

MEETING:	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
DATE:	7 November 2019
TITLE:	Language Specifications
AUTHOR:	Siôn Elwyn Hughes
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT	Provide an update on the progress of the Language Specifications project and give Members an opportunity to ask questions or propose recommendations for any further action

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2015, the Language Committee decided to examine the procedure for recording the language skills of staff - in preparation for the emergence of the Welsh Language Standards in 2016 at the time.
- 1.2 In January 2016, a further decision was made to review the language requirements and conditions of Council posts in order to impose realistic requirements alongside the post duties. For example:
 - **Teacher:** The requirements were kept at the highest level due to the nature of the post
 - **Leisure Assistant:** The speaking and listening requirements were kept high in order to reflect the importance of the oral skills in the post but the writing requirements were lowered as a leisure assistant is not required to write reports, minutes etc.
- 1.3 In 2017, the second part of the project was started, namely ensuring that support is available for existing members of staff either to maintain their Welsh skills or reach the language requirements of their post if a discrepancy existed.
- 1.3 We started by running a pilot with the Gwynedd Consultancy Department at the end of 2017. This was partly due to the Department's needs and also because of their desire to work with us.
- 1.4 We worked closely with the Head to map out the work and decide on the priorities, and in doing so we arranged training for six members of staff by the summer of 2018.
- 1.5 The Department has now completed the various stages of the process in its entirety once, and is now reviewing and updating any needs regularly with the support of the Language Specifications team.

- 1.6 One of the most important lessons learned from the pilot is the importance of meeting the Heads and Managers, and including them in the process from the very beginning.
- 1.7 In addition, the department and managers taking ownership of the work was crucial to the success of the project.

2. Summary of the presentation

- 2.1 Following the pilot with Gwynedd Consultancy, we started working with other departments in November 2018.
- 2.2 It was decided to prioritise front-line services and workers in order to ensure that the staff who come into regular contact with the people of Gwynedd are able to offer a service through the medium of Welsh according to the language specification of their posts.

Among the departments and services we worked with first were:

- Children and Supporting Families: Youth Justice Service
- Highways and Municipal: Recycling Sites Service
- Adults, Health and Well-being: Hafod Mawddach Care Home, Barmouth

- 2.3 We have now visited **64** services (many of which were front-line services) across the organisation and have assessed **2108** individuals- **approximately 30% of the Council's workforce**. This is a combination of face-to-face assessments, on-line self-assessments or the opinion of the line manager.
- 2.4 Of those assessed to date, **93.3%** reach or pass the language specification of their post.
- 2.5 In order to facilitate the assessment process and increase the project's efficiency, an on-line assessment was created internally which notes the individual's level based on the answers to questions about language ability. This level validator offers something unique to the Council, and has even attracted interest from other organisations and councils - most notably to date is Conwy Council.
- 2.7 All types of support, including internal refresher courses, external courses, on-line courses and apps and websites are continually offered to staff to improve or maintain their Welsh skills.
- 2.8 In order to offer after-care to those receiving training, and support speakers who lack confidence or who want to improve their Welsh using methods other than a classroom setting, the **Befriending Scheme** was set up in March 2018. This Scheme pairs a member of staff who is confident in speaking Welsh with another member of staff who wants to develop their language skills.

The five Friends are currently working with staff, and the Scheme has already succeeded with a member of Byw'n lach staff.

Next steps

- 3.1 It is hoped that we will complete our visits to the services of the Economy and Community Department, Corporate Support Department and Environment Department in the coming months (depending on the managers' response to our requests to meet).

3.2 We will continue to work closely with Byw'n Iach to offer the necessary support to the staff. We have already agreed on training dates over the coming months that staff who need to reach the Language Specifications will be attending.

3.3 We will continue to work with care staff in care homes, mainly but not restricted to the south of the county, but we will also be looking to reach mobile staff such as community care workers.

3. What is sought by the Committee?

4.1 We would welcome observations or questions from the Committee on the work to date as well as recommendations and suggestions for the next steps.