
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: MONDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2022

PRESENT:

Councillors: Elfed Wyn ap Elwyn (Chair),
Llio Elenid Owen (Vice-chair)

Menna Baines, Jina Gwyrfai, Olaf Cai Larsen, Gwynfor Owen, Richard Glyn Roberts, Meryl Roberts, Peter Thomas, Elfed Wyn Williams, Gruffydd Williams and Sasha Williams.

Officers: Vera Jones (Democracy and Language Services Manager), Llywela Haf Owain (Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser), Gwenllian Mair Williams (Language Adviser), Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer) and Sioned Mai Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

OTHERS INVITED:

Councillor Elwyn Jones (Chair of the Council) and Richard Medwyn Hughes (Vice-chair of the Council).

- Item 6: Dafydd Wyn Williams (Head of Environment Department), Gareth Jones (Assistant Head of Environment Department) and Carwyn Meredydd (Senior Executive Officer Environment Department).
- Item 7: Meirion Williams (Assistant Head of Highways and Municipal Department).
- Item 8: Dewi Morgan (Head of Finance Department).
- Item 9: Llio Mai Dafydd (Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Eirwyn Williams.

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 meeting of this committee held on 20 June 2022, as a true record.

5. WELSH GOVERNMENT: LETTER FROM THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND WELSH LANGUAGE

This letter was submitted for information to Committee members from the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser with the main points noted below:

- It was explained that prior to the election in May 2022, former committee members had written to the Minister for Welsh Language and Education to express concern that Microsoft Teams did not provide a simultaneous translation facility and meetings had to be held in English.
- It was expanded that the letter sent by the former members requested a default simultaneous translation facility in every meeting for the meetings to be held through the medium of Welsh.

Committee members were given an opportunity to discuss and ask questions:

- Disappointment was expressed in the Government's decision to wait two and a half years before holding their meetings via Zoom. Microsoft Teams had not coped well with simultaneous translation systems during this period and in the meantime a second rate interpretation standard was provided over the phone as attendees joined the meeting on their computers. It was added that contributors had to inform the organisers if they wished to talk in Welsh. It was noted that if 10% of the meeting attendees did this, then this is when the simultaneous translation was provided. It was explained if there was not a sufficient number of requests to participate in Welsh, then there was no choice but to contribute in English.
 - In response to these points, the Democracy and Language Services Manager confirmed that the new Microsoft Teams had updated their interpretation systems. It was expanded that the Council was currently trialling this prior to use in meetings. It was confirmed that the user's experience was very important and therefore Microsoft Teams would not be used for Council meetings until the quality of the service corresponded to what is provided by Zoom.
 - In response to these points, the Language Adviser emphasised that it was not the Government's choice to set a requirement for 10% of attendees to make a request to speak in Welsh in meetings before getting a simultaneous translation service. It was confirmed that this was part of the language standards and the Welsh Government and local authorities must follow these. As a result, it was stated that the Government was in compliance with the standards.
- Disappointment was expressed that the Government did not feel that they needed to go a step further than the standards to encourage more Welsh speakers. It was asked how proactive was the Government in promoting the Welsh language and to ensure a translation provision.
 - In response to the question, the Language Adviser noted that there were varied aspects to promoting the language within the Government. It was elaborated that the Government was very reliant on officers to promote the language, however, they still did not have the provision to make this effectively.
- It was agreed that the Government needed to support Officers and Ministers to speak Welsh in the workplace. It was confirmed that a simultaneous translation service was a contemporary way to be able to hold meetings in Welsh, however, there was a need to go further to ensure the future of the language.
- It was asked how the language standards were set.
 - In response to the question, the Language Adviser noted that the standards were part of the Government's legislation. It was confirmed that these

standards were monitored by the Language Commissioner and the same standards were imposed on Local Governments. They proceeded to confirm that the standards had been written with the mindset that meetings were held by default in English. Cyngor Gwynedd holds its meetings in Welsh by default and therefore went further than the requirements of the standards.

- Gratitude was expressed for the letter.

RESOLVED

- Disappointment was expressed at the response to the letter as their response was not more positive. This letter emphasised the need to encourage Welsh speakers to speak Welsh in the workplace as well as to improve the simultaneous translation service. It was confirmed that the letter also requested confirmation as to how the Government promotes the language with the exception of following the language standards when holding virtual meetings.
- To organise a discussion at the next meeting regarding the future of town councils to ensure the future of using the Welsh language at their meetings.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of the Environment Department, Assistant Head of the Environment Department and the Senior Executive Officer, Environment Department and attention was drawn briefly to the following main points:

- It was reported that 91.7% of the department's officers meet the language designations of their posts and pride was expressed that this was higher than the Council average. It was confirmed that 78.5% of all the department's staff had completed a language skills self-assessment and the department encouraged the remaining staff to complete this as soon as possible.
- It was confirmed that 14 officers in the department did not reach the language designations of their post, however, they were encouraged to attend various courses and training. The department encourages staff to take advantage of the language refresher course. The website was praised as it was a good resource that assisted officers as well as the language forum. It was emphasised that talks always commenced in Welsh and every effort was being made to ensure that everyone feels comfortable to foster their language skills and confidence.
- It was emphasised that these figures did not include the waste service officers who had transferred recently from the Highways and Municipal Department.
- Pride was expressed that the building control service had managed to encourage people to ensure that the names of their houses remained as Welsh names, or to encourage owners to change the names of their houses back into Welsh by demonstrating the importance of traditional names. The Planning service also promoted the Welsh language by following policy PS1 that gives detailed consideration to the language when dealing with planning applications.
- It was explained that a proportion of the department's work was externalised to contractors. Assurance was given that every effort was made to safeguard the language. It was emphasised that invitations to tender as well as the guidelines were bilingual. It was noted that difficulties could arise when trying to translate

standard national contracts as the meaning of the contracts could easily change. However, it was reported that the department had managed to get Welsh language contracts with bus companies by tailoring their own contracts.

- Details were given that one of the main barriers facing the department recently was the lack of recruitment. It was confirmed that it was generally difficult to recruit qualified officers across the department's services and the challenge had intensified by striving to recruit qualified officers who also possessed sufficient Welsh language skills.
- It was elaborated that the department had managed to recruit a professional trainee in the traffic service with strong language skills. The department continues to invest in the trainee to ensure that he is qualified to deliver the role confidently. Concern was expressed that situations arose where the department invests in people and ultimately they are lost to the private sector or other local authorities as the salary was higher in these settings. Unfortunately, several officers from the department had changed jobs to work in other locations as a result.
- It was explained that the department was leading on tackling the climate change and nature emergency. It had been ensured that all the discussions were being held through the medium of Welsh or that the use of the language was being encouraged, if it was not possible to hold them completely in Welsh.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- It was asked if recruitment difficulties were worse following the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was also asked what steps the department was taking to ensure that new officers learnt Welsh language skills when language requirements were reduced when advertising for the second or third time.
 - In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department noted that there had been difficulties with recruitment for some years to ensure that officers were qualified and possessed Welsh language skills. Language skills continued to be important for jobs in the department even if the post was advertised more than once. It was noted that more applicants applied for posts when the language designation was reduced. The competence and language skills of applicants were weighed up to ensure that the best officer was recruited. Reliance would be placed on the successful applicant to foster his/her language skills once he/she received the post and naturally some individuals would be more committed to the language than others. This department gave encouragement and support to everyone who needed additional help with the Welsh language immediately when they commence the post.
- It was asked if the planning department had any control over business names as well as house names. It was felt that recently the names of companies were only in English and it would be useful for residents and visitors if the names of the companies were in Welsh or bilingual.
 - In response to the query, the Assistant Head of the Environment Department noted that the department's control of business names was limited as every sign did not require planning permission. Only in situations whereby a development or sign needs planning permission will the department be able to control the names of businesses promoted to be in Welsh or bilingual and this by imposing a planning condition to this end.

- In response to the query, the Senior Language and Scrutiny Adviser noted that these observations would be forwarded to the Economy and Community Department as well as the Business Support Team for them to be aware of the members' concerns.
- It was considered should the department be likely to recruit non-Welsh speaking officers in the future, bearing in mind that there was more pressure and demand for their services as a result of the new legislation.
 - In response to the query, the Assistant Head of the Environment Department noted that the recruitment challenges was not a new problem for the department. As there had been difficulties for some years, the department was now seeking to attract applicants in several different ways. It was noted that the planning department had been chosen as a pilot department for the planning workforce project, which was an improvement priority in the Council Plan. Job descriptions are reviewed and evaluated to ensure that they are more competitive with nearby authorities. An application had been made by the department to get a new trainee to join the team and to also receive three years of qualification training. Despite the recruitment difficulties, the department was aware that the majority of their work dealt with individuals and communities and therefore language skills were essential. This will not change and every encouragement and support will be given to all to develop Welsh language skills.
- It was asked how the Welsh language was prioritised within the planning service when there were many changes on the horizon and not enough officers currently to reach the requirements on time.
 - In response to the query, the Head of the Environment Department reported that there was already a little slippage in the time-schedules to respond to planning applications. It was admitted that there was pressure on the planning enforcement service, and challenges with the time taken to determine planning applications, there were also additional implications in terms of staffing with the introduction and implementation of the Article 4 direction to get better control of holiday homes. It will be necessary to ensure that additional officers are available to cope with the workload. As was discussed earlier, every effort was being made to find competent applicants with sufficient Welsh language skills and every support was available to any eligible applicant requiring help to foster his/her language skills. The department would not disregard an application because the applicant did not reach the language designation of the role, as the commitment of individuals to try and improve their language skills was different from case to case.
- Pride was expressed that over 91% of staff in the department met the language designations of their posts and it was asked if it was possible to know how many staff understand and speak Welsh, but do not reach the language designation.
 - In response to the question, the Language Adviser noted that departments received a report on language designations at least twice a year and further information would be provided when discussing the last item of this meeting.
- Attention was drawn to the fact that the Eryri National Park Authority was the planning authority for the Park and therefore had responsibility for dealing with planning applications, enforcement matters and for preparing planning policy within the Park's area.

- Gratitude was expressed for the report.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HIGHWAYS AND MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

The report was submitted by the Assistant Head of the Highways and Municipal Department, and in brief attention was given to the following main points:

- It was reported that 94.5% of the department's staff meet the language designations of their job. Unfortunately, only 39% of the department had completed the survey. While this was the lowest response rate of all the Council's departments, it was difficult to say how many people reached their language designation.
- It was expanded that consideration had been given to access to the survey and many front-line staff in the department had failed to complete the survey as they had no access to a computer. It was discussed with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to try and simplify the on-line survey as well as sending a hard copy of the survey with a letter of explanation from the head of department, but unfortunately the majority of officers had not completed this, as an increase of 14% can be seen in the number of responses last year.
- There was a discussion with officers to receive feedback regarding why staff did not want to complete the survey and several reasons of explanation were given.
 - Some believed that it was a pointless process.
 - Some were worried about their employment future if they did not reach the language designation.
- An intention to work jointly with the Environment Department was expressed to try and get more feedback to this survey, and it was confirmed that the waste collection workers had transferred to that department.
- It was explained that the recruitment of professional and front-line officers had been an obstacle during the last period. This has been a specific problem with litter collection service workers and street cleansing in the Meirionnydd area. Although the language designation for these roles was basic, the department had to weigh-up and measure the importance of employing workers with Welsh language skills, with providing a quality service.
- It was reported that the department had managed to appoint an officer who had developed his confidence and language skills. The applicant submitted his application in Welsh, and since then had been appointed on condition that he attends a language course at Nant Gwrtheyrn. The officer was very keen to attend and was now communicating both verbally and in writing in Welsh to a very good standard and was confident.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- Concern was expressed that some of the department's technical terms were not translated from English into Welsh. Translation processes were very effective in Wales and it was asked if it was possible to re-visit this matter.
 - In response to the query, the Assistant Head of the Highways and Municipal Department noted that many steps to externalise the work occurred bilingually but very often conditions were included in English only as the meaning can easily vary when translated. This means that the majority of documents include the Welsh language but certain sections used English only.
- A number of matters associated with language designations were discussed. Some of these included controlling slipping into English in the office for the benefit of officers who are learning Welsh, and to consider that line managers take more of a role to complete language skills assessment forms.
 - In response to the enquiries, the Language Adviser confirmed that all the matters relating to language designations would be discussed in Item 9, at the end of this meeting. Should any questions arise following the presentation, it would be appropriate for the members to ask them during that discussion.
- There was pride in the stories about officers who had managed to improve their Welsh language skills since joining the Environment department as well as the Highways and Municipal department. It was asked if there were projects in the pipeline to promote the success of such individuals, to set an example for other officers who are trying to improve their language skills.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer noted that such successes were shared with staff on the internal language site. In addition to this, the annual Gwobr Dafydd Orwig was awarded to encourage officers to continue to foster their Welsh language skills.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: FINANCE DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of the Finance Department, and in brief he drew attention to the following main points:

- It was reported that the vast majority of staff in the department had completed the recent language skills self-assessment. The results indicated that 216 of the workforce reached the language designation of their post, with 2 members of staff failing to reach this. It was noted that 96% of staff had completed their self-assessment and 4% had not completed this, they had not done so as they were new to their role. It was confirmed that this 4% was equivalent to 11 members of staff.
- It was elaborated that every effort had been made to ensure that the 2 members of staff, who had not reached the language designation for their post, would be encouraged and supported to attend training courses to gain confidence. It was confirmed that the officers in these cases had attended courses but continued to lack a little confidence in their language skills and had marked themselves harshly when completing the assessment.

- Details were given that the department had not been successful to promote the Welsh language in all aspects of the work. The department contacts specialist technical companies regularly as well as information technology providers. Many of these companies usually come from the USA and despite every effort to start a discussion in Welsh, the department had to be realistic when sending Welsh language documents to consider whether they can be effective or obstructive. However, it was ensured that the fact that contact with a few of these companies occurred in English, did not prevent the department from providing a Welsh language service of the highest degree to staff and Gwynedd residents.
- It was emphasised that the majority of documents were bilingual or in Welsh. Essential work had been undertaken to ensure that all the technical terms in the department had been translated and therefore the people of Gwynedd have the option to complete any form such as tax forms or applications for benefits as well as reading reports, in Welsh if they wished.
- An update was given that the IT service had by now updated Windows software on all the Council's computers to use the Welsh language as the default language rather than English. This had been encouraged in the past, however, recently this change had been mandatory on all Council devices.
- It was explained that the department had developed a Digital Learning provision since April this year. This had taken place following the process of winding-up the Cynnal company and internalising the support they used to provide. As part of this support the department is responsible for providing a laptop to all the county's teachers and is in the process of providing laptops to all year 7 to 11 pupils in Gwynedd schools. It was confirmed that these would also use the Welsh language as the computer language.
- It was explained that there had been some change to external users as Barclays Bank had closed key branches the department used, in Caernarfon, Porthmadog and Dolgellau. This meant that people lost an opportunity to chat in Welsh at the bank and were likely to have to deal with the bank on-line or over the telephone more often. Despite this, an alternative service had been established with the post office and therefore there was a dependency on the ability of post office staff to speak Welsh.
- Reference was made to several other examples where the department was trying to ensure use of the Welsh language. It was noted that a buddy scheme had been established where a Welsh learner is matched with an officer from another service and gets support to foster their language skills. Reference was also made to the department's intranet that had recently been updated to include a dictionary of useful words for the department's services to use and to make it easier for staff. It was confirmed that the department continued to work closely with the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer to ensure that everything was done to enable officers to work and communicate confidently and naturally in Welsh.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- The department was commended for its decision to change the computer language from English to Welsh and it was asked whether the department had received any concerns or negative responses as a result of this change?

- In response to the query, the Head of the Finance Department noted that IT service staff had feared a negative response to this change. However, there had been no negative response. Naturally, staff had taken time to get used to the change but generally everyone could remember where the icons and buttons are and the Welsh terminology had kept up with this.
- It was asked if it was intended to extend the buddy scheme to be used across the council?
 - In response to the query, the Head of the Finance Department noted that he would be happy to do this within the department. However, only one officer was currently eligible for the scheme and therefore there was no scope to expand this within the department at present.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer noted that this scheme was available to every department within the council. It had been created voluntarily by individuals having attended refresher Welsh language courses and they wanted to ensure there was regular use of the language to be able to foster their skills.
- Gratitude was expressed for the report.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and note the observations received.

9. PROJECT UPDATE: LANGUAGE DESIGNATION PRIORITY

The report was presented by the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer, and she briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- The background of the language designations project was reported upon, confirming that it derived from the discussions of the Language Committee in 2015, before the new language standards came into effect in 2016. As a result of this project, the Council has a better understanding of the different language skills the workforce has and can offer more suitable support to foster the language skills of staff.
- It was confirmed that the project had also been developed to place language designations for the Council's various posts. As a result of this, officers would have more awareness of the required skill level to be able to deliver the work effectively.
- It was explained that the project had been pivotal to establish an internal language system that retains information about staff language skills and to establish a process to share information about courses, share feedback and successes with the different departments. Also, as part of the project, an internal language site was developed. Different sections of this language site were shown to members.
- Attention was given to the questions that arose during the previous discussions and the following information was noted:
 - It was explained that the process of gathering information via a self-assessment survey was varied. It was reported that some people were happy to complete this on-line and others wanted to receive a hard copy. It was explained that the manager provided information for the project in situations when workers did not have easy access to a computer, or they are front-line workers. The intention was for the information to be gathered in the simplest way possible for everyone to have an opportunity to complete this. It was also explained that project

officers understood that some people were suspicious of completing questionnaires and language skills were a sensitive issue for many.

- It was thought that the number of people who speak Welsh was higher in some departments than what had been noted in the findings. It was noted that some people could speak Welsh but did not reach the language designation and therefore had not been included in some figures. It was confirmed that this was the main aim of the survey to ensure an understanding of the different skill levels that exist in different teams in order to ensure that the relevant support was available for officers.
- A copy of the survey was shown as an example to the members.
- It was noted that the formal project would come to an end in the next few months. It was confirmed that the process of gathering information about staff language skills was on-going, however, the main focus of the officers had moved to ensure that staff received support to develop their language skills.
- The formal project would come to an end in the next few months. Staff support and gathering information was continuing but the focus had moved to staff support.

Members of the committee were given an opportunity to ask questions:

- It was asked if the language self-assessment was completed within the Education department as it was a process that was being developed across the Council.
 - In response to the enquiry, the Welsh Language Learning and Development Officer noted that the self-assessment was available for department staff, and some department officers had completed the survey. Recently the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan had been established and more work would be undertaken to get information about the language skills of officers in the Education department as a result of this. This strategy and the recent Welsh Government plan enabled department officers to receive more support and Welsh lessons should the need arise.
- Gratitude was expressed for the report.

RESOLVED

- To accept the report and to note the observations received.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.15pm.

CHAIR