MEETING	**Language Committee**
DATE	**19 October 2021**
TITLE	**Welsh Language Promotion Plan: Finance Department**
PURPOSE	**To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy**
AUTHOR	**Dafydd L Edwards, Head of Finance**

Background

1. This report has been prepared to present information to the Language Committee on the contribution of the Finance Department to the Language Policy.

2. The Council's Language Policy is embedded in all the Department's work, and this report highlights the opportunities that are available to improve the provision for our residents, whilst also acknowledging the challenges facing the field.

The Language of the Finance Department's Jobs and Staff

3. Following recent work to review the linguistic requirements of all the Department's posts, identify the language designations of the posts, and then to assess the language of the Department's staff, it can be reported that 92% of the Department's staff have now submitted a self-assessment, and 99% of those reaching or passing the language designations of their posts.

4. Maintaining the ability to offer our services through the medium of Welsh is ongoing, and we consider the language requirements of staff in our day-to-day work, when recruiting and appointing, when inducting and conducting ongoing appraisal conversations. We offer support to staff to develop their language skills, so that they can provide the best service to the people of Gwynedd in Welsh and maintain our high standards in the context of the language.

Conclusion

5. The various services of the Finance Department support various letters, leaflets, forms, posters, websites and bilingual systems, with Welsh as the default language. Furthermore, the Department aims to achieve the quality of 'Cymraeg Clir', so that Welsh customers do not feel that our Welsh language documents are too difficult to understand and use.

6. With some specialist aspects of Finance and IT work, we are battling hard to reach the standard. However, if we fall short at times, I trust that this is not due to a lack of ambition or lack of effort by the Department.

Committee Members' Questions

7. The following table has been prepared in order to present the Finance Department's responses to the questions and matters that the Language Committee members wish to discuss, with examples of the Department's services that I would like to highlight.

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1. BOOSTING AND PROMOTING

How do we go beyond providing bilingually to increasing the opportunities for people to use the Welsh language in the community, to contribute to the national target of creating a million speakers, and to the Well-being goal of ensuring that the people of Gwynedd are "Able to live in a naturally Welsh speaking society"?

Question 1 - Can you highlight any projects within your department that contribute to one of the Council's language strategy priorities, namely the Welsh Language Promotion Plan for Gwynedd?

Response:

Overall Product Quality -

Extensive work by the various services of the Finance Department contributes to the promotion of the Welsh language, with publications such as the Council's Statement of Accounts, the Pension Fund's Annual Report, and Taxation and Benefit forms setting the standard and are reference materials for other bodies to follow suit.

Over time, we have aimed to set up different letters, leaflets, posters and forms in 'Cymraeg Clir' (simple, natural and clear language) for every Taxation and Benefit engagement. Our officers have worked in consultation with Canolfan Bedwyr at Bangor University, and with J. Elwyn Hughes, in order to achieve a readable and understandable quality.

Microsoft Windows Language -

The worldwide use of computers through the medium of English by businesses and individuals has conditioned users (even in Gwynedd) to familiarise themselves with English terms in various systems. Despite this, we encourage our users to work with the Welsh language installation on their computers.

The Council supplies computers on the Microsoft Windows platform for our officers, serving approximately 2,700 users. These computers are received with an English language operating platform, which is the default standard for computers supplied in the UK. By now, internal steps are taken to adjust the settings when preparing the computers for our users, with each new computer being equipped with a Welsh language operating platform.

Our users are encouraged to keep this setting, but it is not mandatory, and the user can change it from Welsh to English. Despite this, some departments show that over 3 in every 4 computers continue with the Welsh language setting, with around half of our user population across the Council now using the computer in Welsh.

2. OUTSOURCING WORK AND AWARDING THIRD PARTY CONTRACTS

How do we ensure that the quality of the bilingual service is maintained when oursourcing work and awarding contracts?

Question 2 - If the department outsources work on contract, can you refer to any good practice, either when imposing conditions or when monitoring, in order to ensure compliance with the linguistic conditions?

Response:

External Suppliers -

When the Finance Department outsources work on contract, we ensure that a Welsh language service is offered to people within the county's communities, for example the customer service at Barclays Bank and the Post Office.

This is not always possible with some consultancy services, due to the specialised nature of the market, which at times creates considerable translation work for our staff in order to ensure that our internal business discussions are in Welsh, and our public products are bilingual.

Collaboration across Wales -

In some situations, e.g. The Wales Pension Partnership, national collaboration was chosen, rather than outsourcing to an external company. The inter-authority agreement of the 8 Welsh pension funds ensures that reports to the partnership's joint governance committee reflect Gwynedd's bilingual standards, and ensures an equal platform for the language beyond the county's boundaries.

There has been a similar situation with the WCCIS computer system for supporting care cases of all kinds, provided nationally by Care Works. The considerable input of Gwynedd Council's IT developers has enabled the system to provide as much as possible bilingually.

Gwynedd Council is also represented on the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Technology Board, which advises the Minister on establishing a "Welsh Language Technology Action Plan", and is part of the Welsh Government's Welsh 2050 strategy. The action plan has now been published, with Council representation continuing to assist the Government on these issues.

3. OPERATING BILINGUALLY

How do we succeed in implementing the requirements of the Welsh Language and Standards Policy?

Question 3 - Are there any obstructions that prevent you as a department to offer a full service in Welsh?

Response:

Virtual Translation -

It was noted above that English-medium computer systems could hinder the Council's ability to provide a Welsh language service, and this was highlighted by virtual translation during the Covid crisis, when there were urgent developments.

At the end of March 2020, there were far-reaching changes for holding meetings. It was not possible to hold face-to-face meetings and so we turned to virtual meetings. The Council's in-house provision at the time was 'Skype for Business', soon upgrading to 'Microsoft Teams', with the new technology working seamlessly in Welsh for the Council's internal meetings.

However, with the re-establishment of external, democratic and inter-agency meetings, the provision for simultaneous translation was required. By now, Microsoft Teams was the standard provision in the Council and, indeed, is still firmly established across Wales, but unfortunately, the provision for simultaneous translation was not part of the package.

For a while, through the co-operation of the Council's technical teams and translation service, a way of working was introduced where it was possible to conduct a simultaneous translation service on this medium, but this was an awkward and unreliable solution as it extended the capabilities of the software beyond its original purpose.

Through collaboration between the translation, democratic and information technology services, a durable, reliable, easy-to-use and effective simultaneous translation service was introduced on the Zoom platform. This platform remains active for any meeting requiring simultaneous translation, as there is a further delay in delivering the provision on the Microsoft Teams platform.

Although the democratic meetings of the Council continue to be virtual, our use of Zoom and simultaneous translation provision enables us to broadcast a full program of Council meetings live on our website.

4. DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Question 4 - *Do you have ideas about new ways we can use to promote the Welsh language in the county's communities - either in your own services or by collaborating with others?*

Response:

The Language Charter -

The Information Technology project 'The Language Charter' is an example of proactive development that has promoted the Welsh language within the county's communities and beyond.

The aim of the Language Charter, which is funded by the Welsh Government, is to increase children and young people's informal use of the Welsh language in social situations. The Language Charter was established in Gwynedd in 2011/12. Over time, the program was delivered in Welsh-medium primary schools across Wales, and by the 2019/20 academic year, 423 schools were participating in the Language Charter.

The language charter is based on measuring pupils' progress anonymously through "The Web Language" software developed by Gwynedd Council's Information Technology Service for internal use in the County's schools, and when the Charter's use was expanded nationally, the use of "the Web Language" was extended nationally, adapting it into a bilingual package and staging it on HWB's national infrastructure.