
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE 16/01/20

PRESENT: Councillor Elin Walker Jones (Chair)
Councillor Cai Larsen (Vice-chair).

COUNCILLORS: Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elwyn Jones, Eric M. Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Eirwyn Williams and Elfed Williams.

OFFICERS: Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllïan Mair Williams (Workplace Language Development Officer), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

OTHERS INVITED: Councillor Nia Jeffreys (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support) and Edgar Wyn Owen (Council Chair).

Present for item 5:

Aled Roberts (Welsh Language Commissioner)
Garem Jackson (Head of Education)
Debbie A. W. Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager)
Bet Huws (Gwynedd Language Development Officer - Meirionnydd)

Present for item 6:

Garem Jackson (Head of Education)
Debbie A. W. Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager)

Present for item 8:

Sophie A. Hughes (Business Support Officer)

Present for item 9:

Sian Wyn Griffiths (Public Relations and Communications Manager)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Charles Wyn Jones.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 7 November 2019 as a true record, subject to amending the second sentence of the penultimate paragraph under item 4 - Minutes (9 July 2019) to read as follows:

"Resolved that the letter* sent should be reviewed at the next meeting."

*[*a letter from the Workplace Language Development Officer to Grŵp Llandrillo Menai regarding engaging the interest and commitment of the Group's tutors in the conference organised for young people to discuss the value of the Welsh language as a skill for the workplace.]*

It was also asked where on the agenda the letter appeared. In response, the Chair confirmed that the letter had been sent, and should members wish to receive a copy, that this could be arranged. She was not aware that a reply to the letter had been received as yet.

With reference to item 5 of the minutes - Arfor Programme, the Chair noted that a letter had been sent to the Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language, in accordance with the committee's request, asking for the Government's commitment to the scheme. An automatic reply to the letter had been received, but a full response had not been received thus far.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER

Aled Roberts, the Welsh Language Commissioner was welcomed to the meeting to give members a presentation on his work.

The Commissioner gave an outline of what he regarded as the purpose of his role, focusing on his impressions of the Welsh language's situation across Wales. The following key points were highlighted during his presentation:

- That he was very keen to know what challenges faced this Council and to see what support his office could provide.
- That after embarking on his job in April 2019, he had travelled the length and breadth of Wales for six months in an attempt to fully comprehend the actual situation of the Welsh language, and that he had realised that the situation varied greatly from one part of Wales to another, with some parts making him feel hopeful and others dampening his spirits at times.
- That Gwynedd Council's internal Welsh-language administration and some of its policies were to be commended and that there was room perhaps to disseminate this good practice across Wales.
- Although the 2050 Welsh Language Strategy was the responsibility of the Welsh Government, that there was room for him too, as Commissioner, to ensure that the powers he possessed reinforced that strategy.
- That the priorities of the Office of the Commissioner in the first few years in terms of the standards and in terms of local authorities had been to ensure that documents and services were available bilingually, but nowadays local authorities were expected to self-regulate to some extent.
- That there were much more important standards than these regarding the future of the language, namely the standards involving the need for the Welsh Government and local government to assess the impact of various policies on the Welsh language and standards involving internal administration.
- That he was also very eager to do more work on promotion plans, as the only requirement on councils at present was that they prepare a plan every five years, and there was no reference to monitoring nor challenging those plans. Therefore, he wished the Office to consider the content of the Gwynedd Promotion Plan.

- That the duties of the Office were shared between regulatory responsibilities and promotion responsibilities. The act required that the Office accomplishes the regulatory responsibilities, but as those responsibilities increase, and resources diminish, it becomes increasingly difficult to undertake promotion work. Therefore, it had to be ensured somehow that resources are released internally to enable the Office to undertake more promotion work.
- Despite his agreement with every point in the Gwynedd Promotion Plan, that there was room to ask how successful the Council was in terms of its objective, e.g. in relation to the childcare sufficiency assessment, approximately 40% of placements were within bilingual situations, but there was no definition of 'bilingual situation'.
- That the situation of the Welsh language varied greatly across Gwynedd and that he had not realised before that some areas of the county were so Anglicised. He referred specifically to the excellent work being done by the head of Ysgol Bro Idris in developing a Welsh ethos at the school under very difficult circumstances.
- That the fact that children speak Welsh fluently by the time they start secondary education highlights the strength of the county's primary sector education policy, but there was room for the Council to consider its education policy in the secondary sector. There was also room to question what was happening with regard to the transfer of language in the home as it appears that the school, and not the home, is now safeguarding the Welsh language. It was also important that children did not regard Welsh as only mattering in school.
- That the Welsh-language education provision could be confusing and inconsistent in some bilingual schools, with fewer pupils than should be the case sitting five or more GCSEs through the medium of Welsh.
- That the conversation was ongoing regarding post-16 provision. There was no Welsh-medium education within further education in the south east, and approximately 85% of the expenditure on the Welsh language in further education went to two colleges in Wales.
- That there was room to thank Gwynedd for the steps taken with regard to apprenticeships.
- That all strategies in relation to the language show that young people who had been in Welsh-language education do not continue to use the Welsh language after reaching 16 years of age, nor bring their children up in due course to speak the language naturally. This meant that millions had to be invested in introducing the language to the next generation of children in the schools and the situation was not sustainable. There was a need to ensure that the health authorities had strategies to introduce the language to young parents and there were responsibilities on local authorities to ensure that childcare was available locally in the Welsh language for those young parents. Also, the situation of the Welsh language had to be consolidated within the schools and ensure that this continues through to the secondary sector and on to post-16 education.
- That there was a responsibility on the Welsh Government and British Government to ensure work opportunities for young people in the north-west and that civil-service based salaries are paid in Gwynedd. It should also be borne in mind that losing jobs in north Wales, especially in the north-west, has a greater impact due to the fragile nature of the economy.
- That Cymraeg 2050 did not define 'Welsh speaker', but that there was a more important second target, i.e. that we increase the percentage that uses Welsh on a daily basis from the current 10% to approximately 20% by 2050. There was much greater hope of hitting the target if the Welsh language stood its ground, or gained ground, in Gwynedd as there were many more opportunities to use the Welsh language daily in Gwynedd than in other places.

- That he did not wish to see Wales in the same situation as Ireland. The Irish language was Ireland's official first language, but of the 1.76m people who stated that they could speak the language (i.e. quite a similar percentage to the target of 1m Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050), only 56,000 said that they used the language on a daily basis. It is easy to think, that because the language has been accorded status for the first time, we are winning the battle, but the battle would be won in our homes, in workplaces and in colleges.
- That he was hopeful for the future and saw a change in relation to the standards, and nowadays, it was not possible for any council to challenge the Office of the Commissioner as to what they should be doing in relation to the Welsh language, because it was now legislation. There was, however, a lot more promotion work to be done, and specifically to promote the use of the Welsh language.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following matters were raised:

- The Commissioner was thanked for providing the committee with a dose of reality, and the importance of increasing and improving what we had was emphasised.
- The hope was expressed that schools' categorisation would be realised.
- It was noted that it was not understood why we encourage our young people to attend colleges outside Wales, and why the Welsh Government pays to send them to those places.
- This Council, it was noted, was hopeful and ambitious for the language, and shared the Commissioner's vision in relation to promoting use of the language and good practice.
- It was asked how the Council could work with the Office of the Commissioner to ensure more opportunities for people to use Welsh in the field of technology.
- It was noted that the education sector had now become very important in producing Welsh speakers and that it was likely that a greater number of Welsh speakers was now being produced by the education system than in the home.
- It was noted that it appeared that the way of hitting the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 was by increasing the number of children in Welsh-language education throughout Wales, although it was acknowledged that this increase would be gradual.
- The demand for Welsh-language education in south-east Wales, it was noted, exceeded the provision, and it was asked to what extent it could be ensured that anyone who wished to receive Welsh-language education could have access to it within a reasonable distance.
- There was reference to Ysgol y Traeth, Barmouth as an example of a school that succeeded in accomplishing innovative work with the Welsh language in an area without a tradition of Welsh. It was noted that conditioning pupils and their parents to see the advantage of Welsh as a subject and medium in such areas was an uphill struggle.
- It was noted that the Welsh language was important as a qualification for careers in Gwynedd and was seen as a language of opportunity, but that more pressure needed to be brought to bear on other authorities across Wales to appoint bilingual staff.
- The 'Doctoriaid Yfory' (Tomorrow's Doctors) scheme is a very good way of breaking new ground, it was noted.
- It was noted that Ysgol Gynradd Rhiwlas continues to do good work in relation to the Welsh language, but that the children who transfer to Ysgol Friars soon forget their Welsh.

- The importance of ensuring that the Planning Department has regard for the influence of any development on the language was emphasised, irrespective of whether or not it is stipulated in the Development Plan.

In response to some of the above observations and questions, the Commissioner noted:

- That he had been partly responsible for drawing up the current policy to fund students, and that legal advice at the time stated that it was not possible to restrict admission to colleges in Wales.
- In terms of technology, that the responsibility had transferred from the Office of the Commissioner to the Government since September of last year, and that this was significant, as Government resources were much greater and they had greater influence in purchasing systems, etc. Representatives from the Office discussed problems raised by Gwynedd Council in relation to Welsh-language apps with the Government and it was important that the Council continued to refer practical problems of this type to the Office of the Commissioner so as to enable steps to be taken for them to be resolved.
- That meeting the demand for Welsh-language education depended on the Government's figures regarding the requirement for growth corresponding to actual demand. It was believed that there was enough slack within the system at present to ensure that this happened, but should the demand exceed what was planned by the Government and local government, an interesting discussion would ensue. This would not entail building new schools everywhere, but some schools would be called upon to change their language medium. It was also necessary to be realistic about the lack of planning over the last 10-15 years in terms of the number of Welsh-medium teachers needed to meet what we had at present, let alone growth.
- That the need was agreed to increase the opportunities available for young people to use the Welsh language in the workplace. An assessment was carried out of how many councils denoted jobs as Welsh essential ones and it was observed that the processes were comparatively elementary, with some tending to use Welsh essential solely within the Education Department, and others having no language requirements. It was further noted that the Government had established the Health Education and Improvement Wales body which did not come under the standards even, and the Health Board's 'Mwy na Geiriau/More than Words' project was not being monitored at all. It is acknowledged that the attempt to attract more Welsh-speaking doctors is commendable, however the Office receives more language complaints in relation to the health boards than in relation to local government. There was no lack of commitment to the Welsh language at a strategic level, rather a lack of implementation at grass roots level. Although councils led the way in terms of standards, they failed to provide Welsh-language services due to their failure to appoint Welsh speakers, and part of his work during the next six to seven years would be to endeavour to the best of his ability to complete the circle so that all the investment in education was not wasted.
- That the numbers sitting Welsh first language examinations at Ysgol Friars had risen. Schools marketed themselves on the basis of how many A* - C grades their pupils were awarded, and it was natural for non-Welsh-speaking families to want their children to sit a Welsh second language examination as they would be more likely to get a good grade. Perhaps it was necessary to ensure that children who had received a Welsh-language primary education sat a Welsh first language examination, so that they were fluent in Welsh on leaving school. He added that there was no legislative basis to schools' categorisation. The provision could be confusing and inconsistent in some bilingual schools, with fewer taking subjects through the medium of Welsh than should be the case. He referred to a particular school outside of Gwynedd which fell into bilingual category 2A (which meant that 80% of the pupils should be receiving a Welsh-language education), noting that

when he looked at the figures, he saw that only 37% of pupils sat examinations through the medium of Welsh in at least five of their subjects. When the school was asked about the situation, it was explained that excessively pushing the Welsh language meant that the school would lose children to a neighbouring school. The education consortia and Estyn also had a responsibility to draw attention to any problems in terms of schools' language category in comparison to what was happening in classes. The legal responsibility lay with the county councils, but very rarely did councils send people into schools to find out what was going on. In his opinion, if a school was a bilingual one, the child should be leaving school at the age of 16 able to speak Welsh, but as this did not happen, a discussion was needed about categorisation. It was not possible to have a compromise as happened in the past, as all that compromise did was to weaken the language's situation.

- In terms of planning, there was room for the Welsh Government to decide whether the new TAN 20 or the legislation was the way forward. Another conversation was to be had with the Planning Inspector as they moved to a situation where the Planning Inspectorate served Wales only. Perhaps the Welsh language had not been a strength in terms of their assessments under the system historically, but this was something that would have to be developed in moving forward. This was not a matter for the county councils, but there was a need to make sure that the entire planning system paid adequate attention to the Welsh language.

The Commissioner was thanked for his interesting and inspiring presentation and for responding to the members' questions and observations. The desire to invite him back to the committee to continue the discussion was expressed and good wishes were extended to him in his work.

In response, the Commissioner noted that he would be keen to return to the committee to discuss some of the practical problems, such as education and planning, as everyone was working towards the same aim.

The members were invited to contact the Office of the Commissioner if they had any further comments or questions.

In response to a further question by a member, the Commissioner confirmed that the Office did not have a role in relation to correct language in schools nor in relation to house and farm names, although it did have a responsibility for village and town names.

6. ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT OF THE WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP)

Submitted - the report of the Education Corporate Services Manager inviting the committee to consider the content of the annual review report and offer observations.

Further to the content of the report and to the Welsh Language Commissioner's presentation (item 5 above), the Head of Education noted:

- That he agreed in full that the provision in schools in relation to category 2A had been a weakness in the past, but since the advent of the Secondary Sector Language Strategy in Gwynedd, the Authority now had a clear indication of the situation in every school. This information was vital in order to draw up a purposeful plan for all the different linguistic situations in each school in order to strengthen not only the social use element but also to influence the language curriculum.

- He could not overemphasise the extent to which the Department took pride in the fact that it could provide the entire range of services to the most vulnerable learners through the medium of Welsh (outcome 6) and that this was a credit to the staff and to the Council's vision and the investment made in this field.
- That the Minister for Education had congratulated Gwynedd on the way the Council had established a different education system in Dolgellau, which meant that the Welshness of the primary schools permeated Ysgol Bro Idris. He also noted that he wished to congratulate the Headteacher and staff and governors on their work in promoting, insisting and ensuring that the Welsh language holds its ground at the school.
- That the Headteacher of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn also had a strong vision. As with Bro Idris, Tywyn again was an uphill struggle in terms of having a positive influence in relation to the Welsh language, but the way in which the school had adopted the plan for the Secondary Sector Language Strategy had received national attention and provided a way forward for any other institution.
- That significant green shoots of change had also been witnessed at Ysgol Friars, with the number sitting Welsh First Language on the increase.
- That the percentage of children coming into the foundation phase from non-Welsh-speaking homes was on the increase. A decline in children's social skills was also a factor, with children starting the foundation phase without communication skills in any language, and the fact that almost all of them were assessed through the medium of Welsh at the end of year 2 was testament to the success of the foundation phase in Gwynedd.
- That it was believed that major steps forward were also being taken in the secondary sector as a result of the fact that Gwynedd had the first Secondary Sector Language Strategy in terms of promoting the Welsh language in Wales.
- That the success of the Primary Schools Welsh Language Charter had now spread throughout Wales as a result of Gwynedd primary schools' vision in adopting it in 2011.
- That Estyn was now, for the first time, measuring to what extent schools gauged children's informal use of Welsh, and that this stemmed directly from a meeting held in Carmarthen in 2013 where a copy of the Gwynedd Welsh Language Charter was presented to the then Chief Inspector of Schools.
- That he agreed with the Commissioner about the need to challenge a school's context in terms of bilingualism and that there was some way to go too in being able to face up to and report on the reality in our schools, but the fact that this was being acknowledged was an important step forward.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion the following matters were raised:

- The fact that excellent work was taking place at Ysgol Bro Idris and also at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn was reiterated.
- It was noted that because of the perception that Ysgol Friars is an English school, children travelled there from areas such as Porthmadog, and more information was requested about the pilot scheme to develop the language skills of the workforce.
- It was noted, despite a number of children sitting Welsh first language GCSE, that much fewer followed other subjects through the medium of Welsh, and it was asked whether data was available on how well this group of children speak Welsh.

In response to some of the above observations and questions, the following was noted:

- That the pilot scheme to develop the language skills of the workforce at Ysgol Friars was funded through a grant awarded to the region and which was then allocated. This grant funding has been used over a period of time to employ a language tutor to work with some of the school's teachers, in order to develop their skills and confidence to use the Welsh language in class, and developing an element of Welsh within their educational resources too. Acquiring those skills would not be an overnight process and no specific target was set for that. However, the Department collaborated closely with the school and influenced where possible.
- That this was a very exciting time in Gwynedd within the context of the Welsh language, with the Welsh Language Charter having long been established, and the Secondary Sector Language Strategy having a greater influence on a cohort of children, both formally and informally, within the context of informal Welsh than ever before.
- That the Service also planned for the new curriculum as a consequence of Professor Donaldson's work, which would become increasingly important in the life of our schools.
- That a piece of work was commissioned to look at the post-16 provision in Gwynedd, focusing specifically on the sixth form element in Arfon, in order to discover whether there was a case for changing the current system. The Welsh-medium provision lay at the core of the brief for this work and the perception that post-16 education through the medium of Welsh was a hindrance to young people had to be done away with.
- As so much was happening in this field at present, it was decided to establish a Project Board around the Welsh language, and it was noted that the Department would be pleased to provide the committee with summary and timely reports on the work as a means of showing what the Department was doing in the field of Welsh in its entirety.
- That it was slightly premature to present data on the use of more informal language by those pupils sitting GCSEs, but it was hoped to see in due course that there was a link between those following a number of subjects through the medium of Welsh and the use they made of Welsh. This was one reason why specific attention had to be given to the medium across the curriculum as this is what would provide learners with the skills and confidence to be able to use Welsh in a range of different situations, rather than Welsh solely as a subject.

The Chair suggested, as there were still quite a few questions and discussions, that the committee should scrutinise the report further. She thanked the Head of Education for suggesting that regular reports come back to the committee and suggested that a representative of the committee should sit on the Project Board around the Welsh language to scrutinise the plan because it was so comprehensive, and also to meet the need to support the Head of Education with the plan.

RESOLVED to propose the Chair, Vice-chair and Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd for consideration by the Department to act as members of the Project Board in order to scrutinise the plan further.

7. CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Submitted - a report by the Cabinet Member providing an update on the key developments in the Welsh language field since the previous committee meeting.

As time did not allow giving full consideration to the report and that the Cabinet Member had to leave the meeting at this point, members were invited to get in touch regarding any questions about the report.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

8. MENTAL HEALTH AND THE WELSH LANGUAGE

The Business Support Officer provided a presentation on the mental health provision through the medium of Welsh, arising from her research work for her master's degree.

The Chair thanked the officer for the presentation, emphasising that the conclusions of the research work prove the linguistic need for this provision.

RESOLVED to agree with the conclusions of the research work and to invite the Business Support Officer to conduct a workshop on this subject with all Council members because the presentation contains such a wealth of information, information which is relevant to all, and because the officer had to rush through her presentation, time being so short.

9. WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN A BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT - COMMUNITY RESOURCE TEAMS

RESOLVED to defer the item until the next meeting as time did not now allow the report to be given balanced consideration, and also because the report's author, namely the Health and Community Care Transformation Programme Leader (Gwynedd and Anglesey) was unable to attend this meeting.

10. PRAISE AND COMPLAINTS REPORT

Submitted - the Language Adviser's report presenting the latest information to the committee on complaints and examples of success in promoting the use of the Welsh language within Council services.

The Language Adviser explained that several of the complaints dated from a period before the last meeting, but that they were not reported on previously as they had not been resolved at the time.

A member noted that he welcomed receiving these complaints as they provided an indication of what was happening at grassroots level.

As time did not allow giving full consideration to the report, members were invited to get in touch regarding any questions.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.00 pm

CHAIRMAN