- It was explained that there was a need to ensure that the local need was underlined in newly developed rented housing. It was noted that over-development in areas where the need did not exist was just as detrimental to the language as underdevelopment.

RESOLVED:

To accept the report and ask the Language Unit to use the observations received from Members to draw up a response to the consultation.

9. RESEARCH REPORT - NEW HOUSING IN GWYNEDD

The Research and Information Manager submitted the results of the research. It was reported that this research was work commissioned by the Council's Leadership Team in 2018 to gather evidence in the field so that information would be available for various Council functions in the fields of housing, planning, the Welsh language etc.

The research involved visiting every new house that had been built in Gwynedd within a specific period, asking some questions about who lived there, where they had moved from and their reasons for choosing a new house in that area. They were also asked about where they had lived previously to gather evidence of the housing supply chain before moving to a new house. It was noted that there were two versions of the results - a concise version and a complete version detailing the findings. It was explained that the intention was to submit the information as part of a large group event on housing issues during 2020, however, in light of Covid, holding such an event would not have been practical. It was reiterated, because the local housing market had been transformed during the Covid period, that the research results had become dated earlier than expected.

It was highlighted that all Council elected members had received an opportunity to receive a presentation on the work at a briefing session in December 2021.

Some of the main findings were discussed elaborating on the research results on Language issues

- That the proportion of new housing residents who were Welsh-speakers (namely 68%) was very similar to the proportion for the general Gwynedd population at the last Census (namely 65%).

- There was a pattern for every age group that indicated that younger new housing residents were more likely to speak Welsh than older residents, with 91% of 3-11 year olds and 68% of 25-44 year olds able to speak Welsh. The lowest percentage (47%) belonged to the 65 - 84 year old age group.
- That residents of new housing in "small" developments (four houses or less) were slightly more likely to be able to speak Welsh than the residents of larger developments (74% as opposed to 66%). Also, a slightly higher percentage of new social rented housing residents spoke Welsh compared with the residents of other types of new housing (74% compared to 68%)

Gratitude was expressed for the report

An opportunity was given for committee members to ask further questions - and the Officers answered those questions

When would the results of Census 2021 be published?

Some results were to be published during May / June and then in phases until the end of October 2022. It was reiterated that no specific timetable had been published.

The Department was congratulated on completing very interesting research. Was there a need for a third option in asking what the main language of the home was? It was asked whether the finding reflected the general trend?

It was accepted that there was a need to consider an additional question, however, the questionnaire followed the pattern of the census for consistency. The questionnaire asked about the main language of the home, but by holding a conversation more information was provided. The research reiterated the general opinion.

It was noted that a request for this information had been made some time ago following concerns about the impact of the Local Development Plan. This important information about planning matters was welcomed. Was it intended to update the information and review the situation? Suggestion that new houses built in light of the Local Development Plan could be monitored. This had set the foundation - it was proposed that it was timely to update the information.

It was noted that this research had only considered new housing and it was expressed that a number of departments had expressed an interest in the research and therefore there had been many requirements on the work. It was noted that informal conversations had been held with the Planning Department, the Language Unit and the Housing Department and for the time being, it was not intended to carry out research using the same pattern - as it was possible to obtain the information from other sources.

Would it be possible to refer the matter to the Communities Scrutiny Committee?

A presentation had been given to all Council elected members on 14 December 2021 - it was suggested that the documents should be circulated again and to consider the best way forward.

That the work encouraged discussion - it was an important piece of work that needed to be updated and kept alive.

RESOLVED

- **To accept the report and to note the observations.**
- **Refer a request from Committee members to the relevant Cabinet Member to consider updating the information in future.**

The meeting commenced at 1.00pm and concluded at 3.40pm.

CHAIR