

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 22.10.15

Present: Councillor Eirwyn Williams (Vice-chairman in the chair)

Councillors: Craig ab Iago, Elwyn Edwards, Tom Ellis, Alan Jones Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Siân Gwenllian, Charles W. Jones, Eric M. Jones, Sion Jones, Elfed Williams, Hefin Williams and John Wyn Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillor Dyfrig Siencyn (Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language).

Officers: Dilwyn Williams (Chief Executive), Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery), Gwenllian Williams (Language Development Officer), Garem Jackson (Education Improvement Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member and Scrutiny Support Officer).

Apology: Councillor Gweno Glyn.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. URGENT MATTER – PLAS GLYNLLIFON'S NAME

This matter had not been included on the agenda; however, the Chairman agreed to hold a discussion on this matter as an urgent item under Section 100B (4)(b), Local Government Act 1972, as the matter had arisen since the last committee meeting, that the situation was changing on a daily basis and that it was important to ascertain the formal view of the Council's Language Committee sooner rather than later.

The Chair explained that a request had been received from Councillor Siân Gwenllian for the committee to discuss the matter of Plas Glynllifon's name, and the member was invited to further elaborate.

Councillor Siân Gwenllian referred to the recent reports in the press in relation to this matter, and noted:-

- Although everybody had understood that the MBI Sales company, Plas Glynllifon's prospective buyer, had reconsidered its decision to market the country house under the name of Wynnborn, as the name had disappeared from its website for a while, that the name had now been reinstated on its website, and the house was still being marketed under this name.
- She had met with a representative from the company's executive, who emphasised that Wynnborn would be the name used during the initial marketing period of one or two years, but there was a risk that the name would become established during this time.
- She had requested a further meeting with a representative of the company's sales and marketing department. Hywel Williams MP intended to table a motion in Parliament and an online petition had started.
- The situation as it stood emphasised the need for the inclusion of a clause relating to the Welsh Language in the Historic Environment Bill which was currently being considered by one of the Assembly's committees. <<

RESOLVED

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE Thursday, 22 October 2015

- (a) To write to the MBI Sales company to state our position regarding the use of the name Wynnborn, and ask whether they would be willing to receive a deputation from the Council, to include the Leader, Deputy Leader and the local member.
- (b) To prepare a press release stating our position.
- (c) To write to the Minister for the Welsh Language and the Welsh Language Commissioner.
- (ch) To contact the Chair of the Assembly Committee that is discussing the Historic Environment Bill to pressurise for the inclusion of a clause in relation to the Welsh Language in the bill, and to contact Anglesey and Ceredigion Councils on this point, and submit a report to the next committee meeting if not sooner.

3. MINUTES

The Chairman signed the minutes of the previous committee meetings held on 18 June and 8 July 2015 (special meeting) as a true record.

4. LANGUAGE INVESTIGATION REPORT – THE USE OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE AT MEETINGS

- (a) Submitted – Language Investigation report – The Use of the Welsh Language at Meetings. The Chair of the Investigation, Craig ab Iago presented the report and the response of the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language to the recommendation was requested.

The Cabinet member thanked the Investigation Group members for their work, and noted:-

- He welcomed the report which contained many very positive aspects.
- The recommendations were ones that he would follow, in particular number 5, regarding influencing not only other councils, but also public bodies, and he was confident that all the recommendations could be implemented within six months.
- The work with the public bodies was ongoing through the Local Services Board, and it was hoped, with the development of this work, that the public bodies which formed the Board would commit to the use of the language.
- The work of undertaking an audit on the use of the Welsh Language within the Council was due to start imminently and a report would probably be published in due course.
- He would be willing to submit the report to the formal Cabinet as this would strengthen the recommendations.

During the discussion, it was noted:-

- Before seeking to influence bodies outside the county, there was a need to influence bodies within Gwynedd that continued to operate through the medium of English, such as community councils and governing bodies.
- The response to the questionnaire by the external bodies had been disappointing, whereas the responses to the questionnaire for managers and members were extremely positive.
- The investigation had produced a good outcome, it had analysed the matters requiring attention in detail, and presented clear recommendations to the Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED to accept the recommendations of the investigation and to formally submit them to the Cabinet Member.

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE Thursday, 22 October 2015

(b) Submitted – two suggestions for the next investigation:-

- Consider the extent of the visibility of the Welsh language.
- Consider how the planning system promoted and safeguarded the Welsh language.

The Senior Manager - Democracy and Delivery, noted:-

- The Communities Scrutiny Committee, at its next meeting, would receive an overview of the position of the Welsh Language and planning and, without presumption, this could lead to an investigation by that committee in due course.
- A message could be sent to the Communities Scrutiny Committee to state that the Language Committee would be eager to support any work undertaken by it in this area.

RESOLVED to note a wish to consider the visibility of the Welsh language and to work on a brief for an investigation. In the meantime, to hold a discussion with the Communities Scrutiny Committee about the next developments in relation to planning and the Welsh Language, and to authorise officers to proceed with either, or both, if capacity allows this.

5. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Submitted – the verbal report of the Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language, detailing the recent developments within the field, which included the ongoing work with the Local Services Board, the audit on the use of the Welsh Language, the establishment of a new language centre in Bangor, the current work in relation to a bilingual workforce, the Language Charter, the initial response to the Language Standards, linguistic planning and the project in Dolgellau to promote the language.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

6. UPDATE ON THE LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Submitted – the report of the Language Development Officer noting that the final Compliance Notice on the Language Standards had been received on 30 September, and attached, for information, the standards requiring compliance with within 6 months, along with a summary of the action points.

During the discussion, it was noted:-

- The definition in the Standards should not be the language of ‘choice’, but rather ‘the language normally spoken’ as it is immediately obvious whether or not somebody speaks Welsh.
- Gwynedd Council would exceed the requirements of the Standards due to the linguistic nature of this county.
- There was a need to improve the language of some of Galw Gwynedd’s staff, who tended to refer to numbers and months of the year etc. in English.
- The Standards were aimed at other councils that in general did not pay sufficient attention to the Welsh language, and that consideration should be given to appealing against any Standard that required this Council to collect information in order to prove something that was already evident, as that this would be a waste of money for Gwynedd’s residents, and would draw resources away from the work of promoting the language.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to present an update at the next meeting that would also refer to any appeals lodged in the meantime against any Standard that is deemed as continuing to be disproportionate or unreasonable.

7. THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER'S RESPONSE TO THE ANNUAL REPORT ON THE LANGUAGE PLAN

Submitted – the Language Development Officer's report, presenting the Council's response to the further enquiries in the Commissioner's response to the Annual Report, and the members' response to the following matters which arose from the report:-

- Language complaints reporting procedure – a recommendation that complaints should not be reported to the Language Committee before any enquiries had been completed and a response sent to the complainant, if appropriate.
- Arrangements for recording the language skills of staff – members were asked to consider to what extent the Council should record language skills.

During the discussion, it was noted:-

- It was beneficial for members to hear about any language complaints that were received, and it was suggested that two categories of complaints could be presented to the Language Committee in future: resolved and unresolved complaints.
- Regardless of what the Standards stated, the arrangements for recording the language skills of staff must be as unbureaucratic as possible, while still providing a functional illustration of the linguistic skills of staff e.g. werethey able to hold a conversation, write a report, etc., in Welsh, and possibly ask them how supportive they were of the Welsh Language.
- The information about skills and the softer information relating to attitude etc. could help to target the work of the Learning and Development Service, rather than it being a purely responsive service.

The Language Development Officer was congratulated on her thorough work in relation to this and other linguistic matters.

RESOLVED

- (a) To accept the response of the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Council's response to the request for further information.**
- (b) Two categories of complaints should be presented to the Language Committee in future, namely resolved complaints and also to report for information on those complaints that the department are still investigating.**
- (c) Consideration should be given to the arrangements for recording the language skills of staff, with as little bureaucracy as possible, while still providing a functional illustration of the skills of staff.**

8. SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION REPORT – WELSH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Submitted – the final report of the Scrutiny Investigation – Welsh Medium Education by the Chair of the Investigation, Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd. He noted that:-

- The investigation included the implementation, consistency and success of the authority's language policy in the County's schools, and he thanked his fellow members on the group and the officers who had worked so hard over a period of 6-7 months.
- The draft investigation report had been submitted to the Services Scrutiny Committee on 22 September. The committee had decided to accept the contents of the report, to approve the recommendations which were submitted to the

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE Thursday, 22 October 2015

Cabinet Member for Education, and requested that he presented a progress report on the actions in six months' time.

The Education Quality Improvement Officer presented the response of the department to the report, and noted:-

- The department welcomed the work and praised and recognised the immense work that had been achieved in this field, which underpinned all the department's work.
- The Cabinet Member for Education had accepted the recommendations, and as a next step, discussions would be held between the department and the Cabinet Member in relation to the practicality of implementing the recommendations.
- The scrutiny committee had reached many of the same conclusions as the *Trywydd* company who had been commissioned to undertake work on the secondary sector.

In discussing the conclusions of the investigation:-

- Specific reference was made to the linguistic situation in Bangor, and the positive impact of the Language Charter on the attitudes of the area's children towards the Welsh Language.
- It was noted that children were making good progress at the Latecomers Centres. However, frustration was expressed that the drivers transporting the pupils to and from these centres were not Welsh speakers. In response, it was noted that this observation had also been made at the Scrutiny Committee, and it was confirmed that the Education Service was investigating the matter.
- The members of the investigation and officers were thanked for their thorough work that had led to a series of clear and far-reaching recommendations.

RESOLVED to note the report.

9. LANGUAGE COMPLAINTS

Submitted – the report of the Equality and Language Officer detailing the latest language complaints to hand.

Referring to a complaint about insufficient Welsh language provision on a website which schools were directed to by the Welsh Government for specialist information and advice on outdoor activities (OEP website), the Language Development Officer further noted:-

- The English-only reply from the Government's Education and Skills Department to the complaint explained that the Government was not of the view that it was its responsibility to pay for the translation of the resources as it was an external website.
- It was intended to send a complaint to the Language Commissioner regarding the English-only reply that was received to the complaint.

A member expressed concern that there was no translator present at a planning appeal in Porthmadog on 13 October against the Council's decision to refuse an application to erect a wind turbine in Llanaelhaearn. The officers agreed to make enquiries.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.45pm.