
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 05.07.16

Present: Councillor Eirwyn Williams (Chairman)
Councillor Charles Jones (Vice-chairman)

Councillors: Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Gweno Glyn, Alwyn Gruffydd, Charles W.Jones, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Hefin Williams, and John Wyn Williams

Also in attendance: Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Cabinet Member - Welsh Language).

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery), Gwenllian Williams (Welsh Language Development Officer), Hawis Jones (Strategic Planning, Performance and Projects Manager), Debbie Anne Jones (Welsh Language Officer) and Ann Roberts (Member Support Officer).

Apologies: Councillor Tom Ellis, Eric M. Jones and Owain Williams.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Eirwyn Williams as Chair of this committee for 2016/17.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Charles Jones as Vice-chair of this committee for 2016/17.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee that took place on 21 April, 2016, as a true record.

In a enquiry regarding the name of a local beach, the Welsh Language Development Officer confirmed that she had received a response from five local community/town councils noting that both names were used - Traeth Greigddu and Black Rock. The Welsh Language Development Officer would return to the other three community councils for a response so that evidence could be provided to the OS.

Reference was made to an English map submitted to the Planning Committee on Monday, 4 July and it was agreed that the matter would be discussed with the Planning Department.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER - THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Debbie Anne Jones was welcomed back to the Council following maternity leave.

Submitted – the verbal report of the Cabinet Member - the Welsh Language, detailing recent developments in the field, including:-

- Language Audit and the action plan. Promoting the Welsh Language by means of our valuable resource, namely our staff.
- Meeting with nearby Councils to discuss how to respond to the emerging Language Standards requirements.
- Bangor University conference and their research which provided evidence. Need for more collaboration.
- Meeting with Aberystwyth University. It was reported that the University was exploring research fields in housing, the movement of people and others.
- Bangor Language Centre would be opening at the end of the summer.
- Meeting to be arranged with Welsh Government civil servants to discuss Gwynedd Council's Hunaniaith.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

6. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Welsh Language Development Officer detailing the latest language complaints to hand and the responses.

A complaint had been made regarding English only swimming certificates presented to children by the Leisure Centre in Pwllheli.

A member reported that she had submitted a complaint a fortnight previously about a sign which had errors in the Welsh language. The Welsh Language Development Officer had not received the complaint thus far.

It was reported that the language audit showed the need to target specific fields such as signs and leisure.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

7. THE ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER

Submitted - the report of the Language Development Officer to the Welsh Language Commissioner, reporting against the language standards that came into force on 31 March 2016.

It was noted that the language standards were minimal and it was Gwynedd Council's ambition to achieve the higher levels.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

8. LANGUAGE AUDIT - RESULTS OF THE LANGUAGE AUDIT AND ACTION PLAN

Submitted - the report of the Welsh Language Development Officer by the Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery. Details were provided on how the audit was undertaken and the results from the work which led to the further action steps. It was reported that there was a gap in some service elements which prevented a complete Welsh language service being offered, for example, systems not available in Welsh. Nevertheless, it was reported that there would be communication with other bodies to put pressure on them to offer a Welsh language service.

The 'mystery shopper' exercise found that the Welsh language pattern in youth clubs was very disappointing with the need to equip staff to be more confident to use the Welsh language all the time.

It was reported that the Council had not prepared an explanation of what exactly the Welsh Language Policy entailed when using the language. Consequently, new guidelines had been produced recently which included a reference to assistance. Reference was made to the need for contracts with external companies to include conditions which detailed what exactly was required, for example, installing Welsh language signs, and the need for a Welsh speaking officer on the site.

It was noted that recruitment in some fields was difficult and that there were arrangements in the pipeline to discuss the matter with every Head of Service in turn as a result of previous decisions by this Committee.

It was agreed that it was necessary to change staff and managers' behaviour and this could be influenced by the Internal Communications Team. It was noted that the phrase "Always start every conversation in Welsh" was very important in changing staff and managers' behaviour.

A member suggested that it would be very valuable to ask for feedback regarding the Language Charter from head teachers of schools. Concern was expressed by the member that the paperwork with the Language Charter was becoming a burden on the schools. In response to the member's concern, the Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery reported that Gwynedd Council had experimented with the Language Charter for two years and were now examining what was good practice.

The Welsh Language Development Officer explained that the Council was in the process of developing a language web for the office which included eight simple questions on the use of the Welsh language, staff awareness and confidence. With the language web, the Welsh Language Development Officer would be hearing from the officers themselves rather than managers as it was only the opinion of managers which was received from the Welsh language audit. It was intended to use that for targeting interventions in departments which needed attention.

The observation was made that staff needed encouragement and reference was made to the unbelievable work which had been achieved recently by the Welsh football team and Gwynedd Council could achieve similar work. It was noted that two Hunaniaith community officers had visited Youth Clubs providing presentations on Welsh history.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

9. LANGUAGE INVESTIGATION - THE VISIBILITY OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN GWYNEDD

Submitted - the report of the Strategic Planning Performance and Projects Manager providing an update on the work of the investigation thus far. It was reported that good progress was being made with the work and the aim was to report to the Language Committee in January 2017.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

10. REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Submitted - a report published by the Working Group on the Welsh Language and Local Government, June 2016, by the Welsh Language Development Officer. It was noted that the report was very positive for Gwynedd and proposed 14 recommendations. It was reported that Gwynedd Council was already responding to most of these recommendations. It was noted that one of the recommendations was very relevant to Gwynedd, namely "Local Governments, including in their function as Local Education Authorities, should be under a statutory duty to undertake workforce planning in terms of linguistic skills, and where required, to provide suitable training to meet those needs".

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report and to send the following observation to the Public Services Minister, noting that the Language Committee welcomes the report which is moving in the right direction and is looking forward to the next steps.

11. THE LANGUAGE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2016-17

Submitted – the report of the Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery on the Committee's work programme for the coming year.

A member suggested that there was a need for a statement from the Council on the development of the Language Plan. It was reported that a new Strategic Plan would be submitted in March 2017 with a statement of intent to be submitted to staff prior to that. It was reported that consideration would be given to strengthen meetings of the full Council and to include a discussion statement on 'the state of the nation' regarding important plans. It would be possible to include in this such matters as the language audit.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

Everyone was thanked for their contribution to the Language Committee and Wales was wished well for tomorrow.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.35am.