

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	24 October 2023
TITLE	Report of the Environment Department
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The aim of this report is to present information to the Language Committee about the Environment Department's contribution to the Language Policy.
- 1.2. The Environment Department includes a range of services across the fields of Waste and Recycling, Transport, Planning and Public Protection.
- 1.3. The nature of these services means that staff come into contact regularly with members of the public, councillors, other Council staff, and other authorities and external partners.
- 1.4. As a Department, every effort is made to ensure that the services are provided in the customer's preferred language, and there is effort by the Department's officers to promote the use of the Welsh language through their work.
- 1.5. In the report we will highlight the work that is taking place across the Department to support and promote the language, the opportunities that are available to improve the provision for our residents, but also recognising the challenges faced.

2. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

Question 1. Promoting and advancing

How does your department go beyond offering bilingual services and contributes to the objectives of the county's language strategy (what activities and projects have been carried out during the past year which raise the status of the Welsh language and ensure opportunities for people to use Welsh in the community)?

The Council's language strategy sets priorities for promoting the Welsh language in five areas:

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

The current strategy can be viewed here:
(<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/cy/Cyngor/Dogfennau-Cyngor/Strategaethau-a-pholisiau/Cynllun-iaith/Cynllun-Hybu'r-Gymraeg-yng-Ngwynedd-2018-2023.pdf>)

Planning Policy, Landscape and Nature

The work of the Planning Policy Team revolves mainly around preparing, monitoring, reviewing and revising the Joint Local Development Plan (2011-26) including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance. Consideration of the Welsh language has been central to the process of preparing the Plan which incorporates planning policy PS1 that deals specifically with the Welsh language and culture.

The Supplementary Planning Guidance (Maintaining and creating distinctive and sustainable communities) also contains 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 area. The Team will continue to prioritise this key area when preparing the New Local Development Plan for Gwynedd.

Much of the officers' work in the area of Landscape and Nature means that they work closely with the public, and facilitating access to our natural environment is an integral part of their work. In that respect, Officers of the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation have developed a pamphlet containing different walks as part of a seagrass project in the area. As well as preparing material about the walks and the project, the officers have also been leading walks with learners, giving them the opportunity to practise their Welsh and learn new words and terms.

This team has also led a partnership to develop a bilingual education pack titled 'Tir a Môr' for primary schools. The pack offers a quality resource that can be used with a variety of worksheets which means that schools can continue with studies in the classroom, and it also enable teachers to hold their own sessions.

Biodiversity officers carry out regular work to encourage interest and promote nature. A nature discovery day was held jointly with several partners in the Morfa Madryn nature reserve near Llanfairfechan, and this was an opportunity to hold a variety of activities with families.

In Parc y Dre in Caernarfon, with funding through the Local Nature partnership, the team has installed signposts that state the names of trees in Welsh, English and Latin in this historical park. As an extension of the efforts to encourage the use of Welsh names for trees and plants, an information leaflet was produced which stated the names for various species, and this leaflet was promoted on the Council's stall in the Llŷn and Eifionydd National Eisteddfod.

As part of the work of promoting our public green habitats, officers worked with Local Nature Partnerships in Wales to ensure language consistency and accuracy between different regions when promoting the 'It's for Them' stakeholder toolkit. The information in this pack was used to create the promotion signs and to share the message as part of the Ymylon Gwyllt Gwynedd programme.

Planning

When dealing with any planning application, decisions are made in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan, which, as outlined above, contains a specific policy on the Welsh language and a Supplementary Planning Guidance that provides detailed guidance on how to implement the policy.

By operating in this way, the Planning Service contributes to the promotion of the Welsh language in the area, ensuring that applications give consideration to the Welsh language in accordance with the Policy and guidance, highlighting the cultural significance of the language, as well as promoting for the language to be made visible in developments (e.g. signs). Although we have no power over the contents of signs, officers always try to contact applicants to try to secure Welsh-language signs.

The Service has also contributed to the Council's project on Protecting Place Names. Through this, the service has reviewed planning conditions and added a planning condition for any new housing developments to ensure a Welsh name for the house or the estate. This helps the Building Control Service when dealing with formal applications to name new houses and streets.

Building Control

The Service has responsibility for managing the naming of streets and the naming and numbering of properties, and it has a statutory duty to ensure that any new name or revisions to the names of streets and properties are allocated logically and consistently.

Whilst it does not have enforcement powers to reject an application unless there is duplication or the name is inappropriate, the Building Control Service takes a proactive approach to highlight the historical and cultural significance of Welsh place names.

The latest statistics (2022/23) show that 76 applications were made to change a property's name, with 95% of the names that were registered through Royal Mail being Welsh names. It is noted that where applicants applied to change a name from Welsh to English, there were connections with the business name(s). It is very encouraging that of the 76 applications, 22 owners changed back from English names to Welsh names, with many appreciating the original historical naming (others changed from one Welsh name to another or put a name on the property for the first time, and chose to do so in Welsh).

Within this field of work, Cadw have commissioned language advisers to conduct research to obtain a better understanding of the changes around Welsh place names, and the Building Control Service has shared experiences with them. This

research will contribute to the consideration of a range of legislative and non-legislative options that are available to protect place names if and where they are identified as names that are under threat of being changed; and will strengthen the evidence base on changing place names.

Public Protection

The Food Safety and Trading Standards Services support and participate in national campaigns to promote important messages to the public. This includes messages on the Council's social media accounts.

When investigations are undertaken by the Public Protection Services' officers, communication and liaison is undertaken in the customer's chosen language, and they highlight the fact that the Council welcomes Welsh-medium communication.

Transport and Road Safety

As part of the 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. Any documents or messages that are displayed on buses and bus shelters are fully bilingual.

The Road Safety team holds activities in schools and in the community, with the vast majority of face-to-face promotion taking place through the medium of Welsh, unless a member of public's preferred language requires them to communicate in English. The Team also promotes its work bilingually on websites and social media.

Parking and Street Works

The Service offers bilingual methods of payment in the county's car parks through the pay and display machines or through a mobile phone app. In terms of the street works aspect, obviously all the signs that are installed on parts of the highway are bilingual, with the Welsh displayed first.

Waste and Recycling

Regular work takes place in this field to promote recycling services and encourage residents to make the most of the methods that are available to recycle materials. All the information and publicity material produced is bilingual, with priority given to the Welsh language.

Officers attend events to promote these services and they communicate and present in Welsh unless the residents' preferred language requires them to discuss bilingually or in English.

Every effort is made to capitalise on every opportunity to promote the services and encourage residents to reduce waste, and there was a good example of this in a presentation about making the most of the food you have, where a promotion session was held with a local cook during the National Eisteddfod.

The promotional material produced ensures the use of clear Welsh, and all the internal messages for the workforce are provided bilingually, with priority given to the Welsh language.

Question 2. Policy and Standards Matters

- i. Staff language skills – the number of Welsh speakers and learners within the department (latest Language Designations data).
- 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 Language Policy and Welsh Language Standards)?
- iii. Compliments and Complaints – provide information on any compliments or complaints that the department has received during the year about Welsh/bilingual services.

i. Staff language skills

The Environment Department employs 345 members of staff, and the most recent overview report shows that 91% of the Department's staff who have completed a language self-assessment or who have been assessed by their line manager, meet the language designations of their posts. This is consistent with staff language levels across the Council.

It is important to note that the fact that a member of staff does not meet the language requirements does not mean that they are unable to offer a Welsh-medium service to the customer, and the Department promotes any opportunities for staff to attend training to develop skills or refine their language skills.

However, it should be noted that a significant number of the Waste Service's workforce do not have a language designation assessment. This follows a pattern that was seen before the waste services transferred to the Environment Department, and we note that efforts were made by the Highways Department previously to ensure that language assessments were being completed. Efforts are continuing to ensure that assessments are undertaken in order to understand staff language skills across the Department.

The most recent overview report shows that 49 staff in the Waste services have been assessed, but there are 111 members of staff without an assessment. This is clearly a challenge, and we recognise that further work must be carried out to ensure that assessments are completed, and there is a request for line managers to assist with the work of conducting assessments over the next period.

ii. Barriers

There have been recruitment challenges in some specialist fields including Planning and Public Protection, in terms of the required qualifications and the ability to communicate in Welsh. This has been true within Planning, where the recruitment of qualified Planners who are able to speak Welsh can be difficult, but the ability to communicate fluently through the medium of Welsh is essential in a service that deals regularly with the public.

Nevertheless, it is pleasing to be able to report that the Planning Service has appointed two professional trainees for a period of three years in recent months. This offers an opportunity to train officers and ensure the succession of the service in future, where we will have officers who will be able to offer a Welsh-medium service to the residents of Gwynedd in future.

Three trainees have also been appointed to the Public Protection services since the report that was submitted to the Language Committee last year, with one trainee working in each area of Public Protection which are Food and Safety; Environment and Licensing; and Trading Standards. These trainees started in post a few months ago, with the three individuals having the opportunity to gain specialist professional skills through the medium of Welsh.

iii. Compliments and Complaints

The answer to question 1 outlines the range of areas where the Department's services are working to support and promote the language. Many of these efforts that were highlighted in activities during the National Eisteddfod this year have been praised and received positive feedback.

With regard to complaints, the Planning Service has dealt with some comments that have been raised due to the fact that officers' reports on applications are prepared only in Welsh. But applicants accept that this is the situation, and that a translation can be provided when this is requested.

Concerns have been presented about place names in road closure notices and the fact that English names have been included alongside the Welsh. In such cases, there is a tendency to include all the names that are used for a street or location (both Welsh and English), to ensure that the notice is understood by and inclusive for all road users. But in order to address the concerns raised, the matter is being considered by the Legal Service.

Question 3. Development Opportunities

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?

With advancements in the field of vehicle charging, officers from the Traffic team are working to ensure that external providers ensure that this new technology can be used through the medium of Welsh. By developing a network of charging machines on Council land, we are adopting new terminology in Welsh when referring to technical elements in an attempt to encourage the public to use the Welsh terms, such as 'gwefru' (charging), 'gwefru chwim' (fast charging) etc.

Positive work is happening to promote opportunities to develop staff confidence to use and develop their Welsh skills, and work takes place to promote any successes internally through the Staff Intranet and the Gair o Gyngor magazine. Publicly highlighting the efforts of Council staff in this field would be a way of emphasising that we are keen to support staff development and could encourage new speakers or people who do not have confidence in their Welsh skills that the

Council is an employer that supports the workforce to develop skills and confidence in their Welsh language.