

More than just Words - Follow-on Strategic Framework 2016-2019 – Gwynedd Council situation

Since 1996, Gwynedd Council has been operating bilingually in every aspect of its business. Its strategy regarding the Welsh language has extended to recruitment processes and requirements, data collection, contracts, commissioning, procurement and training.

As a Department, we have committed to More than just Words from the outset since its publication in 2012 and we welcome the principles of the Follow-up Strategic Framework which was published in 2016. Gwynedd's Statutory Director, Morwena Edwards, plays a national role by leading on this important agenda on behalf of other directors, and she then reports on Gwynedd Council's progress in her annual report.

The Strategic Framework notes seven key objectives which need to be fulfilled, and as a Council and a Department we have made progress in responding to the objectives.

Objective 1: National and Local Leadership, and National Policy

Gwynedd Council has a robust and clear Language Policy which emphasises the provision of services that respond to the needs of citizens, and meets their duty to comply with Language Standards. The Policy and Standards came into force on 31 March, 2016. It is evident that More than just Words principles have been intertwined with Gwynedd Council's broader principles and policies, and there is close collaboration between this department and the Workforce Language Development Officer on overlapping elements.

The Council has also committed to promote use of the Welsh language through its services - internally and externally - and this work is achieved through the Council's Language Unit which also includes the language initiative, Hunaniaith, for the county. The Council is currently developing a new language strategy - Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd 2018-2023 - which will set the vision for the next five years.

The Council has a robust recruitment policy which has existed for many years and it ensures that bilingual staff are appointed where needed. If the individual's linguistic ability does not reach the requirements of the post, language training will be provided from a learner's beginner level up to language refresher standard and using clear Welsh.

The commitment of the Adults, Health and Well-being Department and the Children and Supporting Families Department to the principles of More than just Words is a reflection of the commitment and priority given across the Council to offering Welsh-medium services. A senior officer was designated to promote the Welsh language within the Adults and Children's Departments, namely the Senior Business Manager. In addition, a Workforce Support Manager was designated within the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to act as a 'More than just Words Champion'.

In order to promote collaboration and share good practice, the Department is a member of the North Wales More than just Words Forum, which has a representation from the Health

service, Ambulance service, Fire Service, Colleges and Councils across north Wales as well as the Care Council for Wales.

Objective 2: Mapping, Auditing, Data Collection and Research

Currently, approximately 88% of the service's staff are able to speak Welsh and we are confident in the Council's current ability to provide the Proactive Offer although some weak pockets have been identified. The Council's recruitment procedure is followed and information about staff language is collected on the Council's Human Resources computer system. We have committed to plan, develop, implement and invest in a bilingual workforce.

During 2016-2018, the Human Resources Department commenced the process of assessing current posts to ensure that language specifications (the language requirements set for them) were appropriate for the posts in question. A new skills framework was developed based on WJEC's framework, and the intention is that the work will proceed to assess the skills of individuals who hold the posts, to ensure that everyone meets the necessary requirements. This will allow us to plan more suitable training and identify gaps in staff skills in terms of the Proactive Offer.

We are aware that there are shortcomings in our provision e.g. in the south of the county. It is anticipated that ensuring a bilingual workforce for the future in this part of the county will be a challenge. There is an intention to review plans to collaborate with further education providers across north Wales to ensure that the future workforce will be drawn to appropriate courses and that the value of bilingual skills is maximised. This also corresponds with one of the priorities noted in the Welsh Language Promotion Plan.

We already provide Welsh lessons and Welsh refresher lessons which have been tailored to the level of staff needs and regional courses are available for our partners which address the language element. Emphasis is placed on the importance of language in induction training for care staff and in the 'First Year in Practice' workshop for social workers. We continue to collaborate with Bangor University to ensure that a high percentage of students undertaking an M.A. in social work are Welsh speakers.

In terms of the individual receiving care, information about language choice is gathered during the initial contact as it is within the role of the social worker to identify language needs as part of the assessment. By means of the brokerage system, we can ensure that the skills of providers correspond with the needs of our users, which includes linguistic needs.

We are now in a better position to record data since the new WCCIS computer system was introduced in August, 2017. The verbal and written language choice of the service user and the ability to communicate bilingually has been streamed into the developmental details of the new system (WCCIS) and it is hoped that it will not only enable the service to operate bilingually, but also to facilitate the process of communicating and transferring information to external agencies. At present, we are reviewing our templates on the system e.g. 'What matters' and the 'Care Plan' to ensure that Language choice is addressed and also to ensure that the commissioned service has responded to Language needs when a review is undertaken.

In the future, reports from the WCCIS system will allow us to identify the weaknesses and shortcomings of the provision in terms of the Proactive Offer that will then be fed into the planning and commissioning process.

Objective 3: Service Planning, Commissioning, Contracting and Workforce Planning

In its service procurement documentation, the Council clearly notes the need for providers to demonstrate how they would ensure that the linguistic requirements of individuals receiving a service will be met and respected.

Current commissioning plans place a clear emphasis on the importance of language. Due to recent legislations, the Council is currently reviewing its commissioning plans.

Work to review the commissioning plans will be an opportunity to seek new opportunities to strengthen arrangements and processes to ensure that More than just Words principles are incorporated.

All of the Council's current contracts with care providers include specific clauses regarding linguistic requirements and the need to respect individuals who receive a service. This step is implemented in a manner that complies with the Welsh Language Commissioner's guidelines on commissioning services. Recently, when reviewing Residential Care contracts, we have placed an expectation on providers to prepare a Language Policy to demonstrate how they will achieve the principles of More than just Words and draw-up an improvement plan. Consequently, as a Department we can ensure that the principles of More than just Words will mainstream into all aspects of the services we commission as Adults and Children. Also, it will form the foundation to establish a positive and supportive monitoring procedure to More than just Words principles in future. In order to support our providers, a Language Policy template was formulated. Also, a course was established and held for third sector providers and managers to explain how to complete the document and to raise awareness about the Proactive Offer.

During 2016, engagement work was undertaken to feed into the Gwynedd Population Needs Assessment. Useful information was gathered about the population in terms of growth demographic, location, life expectancy and healthy life expectancy. Information was also gathered about the profile of the Welsh language. At the end of the process, a number of interesting facts came to light to assist the Department to plan care services for the future. The results have been subject to the Council's committee procedure.

It will be challenging to encourage some non-Welsh providers to promote bilingualism and Welsh culture within their organisations. There is a need to increase the interest of providers and the practical challenge is costs that could be associated with any requirements e.g. releasing care staff to attend courses to learn Welsh. There will be a need to collaborate with external Providers to identify more creative ways of overcoming the difficulties. There will be a need to make them realise the importance of the fact that language is part of the care and also the priority given by the Council to providing services in the individual's chosen language.

Objective 4: Promotion and Engagement

The Communication Plan is being developed by the Language Unit and the corporate Communications Unit, which will ensure that regular messages are transferred to all Council staff about the importance of offering Welsh-medium services and the resources and support available to them to improve their skills and confidence.

The Council and the Department's front-line staff wear a language work logo (if appropriate) and posters can be seen in every reception and in our residential homes. By visiting teams, an opportunity was received to raise awareness about More than just Words and to hold a discussion with staff. Staff are reminded about the principles of More than just Words by means of items in the Department's 'Newsletter'.

Publicity has been given to More than just Words and the 'Proactive Offer' at meetings, via bulletins and e-mails to independent care partners and the third sector. The 'work logo' and also the 'Pocket Book for Students' were distributed at meetings.

The Language Unit and the Learning and Development Team are now holding a short session as part of every induction training for new care staff, in order to draw attention to staff responsibilities in offering a bilingual service, to raise awareness of the proactive offer principle and to respect the service user's linguistic needs.

Two half day courses were arranged for Managers and Owners of Care establishments in order to raise awareness of 'More than just Words' and to give guidance on how to create a self-assessment of their business, as well as creating a Language Policy and improvement plan. Unfortunately, the response was very disappointing. Despite this, there is an intention to collaborate with the Care Council for Wales on this issue and to promote the course for providers and the third sector in Gwynedd.

Every support is given to More than just Words campaigns, such as the Music Day, by using the Council and the Department's publicity methods. As a Council, three applications were submitted to the More than just Words Celebration Event 2017 and independent and third sector Providers, as well as Councillors, were encouraged to nominate and take part.

The North Wales More than just Words Forum is a way to share ideas and is an excellent opportunity to collaborate with Health, councils and other organisations to identify opportunities and good practice. We have two officers attending on behalf of the Department. In October 2017, the Forum was acknowledged in a national More than just Words event in Cardiff by winning Special Recognition in the Leadership category.

The following are examples of recent collaboration -

In order to promote the Forum's agenda, a representative from Gwynedd supported the Care Council in interviews to appoint a Work Welsh Engagement and Development Officer. The purpose of this post is to promote the importance of the Welsh language in Social Care in Wales and to encourage participation in the Work Welsh Plan. It is hoped that Gwynedd Council will also benefit from this appointment.

During this month, the Forum intends to have a More than just Words stall at the Annual North Wales Registered Care Managers Forum in the Optic, St Asaph. Once again, this will be an excellent opportunity to hold conversations with north Wales registered care managers to raise awareness about More than just Words.

Objective 5: Professional Education

Our Workforce Development unit is collaborating with education bodies and professional bodies on behalf of the Department and the Council to discuss curriculum matters and care staff training programmes. They are continuing to collaborate with Bangor University to ensure that a high percentage of students undertaking an M.A. in social work are Welsh speakers and to provide placements for students within the teams.

It is believed that what has been noted as an update to objectives 1 to 5 also summarises the situation in terms of objectives 6: Welsh in the workplace and 7: Regulation and Inspection.

Objective 6: Welsh in the workplace.

A Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer was appointed in Summer 2017, and this post will not only seek to support pure learners, but also to implement a training programme that will improve the skills and confidence of Welsh speakers. The officer works closely with the Language Unit and with workforce development officers and other training of the service to ensure that training and support is targeted where it is needed the most.

Next Steps

The Department is aware of a number of fields that need further attention to move the More than just Words agenda forward in the care field; however, for the next year, it is intended to prioritise to focus on the following:-

1. Offer support for Gwynedd private care providers to adopt a Language Policy template from the Department so that they can complete a self-assessment of their ability to provide the Proactive Offer. Then, we are eager to collaborate with Providers to formulate an improvement plan e.g. identifying training requirements, providing support to promote Welsh speakers in the workplace, strengthening Welsh culture within their business etc. Other Councils in north Wales have already expressed an interest in our intention and are eager to hold a further discussion at the North Wales More than just Words Forum.
2. Improve our system to monitor the implementation of language requirements in accordance with our agreement with all providers by collaborating with the Social Care Council and Care Inspectorate Wales.
3. Collaborate with other partners e.g. colleges/councils to improve our recruitment system to attract Welsh speakers and learners into the Care field.