

DATE	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
MEETING	19 OCTOBER 2021
TITLE	Report of the Environment Department
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report has been prepared to present information to the Welsh Language Committee on the Environment Department's contribution to the Welsh Language Policy.
- 1.2. The Council's Language Policy is embedded in all the Department's work and in this report, we will highlight the opportunities that are available to improve provision for our residents, and acknowledge the challenges we face in the field.
- 1.3. After recent work to identify the language designations of all jobs in the Department, we can report that 79% of the Department's staff meet the language requirements. It should be noted that the situation differs when we look at specific services.
- 1.4. At first glance, the percentage seems low in comparison with the Council as a whole (91%). The fact that individuals are not able to meet the post's language requirements does not mean that they are unable to speak Welsh and offer a service through the medium of Welsh to the customer. The training opportunities available are extensive and there are positive and continuous examples of individuals in the Department looking to develop and improve their language skills.

The New Test, Trace and Track Service [TTP]

- 1.5. The Test, Trace and Protect service (TTP) was established in May 2020 and came into operation on 1 June 2020. The service at its peak has employed over 100 employees - 7 seconded from other services within the Council and 5 other staff working as 'bank' staff. There is a significant turnover of staff in the Service and therefore a large number [over 100 by now] newly employed staff.

The principal aim of the Test, Trace and Protect service in Gwynedd is to:

- Identify people who have been infected or who have been in contact with a positive case of Covid-19 and support them to isolate during the infectious period, or until the symptoms or the incubation period have elapsed; and
- Support people with symptoms to get access to a Covid-19 test.

- 1.6. The service has contacted thousands of people across the county, directly and through the implementation of mutual support with other local authorities across the north, to offer invaluable support and advice.

- 1.7 One of the barriers faced by this service was in recruitment. As the service is coordinated at regional and national levels, the Council did not have full control over the recruitment process. The service was led (hosted) by another authority, which was responsible for the recruitment drive. Due to a lack of understanding of the specific needs of the north-west in terms of having Welsh-medium workers, the service in Gwynedd was left with a shortage of Welsh-speaking candidates who could be appointed to the vacant posts. This situation has left the service vulnerable in terms of having enough numbers of staff to respond (in any language) to surges, and, to respond to the needs of Gwynedd residents in their own language.
- 1.8 Nevertheless, 90% of the staff who have been appointed are either first or second language Welsh speakers or Welsh learners. Learners are regularly paired with fluent Welsh speakers for role play, and to improve their skills. We also have a Welsh speakers' group where those who are learning the language can speak in a safe environment with those who are fluent.
- 1.9 The service is responsible for its own training, and has conducted the training bilingually. The Test, Trace and Protect Service in Gwynedd Council has a dedicated training team that designs and delivers all aspects of training required, including induction and initial role training up to the implementation of new/revised Standard Operating Procedures, the last of which occurs regularly. The training method is just as flexible and responsive as the service we provide; with short weekly training interventions (for each job role), until all team members are able to self-evaluate their performance and request training when they feel they need it.
- 1.10 The following is a quote from the service about the work that has been done to encourage staff and improve their confidence in their Welsh language skills during the period:

"When we get someone who speaks English as a first language but who has some Welsh, we pair them with a fluent speaker and role play takes place for daily checks in Welsh with them, which works very well. This builds their confidence a lot and they realise they know more than they thought. They then start contributing in Welsh during 'amser paned' and their confidence grows to be able to hold a full conversation with a customer in Welsh. We have a small team of staff who mentor these people, it works really well."

2. RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

MATTER THAT THE MEMBERS WISH TO DISCUSS:	PROMOTING
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?	
<p>I consider the following to be good examples within the Department of projects and services that have contributed over the past year towards the Welsh Language Promotion Plan in Gwynedd:</p> <p>Building Control Service: This service has responsibility over managing street names and naming and numbering properties under the provision of the Public Health Act, 1925. The Council has a statutory responsibility to act to ensure that any new name or changes to street and property names, and / or numbers are allocated with a logical and consistent approach.</p> <p>The Service has a Policy that is implemented when dealing with applications to change street names and property names and the Policy deals specifically with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• naming new property• re-naming existing property• naming a new street or development• re-naming an existing street or estate <p>The legislation behind these arrangements is very dated (1925) and the only consideration under the law is whether there is already a house of the same name, or whether the name is appropriate (e.g. decent). There are no enforcement powers for this, and the law does not allow us to refuse an application unless it is a duplication or that the name is inappropriate.</p> <p>Nevertheless, by using the Policy the Service has in place, we can be proactive in highlighting the historic and cultural significance of Welsh names, and encourage applicants both formally and orally who wish to change a name from Welsh to English to change their minds.</p> <p>Statistics from 2019/20 demonstrate that there were 110 applications to change a property's name and approximately 97.8% of the names that were subsequently registered through Royal Mail were Welsh names. Note that there were approximately 8 examples where applicants changed their minds following discussions with the Service and kept the Welsh name.</p> <p>It is noted that there has already been contact between the Service and the new Welsh Language Promotion (Protection of Indigenous Names Project) Officer and that discussions are in the pipeline.</p> <p>Joint Planning Policy Service: The main function of this Service is to prepare, monitor, review and amend the Joint Local Development Plan (2011-26) including the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance.</p>	

The Planning role is limited to seeking to create the best possible circumstances through the Plan's policies to facilitate sustainable developments. Considerations of the Welsh language have been central to the process of preparing the Plan and the Plan has a specific planning policy namely Policy PS1 that deals with the Welsh language and culture.

Also, Supplementary Planning Guidance (Maintaining and Creating Distinctive and Sustainable Communities), includes detailed guidance on how to consider the Welsh language when dealing with applications for new developments.

It is believed that the Plan therefore contributes to promoting and supporting the Welsh language in the Plan area.

Planning Service: One of the main duties of this Service is to deal with planning applications for all kinds of development including housing, employment (factories and shops), tourism, agriculture, minerals and waste etc.

In accordance with the statutory requirement, we must determine planning applications in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan, and as noted above, the Plan contains a dedicated Welsh language policy and a Supplementary Planning Guidance that provides detailed guidance on how to implement the policy.

By acting on the duty of dealing with planning applications and in accordance with the Plan's requirements it is believed that this again contributes to promoting the Welsh language in the area. This is done by ensuring that applications consider the Welsh language in line with the Policy and Guidance that highlight the cultural importance of the language in addition to promoting the language so that it is visible in developments (e.g. signage).

Bilingual road signs – events: We take pride that all the signs on the County's transportation network are bilingual. When we receive road closure applications due to necessary works or an event that affects part of the highway, organisers must provide a bilingual signage plan as a condition of the permission.

Licensing: The Licensing service has gone about providing applications forms in both languages for a wide range of licences; even if the Home Office has not provided official forms through the medium of Welsh. Businesses applying for a licence receive encouragement and support in the form of bilingual templates for advertising applications for premises licence in the press. Citizens can submit information in Welsh orally and in writing at Committee hearings or court proceedings.

2. If the department awards work externally on contract, can you refer to any good practice, either when imposing conditions or when monitoring to ensure compliance with the linguistic conditions?

I specifically wish to draw the Committee's attention to the following Contracts:

Category Management: In every contract set by the Corporate Category Team, we endeavour to ensure that the standard of the Welsh medium service is secured and maintained. A copy of the Language Policy is included in the tendering documents, and every applicant is asked to read it to ensure that they understand what is required of them in terms of the Welsh language (such as if they need to use signage, they must be bilingual), but also that they understand the importance of the Welsh language to Gwynedd Council.

The language requirements (which reflect the Council's Language Policy) of every contract are determined according to the needs of that contract. For example, when a new contract was created for a bathroom hygiene service, it was noted that an English-only catalogue was not enough, and there would have to be a Welsh language catalogue. The company arranged for a catalogue to be translated specifically for Gwynedd Council.

Ensuring the standard of the Welsh language in a service is also important – for example, we recently asked for quotations for design and branding work for a service – emphasising the expectation for suppliers to create Welsh and English versions, and in order to verify the standard of the Welsh language in the work, it was noted that the in-house service had the right to provide input during the design process and check any final work.

Projects / contracts: The nature of the engineering industry tends to be English. To encourage the use of Welsh during the purchasing process, we are taking the following steps;

1) ensure that 'invitation to tender' or 'instructions to tender' documents are advertised in both languages.

2) outline clearly, that responses submitted through the medium of Welsh will not be considered less favourably than English responses.

We will also take advantage of the opportunity to form questions in a creative way during the tendering process that steers major contractors to ensure that some of the social benefits remain local e.g. ask site workers to be bilingual or able to respond to problems on the site within 45 minutes

Bus and taxi contracts – It is part of the terms and conditions. The Contractor shall ensure full compliance with the Council's Welsh Language Policy.

3. Are there any obstructions that prevent you as a department from offering a full service in Welsh?

Barriers/ challenges within the Department in terms of recruiting to specialist fields in terms of qualifications and the ability to communicate in Welsh.

Biodiversity / Ecologists: Over the last 12 months, posts have been advertised that require qualifications and experience in ecology and countryside management. Not only did we see a small number of applicants, the number who met the posts' language requirements was also very low, for example:

- Biodiversity / Nature Partnership Officer
- 5 applicants / 1 met the language requirements
- Llŷn AONB Officer
- 4 applicants / 2 met the language requirements

Planning Service / Joint Planning Policy: In general, terms, recruiting qualified Planners is very difficult and recruiting qualified Planners who speak Welsh is even more difficult. The Planning Service deals with the public every day and fluency in Welsh is therefore extremely important and despite the challenges, we still manage to do this.

Over the years, the Service has been looking more at appointing applicants who have a degree in similar fields of work (e.g. Geography), and then training them at work in addition to paying them to achieve a qualification in the Planning field. This has been relatively successful over the years – but when we advertise Planning posts – the number of applicants is very low although we have been fortunate over the years to have good applicants. Another challenge is retaining staff in the long-term in light of salary levels by comparison with most of the other authorities in North Wales.

Regional Planning Work: With a Corporate Joint-committee for the North Wales region in the pipeline, which will include a statutory duty to prepare a Strategic Development Plan, the time will come to appoint regional officers to prepare the Plan. At the moment, there is no information about whether the Welsh language will be essential to these posts but it is likely that it is important to highlight that this could influence how it will operate in relation to the Welsh language.

Project Management / Engineering and Transportation: As I mentioned above, the nature of the engineering field tends to be English with most stakeholders familiar with using English technical terms. In terms of translating tender documents, our concern is that this is not always practical in terms of maximising the risk of misinterpretation or losing the real meaning of specialist terms identified in the field. Recently, we have experienced difficulties in attracting people to apply for the post of Senior Traffic Engineer. We believe that the main reasons for this is the lack of people who are qualified to the essential level in the field who also reach the Council's language requirements.

Public Protection Services: Covid has highlighted the importance of our three Public Protection services namely Pollution Control and Licensing, Food and Safety and Trading Standards. There has been a demand nationally for officers with expertise and qualifications in these fields and it has certainly been identified there is a general shortage of these specialist skills. Given the lack of competency in these fields, it is even more difficult to recruit qualified officers who can meet the linguistic level expected by the Council for such a post. Therefore, the Department is planning to implement a training procedure in place to invest in individuals who already have the ability in Welsh to qualify in the Public Protection fields. This will not solve things overnight, and it is likely that no such solution exists, but at least this direction has the potential of offering jobs and qualifications to local applicants who know the County's culture. The department is eager to follow the same model in other services where there is a lack of expertise if this direction is seen to be successful.

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

The Department continues to promote and support the use of Welsh in each one of our services and providing services to Gwynedd residents remains a priority. But it must be acknowledged that the Department is facing significant challenges in terms of recruiting and appointing in the following fields:

Biodiversity: Within Biodiversity / Countryside Management, Local Authorities, the National Park and Natural Resources Wales compete for officers who can work through the medium of Welsh. The impression is that not many young fluent Welsh speakers choose to follow relevant courses or consider this field as a career path. Research to discover the situation in schools and universities would be useful to raise awareness of the field.

Engineering / traffic / transportation: Should subjects such as civil engineering be taught through the medium of Welsh as well as English at schools / colleges, the Welsh terminology might not be as unfamiliar to companies and they may be more willing to use Welsh.

