

MEETING:	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
DATE:	21 ST APRIL 2016
TITLE:	LANGUAGE POLICY
AUTHOR:	GERAINT OWEN, HEAD OF CORPORATE SUPPORT
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:	OUTLINE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACTING UPON THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LANGUAGE POLICY IN RELATION TO RECRUITING AND APPOINTING

BACKGROUND

At the meeting of the Language Committee on the 14th January this year, a report was submitted in which members were invited to comment on the draft language policy for the Council prior to submitting the final draft to full Council for adoption.

The Council adopted the policy at its meeting on the 3rd March and during the discussion there and at the Language Committee in January, comments were made in relation to the arrangements and the timetable for non-Welsh speaking staff to learn Welsh to the appropriate level.

The Language Committee's decision on the 14th January requests that the Senior Manager enquires with the Head of Corporate Support in respect of "is there a timetable in terms of when a non-Welsh speaking person who is appointed to a post is required to learn the language and what happens if that individual does not fulfil those requirements within the timetable".

At the same meeting, Committee members received a presentation by the Workforce Development Officer/ Welsh Language Co-ordinator on the support provided to staff when learning Welsh and the problems faced e.g. lack of clarity in terms of language levels for a post and the lack of referrals for language training as a consequence.

DENOTING LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR POSTS

In accordance with the Language Policy's requirement (and the previous Language Scheme) each post within the Council has an identified language level (see the Framework in Appendix 1). The levels enable the Council to identify the language requirements of the specific post, in both Welsh and English under three headings i.e. listening and speaking, reading and understanding as well as writing.

The language level for each heading is denoted as;

Basic
Intermediate
Able
Fluent

With a brief explanation confirming what is required in practical terms. However, there is evidence that not enough consideration is given prior to denoting the appropriate language level for posts e.g. "fluent" level identified for a post where there is no requirement to present written reports.

Even when an appropriate language level is identified and the individual appointed needs to learn or improve his/her Welsh to attain the relevant level, no recognised criteria exists for the current levels with all assessments dependent to a large extent on the interpretation and professional opinion of the co-ordinator in consultation with the line manager.

In light of this, work is being undertaken in order to address the situation by, initially, denoting practical language levels which correspond with the WJEC Welsh for Adults language levels, namely, Entry, Basic, Intermediate and Higher (see Appendix 2).

Final agreement on these definitions would not only provide improved guidance for managers when denoting appropriate language levels but would also provide recognised standards for measuring the individual's progress and achievement.

Reference is made in the minute from the meeting on the 14th January 2016 to the timetable for learning Welsh to the appropriate level. No timetable is set for learners but the Welsh for Adults guidelines are used, which themselves acknowledge that an appropriate timetable for different individuals needs to be flexible and will vary from one learner to the next i.e. as a guideline, the following is offered;

Entry – 120 hours

Basic – 120 hours

Intermediate – 240 hours

Higher – 360 hours

This would mean a total of 850 hours for an individual appointed to a post which requires the post holder to be fluent in Welsh and where the officer would have no previous ability to communicate in Welsh.

Here is a quote from one of the Welsh for Adults providers:

“We used to persuade people to follow the Basic after two years of Wlpan, but we consider that to be over-ambitious for the majority. Most learners follow the Basic at the end of their third year these days and the Intermediate at the end of the fourth.”

The expert guidance therefore suggests that we should not be setting specific time limitations and that there should be space for flexibility if we are to see individuals succeeding.

UNDERPERFORMANCE

However, it is acknowledged that there is a requirement in future to address situations where the level of achievement is not acceptable, in the same manner as the Council would address underperformance relating to any other aspect of an individual officer's work (see appended a copy of the Dealing with Underperformance Policy within the local conditions of service).

The policy's aim is to improve performance and identify steps to be taken and targets to be attained when there is concern relating to an individual's ability to undertake responsibilities effectively.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee presents comments on the current and proposed arrangements whilst voicing its support to the overall intended course of action.