
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: MONDAY, 24 APRIL 2023

PRESENT:

Councillors: Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn (Chair)
Llio Elenid Owen (Vice-chair)

Menna Baines, Alan Jones Evans, Jina Gwyrfai, Olaf Cai Larsen, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid Owen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Peter Thomas and Gruffydd Williams

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

Item 5: Geraint Owen (Corporate Director) and Iwan Evans (Head of Legal Service)
Item 6: Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department)
Item 7: Iwan Hywel (Chief Officer of Hunaniaith (Gwynedd's Language Initiative))

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elfed Williams and Sasha Williams.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

A declaration of personal interest was received from Councillor Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn in respect of Item 7, however it was judged that it was not a prejudicial interest, and he was not required to withdraw from the meeting.

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 January, 2023 as a true record.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: LEADERSHIP TEAM AND LEGAL SERVICES

The report was presented by the Corporate Director and Head of Legal Service, and they referred briefly to the following main points:

- Members were reminded that the Leadership Team supported the Council's Chief Executive.

- It was confirmed that the Microsoft software was now installed as default on all the Council's devices. It was noted that the number of devices that had been kept on the Welsh software had risen to 63% compared with 47% last year. Nonetheless, they emphasised that continuous work was being done to encourage staff to use the Welsh software on their devices and supporting them to gain confidence in their Welsh-language computer skills.
- It was reported that a new Language Forum was being established, with the first meeting of the Forum to be held in June. The Council Leader, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Support and the Corporate Director were members of the forum.
- It was considered that one of the Leadership Team's main roles was to influence the use of the Welsh language in external bodies. It was noted that the Home Office were currently recruiting Welsh speakers because the Chief Executive, the Statutory Director and Head of Children's Department had refused to welcome non-Welsh speaking Youth Justice inspectors. They elaborated that officers at the Isle of Anglesey County Council had also made a stand in an attempt to have inspectors who could speak Welsh. Furthermore, it was noted that many other County Councils throughout the country had made a similar stand, noting that they would not accept any inspection until the Home Office had succeeded in recruiting inspectors who could speak Welsh.
- It was acknowledged that recruitment difficulties had been challenging over the past year and that the legal service had been relying on a locum service to provide services in several fields. It was acknowledged that this had somewhat affected the use of the Welsh language within the service, as it was an exception to find locum solicitors who were Welsh speaking. It was emphasised that the recruitment situation was improving as the service was able to appoint more staff without compromising the Welsh language requirements, as the individuals who had been appointed already met the Council's language requirements.
- It was explained that Gwynedd was leading on several regional main partnerships including GwE, the Ambition Board and the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. The legal service played a key role in maintaining these. The presence of Gwynedd officers within these partnerships was believed to ensure the use of the Welsh language in fields that were naturally technical. This was reflected in the partnerships' work.
- It was discussed that Cyngor Gwynedd were about to purchase new software jointly with the councils in the east of the North Wales region. It was confirmed that the system's capability to revise and record information in Welsh and English was a core requirement for accepting the software, in accordance with Cyngor Gwynedd's language requirements.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

- It was discussed that difficulties could arise when working with other agencies when simultaneous translation was not available in meetings or documentation. Consideration was given to whether there was a policy in force for such situations, in order to ensure that officers from Gwynedd all followed the same protocol.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that there was a process of recording complaints and difficulties in place. She confirmed that staff were reminded of how to respond in any such situation. The officer elaborated that this matter had been raised with the Welsh Language Commissioner recently and they were keen for the Council to share evidence of examples when they arose. She also detailed that the Welsh Government were keen to know more about any complaints that

- emerge so that they could know which departments did not comply with language policies.
- It was considered whether it would be beneficial for the Council to send any documentation to external agencies in Welsh only to force them to use the Welsh language.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Democracy and Language Services Manager confirmed that the Council's policy was to write in Welsh first with an English translation beneath. It was confirmed that this was also true for the Council's meetings, which were conducted in Welsh with an English translation provided.
 - Consideration was given to the difference between communicating bilingually and communicating in English only, and the possibility that some individuals were ignoring the Welsh parts and concentrating on the English side only. One method was mentioned which could be used to ensure Welsh-medium correspondence from agencies, which was to not respond to any English-medium correspondence until Welsh correspondence arrived. The member elaborated that the method of bilingual communication was something that should be considered when the next opportunity arose to review the language policy.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that the majority of people wrote in Welsh unless they were already aware that the recipients of the correspondence did not understand Welsh. The Corporate Director expanded that the Welsh Language Promotion Plan would be revised over the coming months, and these matters could be considered during those discussions.
 - Examples were shared of situations where people who were able to speak Welsh turned to English when responding to the comments of individuals who spoke English in meetings. It was acknowledged that it was not easy, but it was noted that it was important for Welsh speakers to make every effort to respond to any comments in Welsh when a Translation facility was available to the non-Welsh speakers.
 - The officers were thanked for their work leading on the Welsh language.

Members gave thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Economy and Community Department, and she referred briefly to the following main points:

- She confirmed that Gwynedd continued to lead on the ARFOR scheme with the Isle of Anglesey County Council. She explained that a successful bid had been made to the Welsh Government which secured the continuation of this project until at least 2025 in order to fund projects to promote the Welsh language.
- It was reported that the department had a grant fund for supporting businesses and communities. This was in addition to Welsh Government grants and the Council could impose language-related terms as conditions for the receipt of financial assistance.
- The officer mentioned that there had been a lengthy discussion about how they could promote the Welsh language through the Visitor Economy, and the department had subsequently commissioned Bangor University to work with the Council to set a

baseline and indicators for measuring the impact of visitors to the area on the language.

- She explained that encouraging feedback had been received from individuals who used the facilities provided by the museums, arts and libraries. She explained that several activities were being held in a more informal environment to allow individuals to gain confidence in their use of the language. It was detailed that Welsh learners were more confident to contribute to conversations in such an environment.
- It was explained that the department had received £18 million from the Welsh Government through the Levelling Up Fund, Llewyrch a Llechi as part of our regeneration programmes. It was elaborated that no language conditions had been imposed by the government as the Council distributed the funding further. Nevertheless, the department was attempting to set a foundation for ensuring that language requirements were imposed on any bid for funding in order to ensure that the language was taken into consideration as part of the regeneration programme.
- She referred to one of the obstacles faced by the service, which was developing the linguistic skills of the maritime service. It was explained that the department employed 27-30 beach wardens over the summer to protect the public. Because of the seasonal nature of their posts, the department could not work alongside these individuals year on year to improve their Welsh-language ability – this was a barrier that the department was trying to resolve. Despite this, it was specified that 94.5% of the department's staff reached the language designation for their post out of the 80.5% of all the department's staff who had completed the self-assessment.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

- Members welcomed the fact that the department was working jointly with Welsh for Adults centres, and it was hoped that this arrangement would continue in future.
 - In response to the observations, the Head of Economy and Community Department confirmed that adults education was not the type of work that was normally undertaken within the department. She elaborated that this joint-working was taking place through a grant in cooperation with Coleg Llandrillo Menai with the aim of ensuring that there were education packs available to everyone – whether through colleges or libraries.
- In response to an enquiry about working with independent museums, the Head of Economy Department confirmed that this did take place as part of the department's work, but there had been some impact on this recently due to staff absences. Nevertheless, she confirmed that the collaboration with independent museums would continue in future.
- In response to an enquiry about binding companies to language conditions when they applied for grant funding, the Head of Economy and Community Department confirmed that this was not possible in all cases. She explained that language conditions could be imposed on those applying for grants through certain processes such as the ARFOR project, but unfortunately it was unlikely that we were able to stipulate language requirements on every funding pot received from the Welsh Government. However, she emphasised that the department was seeking to set the foundations so that such conditions could be set in future.
- In response to an enquiry regarding small grants for businesses, the Head of Economy and Community Department confirmed that businesses were able to apply for grants for signs, vehicle stickers or any other method of promoting the language. However, this funding was currently only available for 18 months, therefore applicants were encouraged to do so as soon as possible.

Members gave thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. UPDATE ON THE WORK OF HUNANIAITH – GWYNEDD'S LANGUAGE INITIATIVE

The report was presented by the Chief Officer of Hunaniaith (Gwynedd's Language Initiative) who referred briefly to the following principal points:

- It was confirmed that a voluntary leading group had been established to complete the work of making the initiative independent from the Council. He explained that a new company (not-for-profit), called Menter Iaith Gwynedd was currently being set up by the voluntary group. He elaborated that the aim was to transfer staff to the new entity by the end of the current financial year.
- He explained that there was a good representation of different ages, gender and areas on the group.
- He reported that there would be a soft launch for the new initiative at the Llŷn and Eifionydd National Eisteddfod in August.
- He noted that they had been successful in attracting additional funding through the Welsh Government's 'Summer of Fun' fund last year, which had allowed Hunaniaith to organise 23 events for 341 children and young people across the county.
- He reported that there was good collaboration taking place with the Council's departments such as the Education Department in order to ensure that whole families understood and had input into the events of the immersion centres, had information about Gwynedd's language and culture and opportunities to use the Welsh language. He also referred to joint working with Menter Iaith Môn with the goal of attracting funding from Cyngor Gwynedd's Economy and Community Department, in order to encourage more businesses to make use of the Welsh language day to day.
- The members were reminded that the primary purpose of the initiative was to identify gaps in the opportunities to use the Welsh language in areas, and to work with communities to find long-term solutions for them. The Officer shared an example of this, referring to Welsh yoga lessons in Bangor after identifying the need for such sessions to be held within the area.
- It was noted that three members of staff were supporting the Chief Officer of Hunaniaith. The main focus of their work was to encourage and support communities to develop projects to promote the use of Welsh, which would be sustainable in the long term. He elaborated that the initiative primarily focused on looking at areas, rather than individual projects. He confirmed that the areas that had been prioritised for next year were Bangor, Ogwen, Penllyn and Felinheli. It was also stated that the initiative would focus on the Pen Llŷn area because the National Eisteddfod would be held in that area this year.
- Some of the initiative's priorities for the year ahead were discussed, focusing on ensuring that the National Eisteddfod's visit would encourage more people to speak Welsh in the area and to also work with Welsh children and families to ensure that the language was spoken amongst each other from day to day.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matters were raised:

- In response to an enquiry regarding the effect on the Welsh language in light of the National Eisteddfod visiting the area this year, the Hunaniaith Chief Officer confirmed that the Eisteddfod organisers were exploring various options for specific audiences with the aim of promoting the language. Members shared several ideas, which

included a discounted admission price on certain days of the festival and targeting some areas so as to encourage people to attend and hear the Welsh language in a natural setting, given that the Eisteddfod this year was based in an area where there was a lot of tourism. In response to the above, the Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that she would share the observations with the officer from the Council who was coordinating the Council's arrangements with the Eisteddfod.

- Concern was expressed that the language initiative was separating from the Council, and the reason for this change.
 - o In response to the question, the Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that this change was happening to ensure that communities took ownership of the initiative in the future. It was hoped that more people within communities would take a greater interest in the events and subsequently better promote the Welsh language in communities.
 - o The Hunaniaith Chief Officer stated that the initiative would be open to more funding options when it was an independent entity, compared with being an initiative that was part of Cyngor Gwynedd's Corporate Support Department.

The officer was thanked for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. PRAISE AND COMPLAINTS REPORT

The report was presented by the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser. She referred briefly to the following main points:

- Members were reminded that this report shared examples of successes and complaints associated with promoting the use of the Welsh language within the Council's services.
- She detailed that four complaints had been received relating to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. She added that the Council had not accepted the final decision on two of those complaints. She explained that it was not appropriate to hold a discussion on those complaints as they were ongoing, and they had been included in the report as information for the members only.
- Details were shared of four complaints that had been received in connection with the Council's language policy.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following matter was raised:

- The Council was congratulated on its success, and it was noted that only a very small number of complaints had been received.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.05pm.

CHAIR