

MEETING	Language Committee
DATE	23 April 2024
TITLE	Economy and Community Department Report
PURPOSE	To present information about the Department's contribution to the Language Policy
AUTHOR	Sioned E. Williams, Head of Economy and Community Department

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report was prepared in response to the Language Committee's request for information on the Community and Economy Department's contribution to Gwynedd Council's Language Policy. The report focuses on the progress made over the last year and the table has been prepared in response to the Committee's specific questions. Relevant examples of the Department's services that I would like to highlight have been included.

Question 1. Promoting and advancing

How does your department go beyond offering bilingual services and contributes to the objectives of the county's language strategy (what activities and projects have been carried out during the past year which raise the status of the Welsh language and ensure opportunities for people to use Welsh in the community)?

The Council's language strategy sets out priorities for promoting the Welsh language in five areas:

1. The language of the family,
2. The language of learning,
3. The language of work and services,
4. The language of the community,
5. Research and Technology

The current strategy can be seen here: ([FERSIWN_NEWYDD_CYMRAEG\(SAESNEG\)\(2\).indd \(llyw.cymru\)](#))

Economic Development: The Department has collaborated with partners to submit a bid to the Welsh Government to fund phase 2 of the Arfor Programme. The purpose of the Arfor programme is to support communities that are Welsh language strongholds to thrive by means of economic interventions. There are four main objectives:

- Create opportunities for children and young families (≤ 35 years old) to remain or return to their native communities
- Create enterprising communities within Welsh-speaking areas
- Maximise the benefits of activity by collaborating
- Strengthen the identity of communities with a high density of Welsh-speakers

£11m has been earmarked for expenditure between January 2023 and March 2025 on a package of projects and we have agreed on five projects to fund:

1. Llwyddo'n Lleol (Succeeding Locally)
2. Cymunedau Mentrus (Enterprising Communities)
3. ARFOR Challenge Fund
4. Strengthen the identity of ARFOR communities
5. Learning from the ARFOR Programme

The Department is leading the programme across Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire councils, and a full appraisal of the programme will be available at the end of the phase to gauge the impact on communities.

Business Support: The Service has made it a requirement for any business that receives financial support to commit to completing an assessment of their use of the Welsh language and to work towards securing the Welsh Language Commissioner's 'Welsh language Offer' designation. As a result, 79 businesses from Gwynedd have completed an assessment and 12 have secured the 'Welsh language Offer' accreditation during 2023/24.

Tourism, Marketing and Events: The Service has launched the Gwynedd and Eryri Plan 2035 which is a Sustainable Visitor Economy Plan for the area, formed jointly with the Eryri National Park Authority. One of the principles agreed on is to 'Celebrate, Respect and Protect our Communities, Language, Culture and Heritage'. Through the Plan, priority will be given to promoting local ownership and to developing opportunities to highlight the Welsh language, our culture and heritage.

The Service is working with Bangor University to carry out specific research to try to develop a way of measuring the impact of tourism on the Welsh language within a pilot area in the Ogwen Valley. This work could lead to further research during 2024.

The Service has also agreed to a new indicator, namely '*A percentage of the County's residents believe that tourism has a positive influence on the Welsh language and culture of Wales*' so that the concerns and findings can be responded to through specific activities or interventions. The Gwynedd Ambassador modules also promote an awareness of the Welsh language, culture and heritage of Gwynedd and now over 300 individuals have registered on the scheme.

Museums and Arts:

The Museums Service organises all its exhibitions bilingually and provides a range of activities in Welsh (and some bilingual ones too). The cafe space in Storiel continues as a community hub working with Menter Iaith Bangor to hold baby café sessions as well as sessions to encourage informal conversations over a cuppa between Welsh-speakers and new Welsh-speakers.

Gwynedd Community Arts continues to provide bilingual sessions across Gwynedd to encourage creativity and well-being in the communities of Gwynedd through the arts.

Through the SPF Grants and Community Arts Grants, support is given to cultural organisations and companies in Gwynedd to reach every part of the county and offer a Welsh and bilingual provision. In art activities that are led by a non-Welsh-speaking Artist, the Service uses a Welsh-speaking assistant who supports the Artist to learn, and to provide a Welsh language service to attendees and the parents.

A mix of Welsh and English speakers attended the Craft for Well-being project activities - and the feedback was very positive about this opportunity for people to learn Welsh in a relaxing and supportive atmosphere.

Slate Landscape of North West Wales:

The Welsh language is a horizontal theme within the Management Plan and is addressed at each Partnership Board meeting. Discussions have been held to identify opportunities to monitor any impacts that could derive from projects developing from the designation on the Welsh language by collaborating with Bangor University and discussions continue on subsequent research.

Via the LleNI LleCHI: Our World Heritage Site, Our Pride, Our Future project, there will be opportunities to promote the Welsh language as the community language across the slate areas. Resources and activities will target learners and newcomers and attention will be given to protecting place names and terms so that they are not lost. A large number of events and activities to raise awareness of slate heritage will be part of the project and the language and culture of the slate valleys will be an integral part of what is celebrated and staged through the plan.

Gwynedd Archives: The Archives and Museums Education Service is highly innovative and provides materials and activities for school across Gwynedd in order for them to better understand their communities, the importance of the Welsh language and local identity.

Gwynedd Libraries: The vast majority of activities for children and families, and adults held in Gwynedd Libraries are either Welsh medium only or with Welsh as a central part of them. We believe that by giving people an opportunity to hear and chat, and participate through the medium of Welsh, that the Welsh language will be seen as a community, living language.

This is a quote from an attendee "The story sessions are the only exposure I have to Welsh nursery rhymes and Welsh stories."

As a result of feedback where new speakers asked to join a story session for children to improve their Welsh language skills, we have started three 'Paned a Sgwrs' groups for new speakers in our Libraries, namely Barmouth, Cricieth and Bethesda libraries. These sessions are an opportunity to present various materials and resources that are available from the library, and they often attract 6-12 attendees at a time. Another learners' group meets in Nefyn Library.

We believe that there is added value in holding the sessions in the main Library so that the public can hear the language being used in a natural and everyday way, giving everyone an opportunity to socialise and support each other.

By means of our collaboration plans with the North Wales Society for the Blind and Y Lolfa, we are able to produce audio book resources and audio e-books, and bold print books, in Welsh, with these resources available at Gwynedd Libraries and Libraries across Wales. Through our collaboration at a national level, we ensure that Welsh language interfaces will be an essential requirement in all tenders for digital systems and services.

We work with 'Cymraeg i Blant' to hold sessions for children and families at specific Libraries and this collaboration has been very successful.

The interface of the majority of systems is available in Welsh including our on-line catalogue, the self-service system and Borrowbox.

Neuadd Dwyfor: We are developing a wider programme in the theatre with the emphasis on developing live Welsh nights with bands and artists, such as Al Lewis and Cowbois Rhos Botwnnog.

We continue to encourage our staff teams to speak Welsh together and to assess any needs or support they require to communicate naturally together in Welsh.

Question 2. Policy and Standards Matters

- i. Staff language skills - number of Welsh-speakers and learners within the department (latest Language Designations data).
- ii. Obstacles - Are there any obstacles that prevent you as a department from offering a full service in Welsh (i.e. acting on the requirements of the Welsh Language Policy and Welsh Language Standards)?
- iii. Praise and Complaints - provide information about any praise or complaints the department has received during the year about Welsh/bilingual services.

Staff's Language Skills:

93.7% of the Department's staff had completed every language assessment by 1 March 2024, with 83.3% having completed a self-assessment only. There were 14 members of staff who had not submitted a language self-assessment, and this is mainly because they are either new appointments, or casual front-line staff who have no access to the Council's systems.

Because collecting information from casual and front-line staff can be challenging, we will be focusing on collecting assessments for those officers from line managers in order to note whether the individuals meet the language designations of their jobs or not.

The assessments show that 96.65% of the Department's staff have met the language designations of the job which is an increase on the 93% reported in 2023.

Of the seven members of staff who do not meet the language designation of their job, we will target these individuals to follow language training and this matter is being addressed.

Barriers:

In terms of the Museums and Arts Service, it is not always possible to work with Welsh-speaking artists - if this is the case, we support them to conduct the activities with Assistants who speak Welsh and give the artists who are new speakers an opportunity to use Welsh if they are confident to do so. Support is available through the Arts Council for Wales for artists to learn Welsh but it may be an idea to offer more support through Cyngor Gwynedd.

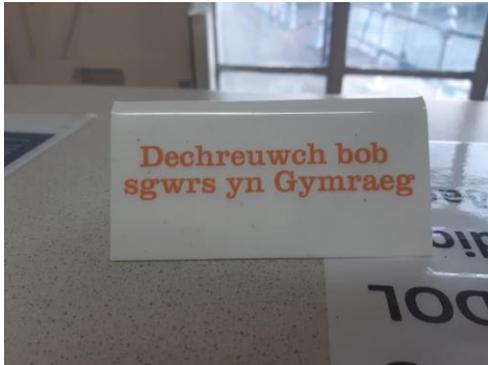
It is challenging at times to share information on social media which is relevant to the arts in Gwynedd if it is not available bilingually.

The ability of the Service to attract Welsh-speakers or new speakers as volunteers continues to be challenging and we are considering the best methods of attracting and managing volunteers for the service.

Maritime and Beaches: Recruiting a sufficient number of seasonal officers to manage our main beaches was very problematic once again in 2023, and therefore there was no choice but to employ a number of officers who did not meet the language requirements of the job. This was more of a problem in our destinations in the south of the county, such as Barmouth and Tywyn.

Some permanent officers of the service, because English is their first language, continue to speak English together despite our efforts to encourage and motivate them to speak Welsh. It is difficult to monitor the use of the Welsh language in the workplace consistently in every location, but the matter is regularly addressed by the team to remind all officers of the expectation.

We encourage all customers who visit our offices to start every conversation in Welsh - see the attached photos.



Question 3. Development Opportunities

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

The Museums and the Arts Service could offer broader activities within our communities to support well-being, creativity, cultural understanding and linguistic skills - but there is a continuous challenge of securing additional funding in order to achieve this work and there is no core budget available in the Service to deliver more than what is already done. We are trying to do this during 2024 through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity (SPF) funding following the appointment of an Engagement and Learning Officer.

Through the projects of the Slate Landscape of North West Wales World Heritage Site, there are opportunities to promote the Welsh language as the community language across the slate areas. The projects in the pipeline offer opportunities for us to build on these opportunities as we attract additional funding to achieve the Action Plan and develop the National Heritage Lottery Fund project.

By using the Service's collections, the Archives Service could offer activities in our communities and in our record offices to promote the Welsh language. Depending on the activity, this could either be achieved with the Service's staff or in collaboration with others - however, the capacity to implement is limited.