

LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
29 April 2021
10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS: Beca Brown, Elwyn Edwards, Alan Evans, Aled Evans, Alwyn Gruffydd, Judith Humphreys, Elwyn Jones, Eric M Jones, Cai Larsen, John Pughe Roberts, Eirwyn Williams and Elfed Williams.

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

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

Present for item 5:

Huw Williams (Head of YGC).

Present for item 6:

Sioned Williams (Head of Economy and Community Department).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Elin Walker Jones and Kevin Morris Jones.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received.

3. URGENT ITEMS

No urgent items were received.

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of the previous committee meeting held on 28 January 2021 as a true record.

The Chair shared the response that had been received from Ken Skates MS. The letter noted that a decision about the future of the Arfor programme would be made when the evaluation of the current programme had been received.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN 2019 - 2023: CONTRIBUTION FROM THE CONSULTANCY DEPARTMENT

The Head of the Gwynedd Consultancy Department presented his report, which highlighted the steps taken within the department to promote the Welsh language among the staff. The following main points arose:

- It was noted that the department had successfully collaborated with the Language Officers to guide them in their efforts.
- He explained that staff had completed language self-assessments to engage them in the procedures, and that they had consequently become aware of the emphasis on the use of the language.
- He emphasised that the department had a high percentage of non-Welsh speaking staff compared to other departments within the Council.
- He noted that 92% of the staff met the requirements of their post, but explained that it had taken considerable time to reach this point, by using lessons and other methods.
- He noted that the buddy scheme had helped to ensure that the use of the language was naturally promoted by Welsh speakers.
- He shared an example of an officer who had joined during the lockdown period, and noted that another officer was supporting her to start her conversations in Welsh.
- He explained that the success was based on the Welsh lessons through *Teams* and the partnership with the University - and noted that this was in conjunction with the language officers.

- The following staff members were acknowledged: Alex Jones, Nansi John and Owain Angus Duncan who had been successful in their efforts and had subsequently won the Dafydd Orwig memorial prize.
- He noted that since 2014 staff had used the Welsh language when attending interviews and meetings in relation to professional qualifications.

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

- A member enquired about the departmental appointment policy in relation to appointing Welsh-speaking staff. It was added that it would be beneficial to be in a situation where the Council could motivate more Welsh speakers to follow technical and specialist careers in order to overcome the appointment difficulties.
- The member expressed thanks for the presentation, and thanked the Language Officers for working so hard in all departments.
- The member enquired whether there was an opportunity to influence external stakeholders and contractors to use Welsh when dealing with YGC department.
- A member of staff asked how many staff worked in the department, in order to examine the context of the numbers that had completed the self-assessment.
- A member suggested that the Council should soon see the benefit of the recent collaboration between the Council and the local education system to promote STEM subjects among pupils.
- A member noted that this report came from a department that faced far more challenges than others in appointing Welsh speakers due to the specific skills required.
- The member proceeded to ask what efforts had been made to reach the specialist workforce across Wales for the purpose of recruiting.
- A member asked how the department ensured that correct Welsh language terminology was used.

In response to some of the above observations, the Head of YGC noted:

- In relation to job descriptions, continuous efforts were made to ensure that all appointments reached the required language specifications, although not all the specialists had the required language skills. He continued by noting that the department made efforts to develop English speakers into Welsh speakers by offering lessons.
- He stated that the department strived to ensure that staff were fluent Welsh speakers, and that those who succeeded continued to use and learn more of the Welsh language.
- He emphasised that YGC department worked for a number of bodies in order to bring income into the Council, and they therefore sold their engineering and technical skills. He also noted that sometimes Welsh speakers did not have the requisite skills.
- As a solution, the Head noted that they collaborated with Coleg Menai/Llandrillo and Glyndŵr University to create opportunities for Welsh speakers to follow technical and specialised career paths.
- He shared another of the challenges facing the department, which was the fact that the Council's salaries within the local department were high, although there was competition nationally, and that the higher salaries tended to attract Welsh speakers.
- The contracts noted that the Welsh language was a priority, and emphasis was placed on the language when dealing with companies. There were examples of companies from England developing language awareness as a result of collaborating with the department.

- He agreed that various methods were needed to promote the Welsh language within the department as it was important to retain Welsh as a living language that could be adapted within various fields.

RESOLVED:

- a) To accept the report and to note the observations received.**
- b) To wish the department well with its continuous effort to further promote the use of the Welsh language amongst its staff.**

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN 2019 - 2023: CONTRIBUTION FROM THE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

The Head of the Economy and Community Department presented her report, noting the responses and the main points in relation to promoting the Welsh language within the department. She added that the Economy and Community Department was in a different situation to a department such as YGC, as the majority of its staff could speak Welsh, and used it due to the nature of their work.

She emphasised that 97% of the department's staff had reached the expected language specification. She added that there was work to be done amongst the staff that had worked in the department for a lengthy period, and were able to speak Welsh but did not use it. She noted that there were no recruitment challenges, and that the younger, newer staff tended to use Welsh naturally.

She referred to the report that included relevant links to further information on language promotion. She drew attention to the following main points:

- The department hoped that it would be possible to fund a successor scheme to the Arfor scheme, if funding was forthcoming.
- A scheme to introduce Welsh music to business who were unfamiliar with Welsh culture had been successful in promoting the Welsh language within the tourism sector.
- She was proud of the libraries service, where 100% of the staff were Welsh speakers and used the language naturally. As community workers, it was recognised that they had an additional role as language promoters among librarians. She shared a letter from a resident who had used the service, and had become interested in the language following the efforts made by staff.
- Regarding contracts with external companies, she noted that the leisure service was the main challenge in relation to promoting the Welsh language, especially in areas of the county with fewer Welsh speakers.
- She explained that this is still being considered since Byw'n Iach company had taken over and that the company has taken big steps to respond to the situation. She went

on to explain that the company was bound to adhere to the Council's language policy as part of its contract and the department was monitoring this carefully.

- There had been obstacles in some cases, for example there is a lack of Welsh being used in meetings with the Welsh Government and National Agencies. It is also anticipated that there may be a challenge to use the Welsh Language in future meetings with the British Government to discuss new grants that would have been previously granted by Welsh Government.

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

- A member expressed her sadness that Welsh Government would not be responsible for allocating funding for new programmes, and added that this would have a detrimental impact on the Welsh language.
- Sustainable tourism was welcomed - selling a place as a destination could be negative, and excessive tourism destroyed the aspects that attracted people in the first place.
- She was proud of the change of emphasis on the type of tourism that would benefit areas such as Gwynedd, namely sustainable tourism.
- A member agreed that Byw'n lach should commit to promoting the Welsh language among its staff. The member asked how this was measured and challenged by the department.
- A member requested more information about the differences between dealing with grants from London and Cardiff, and how much influence the Council would have in insisting that use was made of the Welsh language. There were already examples from the Economic Ambition Board that was led more from Westminster, and signs of a negative influence on the Welsh language.
- A member referred to the libraries' staff as natural ambassadors in their role, and enquired whether it was worth including this in the job description in future.
- A member referred to the huge increase in demand for Welsh lessons, from potential tourists. It was added that they saw the Welsh language as something that enriched their experience of being in Wales.
- A member noted that it was part of the protocol for staff in the departments to be aware that there was an expectation that they should use Welsh.

In response to some of the above observations and questions, the Head of Economy and Community Department noted:

- To ensure that tourism was sustainable, the numbers of tourists must be restricted in certain areas, and that a discussion should take place as part of the review.
- A Council service would undertake monitoring to measure the performance of Byw'n lach company, and the Cabinet Member would meet the company to challenge performance. She added that they had data in relation to staff attainment and the language specifications of posts.
- In relation to the use of Welsh in meetings, she noted that virtual meetings had enabled more Welsh to be used, as software such as Zoom had simultaneous translation capability.
- There was no certainty about the arrangements for the new funds that would replace the European funding succession. It was anticipated that the UK Government in Wales would deal with the applications.

- A natural Welsh culture existed among the staff of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board as the majority were fluent Welsh speakers. However, it was acknowledged that there was a challenge in relation to working and holding discussions with the Governments, as this happened in English.
- In response to the question about libraries' staff, it was noted the role of being a language ambassador was not specifically noted in the job description. However, promoting the Welsh language was a natural part of the post.

The Language Adviser added the following points:

- There was a clause in the Council's language policy that noted that Council staff were expected to communicate in Welsh. It was added that this policy was being amended, and that there would be an opportunity to remind staff about this clause when the new policy was promoted.
- In relation to communication, there had been a change over the past year, with Teams proving to be problematic as it did not have a simultaneous translation facility, and people unwilling to use Zoom although it had an effective provision.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations received.

7. WELSH GOVERNMENT POLICY ON LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION WITHIN THE HOME

The Language Adviser presented information about the Welsh Government's policy on language transmission within the home. She added that a consultation had been held last year prior to the first lockdown period, and therefore the policy had not yet been submitted to committee as a draft document.

She explained that the main purpose of the policy was to focus solely on language transmission within the home, and to offer guidance to enable parents and carers to introduce the Welsh language to children within the home. The Language Adviser welcomed the document, and explained that it detailed a key field, by encouraging parents who had learned Welsh themselves within the education system to transfer the language within the household to their children.

She explained that there were a few further developments, including:

- To develop a better understanding of language habits and the reasons why speakers did not transfer the language
- The timing of the publication, prior to the publication of the latest census results that would include useful data regarding the Welsh language
- A lack of consideration regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on language habits while the schools were closed.
- A lack of detail with some of the steps within the policy and how to realise them.
- It ignored families where Welsh is used naturally.

- There were examples of how to inspire children to use Welsh and re-ignite those skills by supporting the whole family.

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

- Members agreed that the policy was lacking in detail, and needed up-to-date examples of how the steps could be implemented.
- A member added that there was evidence from schools that the negative impacts of excessive screen use over the lockdown period had changed language habits. This also included children speaking English with their siblings.
- A member observed that the report focused on areas where children gained the language through the education system, but did not transfer the Welsh language in future to their children at home. It was added that the reason for this was because English was their mother tongue.
- A member observed that there was no emphasis on problems in areas where Welsh was the natural language of the home for the majority.
- A member added that there was no certainty about the long-term impact of the lockdown periods on the language, as children's habits had changed.

RESOLVED to accept the report and to note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and concluded at 11.30 a.m.

CHAIR

