

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	24 October 2023
TITLE	Welsh Language Promotion Plan: Finance Department
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
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Background

1. This report has been prepared to present information to the Language Committee on the Finance Department's contribution to the Language Policy.
2. The Council's Language Policy is embedded in all of the Department's work, and this report highlights the opportunities available to improve provision for our residents, while also recognising the challenges facing the area of work.
3. The Finance Department's services produce a range of letters, leaflets, forms, posters, websites and bilingual systems, with Welsh as the default language. Furthermore, the Department aims to achieve a 'Clear Welsh' standard, so that Welsh customers do not feel that our Welsh documents are too difficult to understand and use.

<p>The matter that members would like to discuss:</p> <p><u>Language promotion</u></p> <p>How does your department go beyond to offer services bilingually and to contribute to the objectives of the county's language strategy (what activities and projects have been undertaken during the last year to raise the status of the Welsh language and ensure opportunities for people to use Welsh in the community)?</p> <p>The Council's language strategy sets priorities for promoting the Welsh language in five areas :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The language of the family,2. The language of learning,3. The language of work and service,4. Community language5. Research and Technology	<p><u>The language of Microsoft Windows</u></p> <p>Global use of computers through the medium of English by businesses and individuals has conditioned consumers (even in Gwynedd) to familiarise themselves with English terms in various systems. Despite that, we encourage our users to work with the Welsh settings on our computers.</p> <p>The Council supplies PCs on the "Microsoft Windows" platform for our officers, serving approximately 2,700 corporate users. These computers are received with an English operating platform, which is the default standard for computers supplied in the UK. Internal steps while preparing the computers for our users now customize the installation, with each new computer being prepared with an operating platform in the Welsh language. Welsh is the default setting on all Council computers.</p> <p><u>Banking Agreement</u></p> <p>When the Finance Department outsources work on contract, we ensure that a service in Welsh is offered to people within the communities of the county, for example the customer service at Barclays Bank and the Post Office.</p> <p>However, it should be noted the Department's disappointment that Barclays has closed branches over the past two years in Gwynedd. The Caernarfon and Porthmadog branches closed in February 2022, the Dolgellau branch before the end of 2022 and it has now been announced that the Pwllheli branch is closing in November 2023. There will then be only one branch left in Gwynedd, the Bangor branch. The Finance Department will begin the process of tendering for banking services shortly as the agreement expires in September 2024.</p> <p><u>Specialist suppliers</u></p> <p>This is still not possible to maintain a fully bilingual relationship with some specialist and technical services, due to the specialised nature of the market. However, staff always strive to operate in-house through Welsh wherever possible. Where any information is produced publicly, we ensure it is bilingual from the outset.</p>
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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's representative will take care of this.

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

Finance Department Intranet

We have arrangements in place to update and transform the Finance Department intranet. This work is co-ordinated by Technical Lead (IT) and Its None. The intranet will exist in Welsh only.

Pension Fund Stand – Boduan National Eisteddfod

The Pension Fund had a Stand at the National Eisteddfod this year. This was a great opportunity to meet a large number of fund members and help them better understand their pension, and provide them with support to create an online "My Pension" account or complete relevant forms.

Collaborations and Partnerships

The Council has a leading role in several regional partnerships. A number of Finance Department services have been centrally involved in establishing the governance of these partnerships, for example the Corporate Joint Committee (CBC) for north Wales, in addition to the work already undertaken in assisting the establishment of the North Wales Ambition Board. We believe that input in the finance area into these developments means that the arrangements, including presentations and documentation in the field of finance are prepared and delivered in Welsh and English on an equal basis. Gwynedd's ability to deliver technical and specialist issues in both English and Welsh means that we are able to provide certainty and confidence in achieving these objectives.

	<p><u>New pension fund logo</u></p> <p>In preparing marketing materials for the Eisteddfod it was decided to have a new logo for the Pension Fund as the previous logo was outdated. A graphic designer from the Finance Department designed it for us bilingually.</p> 
<p><u>Policy and Standards Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Staff language skills – number of Welsh speakers and learners within the department (latest data Language Designations). ii. Barriers - are there any barriers to your ability as a department to offer a full service in Welsh (i.e. act on the requirements of the Welsh Language Policy and Standards)? iii. Praise and Complaints – please provide information about any praise or complaints the department has received during the year about Welsh/bilingual services. 	<p><u>Staff Language Skills</u></p> <p>Following recent work to review the language requirements of all Department posts, identify the posts’ language designations, and then to assess the language of Department staff, we can report that 220 Department staff (representing 98.18%) have now submitted a self-assessment, and 214 of those (99.07%) are reaching their job language designations.</p> <p><u>Obstacles</u></p> <p>Maintaining the ability to offer our services through the medium of Welsh is ongoing work, and we consider staff language requirements in our daily work, whilst recruiting and appointing, induction and conducting ongoing evaluation conversations. We offer support to staff to develop their language skills, so that they can give the best service to the people of Gwynedd in Welsh and keep a high standard in the context of the language.</p> <p><u>Praise and Complaints</u></p> <p>In May 2023 the Council received the final report of a Standards enforcement investigation: Report and decision notice from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The Commissioner had carried out an investigation in accordance with section 73 and section 74 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 following a complaint from a member of the public. The complainant claimed she received an English-only letter on 06/04/2022 from the Pensions Service. The letter related to the pension of the complainant's late mother. The English only letter was sent back to the Council noting that she would not respond until she received a Welsh letter. The Council sent a Welsh version of the letter to the complainant on 21/04/2022 but the complainant remained dissatisfied as it appeared that the headline and closing greeting of that letter again was in English only. She also noted that the Council had not acknowledged its error with the original letter or offered her an apology for sending her a letter in English only.</p>

	<p>The Pensions Service takes full responsibility for this error, which arose as a result of a mistake as the letter had been prepared outside the standard system and the relevant officer had prepared an English-only letter. The Council accepts that we failed to comply with the requirements of Language Standards 5, 6 and 7 in this particular case, but it is emphasised that this was a one-time error and is not a reflection of the normal arrangements of the Pensions Service or the Finance Department. Officers have been reminded of the requirements placed on them in terms of expected language standards so that this does not happen again.</p>
<p>Development Opportunities Do you have ideas for new ways we could be promoting the Welsh language within the county's communities – either within your own services or working with others?</p>	<p>Courses for Staff The Information Technology Service has been promoting language refresher courses amongst all of its units, with several members having taken the opportunity and the course is now mandatory for new members to the Digital Learning Service Helpdesk.</p> <p>User Group A User Group has been set up for a system created by the Information Technology Service development unit to carry out Individual Development Plans (IDPs) within Additional Needs and Inclusion (ALN). This is a statutory provision with other bodies taking advantage of the use of the system provided by Cyngor Gwynedd and as it is new, a User Group has been set up to make their voices heard and shape the future of the product. Membership includes a range of Councils from Anglesey to Bridgend and colleges across Wales, with the group's activity being conducted bilingually and the virtual meetings bringing on a simultaneous translation service inviting and promoting discussions in Welsh.</p> <p>Day-to-day use We are proud that the whole department provides its services through the Welsh language, and we believe that the ability to work day-to-day through the medium of Welsh has been a great help in attracting and appointing new staff. We have evidence that this culture has built the confidence of many of our new staff and strengthened their use of the language.</p>

Audit Wales

Department officers hold meetings in Welsh only with Audit Wales officers. We believe this has given Audit Wales the impetus to strengthen their Welsh language arrangements and we believe this has been an opportunity for Audit Wales staff to also develop their Welsh and make more use of it.

Computer provision for Gwynedd Schools

The Digital Learning Service was established to provide digital leadership and support to the County's schools at the start of April 2022 and the implementation of the Gwynedd Schools Digital Strategy.

A laptop has now been rolled out to all teachers, and the roll-out of a laptop for all secondary pupils (Yr 7 -11) is underway, with the default language of each laptop presented in Welsh.

The Future

Over the next year the Finance Department will:

- Conduct initial discussions about aiming to work towards obtaining "Investors In People" accreditation, and the work element relating to Welsh Language will form a significant part of this task.
- Over the last year we as a department have started working closely with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer from the Learning and Development Service. We will continue to strengthen this collaboration over the next year.