
LANGUAGE COMMITTEE: MONDAY 30 JANUARY 2023

PRESENT:

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

Menna Baines, Jina Gwyrfai, Gwynfor Owen, Llio Elenid 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 Rhodri Jones (Democracy Services Officer).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Menna Jones (Cabinet Member for Corporate Support).

- Item 5: Councillor Beca Brown (Cabinet Member for Education), Garem Prytherch Jackson (Head of Education Department), Gwyn Tudur (Assistant Head of Department: Secondary), Rhys Glyn (Head of Gwynedd's Immersion Education System) and Debbie Anne Jones (Assistant Head of Department: Corporate Services).
- Item 6: Ian Jones (Head of Corporate Support Department).
- Item 7: Carys Fôn Williams (Head of Housing and Property Department).
- Item 8: Emyr Edwards (Research and Information Manager) and Nia Wyn Vaughan (Senior Research and Analytics Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Eirwyn Williams and Olaf Cai Larsen.

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 10 October 2022 as a true record.

5. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Education, and briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- It was ensured that Cyngor Gwynedd's Language Policy was embedded through all the work done by the Education Department and the county's schools.
- It was explained that a full consultation had been held on the draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The WESP had been operational since September 2022. It was explained that it would be monitored regularly by the Welsh Government's Minister for the Welsh Language and Education, and that the department would use the plan as a live document in order to ensure that it reflected Gwynedd's unique situation.
- Specific attention was drawn to 'Aberwla' virtual world, the Immersion Education System's innovative provision. Welsh Government officers recently visited the new immersion centre site in Bangor to see learners who were newcomers, who were using the virtual-reality equipment to acquire the Welsh language by visiting Aberwla's virtual supermarket. The modern and innovative method of increasing children's confidence in using Welsh in different situations was praised, as this would enable them to use their skills in the community in due course. The immersion centre staff were praised for their work on this new project.
- In the context of recruitment, it was noted that recruitment challenges remained in some of the Department's services such as catering and cleaning, and that there were problems in recruiting teachers for specific subjects in secondary schools in Gwynedd, although it was emphasised that the challenge of recruiting teachers was a national challenge.

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

Did parents have the right to insist that their children's education was provided through the medium of English and exclude Welsh-medium teaching. It was noted that this could be detrimental to the ability of those pupils to gain employment in their local area due to their lack of Welsh language skills.

- In response to the enquiry, the Cabinet Member confirmed that she shared this concern but accepted that there were various reasons why parents requested that their children were educated through the medium of English.
- In response to the enquiry, the Head of Education noted that pupils could receive some of their education through the medium of English under the new curriculum and in accordance with our language policy here in Gwynedd. This was to ensure that pupils were confident and competent in their use of Welsh and English.
- It was further noted that this issue was occasionally raised by parents, and that the department's officers and all the County's teachers held discussions with parents regarding the advantages of receiving a Welsh-medium education, in the hope that they would be willing to follow this guidance. It was noted that the Department had witnessed an increase in the number of parents who were eager to learn Welsh as adults, having seen their children's progress in learning Welsh.
- The Head of Education confirmed that Welsh Government had established a baseline on the amount of education provided through the medium of Welsh. This was currently set at around 60%, although Gwynedd school staff were aware that there was an expectation that the rate in Gwynedd would be far higher, and that schools succeeded in maintaining a very high percentage of children's education through the medium of Welsh.

Concern was expressed that only 40.73% of Gwynedd's schools had completed language assessments. It was believed that it was important to ascertain the linguistic skills of all school staff. A question was asked about what measures were used by the department to ensure that school staff had opportunities to develop their language skills.

- The Head of Education explained that language skills assessments were held continuously within schools. However, it was explained that recruitment difficulties meant that not all staff members had robust Welsh skills. There was ongoing work with those staff members to ensure that they improved their Welsh language skills, supported by training.
- It was accepted that the percentage of staff that had completed the self-assessment (40.73%) was low, and the department would endeavour to ensure that more school staff completed the self-assessment in future.

It was asked how many children in Gwynedd received their education through the medium of English.

- In response to the question, the Head of Education noted that the situation regarding the Welsh language varied from area to area. This had led to a plan to increase the use of Welsh in two secondary schools within the county. It was further explained that the department was investing in schools in order to provide Welsh resources in areas where the percentage of Welsh language speakers was lower than the average for the County.
- The Head of Education noted that this was a difficult question to answer as the new curriculum had been introduced, which led to a bilingual education provision in accordance with the language policy, as previously discussed.
- In response to the enquiry, the Assistant Head explained that the information about the education provision over recent years was currently being collected although it was not yet available. It was hoped to establish definitions of Welsh education, English education and bilingual education to ensure that the figures presented were accurate. There would be a further discussion on the matter once the data had been collected.

A discussion was held on the importance of the Welsh language as the spoken language in the classroom. It was acknowledged that many subjects used English books, resources and websites in order to present the education, but it was felt that the use of Welsh within the classroom was crucial.

Officers were asked for their ideas for ensuring that providers that used school grounds for sports etc. held the activities through the medium of Welsh. It was felt that this was a method of ensuring that pupils heard the language being used naturally beyond the classroom, and also during the evenings and at weekends.

- In response to the question, the Head of Education assured the committee that every effort was made to ensure that coaches used Welsh whenever possible.
- In response to the enquiry, the Deputy Head of Corporate Services noted that conversations had been held to raise the awareness of Headteachers of the expectations when a third party used school facilities. It was hoped to reinforce these arrangements with headteachers in the context of the Language Charter in the future to ensure that children benefitted from these events through the medium of Welsh.

It was noted that the number of pupils completing five subjects through the medium of Welsh had decreased by 5% since the 2016 WESP. It was therefore asked how the department would measure their attainment against the current WESP targets. A question was asked whether the department had developed a Language Forum.

- In response to the question, the Head of Education confirmed that the Education Language Forum had been established to ensure that the Department successfully reached the WESP targets. It was admitted that the Department had difficulties in ensuring this during the Covid-19 lockdown periods, as the pupils were unable to attend school to receive their education. However, all the county's schools were working hard to ensure that these levels increased once again. There were representatives from the Language Committee and the Education and Economy

Scrutiny Committee on the Education Language Forum, and they would be able to report back informally on the Forum's work, providing assurance of the Department's implementation of the WESP.

- In response to the question, the Deputy Head of Corporate Services noted that the first meeting of the Education Language Forum had been held, and that ensuring that the county succeeded in attaining the WESP targets was one of its work streams.

Members gave thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: CORPORATE SUPPORT DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Corporate Support Department, and briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- It was confirmed that the department was central to the promotion of the Welsh language within the Council.
- It was stated that 98.3% of the Department's workforce had achieved the language designation of their post. It was reported that 95.1% of all the department's staff had completed the language self-assessment. This was considered to be extremely positive as 66 new members of staff had been appointed within the past two years.
- It was reported that the department was leading on three of the Council's priority projects.
- It was acknowledged that the department had faced some recent challenges.
- It was explained that the department worked to ensure that the Welsh language was used in procurement contracts, influenced the workforce planning systems, and liaised with external organisations in Gwynedd and Wales within the field of registering and administering criminal record checks in order to provide a bilingual service.

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

It was asked whether the legal unit was part of the department.

- In response to the query, the Head of Corporate Support confirmed that the legal service was not part of the Department.

The Department was praised for its work in relation to Welsh place names, and it was enquired whether it was possible to collaborate with Google Maps so that they could use the Welsh names for the areas of the County.

- In response to the enquiry, the Language Adviser noted that the department had not succeeded in encouraging Google to use Welsh place names yet as such companies obtained their information from a number of different sources. However, it was confirmed that the Department was collaborating with Ordnance Survey so that they could use Welsh names on maps. This work had been positive to date, and it was likely to be an ongoing project in order to ensure consistency within their maps.

Members gave thanks for the report.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION PLAN: HOUSING AND PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

The report was presented by the Head of Housing and Property Department, and briefly drew attention to the following main points:

- It was explained that the department dealt with a number of front-line services such as homelessness, refugees and housing supply. It was explained that the department also dealt with corporate matters such as office cleaning and security. This meant that the department dealt with a vast number of people and it was pleasing to report that all these services were offered in Welsh / bilingually.
- It was confirmed that service users came from various backgrounds and often had specific needs or were suffering from stress. The department felt that communicating with users in their language of choice was crucial, and was proud of succeeding in this respect.
- It was reported that the department had invested time and effort to assist people through the current situation in Ukraine. The Department had succeeded to resettle hundreds of people in the county on a temporary basis in order to provide them with refuge.
- It was expressed that 94% had reached the language designation level of their job. with the vast majority of the workforce having completed the self-assessment. It was a source of pride that this had increased from 67% since January 2022. It was confirmed that 6 members of staff had attended language training.
- The department considered that the Common Housing Policy, which gave priority for social housing to individuals with a connection to Gwynedd, ensured that local people could live and remain in their communities. It was considered that this reduced migration and mobility that had been identified as a threat to the Welsh language within the Welsh Language Promotion Plan. It was further explained that 96% of social housing allocations had gone to people with a local connection between September 2021-22.
- It was noted that there was currently a housing crisis in the area and the aim of the Housing Action Plan was to ensure that people were able to remain in their communities through a number of schemes such as the Plans to Develop Our Own Housing and first-time buyer schemes.
- Another source of pride was the department's computer systems for the Housing Options Scheme.

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

Due to a clause in the report noting statutory requirements to advertise in English (in addition to Welsh), some committee members noted that this could lead to placing Welsh contractors at a disadvantage.

- In response to the enquiry, the Head of Housing and Property Department confirmed that advertising in English was a statutory requirement placed upon the department. However, it was emphasised that the department often advertised bilingually.
- It was explained that within the Council's Framework, Cyngor Gwynedd's Language Policy was shared with the companies following the receipt of bids for work. The department tied the companies to Welsh language requirements within the service that they provided.
- Following a request, the Head of Housing and Property agreed to share the department's statutory requirement and contractors' language profiles with members.

It was asked whether the department could provide information about the number of people waiting for social housing who had Welsh language skills and whether the department could

provide specific information about Dwyfor, Arfon and Meirionnydd in order to examine whether people stayed in their local communities or moved to different parts of the County.

- In response to the enquiry, the Head of Housing and Property Department noted that the department would confirm the latest housing waiting list figures with members of the Committee as soon as possible.
- In response to the enquiry about language, the Head of Housing and Property Department confirmed that the department did not ask individuals applying for housing whether they were able to speak Welsh. It was emphasised that the department would require legal guidance before adding a language requirement when applying for housing, to ensure that no regulations or statutes were breached.

A request was made for an explanation of the meaning of 'local connection' in the context of allocating social housing, and whether it would be possible to include a language clause, or that they had been educated in Gwynedd, when people applied for social housing.

- In response to the enquiry, the Head of Housing and Property Department confirmed that the Council had defined the meaning of the word 'local' when creating this policy, in conjunction with Welsh Government. More restrictive definitions proposed by the Council had been rejected by the Government.
- It was further explained that at the time it was not possible to include a language clause within the policy. She did not believe that the situation had changed since the inception of the policy but noted that she would make further enquiries.

Further information was requested regarding the Housing Action Plan Project.

- In response to the enquiry, the Head of Housing and Property Department confirmed that this project had been developed since she started in her post in order to ensure that the work was being managed robustly. It was confirmed that the department was examining social housing that had been sold with conditions that any future occupiers of the houses were local residents. It was explained that the department gathered data at this point, and ensured that any future purchases were also made by local residents.

At the end of the discussion, Councillor Gwynfor Owen stated that he did not agree with the suggestion of setting a language condition on applications for social housing. He also believed that it was unfair to include a condition that applicants for social housing had to have been partially educated in Gwynedd.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

8. CENSUS RESULTS 2021 – THE WELSH LANGUAGE

The report was presented by the Research and Information Manager and the Senior Research and Analytics Officer. Attention was drawn briefly to the following principal points:

- It was explained that the latest Census had been held on 21 March 2021, with the detailed results on the Welsh language published on 6 December 2022.
- It was explained that the following question had been asked as part of the census, and was used as the basis for the data:
 - “Can you understand, speak, read or write Welsh?”
 - Understand spoken Welsh
 - Speak Welsh
 - Read Welsh
 - Write Welsh
 - OR none of the above”
- It was confirmed that the percentage of Welsh-speakers (3 years old and above) in Gwynedd had fallen from 65.4% in 2011 to 64.4% in 2021. It was noted that this was

lower than the overall reduction in the percentage of Welsh-speakers in Wales, which was 1.2%.

- It was reported that the percentage of Welsh-speakers in Gwynedd had reduced each decade since 1981, and during that time, the percentage had reduced by 12.2%.
- It was stated that the age group with the greatest number of Welsh-speakers was the 3-15 year-old group. However, it was confirmed that there had been a decrease of 2.9% in the number of Welsh-speakers in this age group.
- It was explained that the rates of Welsh-speakers in Gwynedd was very similar to the general patterns seen throughout Wales. It was noted that the only age group that was different to the national pattern was an increase of 0.6% in Welsh-speakers between 50 and 64 years old in Gwynedd, where there had been a general decrease of 0.7% throughout Wales.
- Details were provided on the 13 areas within Gwynedd, confirming that Caernarfon Catchment had the greatest percentage of Welsh-speakers (85.3%) and the lowest numbers were to be found in Bro Dysynni (38.6%). It was explained that a decrease in the number of Welsh-speakers was found in 10 areas, with an increase in the number of speakers only in the areas of Pen Llŷn, Bangor Catchment and Bro Dysynni.
- It was confirmed that the five neighbourhoods with the highest number of Welsh-speakers were located in the Arfon area, and the five neighbourhoods with the fewest speakers were in the Bangor area.
- It was reported that Llanbedrog and Abersoch was the neighbourhood with the largest increase of Welsh-speakers, with the greatest decrease to be found in Hendre area, Bangor.
- It was noted that 7.1% of the population had confirmed that they understood spoken Welsh but could not speak it. This was higher than the Wales percentage of 5.2%. It was confirmed that the neighbourhood with the greatest number of people able to understand spoken Welsh but unable to speak it was Marchog.
- Peblig neighbourhood in Caernarfon was identified as the neighbourhood with the greatest number of people able to speak Welsh but who were unable to read and write it.
- It was explained that the results of the Census showed that 2.3% of the population of Wales could speak Welsh, but were unable to read or write it. This percentage for Gwynedd was 5.4%.
- It was emphasised that more detailed information was released at a ward level, and that work would be undertaken to analyse the results.

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

Disappointment was expressed that the percentage of Welsh-speakers was lower than 70% in 37 out of the 71 neighbourhoods.

It was asked how the neighbourhoods in the Census results were determined, as they were not necessarily villages/communities adjacent to each other.

- In response to the query, the Research and Information Manager confirmed that the Office for National Statistics determined the areas. It was considered that some areas were grouped in a specific way to correspond to Council ward boundaries, but the boundaries had been subsequently amended.

A member praised the ability of Cyngor Gwynedd's Language Policy to ensure that Welsh had a place within our communities and the world of business. Although the number of speakers had decreased overall, the policy succeeded in normalising the use of the language.

Consideration was given to the confidence of individuals to speak the language. It was believed that the figures could be higher if people felt confident in their language skills, as some people felt under pressure to understand and speak correct Welsh in relation to the ability associated with this question.

A question was asked about whether the service used demography in order to examine how many people moved to different areas, and combined this with the census results in order to get clear statistics about the County's communities.

- In response to the query, the Research and Information Manager noted that details about demography were included in the Census results. However, it was not possible to compare the statistics of two areas. It was hoped that information would be shared by the Office for National Statistics over coming months and that various fields could be examined as it was released.

Concern was expressed by some members that Cyngor Gwynedd's Language Policy was not sufficiently robust to ensure that Welsh was used in all situations. It was considered that amendments were needed to ensure that the figures of Welsh language users increased in the future.

RESOLVED

To accept the report and note the observations received.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER: ASSURANCE REPORT 2021-22

The Language Adviser presented the report and noted the following points:

- It was reported that this was an annual report that was submitted by the Language Commissioner and its purpose was to provide a view on how the various public bodies conformed to language standards.
- It was emphasised that the report was not specifically formulated for Cyngor Gwynedd; rather it provided a general national picture.
- It was explained that the report suggested which fields would be given attention by the Commissioner over the coming months.

Members were invited to contact the Language Adviser if they had any questions arising from the report.

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

This correspondence was presented as part of the committee's agenda for information only. The matter was not discussed during the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.05pm.

CHAIR