
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 04.07.17

Present: Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd (Chair)
Councillor Cai Larsen (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Elwyn Edwards, Aled Evans, Judith Humphreys, Charles W. Jones, Elin Walker Jones, Elwyn Jones, Eric M. Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, John Pughe Roberts, Eirwyn Williams and Elfed Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillor Mair Rowlands (Cabinet Member - Welsh Language)

Iwan Evans (Monitoring Officer), Sion Huws (Senior Solicitor - Corporate), Debbie Anne Jones (Welsh Language Services Manager), Gwenllian Williams (Welsh Language Development Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support Officer).

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd as Chair of this committee for 2017/18.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED to elect Councillor Cai Larsen as Vice-chair of this committee for 2017/18.

3. APOLOGIES

Councillor Alan Jones Evans.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

5. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 28 February, 2017 as a true record.

6. REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER - THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Submitted – the verbal report of the Cabinet Member - Welsh Language, detailing recent developments in the field, including the following:-

- That the Primary Language Charter had received national recognition and that it must be ensured that it worked in Gwynedd and made a difference. Reports would be submitted to the Language Committee regularly and we would also be having important discussions regularly.

RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

7. THE LANGUAGE COMMITTEE'S REMIT

The Senior Solicitor - Corporate outlined the background and change to the remit of the Language Committee adopted at the full Council meeting on 15 June 2017. It was reported that the changes had come about as a result of the new scrutiny arrangements.

Comments were made that the Language Committee should have a more operational and proactive role. A member expressed concern that the language was going in the same direction as many other topics.

The Cabinet Member reported that she was eager to consult with the committee between meetings and if there was a particular issue that needed to be looked at, she would welcome the opportunity to work with Committee members.

It was confirmed that the role of the committee was to look at how the Council's internal language policy was implemented and how the Council complied with the Language Standards. The main purpose of the Committee was to look at the Council's internal arrangements in relation to the Welsh language. It was reported that the Committee had been holding investigations which looked at specific topics or fields and had drawn up a series of recommendations for improvement. It was reported that it was presumed that these arrangements would continue and it was suggested that a work programme for the Committee could be submitted to its next meeting. It was noted that matters deriving from the standards report would be placed on the work programme. The main work of the Committee was outlined, and it was reported that promoting the Welsh language was important and that members would be consulted on the strategies but that the main focus of the committees was the internal arrangements.

8. THE CORPORATE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Submitted – the report of the Senior Solicitor – Corporate noting the importance of the procedure in relation to the close link with customer care to ensure that complaints received due attention and that the responses were monitored.

Members' concerns were noted

- that the Welsh language, which was so important, would not receive deserving attention in following the corporate complaints procedure.
- about the bureaucracy and that the objective would be lost.
- about the lack of role for the committee in terms of influence on the complaints and responses. In relation to monitoring the standards, it was noted that evidence existed that the Council was responding appropriately to the standards in any case and the role of the committee was questioned.

The Monitoring Officer explained that it was a corporate complaints procedure for the public to raise a complaint about a service, including language complaints. It was noted that the public wanted a quick solution; therefore, the point of the procedure was to make things easier for the customer. If a member had a complaint, the services could be contacted directly. There would be a role for the committee if it became apparent that there was an increasing pattern to the complaints but that it was not the role of the committee to deal with individual complaints. The committee would have a wider role in terms of quality of language by looking at trends.

A member expressed concern that committee members would not see the complaints from now on. In response, it was noted that individual complaints had been submitted in the past and the committee did not see patterns over time. Consequently, there was no influence on

the committee's work programme. In following the corporate complaints procedure, trends would be identified and those trends could be brought before this committee.

A member expressed concern that the Welsh language was being pushed to have the same type of consideration as a complaint about a pothole. The Welsh language was completely different and was embedded throughout all the Council's work.

The Senior Solicitor - Corporate referred to point 17 in the report which noted the intention to report to this committee about the numbers and types of language complaints, the patterns and plans for improvement. He reported that the arrangements were stronger within the Council by now and ensured that the customer received a response to their complaint. The standard of how the Council dealt with complaints had improved as it was monitored.

In response to a question by a member, it was reported that a language complaint had not been received since the last meeting of this committee.

A member asked whether it was possible to go back to using the old system. In response, the Monitoring Officer explained that the complaints procedure was the Cabinet's responsibility and it was the Cabinet which had adopted this procedure based on the national model. This was the corporate complaints procedure. The procedure ensured that a problem which required more attention was given that and that the procedure was straightforward which stressed the need for solutions from departments.

A member suggested that a request should be sent to the Cabinet to review the procedure in relation to language complaints. He reported that language complaints were different to every other complaint and given that the language was above and beyond everything else the complaints should be dealt with differently due to the status given to the language.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that the committee received a report under the new procedure first to see how it met the requirements rather than going for a separate public procedure for the language. An annual public report would be prepared. Two public procedures would cause confusion for the public.

RESOLVED that the committee receives a report under the new procedure to see how it works.

9. GWYNEDD COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The annual report was submitted by the Cabinet Member - Welsh Language. The Welsh Language Development Officer elaborated on the contents. She explained that they had appointed an officer to the vacancy - Learning and Development Officer - who would help with developing staff skills.

Developments such as the recreational language champion and the suggestions deriving from the Investigation into the Visibility of the Welsh Language which were relevant to Language Standards 35 and 36 - Service Delivery Standards involving public events, were welcomed.

It was noted that an e-module had been developed in accordance with the requirements of the language standards which was available for all members of staff. The Language Champions Scheme was reported upon, and the intention to disseminate it across the Council. It was noted that the type of work undertaken to date in the Consultancy

department already showed the difference in the way staff communicated with each other and at meetings.

A member asked whether there was a role for the committee to seek to extend what it did e.g. working with the private sector to improve provision. For example, looking out past the county's boundaries to see how further influence could be made on the use of the Welsh language.

In response, the Welsh Language Services Manager suggested that the committee received a presentation on 'Hunaniaith', the language initiative in Gwynedd which had the role of promoting the Welsh language outside the walls of Gwynedd Council. It was reported that the Council itself also did everything within its ability to ensure understanding. The Council would create a new Language Strategy between now and March.

A member suggested extending the use of language lanyards / badges to members as well as staff.

RESOLVED

- **to accept the report**
- **that the committee receives a presentation on 'Hunaniaith' at its next meeting.**

10. ACHIEVING THE AMBITION - RESPONDING TO WELSH GOVERNMENT'S NEW WELSH LANGUAGE STRATEGY

The annual report was submitted by the Cabinet Member - Welsh Language. The Welsh Language Services Manager elaborated on the contents. Welsh Government's final Strategy would be published on 11 July 2017.

Concern was expressed that there was so much focus on education as the only way of reaching the aim.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that there was no mention of the Welsh language strongholds, the element of social use of the Welsh language and the use of the Welsh language in communities.

The importance of setting milestones which had been addressed in the report was noted, but that it was a difficult matter to measure. The education system was often used but it would be a challenge and sophisticated ways of measuring would have to be found.

A member suggested that the only way to realise the ambition was by opening more Welsh-medium schools. There were many families where neither parent spoke Welsh therefore there was no Welsh in the home.

A member reported that three-quarters of Welsh-speakers were produced by the education system and a quarter by the home. If we were going to realise the ambition, it was suggested that the way forward was by extending the education system, particularly in the south-east. The Government should support the Local Authorities which already implemented the requirements and the authorities which were taking steps to extend the Welsh-medium education sector.

Disappointment was expressed that the report mentioned using the education system only to realise the ambition and it was suggested that the planning field should also be included. This was a field which often affected the language. A member agreed with this comment and particularly as a result of the decision by Lesley Griffiths, Welsh Government Cabinet

Member, allowing developers to appeal again after Gwynedd had refused an application twice on land in Penrhosgarnedd.

A member suggested that there was room to look at the role of Hunaniaith in terms of the emphasis on developing the Welsh language in the community. It was reported that Language Initiatives had a central role in communities elsewhere and that there was room to look at the role of the Language initiative in this county.

The Cabinet Member - Welsh Language reported that the Council had clearly stressed that the ambition of having a million Welsh-speakers would not be realised through one medium, the education system, alone.

A member reported that rural companies needed to be looked-after and that promoting the economy was essential to keep Welsh-speakers here.

A member reported that the goal was fine, but that the Government and the committee which had formed the Strategy were devoid of ideas and had turned to education as if that were the answer to everything.

It was reported that all committee members came from the south-east.

In response to the comment on the committee membership, the Cabinet Member - Welsh Language reported that there was no representation from the north-west and barely any from the north at all. She noted her intention to raise the matter with the Chair of the committee and to seek fair representation of the speakers across Wales.

The meeting commenced at 10:30am and concluded at midday.