
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 28.06.12

Present: Councillor Liz Saville Roberts (Chair);
Councillor Gweno Glyn (Vice-chair).

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Elwyn Edwards, Tom Ellis, Alan Jones Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Eric M.Jones, Mair Rowlands, Gareth Thomas, Eirwyn Williams, Elfed Williams and Gruffydd Williams.

Officers: Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Sion Huws (Propriety Officer), Ruth Richards (Language and Equality Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Members Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Observer: Lora Gwawr Williams, Advice and Support Officer, Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

Apologies: Councillors Dyfrig Jones and Mandy Williams-Davies; Dewi Jones (Head of Education Department) and Ifan Prys (Language Development Officer).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Liz Saville Roberts as Chair of this committee for 2012/13.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Gweno Glyn as Vice-chair of this committee for 2012/13.

3. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the meetings of the Language Sub-committee held on 6 March and 17 April, 2012 as a true record.

Matter arising from the minutes of 6 March, 2012

Item 5 – Language Complaints

(B) – Complaints against other organisations

Paragraph (ii)

In response to an enquiry, the Equality and Language Officer explained that a response had been received stating that the “WC” form, as a sign for toilets, was a standard European sign approved by the Vienna Convention, and it seemed that the only way forward with this matter now would be to refer it to the Commissioner's Office.

Before commencing discussion on the individual items, the Propriety Officer explained that this new Language Committee was accountable to the full Council, and that it had operational powers within the field of work designated to it. The Corporate Director added

that securing the relationship and link with Hunaniaith was an important part of this committee's work programme.

5. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer, giving details of the latest language complaints received against the Council, complaints regarding other organisations and various other relevant matters.

Referring specifically to the complaint that the Council's Cycling Scheme contained a link to an English-only website, the Officer noted further that it seemed that the response in the report did not reflect the actual situation, and she read the comments of the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager who noted as follows:-

- *This was not the Council's Cycling Scheme, but a Challenge being run by the Cycle Touring Club (CTC) – the Council was one of the partners who had funded the Challenge.*
- *The website was not a website owned by the Council.*
- *The link had been sent out prematurely when the site's Welsh provision was not 100% complete, which had been an error by an officer.*
- *The challenge had not been launched officially to the Council's staff until the website was 100% bilingual.*
- *The Council had made a great effort to ensure that the CTC advertised and implemented this Challenge bilingually.*

The officers were asked to use the term "biking" rather than "cycling" to describe this scheme.

Then, referring to the other matters of concern in part 3 of the report, the Equality and Language Officer explained that the enquiry by Menter Iaith Dyffryn Ogwen related to the Tesco store in Bethesda, and that they had asked for the Council's support to their request to Tesco to consider the requirements of the Welsh language. Hunaniaith had sent a letter to Tesco, and she had also sent a letter outlining the requirements of the Council's language scheme, and drawing attention to the Council's commitment to promoting the Welsh language in the county's communities.

She noted further that the enquiry by Pwllheli Town Council related to the Costa shop in Pwllheli. She had been in contact with the Planning Service regarding this matter and had received a statement from the Senior Planning Service Manager, noting that:-

"Gwynedd Council as a Local Planning Authority tries to encourage use of the Welsh language when applications are received for installing signs. Despite this, it is very difficult to enforce bilingual signs through the planning system and rules. The relevant considerations when dealing with an application for a sign are consideration of the visual impact and the impact on public safety. In addition to this, many different kinds of signs may be displayed without having to submit a planning application to the Local Planning Authority."

It was also explained that there was a clause on every stage of the process requesting that companies gave consideration to the Welsh language, but in Costa's case, any control of the situation would be limited to those signs installed outside the building.

The Corporate Director noted that the Council had little powers at present in the planning field in terms of insisting that bilingual signs were displayed on shops or on developments

that were prominent on the High Street, and it was extremely important in respect of maintaining the area's linguistic character and feel that the Welsh was visible. To this end, he suggested that the Welsh Government should be pressed to review the current national planning policies so that they gave more consideration to the need for signs in Welsh on retail developments in areas that were Welsh in nature.

A member noted that this should not be restricted to Welsh areas only, and that there should be a common policy across Wales.

The Equality and Language Officer then referred to the need to arrange a meeting soon with the Bysus Padarn Company, and asked for representatives to meet with the company.

At the end of the discussion on the language complaints, it was noted that there was considerable inconsistency between the Welsh and English names of streets and villages within the county, and a call was made for reconciling the use of the Welsh names as the standard names. To this end, a report was requested for the next meeting, setting the background and noting the sources of the standard names and the requirements in respect of the names of streets, houses etc.

Reference was also made to the official opening of the Wales Coastal Path, and it was suggested that there was a piece of work to be undertaken here in order to ensure that local names were given to the different parts of the path. It was also suggested that there was an opportunity here to influence the Ordnance Survey to use Welsh names on coastal points and islands.

RESOLVED

- (a) That the Chair and Vice-chair of the committee, along with the relevant officers, meet with the manager of Bysus Padarn Company.**
- (b) To ask the Chair to send a letter to the Welsh Government pressing for a review of the current national planning policies so that they give more consideration to the need to have signs in Welsh on retail developments.**
- (c) To submit a report to the next meeting, setting the background and noting the sources of the standard names and the requirements in respect of the names of streets, houses etc.**
- (ch) That a piece of work should be completed in order to ensure that local names are given to the different parts of the Wales Coastal Path, and to try and influence the Ordnance Survey to use Welsh names on coastal points and islands.**

6. LANGUAGE SCHEME MONITORING REPORT 2011/12

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer, inviting the committee's observations on Gwynedd Council's Language Scheme Monitoring Report 2011/12 before its submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

It was enquired whether it was intended to provide a further questionnaire for users of the leisure centres. The Equality and Language Officer agreed to make enquiries by the next meeting.

Referring to objective C.5 on page 4 of the Scheme, a member noted that no meetings were being held through the medium of Welsh in his ward by now, except for community council meetings and meetings of school governors, and that this needed to be

monitored. The Chair reiterated this comment and asked how the members could monitor what happened outside the Council's formal meetings.

In response, the Equality and Language Officer explained that it would be expected for the new Language Standards to place more pressure on the Council to formalise this type of recording rather than it being dependent on receiving complaints.

Referring to the organisation of language lessons for staff and the fact that considerable difficulty had been experienced in arranging suitable classes for some individuals in Meirionnydd, it was enquired whether the situation had been rectified by now. In response, the Equality and Language Officer noted that she would ask the question to the Workforce Development Officer, as the author of this part of the report.

Further to this comment, the Chair suggested that it would be useful for the committee to receive a presentation by the Workforce Development Officer on the Council's staff training arrangements, such as who offered what to learners and for those keen to improve their written language skills, how did that work across the areas, and did the Council work with others as well to develop staff's Welsh language skills? She then referred to objective D.3 of the scheme – Securing language awareness training for staff. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that staff understood why the language awareness module was important, and what was expected of them as a result, and she expressed her wish to obtain more information regarding this.

In response, the Equality and Language Officer suggested that the Chair and she had a further discussion on this. She noted that the same situation existed with the equality modules as well. She was aware that the Training Unit was looking at having a fairly standard pack, which was fair enough in respect of equality, but with language, the requirements here in Gwynedd were more specific, and therefore more challenging. The module the Council had in the past would have been excellent for some councils, however, there was concern that it didn't go the extra mile and explain the requirements in full to the staff. She intended to hold further discussions with the Training Unit regarding this, and as the work developed, and when it was timely, perhaps this committee would appreciate a presentation on its contents.

The Corporate Director referred to the increasing shift towards providing services on a regional or sub-regional level and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Language Scheme responded to that and sought to safeguard language standards and Gwynedd Council's Language Policy. He suggested that there was an opportunity, through the Language Scheme to highlight that there were risks, but to also insist that this Council adhered to its principles and its values in respect of the Welsh language in any type of discussion regarding providing services on a regional basis. The Language Commissioner was looking at the language schemes of every council in Wales individually, but no one looked at what happened regionally as regards the Welsh language. To this end, he suggested that the Commissioner should be invited to meet this committee so that she could respond to some of these points on a national level.

A question came from the floor regarding what happened if staff did not meet the requirement for them to learn Welsh. The Chair noted that it was expected that the individual and the Council, as the employer, committed to skill the person to a level appropriate to the post. It was important that the recruitment arrangements were sturdy, and there was a need to look at the way jobs were advertised, who were appointed and how those people were developed.

The Equality and Language Officer noted that there were language requirements attached to every post and she explained the basis on which the different linguistic levels were determined.

A member noted that the Welsh language should be treated as any other skill when assessing applicants for jobs.

The Chair suggested that the absence of a regular system to record staff's language skills was a matter that needed to be brought to the attention of the Language Commissioner, calling for the formation of a firm national measure which held its ground legally and enabled the Council to train people according to their requirements.

The Corporate Director noted that it had been a priority by this Council to try and support the local economy and employ local people but there were problems appointing to key posts in some particular fields, e.g. the Social Services in Meirionnydd. Therefore, it was very important to ensure that there were correct learning pathways in the schools so that young Welsh speakers were prepared for the types of jobs the Council found hard to fill.

Kathryn Anne Williams, Occupational Therapist, Social Services and Keira Hendry, Duty Manager, Provider and Leisure were congratulated on winning the Dafydd Orwig Memorial Prize and the "Crossing the Bridge" Prize.

RESOLVED

- (a) To approve the document and submit it to the Welsh Language Commissioner, subject to adding wording to the end that there are risks involved with providing services on a regional level, but that this Council is determined to adhere to its principles and its values in terms of the Welsh language in any type of discussion regarding providing services regionally.**
- (b) To invite the Welsh Language Commissioner to the committee's next meeting so that she can respond to some of the points which arise on a national level.**
- (c) To draw the attention of the Welsh Language Commissioner to the fact that there is no regular system in terms of recording staff's language skills, and call for the formation of a firm national measure.**
- (ch) To ask the Workforce Development Officer to give a presentation to the committee on the Council's arrangements in terms of training staff in the Welsh language.**

7. CONSULTATION: STANDARDS IN RELATION TO THE WELSH LANGUAGE: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?

Submitted – the Equality and Language Officer's report asking the committee to consider how they would wish to respond to the Welsh Language Commissioner's consultation on draft Standards under The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and how best to co-ordinate their response.

It was explained that the consultation period would run until 11 August, 2012.

The Chair referred to three matters that had arisen in this meeting and which were relevant to the discussion on the new Standards, namely the importance of visible Welsh as part of highlighting the equal status of the Welsh language, the need for a standard method of identifying staff skills and the importance of the planning policies.

A suggestion was made to establish a small working group to discuss the new document in detail before the end of July.

The Corporate Director noted that this was a very technical document and that the Commissioner had to work to ensure that the main messages from the document would be conveyed in a clear and simple manner so that everybody understood its implications. He also suggested, as Standards could only be set on Crown bodies subject to the consent of the Secretary of State for Wales, that a representative from the Commissioner's Office should be invited to the working group so that he/she could explain how it might be possible to influence the bilingual policies and Welsh medium services of those establishments that came under the Crown rather than the Welsh Government.

RESOLVED

- (a) To establish a working group including the committee's Chair and Vice-chair and Councillors Craig ab Iago, Tom Ellis and Alwyn Gruffydd to consider and draw up a response to the consultation before the end of July.**
- (b) To invite a representative from the Commissioner's Office to the working group so that he/she can provide guidance regarding how to influence the bilingual policies and Welsh medium services of those establishments that come under the Crown.**
- (c) To inform the remaining committee members of the working group date so that they can submit any comments regarding the contents of the document in good time.**

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.40am.