

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
28 JANUARY 2021
10.00am

PRESENT:

COUNCILLORS: Elwyn Edwards, Alan Jones Evans, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elin Walker Jones (Chair), Elwyn Jones, Eric M Jones, Kevin Morris Jones, Cai Larsen, John Pughe Roberts and Elfed Williams.

OFFICERS: Vera Jones (Democratic and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllïan Mair Williams (Workplace Language Development Officer), Siôn Elwyn Hughes (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer), Llio Mai Hughes (Welsh Language Promotion Officer), Annes Sion (Democracy Team Leader) and Natalie Lloyd Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

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

Present for item 5:

Anwen Davies (Rural Gwynedd Development Programme Manager)

Present for item 6:

Garem Jackson (Head of Education)

Rhian Parry Jones (Gwynedd Secondary Education Officer)

Debbie Anne Jones (Education Corporate Services Manager)

Siân Eirug (Secondary Language Strategic Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Eirwyn Williams.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

Councillor Aled Lloyd Evans declared an interest in item 5 as he was a member of the Menter y Plu committee.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous meeting of this committee held on 12 November 2020 as a true record.

5. UPDATE ON THE ARFOR SCHEME

The Rural Gwynedd Development Programme Manager presented her report, updating the committee on the Arfor programme. She explained that the programme, aimed at encouraging people to start and expand their businesses locally, would come to an end this year. Therefore, this meeting was a timely opportunity to draw the attention of members to the successes and challenges that had been faced. The following main points were highlighted during the presentation:-

- She noted that the programme would end in March 2021, and that the next period would be used to secure expenditure.
- Attention was drawn to four successful projects that had been established due to the programme and the funding. She began by discussing 'Ffiws', a maker space on Porthmadog high street, offering the use of machinery, such as 3D printers, to local businesses.
- She referred to one success story, where a business that had used this equipment had then proceeded to purchase similar equipment to further develop the business.
- She referred to the 'Llwyddo'n Lleol' project, run jointly between Gwynedd and Anglesey, to encourage young local business people to pitch their ideas. The aim was to promote the idea that young local people could stay in Gwynedd, and to show them the possible business opportunities.
- She explained that there had been huge interest, and that ten young individuals had taken advantage of the opportunity. Having received support from the project, she noted that approximately 80% had progressed to develop their business.
- She provided an overview of the 'Enterprising Communities Challenge', a challenge to respond to the local economy through job creation. She expanded on some of the projects that had benefited, such as the working spaces in Henblas and Menter y Plu.

- The Rural Gwynedd Development Programme Manager emphasised that only a few businesses had chosen to defer their schemes due to the Covid-19 crisis period. This was proof that businesses had taken advantage of the opportunity to develop their businesses despite the lockdown period.
- At the end of the programme, she noted that she was uncertain about the next step to ensure that opportunities were available to develop local businesses.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer observations. During the discussion, the following observations were noted:-

- The Rural Gwynedd Development Programme Manager was thanked for the report, and a member noted her enthusiasm for Arfor.
- Disappointment was expressed that the programme would not continue, and it was proposed that political pressure should be brought on the Government to support another element of the programme.
- The proposal received support, and it was noted that the Cabinet should be informed of this.

In response to some of the above observations and questions, the Rural Development Programme Manager noted the following points:-

- It was noted that the number of jobs created would be stated when the monitoring work had been completed. The first priority would be to work with the businesses to ensure that the funding was used.
- The training was conducted in Welsh apart from a small number where experts from specific fields were required as trainers.
- The committee was reminded that the benefits and outcomes of the programme would become evident in the long term, as the businesses that received support expanded and developed.
- There would be an opportunity in the strategic plan to outline what would be most beneficial for the next step – either a similar programme or new interventions.
- It was intended to share the interim report with the committee after its completion.

RESOLVE to accept the report, and as a further step, to write to Welsh Government and Gwynedd Council Cabinet to express the committee's support and desire to see the continuation of the Arfor scheme after March 2021.

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

The Cabinet Member for Education introduced the report, and drew attention to the challenging period that schools had faced during the lockdown periods. In relation to the Welsh language in schools, it was noted that there would be future challenges as children had missed out on being part of a Welsh environment in the school and the classroom.

The Corporate Education Services Manager gave an overview of the annual report on the department's operation. She emphasised that the focus of the report this time was on procedures rather than data.

She explained that the report's content summarised the methods used to cope with the changes in education. The Language Centres had faced the challenges of continuing to provide a Welsh experience to the children, and had taken advantage of the opportunity to innovate by using live learning sessions. She further added that these approaches ensured that the Welsh language reached the learners' homes in order to maintain their language skills. In addition to supporting learners, she noted that the Welsh Language in Education Strategy had another priority, namely to support a confident workforce in relation to the Welsh language.

The Head of the Education Department added that the use of the Welsh language was one of the main challenges facing schools as they re-opened, and they noted an element of concern about the decline.

Estyn's thematic review was discussed, and it was emphasised that Gwynedd's arrangements had been recognised as an example of good practice. He referred directly to the innovative approaches used by the language centres to provide education over the lockdown period, which had received national recognition.

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

- The Department was congratulated on the innovative approaches used, that had been recognised as good practice, and it was emphasised that the Welsh language was facing increasing pressure as distance learning continued.
- A question was asked about whether any steps would be taken to assess the decline in the use of the Welsh language, and to meet the additional requirements following the re-opening of schools.
- It was noted that the authority had obviously taken valuable steps to protect the Welsh language in the face of difficult circumstances.
- Members were reminded of their important roles as school governors, and of their influence on the efforts to maintain the Welsh language within the classroom and beyond.

In response to some of the above observations and questions, the Education Corporate Services Manager noted:-

- It was positive to hear elected members appreciating and recognising the work undertaken in schools and language centres in Gwynedd to protect the language.
- It was intended to establish a baseline to assess the situation of the language following the return of all learners to the classroom.
- The Head of Education Department added that the Education Department had been asked to lead a piece of cross-departmental work with partners such as GwE, Mudiad Meithrin, the Health Service and Further Education centres. He added that the work's aim would be to identify areas where a well-being gap had appeared due to Covid-19.
- He noted that the next steps would be to create an action plan to identify definite milestones to signify how the situation could be strengthened.
- He added that the outcome of the research would be shared with this committee.
- He explained that there were a number of methods employed by schools to limit the decline of the Welsh language. He provided examples, such as ensuring that

learners had the necessary technology to take advantage of live stream lessons, and providing parents with bilingual guidance.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

7. PRAISE AND COMPLAINTS REPORT

The Language advisor presented her report on the latest information on complaints and examples of success in promoting the use of the Welsh Language and good practice within Council Services. She highlighted the following main points during her presentation:-

- Current circumstances had made it difficult to maintain some services, such as virtual meetings and committees due to the lack of a translation function on Teams. However, by now the Council was using Zoom to provide simultaneous translation.
- She explained that the current period had facilitated the development of staff skills, for example, there had been an increase in the numbers of staff learning Welsh and taking advantage of training courses.
- She referred specifically to Byw'n Iach staff who had, in the past, proved difficult to reach in relation to skills development.
- In relation to complaints about compliance with the Standards, it was reported there had been no formal complaints, although some enquiries had been received, and those matter had been resolved quickly with no further action.
- In relation to the language policy, two complaints had been received, one had been resolved quickly, and the other was more complex as the complaint related to the availability of the language of choice on a technical device.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and offer their brief observations on the report. As time did not allow giving full consideration to the report, members were invited to contact the Language unit if they had any further questions or observations.

RESOLVED to accept the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.35am.

CHAIR