

MEETING:	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
DATE:	7 April 2022
TITLE:	Praise and Complaints Report
AUTHOR:	Gwenllian Mair Williams Language Advisor
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT	To present the latest information to the Committee on complaints and examples of success when promoting the use of Welsh in the Council's services.

Successes in promoting the Welsh language and ensuring Welsh language services for residents:

There have been several developments recently, as working arrangements return to an element of normality following the Covid period, and as we return to look again or to resume certain projects and priorities.

A project has been commissioned by the Welsh Language Sub-group Public Service Board to look at ways of influencing the public's use of language in frontline services. Several reception areas, in the Council and other public service partners, have been selected to be involved in the initial research work which will lead to recommendations for increasing the use of the Welsh language amongst the public.

An internal forum has been established recently to monitor and discuss how the Council implements the principles and priorities of Mwy na Geiriau/More than Just Words, the Strategic Framework for the use of the Welsh language in health and social care services. The forum includes representatives from the Children and Adults departments, as well as Corporate Support officers, and provides feedback to the regional forum which includes representatives from several organisations in health, the care sector and local authorities. The internal forum will consider how services can be improved and how the proactive offer can be ensured for service users.

The Language Advisor and the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer have resumed language awareness sessions for Council staff, recently piloting new online sessions with the Test, Trace, Protect Service. The sessions have been very well received and we are keen to hold similar sessions with other services.

The Council has been involved in several public campaigns to promote the Welsh language over recent months, including the promotion of the Commissioner's Welsh Language Rights Day and sharing messages on International Mother Language Day.

COMPLAINTS AND ENQUIRIES FROM THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER - RELATING TO COMPLIANCE WITH THE LANGUAGE STANDARDS

1. Investigation CS018 – Advertisement for the Post of Chief Executive

The original complaint was received during March 2021, but the subsequent investigation took some months to conclude, and the final ruling and actions were not received until early 2022. The investigation was finally concluded on 3 March 2022.

The complaint involved the advertisement of the post of Chief Executive, and the fact that the Council had not included details of language requirements in the advertisement, and had not invited applicants to submit applications in Welsh.

The requirements of the Standards mean that all job advertisements must state whether language requirements are essential, desirable or that there is a need to learn when appointed.

A principle has already been set within the Council's Language Policy and Recruitment Policy that Welsh language skills are an essential requirement for all posts within the Council, and the Language Designations project has gone to great lengths to ensure that the exact level of language skills are set out in the Person Specification document.

This particular advertisement, however, followed a different procedure to the usual, and did not include Job Description and Person Specification documents as usual adverts do. A language designation for the post had been recorded in the jobs system, but had not been included in the advertisement. Also, although the information pack shared with potential applicants mentioned the Council's culture and operating principles, it did not explicitly state anywhere the need for Welsh language skills. It was believed that the reference to the culture of the Council and the county had made the need to be able to communicate in Welsh very clear.

During the investigation, we were asked to explain the circumstances of the advertisement, and to share information about our recruitment policy. As a result of the investigation, it was deemed that the Council had failed to comply with the following Standards:

136A - [failed to] specify the language category of the post in the Recruitment Pack or the advertisement on the Welsh side of the website; and had not specified the language category in Welsh at all when advertising the post; and

137 – [failed] when advertising the post, to include a statement noting that applications may be submitted in Welsh, and that an application submitted in Welsh will not be treated less favourably than an application submitted in English.

The final ruling acknowledged that this post had been advertised in a different way to the usual, and that this occasion did not reflect the Council's normal procedures. The Council was, however, asked to make changes to the Recruitment Policy to note that any posts advertised through different methods would meet the same requirements and would ensure that the language requirements and invitation to submit applications in Welsh were clearly evident. The following conditions have therefore been added to the Recruitment Policy, and will also be incorporated into the relevant section of the Language Policy. These clauses will apply to any posts advertised that do not use the standard templates, such as Heads of departments and senior officials' posts that use a recruitment pack, or secondments that are advertised in more informal ways.

If a post is advertised in a different way, without using the usual job description and person specification templates - by creating a Recruitment Pack, for example - it should be ensured that key skills information is still included somewhere within the pack.

All job advertisements will state the language category of the post, namely that language requirements are essential, in accordance with the requirements of section 5 above.

All job advertisements (in English and Welsh) will include the following statement which will encourage applicants to submit their applications in Welsh, or bilingually and will make it clear that applications in both languages will be treated equally.

"All candidates for Council posts are encouraged to submit applications in Welsh, or bilingually. (Applications submitted in either Welsh only or English only will be treated equally, but the applicant will be asked to consider carefully the language requirements of the post and the organisation and whether submitting an application in Welsh only would be more appropriate.)"

All job advertisements will include the following sentence which highlights the Council's Welsh-medium internal administration and the need for appropriate language skills among employees.

"Gwynedd Council operates internally through the medium of Welsh, and offers all its services bilingually. The applicant will be required to attain the linguistic level noted as one of the essential skills in the Person Specification."

2. Enquiries

Training for election officers:

An enquiry was received by the Commissioner about training for polling station officers. They had received a complaint from a member of the public about a lack of Welsh language training. It was possible to confirm that the training was not part of the Council's responsibility. The training comes under the role of the Returning Officer, and therefore does not come under the requirements of the Standards. This response, and the role of the Returning Officer being independent of the Council, was accepted and therefore did not lead to an investigation.

Libraries' Self-service:

An enquiry was received in February 2022 about the Library service's use of photocopiers and printers. The Commissioner's office wanted to know how these machines were used by the public and whether the software on them was available in Welsh. A response was sent confirming that the photocopiers were available for public use, but did not operate as self-service, and that they had to be operated by a member of staff. They did not therefore come under the Standards' requirements for self-service machines.

Monitoring Compliance

A monitoring meeting was held with the Commissioner's liaison officer in January 2022. This followed the completion of a corporate self-assessment exercise in the summer of 2021. The Council have been given a number of actions following the meeting, to improve compliance with the Standards. The Language Unit have also begun a new self-assessment process within the Council, with a departmental self-assessment being shared with all heads of departments that will feed into our next corporate self-assessment in the summer. These self-assessments will enable us to identify gaps and areas for improvement more effectively.

COMPLAINTS and ENQUIRIES REGARDING A SERVICE OR RELATING TO THE COUNCIL'S LANGUAGE POLICY

Department	The number of complaints	The matter relating to the complaint	Explanation and actions taken
Finance	1	A Council Tax letter using the English version of an address	An old IT system, input with English versions of addresses by the Royal Mail. The individual had to make a written request to change information within the system including the address. It was not possible to switch to using a Welsh record automatically - each address would need to be recorded individually. A discussion was held with the service about the barriers and further work was planned with IT systems that would address the problem.
Economy	1	A lack of use of the Welsh language by businesses	An informal complaint was received about businesses using English names in a new development in the town of Caernarfon. It was explained that the Council did not have powers to compel businesses to use Welsh names, that the development was not under the direct control of the Council, and also that the businesses in question were part of established chains, rather than new businesses established on the site, and therefore it would be more difficult to get them to change. The two businesses concerned also used Welsh signs within the shops, and employed Welsh speakers.
Highways and Municipal	1	An English-only leaflet was received by the public	A complaint was received that English-only leaflets had been issued by Colas to notify residents of roadworks. The department

			confirmed that they had contacted the company to resolve the issue, and to ensure that they had a translation and templates of notifications/pamphlets available in the future. The service's attention was drawn to the proofreading support that can be obtained from the translation service.
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