
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: MONDAY, 20 JUNE 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors: Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn, Gruffydd Williams, Jina Gwyrfai, Llio Elenid Owen, Menna Baines, Meryl Roberts, Olaf Cai Larsen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Sasha Williams

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Service Manager), Llywela Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllian Mair Williams (Language Adviser), Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer). Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer) and Rhodri Marc Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

OTHERS INVITED:

Councillor Elwyn Jones (Chair of the Council), Richard Medwyn Hughes (Vice-chair of the Council) and Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support)

Item 8: Alun Gwilym Williams (Senior Business Manager, Adults, Health and Well-being Department)

Item 9: Marian Parry Hughes (Head of Children and Supporting Families Department)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Elect Councillor Elfed Wyn ab Elwyn as Chair of the Welsh Language Committee for the year 2022/23.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Elect Councillor Llio Elenid Owen as Vice-chair of the Welsh Language Committee for the year 2022/23.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Alan Jones Evans, Gwynfor Owen and Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

5. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 7 April, 2022, as a true record.

7. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The report was presented by the Language Adviser, and she briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- The Language Adviser explained that this report had been created as a result of Section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which made it a requirement for the Council after the end of the last financial year, before 30 June 2022.
- It was also noted that its purpose was to summarise and explain how the Council implemented and complied with the language standards.
- Pride was expressed that the report's figures showed that 99.1% of the Council's workforce had Welsh language skills. This figure included any person who had any type of Welsh language skills - whether they were fluent, partly-fluent or only understood a little bit of the language.
- It was expressed that 91% of all Council staff met the language designation of their post. The ability to work through the medium of Welsh was very important to the Council, and the Language Adviser was proud that this figure was high. Nevertheless, it was accepted that this figure could be increased. One way of attempting to do this at present was by offering Welsh language training to those staff who did not yet meet their language requirements, in order to help them develop the skills.
- It was noted that 909 jobs had been advertised on the Council's website in the last financial year where it was noted that Welsh language skills were essential for the role.
- It was explained that a number of developments had been completed over the year in order to ensure that bilingual services could be offered effectively:
 - o The Translation and Democracy Services teams had been busy over the year developing facilities in order to be able to hold multi-location meetings. Testing had been undertaken to ensure that the meetings could be held with people attending in the chambers and some people attending virtually, whilst also ensuring that the simultaneous translation service could continue without any obstacles.
 - o Trials had been undertaken with Council departments for a new self-assessment system. This system asked them to complete a self-assessment in order to see to what extent they complied with the language standards. This enabled the Corporate Support department to carry out a Corporate Self-assessment of the Council's compliance with the language standards, for submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- A member asked whether it was possible to look at the percentage of Council staff numbers who met the language designation level of their job over time, so that it could be compared with the last years.
- It was asked whether it would be possible to contact other agencies and bodies that collaborated with the Council when they suffered from linguistic failures. A member

also asked if this could be done at a high level in order to ensure that the linguistic standards of our partners were sufficient.

- It was expressed that anecdotal evidence suggested that the standards of language skills increased as salary scales increased, thus this could create a social divide. Specific reference was made to the difference in skills between jobs in locations such as schools.
- It was felt that the ability to use the Welsh language in the workplace should be essential for every post, because in some circumstances the communication language changed from Welsh to English naturally if one (or more) of the staff did not speak Welsh.

In response to these points, the Language Adviser noted

- That it was not possible to compare the numbers of staff who met the language designation of their post at present, since the data had not been gathered in the same method over the past years due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, it would be very interesting to compare these figures from year to year and see whether the figure increased or decreased. The Language Adviser was confident that this could be done from the next report onwards, because by then the data would have been gathered in the same method for two consecutive years. The Language Adviser was also confident that the relevant figure of 91% would increase this year as more Council staff completed a language self-assessment and as more staff attended linguistic training.
- That issues regarding the linguistic failures of our partners and other agencies were being raised by Council staff. Subject to the circumstances of the linguistic failures, officers would refer to them at meetings with the relevant people or would make direct contact with the agency/partner. Including such failures in a report such as this drew the matter to the attention of the Language Commissioner, who would then place pressure on the agency to improve its language standards. It was noted that it would be possible to put a protocol in place in order to establish a process of contacting partners effectively, should a linguistic failure occur.
- That there was an element of truth in the fact that the linguistic skills of staff increased as salary levels increased, particularly written and reading and comprehension skills. This could be explained to some degree by the requirements of those posts - i.e. a manager level post would require higher language skills due to the need to present reports to committees, etc. As the same need did not exist with lower-level posts, it was likely that the linguistic skills of the individuals were lower in general. However, the Language Adviser also drew attention to the fact that offering comprehensive training opportunities was a key part of the language designations project.
- That every job advertised on the Council's website noted that Welsh language skills were essential (and not desirable). No job was advertised with desirable language requirements. What varied was the specific level of skills that were designated for the post. The Language Adviser also referred to the challenges that were facing the Council in terms of recruitment. Also, it was noted that there was a clear expectation that any worker being appointed but who did not meet the language requirement of their post followed training and worked to reach those linguistic levels over time.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and to note the observations received and approve the report for publication by the closing date, 30 June 2022.

8. LANGUAGE POLICY AND WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION ACTIVITIES: ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELL-BEING DEPARTMENT

The report was submitted by the department's Senior Business Manager, and in brief, he drew attention to the following main points:

- It was explained that the department followed a Successive Strategy Framework entitled 'More than Just Words', which set requirements on the department to ensure that care was available for the residents of the County through the medium of Welsh without them having to request this.
- It was reported that one of the department's biggest challenges of late was the recruitment of new staff. This was a national problem, and within the county, some areas experienced more difficulty than others with the recruitment of staff. In addition to this, there were some specific posts, such as Occupational Therapists, that were difficult to fill as specialist skills, as well as Welsh language skills, were needed.
- He elaborated on a very specialised field that the department was involved in, namely Dementia. Further investigations revealed that it was all-important for patients to receive care in the language that they felt most comfortable to use, as this improved their well-being. Subsequently, the department was working to develop Dementia units in supported housing, dementia specialist support staff and new technology to support people who wished to stay in their own homes.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- A member asked whether it was possible to ensure that Welsh-medium care was available for people suffering from Dementia within the private sector.
- Enquiries were made as to whether the department had had to consider advertising for posts where Welsh was not essential in order to attract applicants who had the relevant specialist skills.
- It was enquired whether the department had a process to try and pair-up patients with carers who were able to provide care in accordance with the patient's language choice, particularly bearing in mind that not all patients required care through the medium of Welsh.
- It was asked whether there was an intention to offer care through the medium of Welsh beyond Gwynedd at present, and whether the budget was available in order to provide care effectively.

In response, the Senior Business Manager noted:

That ensuring care through the medium of Welsh to patients within the private sector was very challenging as every patient had the right to choose where they received their care. This was the reason why the department was so eager for the Council to offer and provide care through the medium of Welsh.

- It was confirmed that every effort was being done to pair-up patients with carers who had suitable linguistic skills. This could be challenging at times, particularly when a patient needed urgent care.

- It was noted that there was an intention to develop the out-of-county opportunities of receiving care through the medium of Welsh. It was noted that these opportunities were very restricted at the moment, but Gwynedd led the way to encourage other counties through the 'More than Just Words' forum.
- It was explained that there was an intention to try and attract professional workers, e.g. Social Workers and Therapists who had moved away from the area and returned to Gwynedd to live and work, in order to strengthen the provision in Gwynedd.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and to note the observations received.

9. LANGUAGE POLICY AND WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION ACTIVITIES: CHILDREN AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES DEPARTMENT

The report was submitted by the Head of Department, and in brief she drew attention to the following main points:

- It was explained that this department also followed the 'More than Just Words' Successive Strategy Framework, in the same way as the Adults, Health and Well-being Department,
- The Early Years Service collaborated closely with CWLWM, which were 5 national lead organisations for childcare, in order to promote the Welsh language across childcare settings within the County. This very often led to new projects that were promoted by the 5 organisations, such as a new podcast by Mudiad Meithrin with the assistance of Nia Parry, entitled 'Baby Steps Into Welsh', which assisted children and parents to learn the language. The Early Years Service also benefitted from collaborating with CWLWM as the Mudiad Meithrin's Cynllun Croesi'r Bont bridged nursery classes linguistically, and 11 cylchoedd meithrin within the county received such support.
- It was also reported that the department promoted the Welsh language independently in many ways. £100 grants were being offered to non-Welsh speaking private childminders to purchase relevant Welsh language resources. In addition to this, many teams within the department used the 'FRIENDS' parenting course and had managed to translate the course into Welsh for the County's parents.
- It was noted that it was not possible to obtain a suitable childcare setting within the county for every child, often for safety reasons. If no Welsh-medium setting was available for the child, the department and the Social Workers would continue to visit and contact the children through the medium of Welsh, in order to promote their linguistic development.
- It was explained that the department was leading 55 Nursery Education providers at present, who received support from an Early Years Teacher to assist with teaching through the medium of Welsh. Pride was expressed in the Flying Start Scheme, which served in deprived areas in the County, and provided a Welsh-medium education to 2 year old children. There were 12 Flying Start Child Care settings within the County at present.

- It was highlighted that work was being completed to promote the Welsh language for older children as well, such as creating and developing the Duke of Edinburgh Award App for secondary school children.
- It was confirmed that promoting the Welsh language had been given prominence by the department over the past year. One member of staff, Stephen Wood, succeeded in the Dafydd Orwig Memorial Awards this year, for his success in learning Welsh. As well as using the language verbally within the department, many written resources and videos had been developed to train staff on various important features within the department. Also, the department was in the process of dubbing resources for regional and national use, in order to provide an effective bilingual service.
- A discussion was held on the effective work of the Youth Service, and it was noted that many schemes such as gardening, cookery and graffiti workshops, were now available through the medium of Welsh and that the feedback of 16-25 year olds who had participated in the workshops, jointly with the 'FRIENDS' scheme, stated that they had enjoyed the fact that they had been able to participate in Welsh, as they felt that this was beneficial to their personal development.
- The committee was updated on the Activities and Play Framework for children, young people and families. Now, 24 activity providers were able to do this through the medium of Welsh. Furthermore, over 50 organisations had come together to present well-being activities during the recent well-being week. The latest technology was used via the 'Haia' platform in order to hold all activities as Hybrid events, and through the medium of Welsh. Following this success, a new App was being developed - 'Ai Di', in order to help connect children and carers. It could be used to connect with schools, as well as for community use.
- Members were reassured that linguistic requirements were being included in every third-party contract where suitable and that this process was monitored regularly between the Service Manager and the Manager on behalf of the provider.

Concern was expressed about the recent recruitment problems, similar to those of other Council departments. It was noted that it was at times challenging to recruit people who were qualified and had specialist skills, as well as Welsh language skills. The department was looking at ways to overcome the problems, as well as provide support to staff members who wished to develop their Welsh language skills.

- It was added that challenges were facing the department when collaborating with partners since the facilities were not always available to be able to communicate effectively in Welsh. It was explained that not everyone could offer a simultaneous translation provision.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- Pride was expressed in Gwynedd Council's translation service and a discussion was held on the need for a protocol to demand that the Welsh language was used when collaborating with partners and to inform them if their Welsh language services were insufficient.
- It was noted that facilities were being wasted if people did not use them. Everyone was reminded of the need to use the Welsh language if they were able to, in order to sustain it and help others to learn.

- The department's work in developing a number of new and useful apps for people of all ages was praised. It was asked whether it was possible to monitor the use made of the apps to see how much use was made of the Welsh versions.

In response, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor noted:

- That staff could be reminded of the current language policy and their responsibilities regarding informing partners of linguistic failures. It was explained further that a new protocol, as previously discussed, could be created in order for staff to inform the department's officers that a linguistic failure has occurred, so that contact could be made with the partners, the Language Commissioner and the Government, if needed.

In response, the Language Adviser noted:

- As this matter had been raised a number of times during the meeting, that consideration could be given to adding a protocol as an amendment to the new language policy, before it was submitted to cabinet members, should the committee agree to do so. It was expressed that the fact that officers had a responsibility to inform and respond to any linguistic failure was positive, because they had a direct contact with the partner, and that this reinforced the language policy.

In response, the Head of Children and Supporting Families Department noted:

- That there was a need to ensure that partners and other regional and national agencies improved their linguistic standards as the use of the Welsh language was secondary in many meetings. It was agreed that there was a need to use our method of implementing the Welsh language as an example to other agencies.
- It was noted in response that it was not possible to monitor the use of Welsh in a number of the apps developed to date, as they dealt with individuals' personal information. Nevertheless, the hope was to be able to monitor the amount of Welsh used on the Duke of Edinburgh Award app.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and to note the observations received.

10. LANGUAGE POLICY

The report was presented by the Language Adviser, and she briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- She began by explaining that the department had started to look into potential revisions to the language policy in 2020, following major changes in the way the Council operated when providing services to the public.
- It was explained that a need had arisen to provide clear guidance to staff about specific subjects, such as how the Welsh language was being used via the Council's IT systems.
- Details were given on the proposed revisions to the policy, such as:
 - o General principles at the start of each section
 - o Substantial changes to Section 5 (Digital services - website, apps and self-service) to explain the use of Welsh in different technological systems.

- Adding a new clause to Section 6 (Signage) to reflect the Council's commitment to the place names project and promote Welsh place names.
- Substantial changes to Section 12 (job advertisements and the recruitment process).
- Obtaining assurance of whom is accountable to the policy as well as the responsibilities of Elected Members and Language Committee Members under Section 15 (Accountability).

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- A member asked whether consideration had been given to including suitable wording in various sections of the policy to ensure that the Council protected the percentage of Welsh speakers in communities, as well as maintain Welsh services for those speakers.
- The need to ask one question through the medium of English at the Council's recruitment meetings was questioned and considered.
- A member asked whether something needed to be included which noted the need for Welsh language skills for sub-contractors who worked with the Council on various projects.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that elected members were bound by the Code of Conduct, and therefore there was a need to consider whether the language policy acknowledged this.
- It was asked if there were any implications for members of staff who needed to receive training to achieve the language designation of their job but have been unable to attend those training sessions.
- It was asked whether this was the final opportunity to propose changes to the language policy.

In response, the Language Adviser noted:

- That consideration could be given to the point made about protecting the percentage of Welsh speakers within our communities.

That the language standards of sub-contractors who worked with the Council was considered in a specific section of the language policy, but that the wording of this section could be revisited to ensure that this was highlighted.

- It was confirmed that there were no consequences if staff missed Welsh language training to achieve their language designation. Nevertheless, individuals who did not reach their language designation were regularly monitored to see what type of training could benefit them so that they could succeed to foster Welsh linguistic skills.

In response the Democracy and Language Services Manager noted:

- That the suggested changes would be considered before a draft language policy was submitted to the Cabinet. Changes proposed by heads of department would also be considered. If the Cabinet approved the draft, it would be submitted to the Full Council where there would be an opportunity to propose any amendments.

RESOLVED

- To accept the draft report and to note the observations received and approve to proceed to submit the Policy - with appropriate revisions - to the Council Cabinet as the next step in the process for it to be formally approved.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.15pm.

CHAIR