
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 17.01.13

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

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

Officers: Iwan Trefor Jones (Corporate Director), Dewi R. Jones (Head of Education Department), Sion Huws (Compliance and Language Manager), Ruth Richards (Equality and Language Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Also present: Meri Huws (The Welsh Language Commissioner) along with Dyfan Sion (Senior Officer – Policy and Compliance) and Hunydd Andrews (Policy and Compliance Officer).

Observer: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member – Customer Care).

Apologies: Councillors Alan Jones Evans, Selwyn Griffiths, Dyfrig Jones and Gruffydd Williams.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 11 October 2012 as a true record.

3. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WORK OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER

Meri Huws, the Welsh Language Commissioner was welcomed to the meeting to give a presentation on the work of the Commissioner.

During her presentation, the Commissioner noted the following:-

- The Welsh Language Commissioner post had been created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.
- This measure had given official status to the Welsh language in Wales, and this for the first time ever, but that it did not affect the status of the English language in Wales.
- The Commissioner's statutory powers had come into effect on 1 April, 2012.
- The Commissioner was independent.
- The Commissioner could do anything that she deemed appropriate in order to promote the use of the Welsh language, to facilitate the use of the Welsh language and work towards ensuring that the Welsh language was treated no less favourably than the English language.

She then elaborated further on the functions and powers of the Commissioner, which included the power to conduct inquiries and to investigate complaints. She elaborated on

the standards that the 105 organisations or companies that came under the Language Measure would be expected to reach, together with the proposal to establish a Welsh Language Tribunal to receive appeals from organisations.

She noted further that the Commissioner received approximately 50-100 complaints a month, which mainly derived from health care and Crown bodies, and that she had already instigated an inquiry into basic health care.

Members were then given an opportunity to ask questions and submit observations. Attention was drawn specifically to the following issues:-

- The need to put pressure on the Government from every direction to review TAN 20 as soon as possible as it was not possible to give appropriate consideration to the Welsh language within the current planning process.
- The need to disseminate growth, rather than centralise growth, in order to support communities in areas such as Gwynedd.
- Concern that the Commissioner's powers had been restricted to devolved matters. In response, the Commissioner noted that the Language Act 1993 continued to be in force and that the Welsh Language Measure stated that it was possible to impose standards on all bodies that were operational in Wales, with the consent of the Secretary of State.
- The importance of influencing the 3rd Sector.
- The emphasis placed on dignity in care and the fact that people receiving care in their chosen language was a matter of dignity.
- The importance of supporting and promoting the Welsh language and that implementation steps took place within the Government to drive this forward.
- The need for a linguistic solution for the tendencies to regionalise.
- A desire to see a language assessment as part of any change in the care service.

RESOLVED to put pressure on the Government from every direction to review TAN 20 as soon as possible, by placing the matter on the agenda of the Planning Committee and request the support of the Welsh Local Government Association, the Snowdonia National Park Authority and all community councils in the county on this.

The Commissioner was thanked for her detailed and interesting presentation.

The Chair then announced that a *Hunaniaith* Conference on the Future of Welsh – speaking Communities would be held in Galeri, Caernarfon on 22 March.

4. 2011 CENSUS: FIRST RESULTS ON THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer noting that the first results of the 2011 Census on the Welsh language had been announced on 11 December, 2012, which detailed some of the key results for Wales and Gwynedd. The linguistic data on ward level was expected to be published on 30 January.

During the subsequent discussion, the following main observations were highlighted:-

- The figures had not been surprising at all as the trend was very obvious. If this was not addressed now, we were talking about the annihilation of the language. A mental revolution and a different culture was required, but it was feared that we did not have the desire and will to do so.

- There was a need to persuade the remaining councillors, e.g. in their roles as school governors when making appointments.
- That the Welsh language needed to be introduced as the norm to young people and to make the language more attractive to them, as there was a danger they might be discouraged by the prophecies of doom.
- The language had been losing ground for 100 – 150 years and annihilation was on the horizon unless there would be a change in Cardiff.
- Immigration was obliterating the Welsh Language.
- That it was important to raise the confidence of those young people who felt that their Welsh was not good enough.
- In light of publishing the linguistic data on ward level on 30 January, a seminar should be arranged for all councillors around the end of February to discuss the results of the Census per ward, to submit information about policies that affect the language, to discuss the role of councillors as language leaders in their communities and to consider how to best influence policies for the future.
- That the seminar should be well-timed to be inputted into the Council's new Strategic Plan so that proposals could be implemented through the Strategic Plan.
- That the influence of the University on these figures was not clear at present, but once the results would be received in full, the position of the Welsh language in Gwynedd, with and without the students, would be clearer.
- That the Commissioner's role as an advocate was also key in terms of preventing the deterioration in the everyday use of the language and the importance of marketing the language in a positive way was emphasised.
- That young people needed to be educated regarding the history of the Welsh language.

RESOLVED

- (a) **To note the content of the report.**
- (b) **In light of publishing the linguistic data on ward level on 30 January, a seminar should be arranged for all councillors around the end of February to discuss the results of the Census per ward, to submit information about policies that affect the language, to discuss the role of councillors as language leaders in their communities and to consider how to best influence policies for the future, and inputting the proposals into the Council's Strategic Plan.**

5. WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Submitted – the report of the Head of Education Department asking the members to consider and approve the contents of the final draft version of the plan.

A revised version of page 10 of the plan was circulated as there were a few errors in the version that had been circulated with the agenda. A copy of the Gwynedd Primary Schools Welsh Language Charter was also circulated.

In order to involve all councillors in the discussion, the Head of Education Department noted his intention to submit the final version of the Strategic Plan and the Language Charter to a meeting of the full Council.

During the subsequent discussion, the following main observations were highlighted:-

- That councillors and school governors had an important role in terms of promoting the plan.

- That it would be desired for every school's governing body to appoint a Welsh language champion.
- That school head teachers had an important role in terms of highlighting and selling immersion plans and the latecomers centres for non-Welsh speaking parents. In addition, the success of the children with the Welsh language was a way to sell these centres.
- That pride should be taken in the provision of the language centres and that this committee could receive a report on the progress of children who had experienced this system.
- That it could be difficult to attract Welsh-speakers to help in *cylchoedd meithrin*, Ti a Fi groups, reading groups in primary schools, etc, and that there was a role for councillors here as leaders within the community in terms of spurring people on to the right direction.
- A wish was expressed to see an appointment being made to the post of primary schools Welsh Language Charter Coordinator.

RESOLVED

- (a) To accept the contents of the final draft version of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.**
- (b) To submit a progress report to this committee on the progress of those children who have attended the language centres.**

6. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

As the time had flown by, there was no time for a discussion on this item and members were requested to send any observations on the report to the attention of the Equality and Language Officer.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 1.10pm.