

DATE	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
MEETING	10 OCTOBER 2022
TITLE	Environment Department Report
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
AUTHOR	Dafydd Wyn Williams, Head of Environment Department

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report has been prepared to present information to the Language Committee on the Environment Department's contribution to the Language Policy.
- 1.2. The Council's Language Policy is embedded in all of the Department's work. In this report we will highlight the opportunities that are available to improve the provision for our residents, and we will acknowledge the challenges facing this field.
- 1.3. Following recent work to identify the language designations of all jobs in the Department, we can report that 91.7% of the Department's staff meet the language designations of their posts, which is a little higher than the Council average (91.3%). These figures are based on various assessments including line manager assessment and staff self-assessments. Up to 31/8/22, 78.5% of the Environment Department staff have completed a self-assessment and staff are encouraged to complete this in order to get a full picture of our staff's language skills.
- 1.4. The latest figures indicate that 154 staff within the Department meet the relevant language designations, with 14 not currently meeting the requirements. However, the fact that individuals are not able to meet the post's language requirements does not mean that they are unable to speak Welsh and can offer a service through the medium of Welsh to the customer. The extensive training opportunities available by the Council are promoted amongst Department staff. There are positive examples within the Environment Department of individuals who are developing and improving their language skills and there is continuous encouragement for staff to attend the courses that are available to develop their skills and confidence in the Welsh language.
- 1.5. As members are aware, responsibility for Waste and Recycling has been transferred to the Environment Department since the beginning of the month. We will continue with the work undertaken by the Highways and Municipal Department to ensure that more staff from the Waste and Recycling Services complete the language designation assessments. There will more about the contribution of the Waste and Recycling field to the Language Policy outlined as part of the Report of the Highways and Municipal Services Department.

2. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

A matter that the members wish to discuss:	Question
<p><u>Boosting and promoting</u></p> <p>How do we go beyond the bilingual provision to increase 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 natural Welsh community"?</p> <p>The Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd can be seen here: https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/cy/Cyn-gor/Dogfennau-Cyngor/Strategaethau-a-pholisiau/Cynllun-iaith/Cynllun-Hybu'r-Gymraeg-yng-Ngwynedd-2018-2023.pdf) It sets the priorities for promoting the Welsh Language in five areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language of the family, 2. The Language of Learning, 3. The Language of Work and Services, 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 Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd?</p> <p>Building Control Service: This service has responsibility for managing street names and naming and numbering properties under the provision of the Public Health Act, 1925. The Council has a statutory responsibility to act to ensure that any new name or changes to street and property names, and / or numbers are allocated with reason and in a consistent manner.</p> <p>What is required to be considered according to legislation, is whether or not there is already a house of the same name for example, or whether the name is appropriate (e.g. decent). There are no enforcement powers for this, and the law does not allow us to refuse an application unless it is a duplication or that the name is inappropriate.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Policy operated by the Building Control Service means that we are able to be proactive in highlighting the historic and cultural significance of Welsh names. Officers encourage applicants who wish to change a name from Welsh to English to re-consider, both formally and orally. The Building Control Service contributes to a corporate project to Protect Place-names.</p> <p>Statistics from 2021/22 show there were 67 requests to change property names with 100% of the names subsequently registered through Royal Mail being Welsh names. It is noted that there were no examples where applicants applied to change from a Welsh to an English name. It is very heartening that of the 67 applications, 26 property owners changed from English back into Welsh names with many appreciating the original historical names (and that others changed from one Welsh name to another or naming a property for the first time).</p> <p>Joint Planning Policy Service: The main function of this Service is to prepare, monitor, review and revise the Joint Local Development Plan (2011-26) including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance.</p>

The planning role is limited to seeking to create the best possible circumstances through the Plan's policies to facilitate sustainable developments. Consideration of the Welsh language has been central to the process of preparing the Plan and the Plan incorporates a specific planning policy namely Policy PS1 that deals with the Welsh language and culture.

Also, Supplementary Planning Guidance (Maintaining and Creating Unique and Sustainable Communities), includes detailed guidance on how to consider the Welsh language when dealing with applications for new developments.

Through this work, the Plan contributes to promoting and supporting the Welsh language in the Gwynedd Planning Authority. The Gwynedd Planning Policy Service will continue to prioritise this key area when preparing the New Local Development Plan for Gwynedd.

Planning Service: One of the main duties of this Service is to deal with planning applications for all kinds of development including housing, employment (factories and shops), tourism, agriculture, minerals and waste etc.

In accordance with the statutory requirement, planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan. As noted above, the Plan includes a dedicated Welsh language policy and a Supplementary Planning Guidance that provide detailed guidance on how to implement the policy.

By acting on the duty of dealing with planning applications, in accordance with the Plan's requirements, we contribute to promoting the Welsh language in the area. This is done by ensuring that applications give consideration to the Welsh language in line with the Policy and Guidance that highlight the cultural importance of the language, in addition to promoting the language so that it is visible in developments (e.g. signage).

The Planning Service also contributes to a corporate project to Protect Place-names. By contributing to this project, the service has held a review of the planning conditions and has kept a version in their systems to ensure consistency and efficient use of conditions for staff. The conditions also strengthen the viewpoint of the Building Control Service when dealing with applications to name new houses and streets. This highlights the importance of joint working and communication between the Department's services as well as with the various Departments within the Council.

Traffic and Projects: A Professional Trainee in Planning and Transport Engineering has recently started with the Service. The individual will learn about these important areas within the Environment Department through the medium of Welsh. Also, as part of their training they will work with and learn alongside experienced officers in a natural Welsh speaking environment.

The Service is also proud to celebrate and promote Welsh names in projects wherever possible. As part of the improvements to the Lôn Eifion walking and cycling path between Bryncir and Caernarfon, Welsh names were given priority along the path with the intention of improving awareness and promoting the use of native names.

Road Safety: Service officers work jointly with schools offering activities and education and training through the medium of Welsh to the county's children.

Licensing: The Licensing Service ensures that members of the public can give evidence through the medium of Welsh in formal cases and in the submission of cases for prosecution and appeals through the medium of Welsh where possible. Every hearing and meeting of the Main Licensing Committee and Sub-committees are held in accordance with the language policy - and therefore members of the public can present evidence in hearings through the medium of Welsh.

Climate and Nature: The responsibility for leading the Council's Climate and Nature Emergency Plan is coordinated by the Environment Department. By working together and developing partnerships with other organisations, we support local businesses to work in the field of renewable energy technology. Some projects – e.g. Gwynedd Net Zero Partnership led by Adra - trains the local workforce (especially young people) for them to stay locally to work in local businesses. We also want to expand how many apprenticeships and trainees the Council recruits to work in the climate and nature/biodiversity fields.

We will consult further with external partners and with Gwynedd residents on developing a Climate and Nature Emergency Plan in 2023/24. We will always communicate in the person's choice of language and encourage discussion in Welsh and English.

Internal Communication: The Department produces a regular newsletter for staff that is distributed electronically. The internal newsletter that is provided in Welsh shares news and updates about various departmental and corporate developments and is an opportunity to draw attention to any opportunities to develop Welsh language skills for staff and to celebrate any relevant successes.

Externalisation of work and awarding third party contracts

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

2. If the department awards work externally 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?

Contracts: In every contract awarded via the Sell2Wales procurement portal we continue to endeavour to ensure that the standard of the Welsh medium service is secured and maintained. A copy of the Language Policy is included in the tendering documents, and every applicant is asked to read this to ensure that they understand what is required of them in terms of the Welsh language but also that they understand the importance of the Welsh language to Gwynedd Council. The language requirements (which reflect the Council's Language Policy) of every contract are determined according to the needs of that contract.

Projects / contracts: The nature of the engineering industry tends to be English. In order to encourage the use of Welsh during the purchasing process, we ensure that 'invitation to tender' or 'instructions to tender' documents are advertised bilingually.

Bus and taxi contracts: As part of terms and conditions of bus and taxi contracts, it is a requirement that the contractor ensures full compliance with the Council's Welsh Language Policy.

Trading Standards: When any work is awarded externally, specifically specialised work such as hiring mechanics to undertake a report on the condition of a car, or hiring specialist equipment (that requires an operator to use the equipment), an officer from the service would be present at all times to ensure that communication/contact with the third party would be undertaken in their choice of language.

Licensing: The Licensing Service have seen that the ability to communicate from day-to-day with the Police in Welsh has improved since the appointment of high level Welsh speaking inspectors.

Climate and Nature: We will collaborate with the Welsh Government and Business Wales to influence the private sector when awarding procurement contracts. We will continue to ask for their commitment to the Welsh language as well as new requirements for them to report on how they are trying to reduce their carbon emissions.

Operating bilingually

How do we manage to act on the requirements of the Language Policy and Welsh Language Standards?

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

This could be across the department or in specific services.

e.g.

- *recruitment problems or lack of staff skills*
- *Working in a field that is considered to be an 'English' industry in nature (i.e. external influences)*
- *Working jointly with external bodies and agencies who do not operate bilingually*

Recruitment

Challenges continue in some specialist areas in terms of relevant qualifications and the ability to communicate through the medium of Welsh.

Planning: Recruiting competent Planners continues to be a challenge, and recruiting competent Planners who speak Welsh is even more of a challenge. Obviously, fluency in Welsh in terms of the Planning Service, which deals regularly with the public is extremely important. Despite the challenges, we continue to be able to appoint competent officers who possess the required linguistic skills.

The Service has been looking more at appointing applicants who have a degree in similar fields of work (e.g. Geography), and then training at work in addition to paying for them to achieve a qualification in the Planning field. This recruitment method has enabled us to successfully appoint over the years. However, when we advertise Planning posts, the number of applicants is scarce, although we have been fortunate over the years to secure good applicants. Another challenge is retaining staff in the long-term in light of salary levels by comparison with most of the other authorities in north Wales.

Countryside/Biodiversity: Recruiting staff to this field continues to be challenging. After three failed attempts to advertise for a Biodiversity Officer, we had to reduce the language requirements. Following this, an applicant who is a 'foundation' standard learner was appointed who is enthusiastic to develop their language skills and has already commenced Welsh language training.

Collaboration

Staff in the Environment Department participate in multi-agency meetings regularly, at national and regional level. A significant number of these meetings tend to be held through the medium of English. However, officers ensure that any joint working that would be prepared to be distributed to the public would be bilingual.

Developing new opportunities

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

The Environment Department promotes the use of the Welsh language through the work of each of the Services and any communication with the public will be undertaken according to the language choice of Gwynedd residents.

As noted above, the Professional Trainee in Planning and Transport Engineering has recently started with the Service. We believe that this offers an opportunity to develop the future workforce and to ensure that staff gain experience and that we offer a career pathway for our staff in the future. This in turn will ensure that we have professional officers in the future who possess the language skills the Council desires.

Work is being prepared to promote three new trainee posts for a period of three years in the Public Protection field. One trainee will work in each Public Protection field, namely Food and Safety; Environment and Licensing and Trading Standards. These three posts will give opportunities for successful trainees to gain specialist professional skills through the medium of Welsh.

The Council's Language Forum: The development of the Language Forum is welcomed as an opportunity to share good practice across the Council's departments. It is an opportunity for representatives from all Council departments to discuss ideas about how to raise awareness of the support that is available and how to encourage/inspire staff to make the most of what is on-offer.

Organising voluntary activities within the Council or Council departments may create opportunities for staff to speak Welsh together in a leisurely and more natural environment. It may have a positive influence on family/friends/neighbours and inspire them to organise the same type of activities for new speakers in their communities.

Support: As a Department, we encourage any member of staff to attend courses to learn or refresh the language for the benefit of Gwynedd residents. We will continue to support and encourage staff who are new speakers to use their Welsh in meetings, when greeting and introducing themselves or whenever they are confident to present an item in Welsh in order to build their confidence in a safe environment.