

WELSH LANGUAGE STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held in Conference Room 1b, County Hall, Ruthin on Monday, 18 December 2017 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ann Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Arwel Roberts, Anton Sampson, Tony Thomas, Graham Timms and Joe Welch

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS); Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management (GW); Principal Education Support Manager (GD); Staff Development Officer (MW); Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Ellie Chard, Tony Flynn, Paul Penlington and Emrys Wynne

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest had been raised.

3 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Nominations were sought for the appointment of Chair. Councillor Tony Thomas proposed, seconded by Councillor Arwel Roberts that Councillor Graham Timms be appointed Chair. There being no further nominations it was put to the vote and –

***RESOLVED** that Councillor Graham Timms be appointed Chair of the Welsh Language Steering Committee for the current municipal year.*

4 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Chair invited nominations for Vice Chair. Councillor Ann Davies proposed, seconded by Councillor Anton Sampson that Councillor Tony Thomas be appointed Vice Chair. There being no further nominations it was put to the vote and –

***RESOLVED** that Councillor Tony Thomas be appointed Vice Chair of the Welsh Language Steering Committee for the current municipal year.*

5 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

6 STRATEGIC WELSH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Given that it was the first meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Committee officers thought it would be useful to provide some context together with an update on the Welsh Language Standards and the work undertaken in the last few years, particularly around legislative requirements. Whilst the Committee's work focused on the Welsh Standards, items on the agenda also included the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and the More Than Words Framework in order to make members aware of the work being undertaken via other forums in the wider community.

The Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management submitted a report (previously circulated) and gave a power point presentation which covered –

- the historic position when individual local authorities developed their own plans for Welsh Language which varied greatly in terms of quality
- new legislation in the form of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 and the intention to ensure the Welsh and English languages were treated equally
- the creation of a Welsh Language Commissioner and development of Welsh Language Standards
- 169 Welsh Language Standards having been issued categorised under the themes: correspondence, promotion, policy making and internal administration which the Council had responded to positively
- the role and powers of the Welsh Language Commissioner in ensuring local authorities conformed with the Welsh Language Standards
- the Welsh Language Strategy (approved February 2017) having highlighted five key areas for development with the aim of increasing the number of Welsh speakers in Denbighshire by 0.5% over the next five years with a view to considering a longer term target to increase the number of Welsh speakers over the next fifteen years, and
- strategic responsibility for the Welsh Language Standards together with the day to day handling of Welsh language issues.

Members' attention was drawn to the report and other measures to strengthen and promote Welsh language within the authority including: appointment of Welsh Language Champions; staff drop-in sessions; working Welsh lanyards; bilingual e-mail signatures; Cysill and Microsoft Office in Welsh; telephone answering; intranet; collating information about staff; council's main telephone line; staff excellence awards; culture/ethos of the organisation; mystery shopper exercise and introducing Welsh Language compliance in service challenges. A Welsh Language Officer post was currently being advertised to further assist in the strategic development of the Welsh language in the authority. Whilst both staff and councillors had responded positively to the Welsh Standards there was always room for improvement.

Members discussed various aspects of the report with officers including –

- **Welsh Language Strategy** – reference was made to the 0.5% target which some considered had been set too low. Given the decline in the number of Welsh speakers over recent years it was important to set a realistic target in the shorter term (the outcome would be measured by the census in 2021) and the intention was to set a more challenging target over the longer term. A multi-

faceted approach across all age ranges was being undertaken and whilst youngsters in the education system was a significant growth area, the longer term view was to retain Welsh speakers in Denbighshire through employment opportunities and work with adult education classes

- **Staff Excellence Awards** – the awards to honour staff for their commitment and dedication to developing the Welsh language within the council had been well received and officers reported upon the positive impact of past winners and elaborated upon their continued work in championing the Welsh language both within their own service and other service areas, sharing best practice and promotion of the Welsh language
- **Collating information about staff** – when self-assessing their linguistic skills many staff were reluctant to accurately reflect their ability to converse in Welsh due to various reasons, including confidence in their own abilities, and the Strategy included the need to build staff confidence to use the Welsh language and encourage and support staff in that regard. Some staff were also worried that they might be asked to take on particular duties such as designated Welsh speaker/translator within the service in addition to the job they were employed to do and it was important to be mindful of that. It was hoped that future self-assessments would more accurately reflect the linguistic skills of staff
- **Translation of draft reports** – the issue of draft reports being published in English only had been raised previously. It was clarified that the purpose of the Committee was to focus on the Welsh Language Standards and the Welsh Language Strategy. As there was currently no requirement for draft documents to be published bilingually there was no negative impact on the Standards in terms of compliance and it was not an issue for the Committee
- **Conwy Translation Services/In-house Translation** – some issues had been raised regarding the quality of translations, both for committee documents and some recent press releases, and officers elaborated upon the translation service provided by Conwy County Borough Council together with the reliance on the goodwill of staff for particular in-house translations when there was an urgent need to respond promptly to a particular situation, such as providing information and updates during the recent adverse weather conditions. If the Council felt the accuracy of those urgent translations should be given priority, consideration would need to be given in the budget setting process as to how to resource that out of hours provision. Members recognised the difficulties in terms of regional dialect and particular style in the provision of translation services and officers reported upon the advantages of the translation service provided by Conwy in terms of consistent terminology with many of the translators being very locally based. Complaints and queries regarding the standard of Welsh translations had reduced and tended to focus primarily on style and wording preferences as opposed to inaccuracies. Recent comments made, including concerns over the translation of council minutes, had been taken up directly with Conwy and were being addressed. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts felt that further work should be undertaken with regard to the translation service provided by Conwy in order to provide assurance in terms of quality standards and best value.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

7 WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 - 2020

The Principal Education Support Manager submitted a report (previously circulated) presenting the Council's proposed Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017 – 2020 which demonstrated how the outcomes and targets outlined by the Welsh Government would be achieved. The report also detailed work undertaken to date pending Welsh Government's formal approval of the draft Plan.

The delay in Welsh Government approval of the Plan had caused some frustration but it was expected that approval would be forthcoming in the New Year following which the Plan would be submitted to Cabinet for approval. The Plan was focused on improving skills, particularly oral communication and understanding and worked to the following outcomes –

- more seven year old children being taught through the medium of Welsh
- more learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school
- more students aged 14 – 16 studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh
- more students aged 14 – 19 in studying subjects through the medium of Welsh, in schools, colleges and work-based learning
- more students with advanced skills in Welsh
- Welsh medium provision for learners with additional learning needs
- workforce planning and continuing professional development

The role of the WESP Group was explained in supporting and monitoring implementation of the Plan and details of the Group's membership was provided. The work being undertaken would contribute to the Welsh Government achieving its target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and both Welsh and English medium schools had a part to play. However there was a perception that the Plan related only to Welsh medium schools and work was ongoing to engage and encourage participation of English medium schools – increasing the amount and quality of Welsh taught in English medium schools was a key objective. Finally members' attention was drawn to the disappointing response rate to consultation on the draft Plan, despite extensive coverage, and there was a challenge when creating the next scheme to ensure more input and response from stakeholders.

The following matters were raised during debate –

- the importance of developing skills at an early stage to enhance progression was recognised together with the challenges of ensuring appropriate systems were in place for latecomers in schools to ensure their success
- there was no obvious evidence to suggest that pupils moved from Welsh medium to English medium schools to study for A Level qualifications or any data to show that pupils achieved lower grades when taught through the medium of Welsh at that level. The decision regarding where to study was down to parental choice. However it was noted that some subjects were only taught through the medium of English in some settings and pupils did transfer from one school to another depending on the range of subjects on offer

- some discussion focused on the language categorisation of particular schools and members were advised that the number of children continuing a Welsh medium education following the transition from primary to secondary schools was monitored by the WESP Group and officers were developing a marketing strategy to ensure parents were fully aware of the facts when choosing a secondary school for their children with a view to promoting the Welsh offer – the aim of the WESP Group was not to lose any pupils from the Welsh stream at secondary level; with regard to Ysgol Brynhyfryd officers confirmed that the ‘N’ stream had been removed leaving the Welsh and English medium streams
- whilst it was important for the Committee to be made aware of the WESP, it was the responsibility of the WESP Group to support and monitor its implementation. However members would be welcome to attend a future Group meeting and observe the level of discussion, details of which were provided at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

At this juncture (11.15 a.m.) the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

8 MORE THAN JUST WORDS FRAMEWORK

The Staff Development Officer presented the report (previously circulated) informing members of the progress made in relation to development of the Mwy na geiriau/More than just words framework published by Welsh Government in 2012.

The purpose of the framework was to promote the Welsh language in health, social services and social care and aimed to ensure that organisations recognised that Welsh language was an intrinsic part of care and that people who needed services in Welsh were offered them – this was called the ‘Active Offer’. It was a message that had been promoted with all staff, regardless of whether they were internal staff or staff commissioned to provide services.

Actions to be implemented by the Council in 2017-18 covered the following areas –

- providing details on how services were currently meeting the needs of Welsh speakers alongside targets to ensure improvement
- ensuring the Welsh language capabilities and competence of staff were embedded in human resource and recruitment procedures
- sharing best practice in providing Welsh language services and how to make an ‘Active Offer’ with all staff employed directly or within commissioned services
- providing language training and resources for all staff and opportunities for Welsh speakers to increase their confidence in delivering services in Welsh
- providing Welsh language interfaces and software to social services and social care services staff to enable and help them to work bilingually.

Members welcomed the framework, highlighting the importance of ensuring that people who needed services in Welsh were offered them, without having to ask, particularly as staff were dealing with very vulnerable individuals in many cases. In response to questions officers explained that language preference was established at the first point of enquiry and passed on to ensure that staff in different services possessed the necessary skills in order to meet the needs of the individual

concerned. Care was also taken in the provision of services in residential/nursing homes and day care settings to ensure appropriate interaction and through different activities in order to build confidence. Work was being undertaken to build staff confidence in using the Welsh language and learning the vocabulary and workforce planning was a key issue. In terms of monitoring progress the Welsh Government required an annual report on the delivery of specific actions in implementing the framework and further monitoring would also be undertaken within existing monitoring systems, such as within CCSIW inspections. It was pleasing to note that the Council had received very positive reports from regulators regarding Welsh language notwithstanding that it was a continuous journey of improvement.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be received and noted.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's forward work programme was presented for consideration.

The Committee would meet every three months and meeting dates for March and June 2018 would be finalised following consultation with members. The Corporate Director Communities clarified the Committee's work in terms of the Welsh Language Standards and Welsh Language Strategy and it was agreed to circulate the Committee's terms of reference to members for ease of reference.

Following consideration of the items in the forward work programme it was –

RESOLVED that Committee's Forward Work Programme be noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.40 a.m.