
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: 28 JANUARY 2025

PRESENT:

Councillors: Menna Baines (Chair)
Meryl Roberts (Vice-chair)

Alan Jones Evans, Jina Gwyrfai, Olaf Cai Larsen, Gwynfor Owen, Elfed Williams, Beca Brown, Anne Lloyd Jones, Hefin Underwood and Peter Thomas.

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Nia Lewis (Language Adviser) and Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Item 5: Gwern ap Rhisiart (Head of Education Department) and Rhys Meredydd Glyn (Head of Gwynedd Immersion Education System)
Item 6: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Services Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Rhys Tudur and Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn.

Councillor Beca Brown was welcomed to her first meeting of the Committee and Councillor Llio Elenid Owen was thanked for her contribution to the Committee over the past few years, explaining that she was no longer a Member of the Committee due to her new appointment to the Cyngor Gwynedd Cabinet.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 22 October 2024, as a true record.

5. REPORT OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-2033.

The report was presented by the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System and the Head of the Education Department. They referred briefly to the following main points:

It was reported on a project conducted jointly between the Gwynedd Youth Service and the Urdd aimed at increasing opportunities for young people to take part in activities through the medium of Welsh. It was explained that the aim of the project was to provide more opportunities for young people to use the Welsh language outside of school, increasing their confidence in the language. It was detailed that 5 Community Aelwydydd had been developed in the Felinheli, Bangor, Caernarfon, Ardudwy and Bala areas, offering various activities outside school hours. It was confirmed that these activities were currently held at six secondary schools, but it was emphasised that they hoped to expand on this collaborative project to more secondary schools in the future through further collaboration with the Urdd, Cell B, Gisda and Menter Iaith Gwynedd.

It was explained that the Gwynedd Youth Service received a grant worth £20,000 annually from the Welsh Government to try to increase young people's confidence in the Welsh language. It was noted that the Service's focus was on areas proving challenges with the Welsh language, such as Bangor and Dolgellau. It was acknowledged that this grant had come to an end at the end of the current financial year and, therefore, there was a need to ensure that the work was funded through alternative methods in the future.

Reference was made to modernising plans and expanding on the immersion provision to teach Welsh to children, confirming that the work of building and modernising in Phase 1 had been completed. It was detailed that this phase was a project worth £1.1 million to create immersion units that transition Primary and Secondary education. It was confirmed that a new Immersion Unit had been built in Tywyn and it had officially opened on 20 January 2025. It was acknowledged that there had been a short slippage in the timetable of this development, but the Unit was now ready to receive Welsh learners. In the same manner, it was confirmed that Phase 2 of the modernising developments of the immersion provision was underway with new units being developed in Dolgellau and Maesincla. It was confirmed that the current unit at Llangybi would be moving to the Ysgol Cymerau, Pwllheli site. It was hoped that the three new units would be operational from the summer term 2025.

It was confirmed that the virtual 'Aberwla' ITC project had now been completed. It was explained that the project gave Welsh learners an opportunity to gain confidence to use the language socially in virtual locations before communicating in Welsh in their communities. It was explained that these virtual locations included a glamping field, a supermarket, a garage, a café, a leisure centre and a library. It was emphasised that this project was innovative, and work was being done to trial it in other areas in Wales, including Wrexham, Ynys Môn, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Sir Gâr, Bro Morgannwg and Ceredigion.

It was confirmed that Bangor University had been commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the Immersion Education System in Gwynedd. It was noted that they had conducted engagement meetings with stakeholders, as well as observing learners in the immersion units as part of the evaluation. It was explained that a final report with detailed feedback was expected in March 2025. In the same manner, it was confirmed that officers had presented a report on the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) to the Welsh Government and had received positive feedback. It was emphasised that GwE provided support to the transitional schools to ensure that potent arrangements were in place to increase the Welsh medium education provision.

Members were reminded that a series of engagement sessions to discuss Cyngor Gwynedd's current Education Language Policy had been held recently, with support from the Freelance Language Adviser as a facilitator. It was explained that 20 sessions with various stakeholders had been held and the freelance Language Adviser collated all the

information to draw-up a new draft Education Language Policy that reflected the discussions held.

Attention was drawn to the valuable work of Menter Iaith Gwynedd as they worked with the immersion system, schools and communities for the 'Arwyr Iaith' project. It was explained that this project allowed pupils who had attended the immersion centres to work on an event in Welsh to show their new language skills with the wider community. This project was recently praised in the Botwnnog area and it was hoped that the success of the project would encourage more communities to celebrate the successes of new speakers. They were proud that the project was currently operational in the Tregarth, Porthmadog and Manod areas.

An update was provided that the brand-new Language Charter Framework had been launched, with several training sessions conducted for Gwynedd schools staff. It was explained that the coordinator worked to establish bronze, silver and gold awards when validating the Language Charter.

During the discussion, the following observations were made: -

The Youth Service and the Urdd were congratulated for their work in establishing Community Aelwydydd, and it was asked how the data regarding activities was gathered. It was considered that 19,625 participations were high given the general Welsh language levels. In response to the enquiry, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System confirmed that the figure included every individual who had attended events, noting that it included the same individual if they attended more than one event. It was noted that the method of gathering data would be adapted to ensure clarity in the future.

It was asked whether the Department worked with local rugby clubs and the Young Farmers' Organisation in Gwynedd, as they were organisations that operated a lot through the medium of Welsh and working with them would be another way of gaining young people's confidence in the Welsh language. In response, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System noted that working with these organisations was a good idea in the future with benefits for the young people of Gwynedd and the Welsh language. It was emphasised that the importance of the Young Farmers' Wales organisation was stressed as part of the Department and the Language enterprise's work as an example of informal situations for Welsh learners and speakers to practise their Welsh skills.

The Youth Service was congratulated for providing over 3000 activities and it was asked whether there were any plans underway to ensure that activities would be held in the Arfon and Dwyfor areas in the future. In addition, it was asked whether there was any data available for the number of attendees who noted that they enjoyed using the Welsh language during the sessions, as well as more qualitative data for the future. In response to the observations, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System confirmed that the number of activities was praiseworthy and the relevant officer was to be commended, he explained that a grant worth £20,000 funded the employment of the individual who steered this work. It was also emphasised that the individual worked closely with officers in schools to ensure that additional independent events were being organised in addition to the officer's work. It was acknowledged that event attendees were not asked whether they enjoyed using the Welsh language and further discussions had been held to ensure that this would be added in the future, as well as presenting more qualitative data.

The arrangements of the Immersion System in Gwynedd were praised, considering whether it was possible to immerse more people into the language. It was noted that 195 individuals had been immersed this year and it was asked whether it was possible to increase this figure. In response to the enquiry, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion

Education System confirmed that receiving 195 individuals to the Centres was very high. It was emphasised that the training received here was very specialised and it would cause a risk to the quality of the training and disrupt the homely nature of the Centres should there be more attendees.

The evaluation of the Immersion System was discussed, and more information was requested regarding which individuals have had the opportunity to present observations. In response, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System explained that teachers and headteachers from schools who had pupils attend the immersion Centres had been invited to share observations as part of the evaluation. It was added that pupils and parents had also given their opinions to ensure that the evaluation was as detailed as possible.

It was asked how many latecomers had attended the Immersion Centres, as well as how many individuals between years 2 and 9 were there. In response, it was explained that this data had not been gathered and it would be substantial work to gather the data from schools. However, it was detailed that there was no expectation for the individuals to reach the same standards at the same time, as the system had been formed to ensure that everyone was learning the language on a scale that adapted to them as individuals. It was emphasised that a detailed progress report was provided to the schools after the schools ended their period at the Centres to ensure that the teachers were aware of the individual's understanding of the language in order to provide appropriate support in the future.

Pride was expressed that regaining confidence weeks were held for pupils in years 7-9, asking whether there were plans to expand this to other schools in the future. The Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System explained that this plan had been brought to the attention of some officers following a meeting of a national network that shared good practice regarding the Welsh language. It was emphasised that it was an important plan, and the wish was for it to be presented wider in Gwynedd. However, it was acknowledged that challenges arose when considering that transport budgets disrupted the ability to realise the projects.

It was asked whether the Education Department gathered data on the linguistic impact of those areas where small schools had closed due to the low number of pupils. In response, the Head of the Education Department confirmed that detailed consideration had been given to the Welsh language when considering closing schools, as the Department completed an Equality Impact Assessment regarding the decision. It was explained that these assessments most often noted that there were no linguistic risks arising from closing schools because there were arrangements in place to ensure that the children's education language remained the same as they attended another school. It was emphasised that there was no data regarding long-term linguistic impact gathered by the Department as this was not a required consideration as part of the legal processes.

It was noted that 73.2% of Year 11 pupils studied at least five Key Stage 4 subjects through the medium of Welsh, as well as a Welsh First Language GCSE. It was added that 84.2% of Year 11 pupils sat a Welsh Second Language GCSE examination. It was asked what work was being done to ensure that these figures increased in the next few years. In response, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System explained that many projects were underway to ensure that there was an increase in the Welsh provision of GCSE subjects. It was mentioned that GwE worked with Gwynedd transitional schools to help them with this requirement. In addition, it was confirmed that a plan was being developed jointly with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, for the next 3-5 years to increase teachers' confidence to teach GCSE subjects through the medium of Welsh.

It was asked what use of information technology was being made within the Education Department to promote the Welsh language. The Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System ensured that information technology was consistently used to promote the Welsh language, drawing further attention to the 'Aberwla' resource. It was elaborated that work was being done to encourage individuals to use social websites in Welsh. It was emphasised that every pupil received a laptop device as they attended secondary school for them to be able to complete their work. It was confirmed that these devices were installed with software with Welsh settings. Attention was also drawn to Welsh Artificial Intelligence (AI) being used to help headteachers in some situations.

Reference was made to a 2024 Progress Report of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022-27 of the Early Years service, drawing attention that 47.49% of provision is in Welsh only. It was elaborated that a further 47.10% was provided bilingually, and it was considered how this would be monitored. The Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System emphasised that work was being undertaken jointly with Mudiadau Meithrin to ensure that the language was promoted. It was added that training and recruitment campaigns were also underway to ensure that Welsh-only provision was progressing in the future.

It was noted that the statistic of 64% skilled pupils in Welsh and English was low, asking which steps were in place to ensure that more pupils were skilled in Welsh. In response, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System emphasised that definitions within the field were blurred but the figures of Welsh speakers were higher than that. In addition to the 64%, a further 8.8% were stronger in their Welsh than English and another 21.3% of pupils were stronger in English than Welsh, but there was an understanding of the Welsh language. It was explained that 94.2% had a strong understanding of the Welsh language. It was considered that this was a positive development although work was required to see progress in the future.

Attention was drawn to the fact that 55.57% of the Department staff had not achieved the Language Self-assessment to note that they reached the language designation of their posts. It was considered that there was no substantial change to be seen in these levels since last year. In response to the concerns, the Head of the Gwynedd Immersion Education System confirmed that there was no increase in these figures as a large proportion of the department staff such as catering staff and cleaners, had no access to the 'Self-service' system as they did not have a technology account or equipment to be able to complete the questionnaires. It was confirmed that this was a consideration for the Department and discussions were being held to get to grips with this challenge.

Reference was made to the engagement meetings to discuss Gwynedd's new Education Language Policy, drawing attention to the fact that this item would be discussed by the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 13 February 2025. It was asked whether the Members of this Committee could attend the discussion. In response to the enquiry, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that a request could be sent to the Chair of that Committee for members of the Language Committee to be present in the discussion, and Members were also reminded that a live webcast of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee was also available if they wished to watch from home.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

1. To accept the report and note the observations received.

2. To ask the Chair of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee whether the Welsh Language Committee Members could attend the meeting on 13 February 2025 to listen to the discussion as the 'Education Language Policy' is scrutinised by the Members.

6. REPORT OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES DEPARTMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE REALISATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023 - 2033

The report was submitted by the Head of Corporate Services Department, and he referred briefly to the following main points:

It was explained that the Department's name had recently changed from 'Corporate Support' to 'Corporate Services' to convey the range of services that are part of the Department.

It was confirmed that the Department was leading on six priority projects within the Council Plan 2023-2028 and promoted the Welsh language at every opportunity. It was added that the Department also supported many other projects in the Plan, namely Ffordd Gwynedd Plan Priorities 2023-2028. It was detailed that the Department was leading and contributed extensively towards realising priorities, namely:

- A Satisfied and Healthy Workforce
- Workforce Planning and Talent Development
- The Council's Digital Plan

It was reported that the Information and Research Service was in regular discussions with the Office for National Statistics. It was explained that the Office for National Statistics had considered not conducting Censuses in the future and considered gathering data in other ways to gather similar information. It was noted that the Service and the Department had considered that continuing with the Census in its current form was an important practice to continue.

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Support Service continued to develop staff training modules bilingually through the internal Self-service system. It was added that they had been in contact with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) office in Liverpool to put pressure on them to develop an online application form in Welsh, asking for an update for when that form will be available for use.

Reference was made to the work of the Democracy and Language Service, mentioning the Language Awareness sessions, the Gwynedd Language Forum, the Welsh language in business, Partnership Boards, Place Names Project and Visitors from the Basque Country.

Pride was expressed that Cyngor Gwynedd had been nominated for an 'Employer of the Year' award at the North Wales Work-Based Learning Awards 2025, following the Department's work to promote the Welsh language and influence providers to provide courses through the medium of Welsh to trainees and apprentices employed by Cyngor Gwynedd.

It was confirmed that influential work had been undertaken in the Procurement field as new Procurement regulations had been developed for the future. It was emphasised that the Procurement Service had influenced those discussions to ensure that the Welsh language was central to the Procurement process in the future.

Menter Iaith Gwynedd officers were congratulated for coming out on top in the Menter Iaith Cymru awards recently. It was explained that the award related to their work on developing Croeso Cymraeg.

It was explained that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was a development that the Department was aware of, using it when appropriate whilst being mindful of the challenges of using it. It was noted that this field will receive ongoing consideration from the Department as it developed over the next few years.

It was reported that 166 of the 176 staff members within the Department had completed the language self-assessment. It was confirmed that 119 individuals who had completed it were at Proficiency Level, 39 individuals at Advanced Level and 8 individuals at Intermediate Level. It was explained that the 10 staff members who had not completed the questionnaire thus far were new and they would complete the questionnaire as soon as possible, in accordance with the Department's emphasis to stress its importance.

During the discussion, the following observations were made: -

Concern was expressed that the Office for National Statistics had considered amending the arrangements regarding conducting the census and it was asked whether they had other future options. In response to the enquiry, the Head of Corporate Services Department agreed that it was important to ensure that data was gathered, and the Data and Research service disagreed with the suggestion of bringing the census to an end. However, it was noted that the Service welcomed change if it could be guaranteed that all the necessary data was gathered through new methods. It was emphasised that the Department encouraged the Office for National Statistics to continue with the Census.

Attention was drawn to a new project underway within the Department where the Language Unit, Learning and Development, Human Resources and the Communication team collaborated to dispel language myths. In response to an enquiry about some of the current myths, the Head of Corporate Services Department explained that the public tended to believe that Welsh skills had to be perfect to work in the Council. It was detailed that this cross-service work aimed to amend job descriptions to make them simpler and more accessible, emphasising that some posts required different levels of Welsh language ability. The Senior Language and Scrutiny Advisor added that this work derived from the Council's role on the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board which was trying to develop a series of videos demonstrating the actual and different language needs for posts within the Council. It was also noted that there was support available for anyone who required it to improve their Welsh skills, or their confidence to use the language, that was provided by the Council. It was acknowledged that language myths were a specific challenge for recruiting in the Care field, but work was being done to dispel these myths by using the Council's resources and developing specific resources for this field through the Public Services Board.

An enquiry was made about the arrangements of the Registration service, considering whether it was possible to use Welsh or bilingual forms to register births and deaths by now. In response to the enquiry, the Head of Corporate Services Department confirmed that it was currently not possible to use Welsh or bilingual forms as the Service's administration systems did not allow this. However, it was emphasised that the discussions with service users were being held in Welsh where possible. The Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser added that these challenges derived from the Westminster Government and ongoing lobbying was

taking place to ensure that the language was seen on the appropriate forms in the future.

It was asked what were the arrangements for those staff members who needed to attend language training as they were learning Welsh from the start, considering whether they had time off work and financial support for subscriptions such as 'Say Something in Welsh'. In response to the enquiry, the Head of Corporate Services Department confirmed that specific arrangements were being made for every staff member learning Welsh based on their individual needs. It was ensured that weekly training was provided within normal working hours in sessions of up to 3 hours between September and June, and staff members were released from work to attend them. It was added that the 'Language Training Hub' site demonstrated to staff what was available in addition to this. It was confirmed that information about new training was shared quarterly following meetings of the Language Designation Forum. It was explained that no staff member had requested support with subscriptions, but learners were welcomed to make use of Say Something in Welsh or Duolingo if they wished.

More information regarding the recent visit from representatives from the Basque Country was enquired. In response, the Language Adviser confirmed that this visit was informal jointly with Bangor University, ARFOR, Menter Iaith Gwynedd and the Economy and Community Department. It was explained that the Language Unit had provided a presentation on Cyngor Gwynedd's Language Policy, information about the Language Strategy, promoted the Menter Iaith's work and drew attention to other important organisations. Pride was expressed that the visitors from the Basque Country believed that Cyngor Gwynedd's arrangements were very ambitious and innovative. The Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser added that the visitors from the Basque Country gave a financial investment to the language to ensure that it was central to the country's general operation. It was noted that this was not always true in Wales and Cyngor Gwynedd led the way by developing an innovative Language Policy and Strategy which influenced other organisations.

It was asked whether community consultation work was happening through the Place Names Project, referring to Eryri National Park's far-reaching plan which invited local residents to record the names of buildings and local areas on a map. In response to the observations, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that similar work had been conducted by Cyngor Gwynedd during the National Eisteddfod in Boduan. It was acknowledged that no more sessions had been held to not disrupt the important work that the Park already does in the field. However, it was noted that the observation would be considered when drawing up the work programme for the coming year.

In response to an enquiry on Cadernid Iaith training, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser confirmed that this training continued to be held. It was explained that the aim of the training was to try to ensure that discussions did not turn to English unnecessarily, ensuring that people continued to use Welsh politely in community situations to teach others about the language.

The members expressed their thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.45am.

CHAIR