
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 21.04.16

Present: Councillor Gweno Glyn (Chair)

Councillors: Elwyn Edwards, Tom Ellis, Alan Jones Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Charles W. Jones, Eric M. Jones, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams, Hefin Williams, John Wyn Williams and Owain Williams.

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

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Corporate Support), Gwenllian Williams (Welsh Language Development Officer), Geraint Owen, (Head of Corporate Support Department) and Ann Roberts (Member Support Officer).

Apologies: No apologies were received.

1. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 14 January 2016, as a true record.

It was explained that the meeting with the Chief Executive of Cartrefi Cymunedol Gwynedd to discuss the opportunities and concerns had not yet taken place as the Chief Executive had lost his father recently. The meeting had been rescheduled for the following day, 22 April 2016.

3. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER - THE WELSH LANGUAGE

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

- The Hunaniaith Community work which had been completed for the year and that good work had been undertaken, but that trying to determine what the impact of the expenditure had been was proving difficult.
- A Manager had been appointed for the Bangor Language Centre.
- An initial discussion had been held with Dr Rhian Hodges from Bangor University and we were awaiting practical suggestions in terms of measuring success.
- The Language Charter had been in place for three years in the Primary Schools and had started in the Secondary Schools. It had been rolled out across Primary Schools in North Wales but a robust analysis procedure was required.
- A Language Audit of Gwynedd Council staff had been conducted and the questionnaires had been returned.
- Efforts would be made to seek commitment to increasing the use of the Welsh language amongst external bodies via the Public Services Board. The work of arranging meetings with other councils in order to open a dialogue on promoting the use of the language would start the following month.

The following matters were discussed:-

(A) The use and standard of the Welsh language

The Welsh language used by Council staff was discussed together with the objective established in the Council's Language Policy. It was agreed that the audience needed to be identified and appropriate language used. The Senior Manager - Corporate Support noted that one of the weaknesses seen was that the language of the Council was overly-complicated. It was also noted that staff confidence was a factor and that the support available was working but it must be understood that increasing confidence took time and that there would be several levels of achievement.

A member referred to the need to tackle the lack of use of the Welsh language on digital phones and other digital communication methods rather than focusing on language standards and trying to win children over to the Welsh language via sport and leisure activities. It was reported that there were lessons to be learnt from the Basque Country. It was noted that a different solution was required in all parts of Wales rather than one scheme for the whole of Wales. A member referred to the good work of the Language Charter and the work of developing Welsh-language apps with Cwmni Da which had been teaching children.

Reference was made to the matter of trying to persuade parents to speak Welsh with the children. The Senior Manager – Corporate Support referred to the figures which showed a slippage in the use made of the Welsh language by children once they moved to the Secondary schools with the need to identify why this happened and consider how to resolve it.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

4. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

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

The enquiry regarding the English name on the Ordnance Survey map, namely Black Rock Sands, was discussed. It was suggested that the Welsh and English names should be used. It was explained that Ordnance Survey chose names based on local use of any name and that the Council needed to be prepared for this challenge. It was noted that efforts should be made to try to ensure the use of the indigenous Welsh names in order to try to prevent the decline in Welsh place names.

RESOLVED the need to

- a) Ensure that any telephone conversations with Ordnance Survey are minuted.**
- b) Ensure that Ordnance Survey consults with local Town / Community Councils before deciding which name to use on Ordnance Survey maps.**
- c) To ask the Language Development Officer to gather evidence from old Ordnance Survey maps and any local history books in order to confirm the indigenous name used before discussing further with Ordnance Survey.**

5. THE COUNCIL'S LANGUAGE STANDARDS AND POLICY (EMPLOYMENT ISSUES)

The report was submitted at the request of the members in order to have a better understanding of the Language Standards and categorisation.

The report was submitted by the Head of Corporate Support Department and he reported on the problems identified. He explained that language levels had been denoted to fulfil the requirements of the posts; however, there was no certainty that every Manager had given

adequate consideration when denoting an appropriate level for posts and that the language levels denoted for each post needed to be reviewed. In addition, it was reported that there were no recognised criteria in relation to the existing levels and that any assessment was dependent on interpretation and professional opinion of the Co-ordinator in consultation with the line manager. He reported on the intention for the Language Tutor to use the assessment plan noted in Appendix 2 which set out practical language levels which were in keeping with the WJEC language levels and to assess the officers' attainment against the language requirements.

It was further noted that an agreed timescale needed to be set in order to reach the language requirements but that timescale would need to be flexible and adapted for the language requirements of every individual situation.

In response to a member's request for figures in terms of officers' progress in reaching the requirements, the Head of Corporate Support Department confirmed that officers were making progress and that there were great successes which resulted in awarding the Dafydd Orwig prize every year.

In response to the members' concerns that the Council's conditions were not realised, it was reported that it was important to ensure that Heads of Departments referred the officers to the Language Tutor.

It was explained that it was intended to submit the details of the recommendation to the Management Group as the next step, which would be followed by scheduling consultations with service managers across the Council.

In response to an enquiry by a member regarding the reason why the Council would appoint an officer who was not on the language requirements level, it was explained that there was a shortage of Welsh-speakers for some posts particularly in some specific areas of the County.

The Head of Corporate Support Department confirmed that there would be robust evidence under this new Scheme to display whether officers reached the language requirements relevant to their posts.

In response to an enquiry by a Member regarding why chief officers were exempt from the Under-performance Policy provided as an appendix to the report, it was explained that those officers worked under different conditions of employment and that there was a corresponding policy for them also.

In terms of timescale, it was explained that the Scheme would be implemented immediately with the Human Resources Advisory Service and the Learning and Development Service raising awareness of the new arrangements.

RESOLVED

- a) To approve the Scheme**
- b) To ask the Head of Corporate Support Department to submit a progress report against the Scheme to the Language Committee in 12 months' time.**

The meeting commenced at 2pm and concluded at 3.25pm.