

WELSH LANGUAGE STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held in Conference Room 1a, County Hall, Ruthin on Tuesday, 19 March 2019 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Arwel Roberts, Anton Sampson, Graham Timms (Chair), Joe Welch and Emrys Wynne

Observer – Councillor Meirick Davies

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS); Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management (GW); Welsh Language Officer (MC); Modernising Education Officer (IBR); Programme Manager – Modernising Education (JC) and Committee Administrator (KEJ)

POINTS OF NOTICE

The Chair thanked officers and all involved in organising and participating in the Council's first Staff Eisteddfod on 1 March 2019 which had proved a great success. He also congratulated Wales on winning the 2019 Six Nations Rugby Grand Slam.

1 APOLOGIES

Councillors Ann Davies, Tony Flynn and Tony Thomas (Vice Chair)

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest had been raised.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held on 9 October 2018 were submitted.

Accuracy – Councillor Meirick Davies highlighted that (1) the Chair and Vice-Chair had not been identified in the minutes in line with usual practice, and (2) Page 8, Item 7: Ysgol Glan Clwyd Language Centre – reference in the minutes to 'Glan Clwyd School' should read 'Ysgol Glan Clwyd' in both English and Welsh versions.

Matters Arising – Page 6, Item 5: Role of the Welsh Language Champions, the Chair queried the meaning behind the second bullet point 'requirement of Welsh

speakers was raised as a concern by the committee' – officers confirmed it related to the discussion about the difficulties of recruitment to particular professional posts which was further compounded when the post was categorised as Welsh essential.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 October 2018 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 WELSH LANGUAGE SKILLS SELF ASSESSMENT

The Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management submitted a report (previously circulated) detailing the approach to carrying out a self-assessment of staff's Welsh language skills.

As part of its response to the Welsh Language Standards the Council was expected to carry out an annual self-assessment which was undertaken by the HR Direct Team. Previous surveys had provided a snapshot of skills but there was some uncertainty as to whether the results showed a true reflection of the current situation with some staff identified as having understated their skills – this could be due to various reasons including lack of confidence or to minimise expectations to engage through the medium of Welsh. It was considered that more detailed information on the self-assessment levels would help staff complete a more accurate assessment and provide more comprehensive and meaningful data to enable services to plan their bilingual provision. The proposal was to introduce the same system used by North Wales Police and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the Welsh Language Officer elaborated upon those levels ranging from 0 – 5. All staff were expected to effectively reach level 1 which included greeting bilingually in accordance with Welsh Language Standards. Some work was also being undertaken to identify the training provision to learn Welsh and the intention was to report back to the committee on how the training element was progressing.

Members discussed various aspects of the report with officers who advised that –

- it was the responsibility of individual services to meet the cost of training courses to learn Welsh – Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol provided some free training courses for Welsh learners and staff were encouraged to take up places
- the previous survey showed approximately 29% of staff were Welsh speakers which reflected the equivalent, in percentage terms, of the number of Welsh speakers in Denbighshire – however the percentage of staff was not considered a true reflection given that some staff had been identified as understating their competencies; there was a need to work with staff to identify barriers to correctly assessing skill levels and the new system would help facilitate that process
- Welsh language courses were offered for various levels of language ability to ensure maximum benefits for those staff undertaking the training – courses were provided by Coleg Cumbria and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
- approximately forty staff were currently undertaking courses to suit their language skill levels and the intention was to work with the HR Direct Team on producing a booklet for staff on what formal courses were available together with other informal approaches to developing the language such as mentoring, providing opportunities to chat in Welsh, use of lanyards identifying Welsh speakers, etc.

- it was also acknowledged that in addition to the provision offered by the Council, some staff also learnt Welsh in their own time outside of work and the current data did not currently reflect those undertakings; in addition there was an 'app' which some staff used to learn Welsh – the HR Direct Team were working to identify those individuals in order to better record and reflect the current position
- noted the variance in the amount of Welsh spoken at the main council offices and members agreed with the initial focus on speaking Welsh and linguistic skills with written Welsh to follow as the natural order of things.

The committee welcomed the approaches and agreed that clarification of the different skill levels should assist staff in providing a more accurate reflection of their abilities. Members had also been pleased to note that staff were encouraged to take up a variety of training opportunities and to hear of the range of other initiatives to promote and facilitate development of the Welsh language. The Chair looked forward to receiving the results of the self-assessment process at the next meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED that the approach to carrying out a self-assessment of staff's Welsh language skills as detailed in the report be agreed.

6 WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management submitted a report (previously circulated) updating members on progress made with the Welsh Language Standards (WLS).

The WLS were introduced in Denbighshire in 2015 as part of a roll out to public sector organisations in Wales and were created in direct response to creation of the Welsh Language Bill and role of the Welsh Language Commissioner. Denbighshire was required to comply with 167 WLS covering five key areas – Service Delivery; Policy Making; Operational; Record Keeping and Promotional. The aim was to ensure that the Welsh language was treated as fairly as the English language in order to provide the best possible service to the public in the language of their choice. Much work had been undertaken prior to the introduction of the WLS and some standards were not new to the Council – the response from services had been favourable in terms of ensuring compliance and the Council did conform in the vast majority of cases. However further work was needed around promoting the availability of meetings in Welsh and the rights of individuals invited to meetings to contribute in Welsh as some staff were unfamiliar with that requirement – this would be addressed over the coming weeks through proactive communications. The Council would continue to promote messages about the WLS to ensure the high level of compliance continued.

The following issues were raised during the ensuing discussion –

- the committee was pleased to note the high level of compliance in the majority of cases and acknowledged the action taken to address areas of non-compliance as they arose through a managed action plan and proactive messages – the work of the Corporate Communications Team in that regard was acknowledged together with the support provided by the Welsh Language

Champions. Officers also acknowledged the underlying support of members and clear mandate issued by the Council to comply with the WLS

- some discrepancy was noted between the Welsh and English versions of the WLS in terms of numbering and the inclusion of Standard Number 29a in the Welsh version relating to provision of a simultaneous translation service from English to Welsh which did not appear in the English version – officers agreed to investigate the discrepancy with a view to confirming the requirement in that regard and ensure consistency between both Welsh and English versions
- members reported upon their own experiences of compliance/non-compliance when interacting with the Council and difficulties experienced when using Welsh email addresses. Members were encouraged to report any issues of non-compliance and officers elaborated on measures already introduced to facilitate staff compliance with particular standards including the distribution of templates to use and phonetic bilingual greeting cards, etc. However it was accepted that there was always likely to be isolated cases and reluctant staff should be encouraged to aid a positive response in conforming to the standards; continuing to routinely use Welsh would help to further develop the language
- officers confirmed that once the new Welsh Language Commissioner had taken up the post he would be invited to attend a meeting of the committee
- in terms of the issue highlighted regarding promoting the availability of meetings in Welsh officers confirmed that the option should be proactively offered and staff needed to think ahead when organising meetings in order to meet the requirement – this option was routinely offered for public meetings
- it was noted that different local authorities and public sector organisations were subject to different WLS which would only change if the Welsh Language Commissioner revisited those standards or if there was a change in the law
- officers clarified that Denbighshire's WLS did not extend to schools and it would be up to the individual Governing Bodies as to whether or not to adopt them
- the Council's street naming and numbering policy would be reviewed by Performance Scrutiny Committee on 21 March 2019.

RESOLVED that the report be received and the proposed actions to address issues as highlighted in the report be agreed.

7 YSGOL GLAN CLWYD WELSH LANGUAGE CENTRE

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts provided a brief introduction and some background to the development of a Welsh Language Centre at Ysgol Glan Clwyd following a successful grant application to the Welsh Government which would provide opportunities ranging from preschool provision through to adult learning.

The Modernising Education Officer and Programme Manager – Modernising Education were in attendance for the item and presented further details on the Welsh Language Centre Project as follows –

- the reasoning behind the project following an identified increase in demand for Welsh language education, including preschool provision
- the project would create an infrastructure to support delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan objectives with particular links to: Outcome 1 – more seven year old children educated through the medium of Welsh; Outcome 2 –

more pupils will continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from primary school to secondary school, and Outcome 7 – workforce planning and continual professional development

- the project created a use for the old science block building which had been left redundant following completion of the Ysgol Glan Clwyd project which was held in trust to be used for educational purpose
- detailed the successful bidding process with Denbighshire having submitted the best business case in Wales resulting in £1.5m funding awarded by Welsh Government via the Welsh Medium Education Capital Grant and Capital Funding of Early Years Provision
- elaborated upon the aims of the project to provide provision for preschool pupils, support for latecomers to Welsh Medium education in Key Stage 2 and 3, a facility for the development of Welsh Language resources, a potential base for Welsh Language delivery partners and a small increase in capacity for Ysgol Glan Clwyd. Adult learning could also be provided outside of school hours
- the project would also help to meet the Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Members welcomed the project as a significant development and investment in the Welsh language offer in Denbighshire and applauded the further strengthening of links with partner organisations and the wide range of beneficiaries of the scheme. In response to questions officers clarified the position in relation to the temporary access route to the new Centre given the change in circumstances and confirmed that a commitment had been given to discuss the proposals with residents prior to the submission of a planning application on the change of use. In terms of the project timescale the refurbishment was expected to be completed by April 2020. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts highlighted that the significant investment demonstrated the Council's commitment to the Welsh language in Denbighshire and would create long term benefits and a legacy for future generations. In response to questions regarding transport arrangements he confirmed the whole county would benefit from the new Centre and the peripatetic work would continue.

RESOLVED that the presentation on the Ysgol Glan Clwyd Welsh Language Centre be received and noted.

At this juncture (11.10 a.m.) the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

8 FEEDBACK FROM THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

The Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management explained that officers from the Commissioner's Office undertook random checks in order to assess the availability and quality of services provided by the Council through the medium of Welsh. The Welsh Language Officer delivered a power point presentation on the feedback received in December 2018 as follows –

Audit Monitoring 2017/18 –

- all emails in Welsh and Facebook queries in English received a response from the Council

- one response to a Facebook message in Welsh took 11 days whilst the same query in English took 10 days – the reason for the discrepancy was unclear
- the responses to Facebook messages did not include a statement about correspondence in Welsh – it had been decided to include a statement on the Facebook page that correspondence was welcomed in both Welsh and English

Measure of success – availability and quality of services

- a new approach to assess staff's Welsh language skills
- Welsh training for staff
- Initiatives to support staff – Welsh Walking Club/Council Eisteddfod/Staff Choir/Standards Advertising

Measure of success – encouraging use/understanding of user experiences

- work with businesses to encourage bilingual branding and employ bilingual staff
- work with the Urdd and Menter Iaith to promote the Welsh language
- Welsh Government funding for a new Language Centre at Ysgol Glan Clwyd
- extension to the Oaktree Centre, Rhyl to enable more Welsh language provision
- a new fluent Welsh speaking member of staff recruited to Youth Services, with Welsh-medium football sessions already taking place in Rhyl with 60 attendees
- mapping work taking place with the County Language Forum
- Welsh Language Steering Group

Measure of success – consider impact on the Welsh language/internal action

- the Council was happy that there were robust arrangements in place for considering the impact on the Welsh language when making policy decisions, or in awarding grants
- response to the standards had been positive and there was little change to what the Council had been doing under the previous Language Scheme – it was believed that more one to one staff sessions had taken place through the medium of Welsh and there was little use of interpreters.

During debate members were pleased to note the excellent working relationship between the Council and the Commissioner's Office which further facilitated successful development of the Welsh language in Denbighshire. The success of the Staff Choir was also given special mention with bookings being taken for performances. Some debate focused on the use of Facebook in both Welsh and English and officers clarified the requirements agreed with the Commissioner's Office in that regard and, as councillors, members also accepted some responsibility for posting bilingually and sharing posts on both Facebook pages and to further raise awareness of the availability of the Welsh Facebook page. Officers also confirmed that the availability of the Welsh Facebook page would continue to be reiterated and the Council continued to post on both Welsh and English pages simultaneously. Members noted that the feedback from the Commissioner's Office provided a reflection of performance at that point and much work had also been undertaken since then, including the new Meithryn Centre in Rhyl. Further information was sought regarding the additional Welsh language provision at the

Oaktree Centre, Rhyl and officers agreed to contact the Modernising Education Team for further details and report back to members' thereon.

The Chair thanked officers for the positive report and was encouraged by the progress made and ongoing work to embrace and promote the Welsh language.

RESOLVED that the presentation on the feedback received from the Welsh Language Commissioner be received and noted.

9 WORK OF PARTNER IAITH

The Team Leader – Communications and Campaign Management submitted a report (previously circulated) and delivered a power point presentation on Partner Iaith which was a cross county forum looking at how the Welsh language could be developed strategically across the county. The role of Partner Iaith was to –

- contribute towards the Welsh Government target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050 through a local vision to increase Welsh speakers in Denbighshire
- increase opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- increase awareness of the value of the Welsh language
- working jointly with partners to discuss, share ideas and avoid duplication
- work on a partnership level to identify gaps in provision and meet needs
- promote the Welsh language in the local economy and public services
- emphasise the economic-cultural worth of the language to the tourism industry
- emphasise the importance of the language to organisations responsible for regeneration projects

Partner Iaith consisted of a number of partner organisations, including the Council, and had been considering opportunities for cross-promotion, monitoring of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy and joint promotion at key events across the county. Recent work involved mapping of activities being arranged in areas relating to leisure, children, young people, communities, businesses, families and older people. Whilst there were numerous activities going on in main town centres there were less activities occurring in rural parts of the county, coastal communities and some areas of south Denbighshire. To that end Partner Iaith was proposing to –

- carry out further mapping of activities not being led by the partner organisations
- analyse the findings by September 2019
- make recommendations for inclusion in a forward work plan for Partner Iaith
- support Welsh Language committees already set up to support the Urdd Eisteddfod and look at setting up additional committees in areas where there was a greater need.

Members noted the work undertaken by Partner Iaith and the approach to their current work programme. Reference was made to the other partner organisations and good work carried out in promoting and developing the Welsh language and given the myriad of different organisations members agreed it would be useful to receive a report back on the partnership structures of those organisations, how the partners interacted with each other and how they were funded (including Council

contributions). The important role of communities and their engagement in further promoting and facilitating the development of the Welsh language was also highlighted. In terms of cost it was noted that funding had been made available for the Welsh Language Officer post but beyond that there was no specific budget to develop the Welsh language and any costs were expected to be absorbed into existing budgets. In response to a question regarding the potential for a perceived shortage of funding given the absence of a specific budget, officers advised that provision was being made within services, no gaps in provision had been identified, and no services were failing to meet their standards through the medium of Welsh. Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts added that any legislative or national policy changes requiring implementation, such as curriculum changes, needed to be supported financially by the Welsh Government.

RESOLVED that the approach to the current work programme for Partner Iaith be agreed.

10 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The committee's forward work programme was presented for consideration and members agreed the following additions –

- Eisteddfod yr Urdd Update – standing item on future agendas
- Annual Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner – July
- Welsh Language Training Provision – July
- Briefing on Partner Organisations involved in promotion and development of the Welsh Language – July

It was noted that the item previously requested by the committee on the business section of the Welsh Language Standards would be presented in November.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Committee's Forward Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 a.m.