



<u>MEETING</u>	Language Committee
<u>DATE</u>	23 April 2024
<u>TITLE</u>	Welsh Language Promotion Plan – Leadership Team and Legal Services
<u>PURPOSE</u>	Present information about the contribution of the Leadership Team and Legal Services to promote and further the Welsh language
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1. CONTEXT


- 1.1. This report was prepared to share information with the Language Committee about the way in which the Leadership Team and Legal Services promote and advance the Welsh language.
- 1.2. The Leadership Team employs 19 members of staff including the Chief Executive, two Corporate Directors, the Executive Support Team, the Poverty Team, as well as officers from the Council’s Business Support Service. Furthermore, 23 members of staff are employed by the Legal Services.

In his role, the Chief Executive, with the assistance of the Directors, is responsible for the leadership and general management of the Council’s workforce.

The Legal Services provide legal support across the whole range of the Council’s work; supporting the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer to carry out their proprietary responsibilities; supporting the Returning Officer and the Electoral Officer, and; supporting the Coroner’s service for Northwest Wales.


2. PROMOTION

- 2.1. The Chief Executive holds responsibility for ensuring that our ambition in terms of promoting and advancing the use of the Welsh language is upheld across all departments of the Council. It is a role that requires the CEO, the Corporate Director and Statutory Director (Social Services) to provide support to departments as required, while other times offering challenge in a constructive way.

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- 2.2. The roles of the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors involve regular participation in multi-agency meetings at both regional and national levels. It is disappointing that some organisations, including the Welsh Government, continue to conduct meetings through the medium of English all too often. In this regard, please refer to Appendix 1 for a copy of a letter recently sent to the Welsh Government highlighting these shortcomings.
 - 2.3. The Leadership Team has been spearheading an initiative for all staff to install Welsh-medium Microsoft software on their devices. An additional increase in the number of people using Welsh-medium software was achieved over the past year, but encouragement and ongoing effort are essential to achieve the goal of having all officers using Welsh-medium software.
 - 2.4. The Corporate Director chairs the Council's Digital Transformation Board, which is tasked with developing and implementing the new corporate Digital Plan. The Welsh language is central to the Plan, and this emphasis is reflected in the Digital Suitability Assessment; a mandatory step before any of the Council's departments acquire a digital system or service.
 - 2.5. The Corporate Director, together with the Senior Language and Scrutiny Officer, is a member of a Steering Group established by the Welsh Language Commissioner to develop policy models aimed at increasing the use of Welsh within public bodies in Wales. The Council's role in the Group is essentially consultative to share good practice, and to this end, a dedicated meeting between the Council's representatives and the Deputy Commissioner was held in March to further explore ideas.
 - 2.6. The Corporate Director, together with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member responsible for the Welsh language, participates in the Gwynedd Language Forum established by the Council's Language Unit. Since its establishment, the Forum has convened three times and has more recently formed a sub-group dedicated to examining the opportunities and decisions made by young people to pursue further and higher education through the medium of Welsh or English.
 - 2.7. The Corporate Director is also a member of the Project Group which promoted "Project 15", aimed at increasing the material available on social media platforms through the medium of Welsh. Funds have been earmarked to support this work, which is spearheaded by the officers of the Language Unit.
 - 2.8. The Corporate Director is a member of the Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, and has had the opportunity to promote and support a plan aimed at increasing the use of the Welsh language at the entrances of various other public bodies in Gwynedd.



- 2.9. The Corporate Director has been supporting the arrangements for establishing Menter Iaith Gwynedd, with the expectation that the final official steps for transferring the responsibilities of “Hunaniaith” to this independent entity will occur within the coming year.
- 2.10. The Statutory Director (Social Services) holds particular responsibilities for promoting the use of the Welsh language. It is expected that all local governments and Health Boards in Wales appoint a senior leader as a “champion” of the Welsh language as part of the “Mwy na Geiriau” (More than Words) programme. In Gwynedd, this role is held by the Statutory Director.
- 2.11. As part of this work, the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 requires that the “champion” ensures the use of the “Cynnig Rhagweithiol” (Proactive Officer), which entails providing a service in Welsh without having to ask for it, on every occasion. In Gwynedd, to achieve this goal, the Director chairs the "More than Words" group, which meets monthly to ensure that systems are in place to enable the “Proactive Offer” across the County.
- 2.12. The Director of Social Services adjudicated the Social Care Wales national awards on the use of the Welsh language in the care sector.
- 2.13. The Council plays a leading role in several regional partnerships and the Legal Services have been at the forefront in establishing the governance arrangements of these partnerships, e.g., the Corporate Joint Committee (CBC) for North Wales. There are several dynamics at play in ensuring that the arrangements of these partnerships operate bilingually; but, the input from the Legal Services means that the arrangements, including the governance documentation etc., are prepared and provided in both Welsh and English on an equal basis. Gwynedd’s ability to handle technical and specialist matters in both Welsh and English means that we can provide assurance and confidence in achieving objectives. This is a principle that is clearly established within our partnership work and is rapidly developing into the norm.
- 2.14. While the performance of the Coroner’s Service primarily falls within the purview of the function holder, several aspects relate to the role of the Legal service:
 - 2.14.1. As Gwynedd appoints the Coroner and Assistant Coroners, we wield significant influence over the requirements for these positions. This means that we have been able to ensure that appointees can carry out their duties through the medium of Welsh and English. This has been recognised by the Ministry of Justice and the Chief Coroner, who oversee these arrangements.
 - 2.14.2. The Electoral Services Officer is a member of the Welsh Language Advisory Group of the Wales Electoral Coordination Board. The Group includes



representatives from local government, the Electoral Commissioner, the Welsh Westminster governments. The group's objective is to ensure that Welsh and English are treated equally in terms of electoral legislation and guidelines. It also shared good practice in matters relation to the Welsh language across authorities and ensures that Welsh-medium training is available to polling station staff.

- 2.14.3. The Officer also serves as Vice Chair of the Welsh Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators, which provides support, training and guidance to officers across the United Kingdom. The Association is currently developing training through the medium of Welsh for polling station staff.
- 2.14.4. The Electoral Unit has supported the company that provides our electronic electoral management system to enhance its capability to generate standard letters and warning in Welsh, and these documents are therefore also available to the other authorities who use the same system.


3. POLICY ISSUES AND STANDARDS

STAFF LANGUAGE SKILLS

- 3.1. Within the Leadership Team, it is confirmed that all members of staff meet the language requirements of their respective roles.

BARRIERS

- 3.2. Currently, the Legal Services commissions local workers and external lawyers to fulfil specific capacity or expertise requirements. It must be acknowledged that it is a challenge to ensure such provision through the medium of Welsh. However, whenever possible, we will prioritise using individuals who can work proficiently through the medium of Welsh.
- 3.3. Another aspect is the need to employ high level specialist lawyers who can deliver Services through the medium of Welsh. Whenever possible, we instruct lawyers and barristers with the language skills. On some occasions, it is possible to secure a Service at the highest level to give advice or opinion through the medium of Welsh. However, on issues requiring a larger team, specialised expertise, extensive project scope, ensuring Welsh-language provision is very difficult, if not impractical. While the ability to deliver Services in Welsh is identified on national framework agreements, it is not universally guaranteed across all companies. This is widely reflected even in companies that have their roots in Wales.
- 3.4. There are a total of 22.25 Full Time Equivalent employees – 25 individuals in Legal Services. All the employed staff can fulfil all the requirements of the posts through




the medium of Welsh. There are 3 non-Welsh speaking locums (equivalent of 1.5 positions) currently supporting either legal work or in the main regional legal work.

- 3.5. It can be considered in the medium term that it is possible to move to a position where all services provided to Gwynedd and regionally can be achieved through the Welsh language. Our employment situation in the legal has considerably improved in terms of sustainably attracting and retaining staff. We are building on this and are confident that the development can continue. This includes taking advantage of the Cynllun Yfory to develop staff internally either through professional trainees or apprenticeships. There are specific and specialised requirements around our regional work that impose short-term requirements that we must meet and require expertise of a certain kind.
- 3.6. It is important to recognise that the Gwynedd Legal Service stands out among the 22 local governments, having a team where all officers can provide a complete Service through the medium of Welsh. This remains unchanged and the issues identified above have not altered the culture nor nature of the Service.
- 3.7. Cooperation with external organisations, many of which do not primarily operate in Welsh internally, is crucial. For instance, the Statutory Director (Social Services) works closely with the Health Board and makes every effort to ensure that meetings are conducted through the medium of Welsh. However, the Health Board tends to switch to English if any participant cannot understand Welsh, rather than arranging for an interpreter beforehand. The former Director succeeded to ensure that most meetings were held in Welsh by working with the Area Director of the Health Board.
- 3.8. The Statutory Director uses his influence as a Welsh speaker to encourage the use of Welsh in external meetings and workshops, always contributing in Welsh to ensure that provision is made for the Welsh language.

CANMOLIAETH A CHWYNION

- 3.9. A conference was organised in Aberystwyth in January to bring together for the first time the various graduate schemes run by public bodies in Wales. Welsh was the principal language of the conference, with all but two speakers (9 in total) presenting either in Welsh or bilingually, together with live interpretation for contributions in Welsh. Many participants from external organisations remarked in the feedback that the event was the most Welsh-speaking professional space they had ever attended.
- 3.10. The Wales Graduate Schemes Network was established following the conference, with participation from the various public bodies in Wales that run graduate schemes. Cyngor Gwynedd leads the Network and has ensured that the Welsh language is fundamental to all work, garnering commendation from Efa Gruffydd Jones, the Welsh Language Commissioner. E.g., one idea is to create opportunities



for graduate trainees who speak Welsh but who work in organisations operating internally through the medium of English, to shadow a trainee in another organisation where Welsh is the main business language, e.g., Cyngor Gwynedd. To this end, we have received the following statement of support from the Commissioner (sig., translated from Welsh): *“We need to be able to offer dedicated opportunities to young people within the world of work where they can use and see the value of their Welsh. [...] I very much welcome the [Network] to make Welsh central when introducing apprentices and trainees to the world of work. It will be an opportunity for young people who do not work through the medium of Welsh to develop their professional skills in the language and get a taste of a Welsh-speaking work environment. It will also be an opportunity to share good practice with those organisations that currently operate primarily through the medium of English.”*

4. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 4.1. There is room for reflection regarding the service and the linguistic resources within the Legal Service, e.g., technical documents that we have created. This could be a resource to share externally under proper conditions, subject to resource availability.
- 4.2. As a Leadership Team, we will continue to promote and take advantage of every opportunity to ensure that the Welsh language is given its proper place, not only in the work of the Council but also at community level within the County, regionally and nationally.