

Meeting	Language Committee
Date	25 June 2024
Title	Welsh Language Promotion Plan – Social Services
Purpose	To present information about the Social Services' contribution to promoting the Welsh Language
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<p>Question 1. Support and promote</p> <p>How does your department go beyond offering bilingual services, and contribute to the objectives of the county's language strategy (what activities and projects have been undertaken during the past year that 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 out priorities for promoting the Welsh language in five areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language of the early years, 2. The language of learning, 3. The language of work and services, 4. The language of the community 5. Research and Technology <p>The current strategy can be viewed here: Appendix-2-Strategaeth-laith-2023-2033.pdf (llyw.cymru)</p> <p>Answer:</p> <p>Language of the early years</p> <p>The Gwynedd Language Strategy (the strategy) identifies the need to raise awareness amongst parents about the Welsh-medium education system and to highlight the opportunities that are available to introduce Welsh to children before they reach school age. We are responsible for leading and ensuring the provision of nursery education (10 hours a week for three-year-old children) and a Flying Start childcare provision (12.5 hours a week for two-year-old children). The entire provision is through the medium of Welsh and immerses young children in the Welsh language from their first introduction to education. Since September 2023 we have extended the Flying Start two-year-old childcare provision to several new areas in Gwynedd, with 22 childcare providers providing the service through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. We have also developed a Flying Start app to provide information to parents in the early years. This includes sharing information about the Welsh language and also promoting the Welsh language. They are currently creating videos on the app that are just in Welsh but with English subtitles because of the shortage of Welsh-medium resources that are available, and are also encouraging parents to speak Welsh with their children.</p>

We are also working closely with members of CWLWM (5 national lead childcare organisations in Wales) to promote and encourage the Welsh language across care settings in Gwynedd which include nurseries, *cylchoedd meithrin* (nursery groups), childminders, after school clubs and so forth. There is a variety of resources, help and support available on the lead bodies' websites for promoting and using the Welsh language, and we promote and share these with care settings and providers locally. The service also offers grants of £100 to new private childminders who are non-Welsh speaking for buying Welsh language resources for the provision. The Unit has led on establishing a procurement framework which is a list of approved childcare providers. To be on the list the providers had to evidence that they are able to provide childcare in Welsh or bilingually, and there are now 72 Gwynedd providers on the list. The early years service has collaborated with *Mudiad* to hold 'clwb cwtsh' sessions online. It is a Welsh taster session for free, which is aimed at new learners and concentrates on the language of home parenting.

There are Welsh Language Support Coordinators working for the 5 organisations, and each organisation works on various projects to promote the Welsh language and to extend the number of Welsh-medium settings in Gwynedd. These projects include:

- the [CAMAU Scheme](#) to encourage the workforce of the childcare sector to use and improve their Welsh language skills.
- The "[Croesi'r Bont](#)" scheme ([Mudiad Meithrin](#)) for the immersion of the Welsh language within *cylchoedd meithrin* and increase language transition with schools.

The strategy also identifies that parents require informal opportunities to practise and gain confidence in their use of Welsh, and that activities for the whole family are needed in order to encourage the communication and speaking between the whole family and not just the children. The Department has led on establishing an Activities Providers Framework for children, young people and families across the Council's departments. To date, 32 activity providers have been approved on the framework and are able to provide play opportunities through the medium of Welsh. The Framework is used to commission fun and creative activities, sports and play opportunities for children and young people.

During the school holiday periods in 2023-24, the Department commissioned fun and play activities through the medium of Welsh throughout the county. Partners such as Sbarduno, Byw'n Iach, Logis Bach, the Urdd, Mudiad Meithrin, With Gobaith, Gwallgofiaid, Theatr y Ddraig, the William Mathias Music Centre, Welfare Training Wales, Codi'r To and Pontio provided a varied range of activities throughout the county for children under 5 and their families, primary age children and young people aged 11-25 years old. 4,768 children enjoyed and had the opportunity to join in sessions across the County during the summer holidays, with 408 attending sessions during the half-term holiday. Over the last period the Unit has established a Play Trailer service where a mobile trailer full of play equipment can be taken to communities across Gwynedd, which provides additional opportunities through the medium of Welsh.

The Language of Learning

The strategy identifies that ensuring work-related learning opportunities through the medium of Welsh, such as apprenticeships, can be challenging, and this is something that the Council is currently addressing.

The Adults and Children departments have been part of the Council's Apprenticeships Scheme for a long time and have had some very successful examples. We have worked with the Talent and Apprenticeships Officers to press on the further education providers to provide Welsh-medium courses and to keep to their word that these resources are available in Welsh. However, the area of apprenticeships is challenging in itself for the social services as there are no social work apprenticeships or similar available in Wales at present. We believe this is a missed opportunity and there is work currently underway to establish a Care Academy here in Gwynedd in order to provide a clear professional career path for individuals in a care role to qualify as social workers, occupational therapists or the care managers of the future. As part of this development, the ability to train and qualify entirely through the medium of Welsh will be a core part of the Academy.

One of the other aims of the strategy is to encourage more of the Council's staff to learn Welsh and to improve their skills by taking advantage of various training methods. Across the Adults and Children departments, 22 members of staff have been or have arranged to go on language courses since the start of 2023, including:

- 10 who have/are following Welsh language beginners' courses (entry and foundation level). These are all front-line workers who have direct contact with individuals in the county, including social workers, occupational therapists, support workers and residential workers.
- 5 who have/are following courses for increasing language skills (intermediate and higher level). As above, these are also front-line workers who have direct contact with the county's individuals.
- 7 who have/are following language refresher courses. These are a mix of front-line workers and back office or administrative workers.

Of course, releasing the time of front-line staff in field where there are so many recruitment challenges can be incredibly challenging, which became evident recently as the Adults Department strived to provide Welsh courses for staff in a residential home. Unfortunately, although a high number of staff were interested at the beginning of the course, circumstances meant that only a few of them attended in the end. We will discuss with the home to try to understand why this did not work this time, and try to learn from those experiences for the future.

Nevertheless, ensuring Welsh language skills development amongst the workforce is something that requires much more attention by the social services. As a result of challenges in recruiting the care workforce as well as the specialist workforce, we have more and more staff who do not reach their posts' designated language level as time goes by. It is not clear what the position of the social services, or the Council more widely, is on enforcing language training and securing improvement within a specified timescale. This had been raised as a matter that requires addressing in a meeting of the Gwynedd 'More than Just Words' group where a representation from the Language Unit sits on the group, and we will continue to discuss the way forward.

The Language of Work and Service

We have already referred to the challenges in terms of the language skills of our workforce and recruitment difficulties, and the same information could be revisited in relation to the language strategy's objectives to go beyond the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards and focus on increasing use in order to be able to evidence the need more effectively. We should add, however, that the social services have been involved in the ARFer research programme by Bangor University. ARFer is research that explores how work teams' language practices can be influenced, and we have

one adults social work team in Bangor that have been part of the latest trialling stage, and we are waiting to get to understand the findings. We are hoping to arrange for a care home to participate in the next round so that the programme can be trialled in a different environment.

Of course, social services is a unique field where language challenges are particularly problematic in assessing, supporting and providing services. Communication is fundamental to our ability to understand individuals' true needs and in responding to those needs. Although both departments are confident in the ability of our social work teams to provide support through the medium of Welsh and to take the Welsh language into account as part of decision-making on care packages or placements, fostering or adoption, measuring success is not easy in this respect. Furthermore, there are circumstances where adults or children must be placed out-of-county or in placements where there is no Welsh-language provision. In such situations, the support of our Social Workers will be essential to continue addressing the adult or child's needs.

The Government's framework to strengthen Welsh-medium services in the health and care field – *More Than Just Words* – and the principle of the active offer is crucial to our ability to respond to individuals' needs and evaluate our success in this respect. The active offer means, simply, the ability to identify the need for Welsh-medium services and provide them without someone having to ask for the service. A small group has been established, led by the Statutory Director of Social Services, to lead on the work that stems from the Government's latest five-year plan in this field. The group has been mapping the actions to identify the areas that we need to address, and it has identified main headings that need addressing to steer our work:

1. Learning about the Active Offer amongst managers and practitioners
2. Measuring success
3. Language training
4. Promoting the Active Offer
5. Promoting Use of the Language

We have also been giving attention to the website pages of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, being mindful of the need to present information to the public in a way that could increase the chance of selecting the Welsh version rather than the English. This involves looking at our use of the Welsh language and ensuring it is as accessible as possible, without being overly formal. We will address the pages of the Children and Supporting Families Department website in the same way over the next period, and update them. An Information for Families newsletter is sent out every month, is uploaded on the Council's website and is shared on social media and we have been addressing the use of the Welsh language to ensure that it encourages residents to read the Welsh version. Additionally, we have contributed to specific campaigns where we have been involved in producing marketing material, videos etc. in Welsh, for example Dare to Care or the Foster Wales Campaign. It is an excellent opportunity to emphasise the use of Welsh as a language of work, and is a way of trying to attract Welsh speakers to the field.

The strategy identifies the need to reconsider the support and encouragement given to the private sector to use the Welsh language, and this of course is entirely relevant to the social services department which commissions a large part of its care provision from private providers. The service's Commissioning Manager is a member of the More than Just Words group in Gwynedd, and provides a private sector perspective in those discussions. The service also looks at language clauses within domiciliary care contracts and nursing and residential contracts. In the last financial year, the service has begun addressing language clauses within adults and children care agreements, with the

aim of securing clarity and strengthening them to correspond with the principles of the More than Just Words framework.

Research and Technology

The Gwynedd Language Strategy recognises that it is a significant challenge for the Welsh language to keep up with the continual developments. By now, technology is completely focal to responding to the challenge of increasing demand in the care field, and it can be problematic providing the same options in Welsh as are available in English.

We are aware of the need to encourage more people to use the Welsh language on-line and when using the Council's digital services. We have introduced the AskSara software, which provides a virtual occupational health service to enable adults, children and their families to obtain advice through our website on ways in which they can try to help themselves from day to day. When working alongside the company, we realised that the Welsh version was not up to standard and we refused to operate the service in Gwynedd until this was resolved. We have now translated the whole system on behalf of the company, and this self-assessment system will be available in Welsh to everyone in Wales as a result. We are also re-branding in Gwynedd to ensure that the tool is also promoted in Welsh.

The AiDi app has been commissioned by us to be used by unpaid carers and young carers across the county. The purpose of the app is to create an ID card, to share useful information and show discounts in local shops. Additionally, the app can notify a school or college if a child or young person is running late because of their caring responsibilities. This is the only bilingual app of its kind, and consequently there are discussions taking place regionally and nationally with the aim of other authorities also adopting the app. We are extremely proud that our work in developing an app for Gwynedd carers can potentially lead to opportunities for unpaid and young carers throughout the country to be able to use the Welsh language. The Children and Supporting Families Department is also in discussions around creating an app to provide support to individuals with autism, in the hope that it will have been developed and operational by the end of March 2025. We hope that this will enable us to further influence other organisations.

Furthermore, we were required to roll out new telecare digital equipment by December 2025. We ensured that it was a condition of the new contract with Chiptech that the technology can be used fully through the medium of Welsh in future, by ensuring that all the pre-recorded messages can be uploaded in Welsh. The call centre that receives the calls already provides a service in Welsh.

As part of the work of the More than Just Words Group, we intend to tackle the language difficulties that exist when trying to work multidisciplinary with teams of staff where Welsh language skills vary. We have started discussions with Canolfan Bedwyr, Bangor University with the aim of trying to research how we can address the challenges in creating and sharing individuals' case records. We have discussed the option of developing a 'plug-in' to enable professionals to see the translated version as they record on our social care data base. This would enable them to check as they go and would ensure that the record is available bilingually when required, without affecting the language that is used between us and the individuals and without creating unreasonable extra work for our employees. However, research and work is needed in order to develop the language models so that we can use them in our field from day to day and trust in their accuracy. We plan to address this over the next period.

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 that prevent you as a department from offering a full service in Welsh (i.e., acting on the requirements of the Welsh 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 regarding Welsh/bilingual services.

Answer:

Staff language skills

There are around 1,600 staff across the social services. According to the latest quarterly language report, 73.4% of these have completed a language assessment. Of those who have completed the assessment, 85.5% reach the language requirements of their post. Here follows the figures per department: Children and Supporting Families: By now, 79% of the Children and Supporting Families staff have completed the language assessment, which is a 10% increase since we presented our language committee report last year. Of those who have completed the assessment, 94% reach the language designations of their post.

Adults, Health and Well-being: 69% of Adults, Health and Well-being staff have completed the language assessment, which is a 9% increase since we presented our language committee report last year. Of those who have completed the assessment, 79% reach the language designations of their post.

Looking across the social services, the vast majority of staff who have not completed the assessment are staff who provide front-line care – home care, Learning Disabilities support services, children's support services, and childcare services. These are members of staff who do not have IT accounts or easy access to technology. The language self-assessment questionnaire is an electronic questionnaire that has been placed on the staff self-service system, and although all members of staff can access the self-service system, those without use of IT equipment or accounts are disadvantaged compared with their office-based colleagues. The More than Just Words group have been scrutinising the figures regularly and have decided that using a simple tool that enables the line manager to assess whether or not the individual reaches their post's language designation is a reasonable solution to try to address the gaps that remain in the data. Since this decision we have already managed to secure an assessment for an additional 68 members of staff, with 65 of them reaching their posts' language requirements.

Looking at the members of staff who have been assessed as not reaching the language requirements of their posts, many of them are also carers or support workers. This reflects the recruitment challenges faced by the field, and there is more on this below. There are some social workers and therapists who do not meet the language requirements of their posts either according to their self-assessment, but in several instances the line manager did not agree with the conclusion of the self-assessment (and was of the view that the employee did reach the requirements of their post). Of

course, in a self-assessment, it is very possible for the individual's confidence in their skills to affect the results, which must be borne in mind when considering the data.

Barriers

- 1. Recruitment** – recruitment challenges in this field are evident in both departments, although the impact on the ability to provide services through the medium of Welsh is perhaps seen more in the Adults, Health and Well-being Department. The services providing direct care and our private care providers are finding it very difficult to recruit a care workforce in general, and subsequently it is very difficult to press for workers who reach the language requirements of the post, especially in some areas. We are also facing specific difficulties in recruiting in the occupational therapy field, and as a result we have had to appoint non-Welsh speaking therapists in several teams. Within Children and Supporting Families, we are also experiencing problems in recruiting qualified social workers.

In order to try to address these challenges an Action Plan has been developed across the two departments. Various recruitment campaigns have been undertaken by the department through WeCare Wales, and we emphasise the importance of being able to speak Welsh and the ability to live in naturally Welsh communities as part of that recruitment pack. Amongst the recruitment efforts we have seen:

- Promotion material, videos, continuous social media campaigns calling for carers and promoting the field.
- Workforce planning workshops have been held with services.
- We have collaborated with Human Resources on the Council's new jobs website and on exit interview arrangements.
- 145 work experiences were organised during the 2023/24 financial year across the field, with the opportunity for the sector's prospective workforce to have experience of Welsh as a language of work and service.

Work is also underway to establish a Care Academy – this has already been mentioned in question 1. The Welsh language and the principle of the active offer will be completely central and essential to these developments.

- 2. Provision / Placements beyond Gwynedd and Wales** – We are fairly restricted when trying to secure intensive care placements for a child or a residential placement for adults with Learning Disabilities from Gwynedd out-of-county. Projects have been identified as part of the Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 to address the lack of provision in Gwynedd.
 - a. Developing a residential provision for looked after children in small group homes A project to develop registered residential homes for small groups of up to two children, which will allow them to receive care in Gwynedd, attend local schools, and fully participate in the lives of their communities.
 - b. Supported Housing in the Community – a minimum of 6 houses located across the county to offer suitable and safe care homes to individuals with Learning Disabilities. The service has an accommodation project where they identify individuals who have been placed out-of-county and prioritise them to enable their return to Gwynedd if they wish.

In the same manner, we are also concerned about the language needs of young offenders who receive a custodial sentence. Individuals who were sentenced to prison during the past year have been sent to England because there is not a suitable provision in North Wales. This weakens the young person's contact with their family, language and their culture. This matter has been escalated nationally to the Welsh Government for some years, but the situation remains the same. This puts young people from Gwynedd at a disadvantage by failing to meet their language needs, and is of course a matter of significant concern.

- 3. Technology** – we try to ensure that any technology we use to provide care services is available in Welsh, but this does cause challenges for us. Very often, the latest technology available is very specialist in nature and is only available in English. We try to work with companies to develop resources in Welsh but are finding it difficult to gain their interest in doing so unless there is an additional financial incentive available to them.
- 4. Working with partners** – running integrated services jointly with the Health Board can create challenges for us linguistically, as many of the meetings begin in English. We do make an effort to influence, for example by pressing on them to ensure a simultaneous translation provision in more formal meetings. The same is true when we attend regional and national meetings in the field. A number of our partners do not offer a translation provision, particularly in virtual meetings, and we often have to ask and press on them to be able to contribute in Welsh.

Complaints and compliments – we have not received any formal complaints or compliments during the year that relate specifically to Welsh or bilingual services. Of course, we have received many compliments in relation to individuals and families' satisfaction with the services they receive, and many of these services are in Welsh, therefore we believe that meeting individuals' language needs naturally contributes to the quality of the service.

However, there are several possible reasons why compliments or complaints do not reach us formally. There is some evidence to suggest that individuals in the care field especially are unwilling to complain for fear that it could affect the care and/or support they are receiving. Since a substantial proportion of our service is available in Welsh, it is also possible that these services are such a natural part of individuals' lives that they would not consider complimenting them formally - but we certainly know that there are workers in the field who are aware of informal thanks and comments from residents because they are being provided care in Welsh.

Question 3. Development Opportunities

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

Answer

In order to further promote the Welsh language within the communities of Gwynedd, it is essential that the Social Services fully implement the principles of More than Just Words and ensure that the residents of Gwynedd always receive services in Welsh without having to ask.

We need to ensure that our entire workforce is aware of the requirements of More than Just Words and what it means to them. We are in the process of developing short videos to this end as a first step. There is a feeling that some of the county's most vulnerable residents are not receiving a

service in Welsh without having to ask every time, and that in some cases we are asking them which language they would prefer. We need to continue working towards a situation where the active offer is a custom and that no-one has to express any language preference, that we make the best use of our employees who are fluent in Welsh, and that we can effectively measure the impact of this on the residents of Gwynedd.

As has already been mentioned, it is crucial in order to promote the Welsh language that we continue to push for any technology that is developed as part of alternative care in future to be fully available in Welsh. We will continue to work with Universities and national companies to ensure that the latest care technology can communicate in Welsh.

We will also continue to ensure that our involvement with our partners is bilingual and will promote the importance of use of the Welsh language for the county's residents, and by doing so influence practice in organisations outside the Council.