

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	30 January 2024
TITLE	Report of the Highways, Engineering and YGC Department
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to the Language Committee's request for information on how the Department of Highways, Engineering and YGC implements the Language Policy.
- 1.2 The Department includes a range of services including road maintenance, maintenance of municipal assets, street cleaning and a multidisciplinary engineering consultancy. It is also responsible for managing the Council's entire fleet and for implementing the environmental category management procurement service.
- 1.3 Due to the nature of the Department's work, it is inevitable that most of our staff will come into contact with members of the public. As a result, the majority of them are expected to be able to at least speak Welsh to an acceptable level so as to be able to deal directly with enquiries and, thereby, provide a better experience for our customers.
- 1.4 However, because we have so many frontline workers, it has historically been difficult to determine exactly how many members of staff meet their job language designations. However, the Department has largely overcome this in the last 6 months as explained in the report.
- 1.5 It should be noted that since the merger of the Highways and Municipal and YGC Departments in September 2022, this report now replaces the Language Committee reports that previously used to be prepared by the separate departments.

2. RESPOND TO COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Question 1. Promotion and promotion

How does your department go beyond offering services bilingually and contributing to the objectives of the county language strategy (what activities and projects have taken place in the past year that are raising the status of Welsh and ensuring 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. Family language,
2. The language of learning,
3. The language of work and service,
4. Community language
5. Research and Technology

The current strategy can be found here:

(<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Documents-Council/Strategies-and-policies/Scheme-iaith/Scheme-Hybu'r-Gymraeg-yn-Gwynedd-2018-2023.pdf>)

Answer:

The Department provides frontline services and prides itself on the fact that the majority of staff are able to communicate in Welsh, whether at varying levels of ability.

We believe it is essential to promote the language within the Department so as to improve the service we offer to Gwynedd's residents. We cascade every offer of training we receive from the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer amongst our teams and encourage them to attend the sessions, if only to refresh their existing language skills.

We regularly produce a Highways, Engineering and YGC Newsletter, as well as a YGC Bulletin, and these are circulated to all of the Department's staff in Welsh (see Appendices 1 and 2). These are appreciated, not only for their informative content, but also for their quality and use of clear Welsh.

YGC are experienced in setting up stalls at major local and national events to raise awareness of their services in civil engineering and construction, and to advertise career opportunities. This year was no different with stalls being erected at the National Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show. However, for the first time, this year the stalls also included branding for the revamped Highways, Engineering and YGC Department.

The Department was very active during the Eisteddfod including running engineering, construction and environmental themed activities and competitions for young people. These were ideal opportunities to impress upon young people that they could have a fulfilling career in these fields through the medium of Welsh and, through this, retain talent locally.

Prior to the Eisteddfod, the Department held a competition to name the new road bridge which was located near the site. 3 local schools were contacted to offer their pupils the opportunity to nominate names for the bridge. A panel of engineers, environmental officers and the Prifardd Meirion Macintyre Huws then chose the most suitable name, Bodefail Bridge. Mei Mac's input included advice and opinions on local and Welsh names associated with the area. The award was presented to the winning pupil in the Science and Technology Village on the Maes. The official opening of the bridge was attended by the press and the event was held in Welsh. Recognition was given to the importance of choosing a suitable Welsh name following consultation with the local community. Panels on the development of the scheme were held daily in the Children's Village and in the Council's stall, each with different themes. One of the themes was the challenges faced by women wishing to pursue careers in the engineering and construction industry.

YGC is closely associated with the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), which is the leading professional engineering institution that awards professional qualifications to civil engineers. One of the service's engineers has been appointed as a mentor for the Council and the support that they offer in Welsh has been extended to include engineers at Anglesey and Conwy Councils.

One of YGC's officers was awarded the University of Wrexham Student of the Year award, sponsored by the ICE, this year for his college work. One element of his work included highlighting YGC's work at the National Eisteddfod, the Royal Welsh Show and job fairs, with a focus on promoting the Welsh language and equality.

Rather than purchasing commercial systems operating exclusively in English, the Fleet Service has developed its own systems for managing the Council's fleet assets through the medium of Welsh. The systems appear in Welsh first and users must choose an option to operate in English. We are not aware of any other fleet systems offering these services in Welsh.

YGC provides a communication service to stakeholders on behalf of UK Highways for the section of the A55 between Llandygai and Holyhead. This means preparing important bilingual messages about maintenance work etc. As part of the service, they also organise and attend 'drop-in' meetings locally to share information as needed. UK Highways commissioned YGC specifically because of their expertise in the field and the ability of staff to communicate in Welsh.

YGC also organises a number of 'drop-in' events in Gwynedd and beyond to inform residents about proposed schemes and receive their views on them. These are conducted bilingually at all times.

Interestingly, the Department has sponsored edition 2 in a series of 4 bilingual books commissioned by Menai Heritage Charity, entitled 'Britannia Bridge Lions' to encourage children, and in particular females, to pursue a civil engineering career. The books are sold at the Menai Heritage Museum and online.

Question 2. Policy and Standards Issues

- i. Staff language skills – 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 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.

Answer:

i. Staff language skills

The Department employs 507 staff; 120 in the YGC Service and 387 in the services that were formerly part of the Highways and Municipal Department prior to restructuring in September 2022.

Attempting to find out the percentage of former Highway and Municipal Department staff who reached their job language designations was always challenging. We believed this was mainly due to a lack of work email addresses for our manual workers (around 87% of all Department staff), and limited access to work computers and laptops. So we set to work with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to try and discover other methods of gathering the information.

The situation was reported in detail in our last report to the Language Committee. However, in summary, our main solution was to simplify the online assessment so that it was more relevant to our manual workers and to distribute it to each of them individually with a letter of explanation from the Head of Department. This was carried out and the workers had to sign that they had accepted it. However, unfortunately, the result of this exercise was not as successful as we had hoped. The rate of return remained low, despite efforts by management and team leaders to encourage the employees to respond. The response level increased from 25% to 39% as a result of the exercise; nevertheless, it remained the lowest response rate of all Council departments.

The response level rose to 58% following the transfer of the Waste Collection and Recycling Service to the Environment Department in September 2022. However, it was still among the lowest response rate of all Council Departments. Over 96% of the Department's staff who had responded reached their job language designation. While this was encouraging and reflected the Department's desire to promote the language amongst our staff, it did not reflect the actual situation. So, we undertook a comprehensive exercise to turn the situation around. The first step was to identify those staff members who had not already responded to the assessment and group them into their individual services and teams. Lists of the relevant staff were then sent to the appropriate managers and team leaders and they were asked simply to confirm whether or not the individuals reached their language designation. It took about three months to get the data back. However, the exercise was extremely successful and, now, the Department's response level has risen to 95.64%. Of the number who have

completed an assessment, only 13 members of staff, representing 3.11 %, do not meet their job language designations. Of these, 4 are already undertaking a Welsh language skills training course and others have, or want to have, a one-to-one consultation with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to support them in reaching the language designation of their job.

It should be noted that YGC participated in the pilot scheme for the language designation project and great efforts were made at the time to try and ensure that all staff completed the self-assessment questionnaire. The principles laid down then have continued with the Service and completion of the questionnaires is now an integral part of their appointment arrangements. Prior to the merger with the Highways and Municipal Department, their response rate to the questionnaire was 100% and remains so to this day.

ii. Barriers

Since the Department operates in an engineering industry which is English orientated, it can be difficult to achieve a full service in Welsh. This is primarily due to the need to communicate orally with agencies such as the Welsh Government, North and Mid Wales Trunk Roads Agent, Natural Resources Wales etc.

Also, most of the standard forms for engineering contracts are written in English. The same applies to most of the engineering specifications and national codes of practice we use. In addition, due to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (which replaces the Official Journal of the European Union - OJEU), we can only advertise high-value contracts in English (large schemes or services over a certain price threshold).

The Department prides itself on being able to offer a service that is almost entirely Welsh to our residents. However, it can be difficult to recruit staff who fully meet the job language designation in certain roles. This is true even for posts with elementary linguistic levels.

iii. Praise and Complaints

It was clear from the feedback we received at this year's National Eisteddfod that there is great appreciation, not only for the service that is delivered to our residents, but also for the use and promotion of Welsh in everything we do. This was encouraging and confirmed that we were on the right path in our approach to the language.

In terms of complaints, the Department has received little criticism for our use of the language. However, we have been criticised on a few occasions for allowing external contractors working on behalf of the Road Maintenance Service to use English-only warning signs on sites. However, these criticisms are rare and are resolved immediately once we are made aware of them.

Question 3. Development Opportunities

Do you have ideas for new ways we could be promoting the Welsh language within the county's communities – either in your own services or by working with others?

Answer:

The good work of our staff is often taken for granted and we tend to only receive negative feedback if something goes wrong (which is often out of our control). Historically, services such as Road Maintenance and Street Cleaning have been reticent to promote themselves and raise residents' awareness of the work they carry out. As a result, we have recently focused on highlighting the work of some of our services on social media, with bilingual videos and text in plain Welsh and English, so that residents are aware of the efforts being made to keep their communities safe and tidy. This has been incredibly successful and, as well as informing the public of their work, has brought some pride back into the workforce and reinforced the message that they provide an essential service to Gwynedd's residents. Other Departments and Services are probably in the same position where their hard work is not appreciated. As a result, it would do them no harm to also promote themselves so that the public appreciates that their tax money is being spent effectively and efficiently.