
SPECIAL LANGUAGE COMMITTEE, 08.07.15

Present: Councillor Eirwyn Williams (Vice-chair in the chair).

Councillors: Tom Ellis, Alwyn Gruffydd, Siân Gwenllian, Elfed Williams and Hefin Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillor Ioan Thomas (Cabinet Member for the Welsh Language).

Officers: Arwel Ellis Jones (Senior Manager – Democracy and Delivery), Debbie Williams Jones (Democratic (and Language) Service Manager), Gwenllian Williams (Gwynedd Welsh Language Development Officer (Workforce)), Garem Jackson (Education Quality Improvement Officer) and Eirian Roberts (Member Support and Scrutiny Officer).

Apologies: Councillors Craig ab Iago, Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Charles Jones, Eric Merfyn Jones and Sion Jones.

1. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

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

2. CONSULTATION ON THE COMPLIANCE NOTICE ON WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Submitted – the report of the Democratic (and Language) Service Manager, providing a summary of the Compliance Notice and the main points that were requested to be discussed and responded to by the committee.

It was noted that there would be consultation with the Management Group and the Corporate Management Team prior to the Cabinet Member's formal response to the consultation on behalf of the Council.

During the discussion the following observations were noted by members on the contents of the standards:-

1. Delivering Services (1-87)

- Standards 2, 3, 21, 28, 32, 72 – The principle of delivering standards as needed rather than according to choice was a basic principle and it should be a principle throughout the whole of Wales. If a choice was given, people tended to state that they had no preference and this could result in a reduction in the use of the Welsh language.
- Standard Number 12 – It was suggested that Welsh should be placed first when advertising telephone numbers, helplines or call centre services.
- Standard 30 - The Council provided simultaneous translation at every public meeting that was held and the Welsh language has been normalised to such a degree that the public were completely aware that it was possible for them to speak Welsh at public meetings held by the Council.
- Standard Number 49 – It was not usual for this Council to produce a separate Welsh and English version of a document.
- Standards 67-68 - In accordance with the Council's Welsh Language Scheme, all staff members in receptions were completely bilingual.

Consequently, staff did not wear badges to show that a Welsh language service was available and there were no signs stating that people were welcome to use the Welsh language in the reception. Once again, it was arguable that the Council's policy as it stood was more than sufficient for the requirements.

- General -
- The Council's Language Scheme already went beyond the majority of these standards. It had to be ensured that the wording of the standards did not dilute the Language Scheme and that they reflected the situation that had developed naturally in Gwynedd over the years by practice and procedures.
- The reorganisation of Local Authorities arrangements and the possible impact of this on compliance with the Standards had to be borne in mind in due course.

2. Forming a Policy (88-97)

- The fact that the Council formed policies which did not treat the Welsh language less favourably than English as a matter of course was welcomed but it was agreed that formalising the procedure by establishing a structure to prove that full consideration had been given to the Welsh language would be a way of promoting this aspect in a positive manner.
- It was not the wish to create additional paper work but rather a system could be incorporated to evidence this in the current procedure of submitting policies to the Cabinet.

3. Implementation (98-144)

- The standards should allow this Council to operate in accordance with its Language Scheme in terms of internal administration because placing emphasis on the 'chosen' language, could negatively affect the status of the Welsh language rather than strengthening it by resulting in members of staff choosing to receive information in English rather than in Welsh.
- The fact that the Standards could have more power than the Council's Language Scheme could impact negatively on Gwynedd Council's capacity to carry on operating as it did at the moment in light of any challenge.

4. Keeping Records (147 – 154) and Supplementary Standards (155-176)

- Although keeping records to comply with the standards would create more work for this Council, the Council would be willing to shoulder the responsibility as it would be of assistance from the perspective of forcing other councils to act in a similar way. It would also be a means of confirming this Council's position should any issue arise.

5. Promotion (173-174)

- The Council (under *Hunaniaith*) had a Language Strategy for the County which was published in 2014 for a period of three years. Formulating a new Strategy within a year to comply with Standards 145-174 would serve no purpose. There was also doubt about the Council's capacity to measure the effect of achieving the ambition of any strategy every five years, as the Census was the only data source for measuring the number and percentage of Welsh speakers.

General

- The proposed standards did not take into consideration the innovative steps this Council had already taken and this had to be included in some way within the standards.

It was emphasised that there was a need to provide wider publicity to the consultation and the observations and there was also a need to lobby so that the standards could be extended to all central government bodies that operated in Wales.

RESOLVED to ask Officers to:-

- (a) Summarise the points raised and to circulate the response of the Cabinet Member to members of the committee in draft form if time permits.**
- (b) Give wider publicity to the consultation and the observations via the Communications Unit and Rhaeadr.**
- (c) Lobby and extend the standards to all central government bodies that are operational in Wales.**

The meeting commenced at 3.00pm and concluded at 4.00pm.