

NAME OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Scrutiny Committee - Services
DATE OF MEETING	10 April 2014
TITLE OF ITEM	The 'More than Just Words' Strategic Framework – Gwynedd Council situation
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor R H Wyn Williams

1. Purpose of the report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to note the way in which the Council is responding to the requirements of the 'More than Just Words - Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care' (More than Just Words).

1.2 Information is provided on the progress made against the Welsh Government expectations and information is also provided in response to specific questions raised at the preparatory meeting for this Committee.

2. Context

2.1 'More than Just Words' was published in 2012, along with action plans (one for Social Services and another for the National Health Service). They are to be implemented over a three-year period between April 2013 and March 2016.

2.2 At the core of the strategic framework is the commitment by public services in Wales to provide Services which are citizen-focused, including acknowledging that many people can only communicate their need for care and to participate in their care as effective partners through the medium of Welsh.

2.3 The principle of the 'Proactive Proposal' is evident in all parts of 'More than Just Words'. What that means is that the user's language requirements must be satisfied, bearing in mind that establishments have a responsibility to identify and respond to linguistic needs as a core part of care.

2.4 'More than Just Words' was published in the legal context of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure and it is important to bear in mind that the standards for the Welsh language which will accompany the Measure will lead to creating rights in order for Welsh-speakers to receive Services through the medium of Welsh.

3. The Council's response to the 'More than Just Words' Strategic Framework

3.1 Gwynedd Council has been committed to More than Just Words from the very beginning, releasing the time of a Senior Manager to represent Social Services departments on the Ministerial Task Group established to prepare the Strategic Framework.

3.2 Following the publication of the framework itself, the following steps have been taken, which have been crucial in driving forward this important agenda:

- Commissioning a 'Survey of the requirements and practice of Gwynedd Council in providing Care Home Services (Residential and Nursing) and Home Care', by the Language Planning Centre – the findings were published in March 2013
- The content of contracts and contracts monitoring procedures has been adapted in response to the survey by the Language Planning Centre
- Influencing the specification of the Care and Community Health Management System which will replace our current system (RAISE) when it reaches the end of its lifetime in April 2016, in order to facilitate the work of identifying needs and responding appropriately to them
- Securing the commitment of the Corporate Director / Statutory Director of Social Services and the Cabinet Member for Care to publishing a statement expressing their wish to see sensitivity towards the Welsh language being reflected across the Council and noting the importance of identifying the Welsh-language needs of users when assessing and caring for users
- Information has been gathered from the Census regarding the language profile of communities, and work is afoot to review the Commissioning Plans incorporating the findings which will influence the 'Market Position Statements' which will be prepared in the coming months
- Collecting data regarding care staff in Gwynedd, as a basis for further planning and action
- An audit has been carried out of the way in which social workers and other professionals record the language choice or requirements of the users and findings have been shared with all relevant managers
- As part of an annual questionnaire sent to all internal and external residential and nursing homes in Gwynedd, specific questions were included regarding the ability of these providers to meet the language needs of the users
- A commitment to extend the 'language champion' scheme which exists within the Council's Leisure Centres to all its residential homes
- Appointing 'Welsh-language Development Officers' on Senior Manager level
- Establishing a cross-departmental Task Group to co-ordinate action in response to the national requirements.

4. Response to specific questions raised by the preparatory meeting

4.1 See below the questions asked along with a brief response to each one.

a. What were the expectations on Social Services following the introduction of the Strategic Framework 'More than Just Words'?

We were expected to act in accordance with the requirements within the action plan published by the Welsh Government. This work is afoot, and as shown above, substantial progress has been made within the first year.

b. The Scrutiny Committee has a specific concern regarding language conditions when the Council is commissioning. How confident can the Council be that care services provided via an agreement on behalf of Gwynedd Council provide Welsh-language services, recruit bilingual staff and plan the workforce in order to ensure that bilingual staff are available for every shift?

The highest percentage by far of the care provision commissioned is in the Older People field. The Language Planning Centre was asked to review contracts for home care and residential and nursing care, and 12 recommendations were made. During 2013/14, we have revised all relevant contracts in order to strengthen the clauses referring to the Welsh language. We have also strengthened our monitoring arrangements in order to ensure compliance with these contracts.

Our intention is to extend this work to the remaining Adults and Children fields (day care, after care, adults' placement plan, supported housing etc.) as the contracts expire and are renewed.

It should be noted that the Contracts Unit has specific examples of cases where they have terminated a contract and changed providers as the provider did not meet the contractual expectations in relation to the Welsh language.

The Brokerage Team, which currently only works in the home care field, plays a crucial role as it ensures that Welsh-speaking carers are directed to those users who require the service in that language. There are plans afoot to extend this Team's work to other fields.

c. The document noted four specific categories which required attention, namely children and young people, older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health difficulties. In which fields does the Council anticipate the biggest challenges?

There are two main fields which cause difficulties, namely fields in which medical staff need to be recruited, such as nursing homes, and fields in which a shortage of local provision means that we commission out-of-county placements. These are mainly residential placements, in the fields of Children and Learning Disabilities.

The challenge for us in terms of Older People is to ensure adequate provision to coincide with the high numbers. The rate of Welsh-speakers within this category is high and the fact that dementia is a common condition strengthens the need for care through the medium of Welsh. As well as strengthening our contracts monitoring arrangements, we have amended our annual questionnaire (a questionnaire to gather information from our providers) to include information about the level and skills of the workforce in relation to the Welsh language.

ch. How do the workforce planning arrangements (rotas/caseloads) ensure the availability of a bilingual workforce for Welsh-speaking service users and their families?

Owing to the Council's language policy, the situation in terms of our internal workforce is exceptionally strong in the context of our ability to provide services through the medium of Welsh. Situations where a Social Worker is unable to speak Welsh are very few and far between. Nonetheless, examples are highlighted from time to time where feedback proves that the correspondence does not always meet the linguistic needs of service users and their families. Training and supervision must address this.

There is a higher number of the front-line care workforce who are non-Welsh-speakers; however, the internal Provider department has firm arrangements in place in terms of identifying linguistic needs and ensuring that the support corresponds to those needs. In future, it must be ensured that the Council's language policy, in terms of recruitment, is followed without exception.

d. What pressure does the Department place on other agencies regarding their use of the Welsh language?

As noted above, for agencies which provide services to users, the Department is unequivocal in terms of the pressure, as it is part of the providers' contracts. Responsibilities to collaborate with the Health Board are on the increase, and officers take every possible opportunity to seek to influence practice and increase language awareness amongst Health colleagues. Recently, examples have been seen increasingly where representatives from the Department insist that regional and multi-agency meetings and workshops do not turn to English when Welsh-speakers who wish to speak Welsh are present. The County Forum is a multi-agency forum which has been established to promote and co-ordinate our work

jointly and a senior management representation from the Council will ensure an appropriate platform for the 'More than Just Words' agenda.

dd. Are there barriers that prevent the ability to provide Welsh-language services to service users? How will the service go about overcoming these barriers?

Compared with the rest of Wales, we in Gwynedd are very fortunate as we have access to a suitable workforce which is well-versed in the Welsh language and can meet a large proportion of the requirements. However, recruiting suitable staff continues to be a barrier in some areas and in some specific fields. An example of this is home care and nursing care in parts of Meirionnydd. Another barrier is the attitude of some establishments which provide care and their understanding of their responsibilities. Sometimes, acceptable service is provided in terms of one-to-one care, however, other aspects such as information leaflets, websites, posters etc. are in English only. Another barrier which becomes apparent fairly often is that a provider does not have sufficient knowledge of written Welsh to understand care plans and whilst they are able to provide a carer to do the work, they cannot ensure that a manager or supervisor can speak Welsh well enough to instruct and supervise the member of staff.

We try to overcome these difficulties, firstly by evaluating the size of the problem. As already noted, a questionnaire has been created to gather detailed information for each and every provider. We have assisted establishments with their commitment to bilingual written documentation by referring to the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters in contracts. The Workforce Partnership and the Providers Forum are two crucial groups in terms of offering advice, information and specialist training on the proactive approach and language awareness. In February this year, language awareness training was held for elected members, in the hope that the principles would be disseminated further. An 'End to End' review is about to start in the Adults field and the intention is to ensure that More than Just Words becomes a theme throughout the review of the quality and appropriateness of our current services.

e. To what extent has the service managed to integrate More than Just Words as part of the Social Services Department's culture e.g. service user centred, proactive approach?

Owing to the Council's language policy, we are extremely fortunate in that, even before the publication of More than Just Words, we have gone much of the way to realising the requirements. As the Welsh language is the native language of so many service users and staff members, we do satisfy many of the requirements. What has been strengthened in recent months is the expansion of this culture in a broader sense to the care community beyond the Council's boundaries. By working in partnership with other agencies, including providers, we see progress in terms of our ability to meet people's real linguistic needs. However, we must

not rest on our laurels and it is intended to continue to offer training, review our recording methods and monitor our contracts.

5. The way forward

5.1 The Committee's observations on this information is welcomed and these observations will be useful as we summarise our progress in the Statutory Director's Annual Review (a specific request which has come from the Welsh Government).

5.2 It is proposed that a further report on progress is submitted to this Committee and / or the Language Committee within a period of six months to a year.