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| MEETING | Language Committee |
| DATE | 10 October 2022 |
| TITLE | Welsh Language Promotion Plan: Finance Department |
| PURPOSE | To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy |
| AUTHOR | Dewi Morgan, Head of Finance |

Background

1. This report has been prepared to present information to the Language Committee on the contribution of the Finance Department to the Language Policy.
2. The Council's Language Policy is embedded in all the Department's work, and this report highlights the opportunities that are available to improve the provision for our residents, whilst also acknowledging the challenges facing the area of work.

The Language of the Finance Department's Jobs and Staff

3. Following recent work to review the linguistic requirements of all the Department's posts, identify the language designations of the posts, and then to assess the language of the Department's staff, it can be reported that 218 of the Department's staff (which is 96%) have now submitted a self-assessment, and 216 of those (99%) reach the language designations of their posts.
4. Maintaining the ability to offer our services through the medium of Welsh is ongoing, and we consider the language requirements of staff in our day-to-day work, when recruiting and appointing, inducting and conducting ongoing appraisal conversations. We offer support to staff to develop their language skills, so that they can provide the best service to the people of Gwynedd in Welsh and maintain our high standards in the context of the language.

Conclusion

5. The Finance Department's services produce a variety of letters, leaflets, forms, posters, websites and bilingual systems, with Welsh as the default language. Furthermore, the Department aims to achieve the 'Cymraeg Clir' standard, so that Welsh customers do not feel that our Welsh language documents are too difficult to understand and use.
6. With some specialist aspects of Finance and IT work, we are battling hard to reach the standard. However, if we fall short at times it is because of the technical nature of the issue at hand, not because of a lack of ambition or a lack of effort by the Department.

Committee Members' Questions

7. The following table has been prepared in order to present the Finance Department's responses to the questions and matters that the Language Committee members wish to discuss, with examples of the Department's services that I would like to highlight.

1. PROMOTING AND FACILITATING

How do we go beyond providing bilingually to increasing the opportunities for people to use the Welsh language 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 "Able to live in a naturally Welsh speaking society"?

Question 1 - Can you highlight any projects within your department that contribute to one of the Council's language strategy priorities, namely the Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd?

Response:

Overall Product Quality

Extensive work by the various services of the Finance Department contributes to the promotion of the Welsh language, with publications such as the Council's Statement of Accounts, the Pension Fund's Annual Report, and Taxation and Benefit forms setting the standard and are reference materials for other bodies to follow suit.

Microsoft Windows Language

The worldwide use of computers through the medium of English by businesses and individuals has conditioned users (even in Gwynedd) to familiarise themselves with English terms in various systems. Despite this, we encourage our users to work with the Welsh language installation on their computers.

The Council supplies computers on the Microsoft Windows platform for our officers, serving approximately 2,700 corporate users. These computers are received with an English language operating platform, which is the default standard for computers supplied in the UK. By now, internal steps are taken to adjust the settings when preparing the computers for our users, with each new computer being equipped with a Welsh language operating platform.

Since reporting to the Language Committee last year, the Council has decided that Welsh is the default setting on all Council computers. Although some services already display a clear willingness to transfer to Welsh, only around half of our users across the Council had voluntarily transferred their computer to Welsh. The result was a decision to force the change.

Language Designations Project

As detailed in the introduction above, only two Finance Department staff do not meet the language requirements of their posts. These officers are at foundation level, and there are further opportunities for them to develop their training should they wish. We are confident that progress can be reported soon.

Development of the Welsh language

Since the last report in October 2021, a Council Tax Revenue Assistant (who is one of the officers referred to above) has attended a Language Improvement course with "Dysgu Cymraeg", dedicated to Gwynedd Council staff, between May and June 2022. Now that she has developed to foundation level, working for the Council has helped her learn and develop herself as an individual and gain confidence to use Welsh in the workplace.

"Buddy" scheme

The "Buddy" Scheme has been set up to support one of the aims of this project, which is to help Council staff reach the language designations of their jobs.

The purpose of the scheme is to give staff in the middle of training, or have just finished, the opportunity to use Welsh informally and ask for help in a comfortable position.

There is currently 1 member of Finance staff involved in the Scheme. This example is a Welsh learner, and work in the Taxation Service. She has joined the Buddy Scheme, and has been partnered with a Senior Accounting Assistant. This Scheme enables the officer to hold conversations in Welsh with a co-worker and also be aware that she has a "listening ear". This arrangement seems to work very effectively.

Welsh lessons

During January 2022 a Professional Trainee in the Department completed "Work Welsh" training, a week of online course held by Nant Gwrtheyrn. This training was organised jointly between the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer and Canolfan Nant Gwrtheyrn.

Assessment Collection

Currently 11 members of staff have not submitted their self-assessment. The majority of the remaining staff are new members of staff, and work continues to collect the assessments.

Language Designations Forum

The purpose of this Forum is to share knowledge, good practice, learn from others, deal with barriers and opportunities that arise in the context of the language designations across the organisation.

These meetings take place quarterly for Teams. If any issue, question or comment needs to be raised in the forum, then the Department representative will take care of this.

There is an arrangement whereby all information that the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer will share with the Department representative is cascaded to all Finance Department staff.

Finance Department Intranet

We have arrangements in place to update and transform the Department of Finance intranet. This work is co-ordinated by a Technical Lead (IT) and his Team.

Dafydd Orwig Prize

One member of Finance staff has been awarded the Dafydd Orwig prize for promoting and promoting the Welsh language in the workplace. She received this award while working in another department in the Council. I hope she can use her experiences/good practice in her new role in Finance.

2. OUTSOURCING WORK AND AWARDING THIRD PARTY CONTRACTS

How do we ensure that the quality of the bilingual service is maintained when outsourcing work and awarding contracts?

Question 2 - If the department outsources work on contract, can you refer to any good practice, either when imposing conditions or when monitoring, in order to ensure compliance with the linguistic conditions?

Response:

External Suppliers

When the Finance Department outsources work on contract, we ensure that a Welsh language service is offered to people within the county's communities, for example the customer service at Barclays Bank and the Post Office.

However, it should be noted the Department's disappointment that Barclays has closed branches within Gwynedd since the Department of Finance reported to the Language Committee in 2021. The Caernarfon and Porthmadog branches have already closed in early 2022, and the Dolgellau branch is also set to close.

It is not always possible to maintain a fully bilingual service with some specialist and technical services, due to the specialised nature of the market. However, staff always strive to operate internally through the Welsh language wherever possible. Where any information is publicly produced we ensure that it is bilingual from the outset.

For example, there was recently work with an external supplier to assist the department in distributing Cost of Living Support Scheme funds. Working closely with Council officers enabled all correspondence sent to Gwynedd residents for the scheme to be fully bilingual.

Collaboration across Wales

In some situations, e.g. The Wales Pension Partnership, national collaboration was chosen, rather than outsourcing to an external company. The inter-authority agreement of the 8 Welsh pension funds ensures that reports to the partnership's joint governance committee reflect Gwynedd's bilingual standards, and ensures an equal platform for the language beyond the county's boundaries.

There has been a similar situation with the WCCIS computer system (care service system) for supporting care cases of all kinds, provided nationally by an external supplier. The considerable input of Gwynedd Council's IT developers has enabled the system to provide as much as possible bilingually.

Gwynedd Council is also represented on the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Technology Board, which advises the Minister on establishing a "Welsh Language Technology Action Plan", and is part of the Welsh Government's Welsh 2050 strategy. The action plan has now been published, with Council representation continuing to assist the Government on these issues.

3. OPERATING BILINGUALLY

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

Question 3 - Are there any obstructions that prevent you as a department to offer a full service in Welsh?

Response:

Virtual Translation -

It was reported to the Committee in October 2021 that a far-reaching change for holding meetings was quickly introduced at the end of March 2020. It was not possible to hold in-person meetings, and so we resorted to holding virtual meetings. *Microsoft Teams* is now widely used, working entirely flawlessly in Monolingual Welsh for internal Council meetings.

However, as external, democratic and interagency meetings were re-established, the need to provide simultaneous translation came along. *Microsoft Teams* was now the standard provision in the Council, and indeed was busy catching on across Wales, but unfortunately, provision for simultaneous translation was not part of the package.

Through collaboration between the translation, democratic and information technology services, simultaneous translation provision was delivered through the *Zoom* platform, it proved resilient, reliable, easy to use and very effective. This platform remains operational for any meeting requiring simultaneous translation provision.

Council democratic meetings remain virtual or hybrid, and our use of *Zoom* and the simultaneous translation provision allows us to broadcast a full programme of Council meetings live on our website.

4. DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Question 4 - Do you have ideas about new ways we can use to promote the Welsh language in the county's communities - either in your own services or by collaborating with others?

Response:

Provision of computer to Gwynedd's Schools

A new Digital Learning Service was formed at the beginning of April to provide digital leadership and support to our Schools, including the roll-out of the Gwynedd Schools Digital Strategy.

New laptops have already been provisioned and introduced to all teachers, and the work to prepare a laptop to every secondary leaner (Year 7-11) well underway, with Welsh being the default language in each occurrence. The Service is committed to review the language settings on legacy equipment with a vision that all end user devices are formatted with Welsh as the default language.

The Future

Over the nest year the Finance Department will:

Hold initial discussions about working towards “Investors in People” accreditation; the element of this work that involves the Welsh language will be a sustantial part of this task.

Over the last few months, as a Department we have started to work closely with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer. We will continue to strengthen this collaboration over the next year.