
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 24.04.18

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

Councillors: Aled Evans, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones, Alan Jones Evans, John P. Roberts, Elwyn Edwards, Kevin Morris Jones, Elfed Wyn Williams, Eirwyn Williams, Elwyn Jones, Charles Wyn Jones.

Corporate Support: Gwenllian Mair Williams (Welsh Language Services Manager), Eiliw Alwyn (Corporate Services Project Manager), Nia Hâf Davies (Planning Manager), and Sioned Williams (Member Support Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Eric M. 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 committee meeting held on 27 February 2018, as a true record.

5. LANGUAGE STRATEGY CONSULTATION

A draft version of the Language Strategy, 'Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd 2018-2023', was presented by the Welsh Language Services Manager. It was noted that the public consultation period on the strategy had started, and that it would end on 5 June 2018. It was noted that comments, amendments or suggestions from any individuals or organisations would be welcomed for consideration. The final strategy would be submitted to the Cabinet and Full Council in October 2018, with an action plan that would be prepared during the summer.

During the ensuing discussion, responses were provided to a number of questions/observations from individual members in relation to:

- Linguistic and mutation errors in the strategy.
- There were no actions included in the strategy explaining what would happen, who was responsible, and how progress would be measured.
- Some Council decisions were contrary to a number of the objectives contained in the strategy e.g. the closure of youth clubs that promoted the use of the Welsh language among young people.

Members were guided through the Language Strategy consultation questions. During the discussion, responses were provided to a number of questions/observations from individual members in relation to:

A summary of the current situation and challenges

- The 'Stealth English' that stemmed from the technology/electronic devices that were used in schools - could this be addressed?
- Gwynedd Council was one of the only organisations in Wales that was progressive in its translation of 'apps', the provision of Welsh language technology, and provision of bilingual meetings - why did the government not contribute funding to support this exceptional work?
- Was it fair to encourage young people 'to be community leaders by organising events in their communities' when the Council was withdrawing the facilities and funding to do this?

Priority 1: The Language of the Home

- Language transfer was weak among lone parent families - was it possible to have a specific strategy to address this matter?
- Language transfer was weak in families where only the father spoke Welsh. The message that fathers had an important role in ensuring that their children grew up bilingually needed to be strengthened.
- A suggestion to establish new immersion centres in areas where a high percentage of children were late-comers to the Welsh language.
- Was it possible to combine the language of the home vision with the aim of the Language Charter?

Priority 2: The Language of Learning

- There was a need to provide secondary school pupils with a clear message that the Welsh language was a qualification for both the public and private sectors, which could lead to further future employment opportunities.

Priority 3: The Language of Work and Services

- The workplace was a powerful place to promote the use of Welsh - it was important to expand the workplaces that operated entirely in Welsh.
- Was it possible to influence major banks, supermarkets and energy companies to offer more language choices?
- It was important to ensure that the machines use clear, everyday language Welsh. The translation was often too cumbersome and complex, difficult to understand, which turned people against the language.

Priority 4 : The Language of the Community

- Who was responsible for arranging social activities? It was noted that it was difficult to maintain the momentum of voluntary committees.
- As Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers came together in social activities, there was a risk that English became the language of the activities. Was it possible to provide people in these situations with simple guidance to ensure that the Welsh language could be used without excluding non-Welsh speakers? Guidance on speaking with Welsh learners should also be considered, in order to support them.
- A need to examine options for assisting businesses with the cost of bilingual signage, similar to the grants that were previously available from the Welsh Language Board.
- A need to hold more training sessions for councillors on 'promoting the Welsh language in the community'.

Priority 5: Research and Technology – Setting the Right Foundations

- The importance of giving children in primary schools access to Welsh language technology – if they became familiar with Welsh technology from an early age they were more likely to use Welsh language technology in their daily lives after leaving school.

RESOLVED: To note the contents of the strategy and the consultation questions.

6. REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S PLACE NAME POLICY

The Corporate Services Project Manager presented a research paper, outlining the Authority's statutory duties and rights in respect of naming, recording and promoting house, street and place names in Gwynedd. It was noted that the matter had been the subject of a number of complaints to the Committee over recent years, and that the research paper's purpose was to provide a clearer understanding of the situation. Members were requested to consider the research results and recommendations, and offer their views on the appropriate next steps.

During the ensuing discussion, responses were provided to a number of questions/observations from individual members in relation to:

- Did the Council have the right to insist upon Welsh names for new estates?
- Who was responsible for naming houses, developments and streets owned by the Council?
- New developments were often more likely to be given Welsh names, could this point be emphasised?
- The matter caused concern, not only the naming of houses and streets, but also the naming of fields, rocks, or parts of mountains. Was it possible to seek funding to install a plaque on them noting the correct names, in order to promote the Welsh names?

RESOLVED: To agree to continue to work on the main purpose of the report, to gain clarity, especially on the naming of geographic features and how we could influence the names used by external bodies such as the Royal Mail and the Ordnance Survey, and report back to the Committee on any developments.

7. PRESENTATION ON TAN 20 – PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The Committee received a presentation on Technical Advice Note 20: Planning and the Welsh language (TAN 20) following a request by the Chair, and the concern that the guidance from the government on the matter was ambiguous and weak. It was noted that the new TAN 20 had been published since October 2017, and the similarities/differences between this version and the previous version were highlighted. The weaknesses of the new version were discussed, and the implications for the planning areas of Gwynedd and Anglesey.

It was explained that a response had already been sent to the Government in December on behalf of the Plaid Cymru Group to express concern and dissatisfaction that the Government had ignored the observations of Gwynedd and Anglesey Councils, and had failed to:

- offer a definition of areas of linguistic sensitivity;
- provide guidance on the language assessment.

It was reported that a response had been received from the Minister, Lesley Griffiths AM, noting that Local Authorities were free to expand upon national policy and develop their

own guidance to respond to local needs. It therefore placed the responsibility in the hands of the Local Authority to determine what was appropriate for its area.

Members were asked whether they wished to send further correspondence on the matter to the Government on behalf of the Language Committee, or whether they were happy to wait for the outcome of the development of the Supplementary Planning Guidance, and receive an update at the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED: to leave the item on the agenda for an update at the next meeting.

8. GRIEVANCES AND INVESTIGATIONS

There were no complaints or investigations to note.

CHAIR