

WELSH LANGUAGE STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held by video conference on Tuesday, 16 March 2021 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Ann Davies, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Arwel Roberts, Graham Timms (Chair), Joe Welch and Emrys Wynne (Vice Chair)

Observer – Councillor Meirick Davies

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director Communities (NS); Welsh Language Officer (MC) and Committee Administrators (KEJ & SLW)

WELCOME / POINT OF NOTICE

The Chair welcomed to the meeting Ruth Williams, Chief Officer Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych who was in attendance to deliver a presentation on the work of Menter Iaith.

Due to the current restrictions on travel and requirement for social distancing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic the meeting was held remotely by video conference and was not open to the general public. All members had been given the opportunity to attend as observers and the Local Democracy Reporter had also been invited to observe.

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As trustees of Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych, Councillors Meirick Davies, Arwel Roberts and Emrys Wynne declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 Menter Iaith.

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 10 November 2020 were submitted.

Accuracy – Councillor Emrys Wynne highlighted that the Welsh minutes referred to 12 November 2019 rather than 10 November 2020.

Matters Arising – Councillor Meirick Davies advised that the Chair and Vice Chair had not been identified on the agenda in line with usual practice.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 November 2020 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 MENTER IAITH

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts introduced Ruth Williams, Chief Officer of Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych who had been invited to the meeting to provide an overview of the work of Menter Iaith. A web link to Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych's Annual Report 2019 – 2020 had been previously circulated with the agenda for the meeting which provided a comprehensive overview of activities in 2019/20.

The Chief Officer delivered a power point presentation on Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych which was one of 22 Welsh language enterprises working in Wales to increase and strengthen the use of the Welsh language within communities. The organisation provided a one stop shop for the language and organised festivals, childcare, language sessions and more helping people to live, learn and enjoy Welsh.

The presentation included reference to the following –

- the structure of Menter Iaith (directors, trustees and staff) which was a registered charity recently awarded the Trusted Charity Mark from NCVO
- how Menter Iaith was strategically placed to help deliver Welsh Government's vision for one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and how it was funded
- main targets and strategic themes to increase the use of Welsh together with other key strategies including Denbighshire's Welsh Language Strategy and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and work with other partners and sectors
- delivery within Denbighshire's Welsh language strategic themes (1) Strategic Planning of the Welsh Language in Denbighshire, (2) Children & Young People, (3) Community, and (4) Business & Economy, and details of the wealth of activities/events undertaken in that regard illustrated by photographs, media etc.
- reported upon funding streams open to Menter Iaith as a registered charity including grants from Welsh Government and Denbighshire County Council together with support for activities and projects from other sources
- links to Menter Iaith social media pages were also provided together with contact details for the organisation.

The Chair thanked the Chief Officer for her interesting and informative presentation. It was agreed that the presentation be circulated to members following the meeting.

Members took the opportunity to comment and discuss various aspects of the work of Menter Iaith with the Chief Officer. Main discussion points covered the following –

- Councillor Ann Davies was concerned that enough was being done to support and encourage students from Welsh medium secondary schools attending Coleg Cambria to continue speaking Welsh. The Chief Officer explained that the Coleg had their own officers responsible for ensuring that Welsh was available in line with their Welsh language standards, however if members wished to raise any issues in that regard she could refer them back to Coleg Cambria. As a partner, Menter Iaith tended to work with Coleg Cambria in the

context of Welsh language classes for adult provision, but occasionally held joint activities or events. Whilst not responsible for education Menter Iaith worked with the education sector as part of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to maintain an overview. In response to a further question on the take up of activities by Rhyl youngsters, the Chief Officer advised that at least 90% of pupils in Welsh medium schools were from non-Welsh speaking homes with the majority of pupils learning the language through schools. Menter Iaith did work with some schools but could not undertake more projects without additional funding for more staff. Parents often contacted Menter Iaith for support and advice about how to use Welsh in the home

- Councillor Emrys Wynne referred to the success of Menter Iaith in increasing the use of the Welsh language, particularly in providing opportunities for young people to enjoy the language outside of educational establishments, and congratulated Menter Iaith in that regard. He also highlighted the importance of adequate funding being made available to continue that work in the future and encouraged the local authority to provide the best support possible. It was also important to consider both North and South of the county and whilst the percentage of Welsh speakers in Rhyl was low, the numbers were very high
- Councillor Meirick Davies also thanked staff for the work undertaken and the practical provision in place and was keen to hear more about the work with Coleg Cambria. The Chief Officer reiterated references within her presentation and work with officers responsible for the Welsh language in Coleg Cambria. She emphasised the importance of recognising and understanding the advantages of using Welsh and being bilingual when preparing young people for the workplace, particularly in sectors such as childcare, and those advantages were also constantly marketed to employers and businesses
- the Chair had been interested to hear about the business connections and highlighted the importance of using Welsh in shops, cafes etc. and questioned whether more could be done to encourage that. The Chief Officer acknowledged the importance of supporting businesses and agreed that more Welsh needed to be heard and seen on the street and in places such as shops and libraries etc. on a daily basis to normalise the use of Welsh and increase confidence in the language. In terms of the high street Menter Iaith worked in eight main towns in Denbighshire but due to the small team employed could only reach a small percentage of businesses. She reported upon the use of bilingual signage and promotion of the free translation service of up to 500 words a month but a greater drive was needed. She suggested the Council's Economic Development Officers could start a conversation with businesses asking whether they had thought about the benefits of bilingualism, highlighting that there was no disadvantage to any business operating bilingually or additional costs if planned from the beginning. Other initiatives could include having a condition for using Welsh language when giving grants; advertising posts only in Welsh and designating Welsh essential posts for front line services; the possibility of training or coaching those less confident in the language, and the potential for bespoke courses for business groups.

In bringing the discussion to a close the Chair thanked the Chief Officer for her attendance and the information shared with the committee.

RESOLVED that the presentation on the work of Menter Iaith be received.

[At this point (11.07 am) the meeting adjourned for a ten minute break.]

6 DEVELOPMENTS WITH THE WELSH LANGUAGE REGIONALLY AND NATIONALLY

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts introduced the item detailing ongoing progress of Welsh language activities which had also been discussed at the previous meeting. The Corporate Director Communities added that the aim was to embed those activities into the core business of the council with a view to continual improvement.

The Welsh Language Officer elaborated upon particular areas of the report which included developments in a number of key areas and also noted the impact of Covid-19 on progress delivery with particular reference to the following –

- **‘Mwy Na Geiriau’ / ‘More Than Just Words’** a summary was provided on progress made with the following actions –
 - ◆ continue to inform internal staff and commissioned services of the ‘Active Offer’ and promotion of the orange speech bubble sticker as an easy indication of language choice on paperwork and take up of care providers
 - ◆ increase the use of Welsh by the social care workforce in Denbighshire and promote the use of digital resources and on-line Welsh language courses developed by ‘Cymraeg Gwaith’
 - ◆ demonstrate commitment to embedding the Welsh language within each service area in Community Support Service / Children’s Services
 - ◆ additional work in promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh
- **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan** – construction of Ysgol Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd and the Welsh Language Centre at St. Asaph were completed. Cylch Meithrin provision was opened on the grounds of the new school in Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd and Ysgol Dewi Sant. The impact of Covid-19 on curriculum enrichment activities and Urdd Eisteddfod was also noted. There was a pattern of increasing numbers in Welsh medium secondary education
- **Welsh Language Linguistic Skills Survey** – details of the self-assessment of staff’s Welsh language skills were provided which included a breakdown of the results per service ranging from Level 0 (no knowledge) to Level 5. The survey would not be carried out for the current year as little change was expected although there may be a reduction in the levels due to staff home working as a result of Covid-19 and therefore not hearing and speaking Welsh in the office
- **Update on Welsh Language Partnership – Partner Iaith** – Covid-19 had delayed the mapping of Welsh language activities across the county at present. The Welsh Language Commissioner’s Officer had been invited to discuss how Covid-19 had affected the Welsh language nationally as well as any good practice. The schools categories consultation according to Welsh medium provision was also discussed with the Modernising Education Officer. Work on social media campaigns to collaborate on national celebrations were ongoing.

In closing the Welsh Language Officer advised that whilst Covid-19 had interrupted plans there was still plenty of good work going on and more innovative ways to achieve outcomes.

Councillor Hilditch-Roberts highlighted the continued hard work to improve the Welsh language in very difficult circumstances and thanked the Welsh Language Officer and the team for all their work in that regard. Whilst there was evidence gathered over the last three years of the increase in Welsh spoken in the county there were still improvements to be made and he considered all had a part to play in that regard. He also referred to the difficult financial climate which restricted the amount of funding available for other initiatives, such as providing further support to businesses. Finally he made reference to the challenges for pupils in Welsh medium schools from non-Welsh speaking homes when learning remotely.

The following issues were raised during the ensuing discussion –

- there was some debate regarding the effect of the pandemic on those children educated in Welsh medium schools who were from non-Welsh speaking homes and members were keen to see no reduction in those numbers or in the transition of pupils from KS2 to KS3 as a consequence. Councillor Hilditch-Roberts confirmed a few pupils had been lost from Welsh medium schools as a result but steps had been taken to provide parental support in particular schools together with mentoring, and in some cases measures had been tailored to specific pupils who had been identified as struggling with the language during lockdown. Primary school pupils had since returned to school and speaking Welsh again, therefore it was less of an issue. It was agreed that building back the confidence of those children and speaking Welsh in the school environment was a priority and it would be regrettable if the effects of the lockdown led to a fall in the numbers of children benefitting from a Welsh medium education
- Councillor Emrys Wynne referred to the assessment of staff's Welsh language skills and levels ranging from 0 – 1 and was keen to set a target to remove level 0 following the pandemic and provide more training and support to enable staff to progress quicker through those levels. He highlighted level 3 as a key turning point for Welsh learners, having progressed through the most challenging stages, and he was aware of the good progress being made by an increasing number of staff. Other members also highlighted the positive efforts made by staff in speaking and responding in Welsh at various levels and stressed the importance for all councillors to take the lead, particularly at council meetings
- the importance of providing support for local businesses as discussed under the previous agenda item was reiterated and the role of the Planning Department was mentioned in raising the issue of bilingual signage for new businesses and also to encourage the use of Welsh when advertising.

The Chair highlighted the importance of being proud of what was being achieved but also to continue challenging to ensure continual improvement and he thanked the Welsh Language Officer for the comprehensive report.

RESOLVED that the work being undertaken in Denbighshire be approved.

7 ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE THE WELSH LANGUAGE

Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts introduced the report (previously circulated) updating members on the Welsh language promotional activity since the last meeting and outline plans for the year ahead.

The Welsh Language Officer delivered a power point presentation elaborating upon a number of those activities which included –

- **Staff Eisteddfod** – the Council held its third Eisteddfod between 15 February and 1 March as part of St. David's Day celebrations. Due to Covid-19 it was held digitally via the private staff facebook with various categories for staff to compete and staff voting for the winners. The digital Eisteddfod proved very successful with 163 entries and over 700 votes cast
- **St David's Day** – the staff Eisteddfod was the main event to celebrate St. David's Day but information was also shared on social media about St. David's history, relevant useful Welsh vocabulary and phonetics to help Welsh learners together with interesting facts about the national symbols leeks and daffodils
- **Paned a Sgwrs** – as most staff were now working from home the sessions had been held digitally and after a good start numbers had declined in recent months. This had been due to the need for a screen break over lunchtime when the session was held. The session time had since changed to 9.00 am and numbers had risen again in recent weeks and staff feedback had been positive
- **St Dwynwen's Day** – a quiz was created about the history of St. Dwynwen as part of the celebrations this year which was shared internally and externally on social media with over 30 people taking part. A document of relevant Welsh vocabulary and phonetics was created for Welsh learners and a word search
- **Welsh language music day (Dydd Miwsig Cymru)** – a playlist of Welsh songs was created to share with staff and the promotion of a new song for 'Nerth dy ben' campaign, 'Byw l'r awr' (Live for the hour) to remind each other of our strengths and courage. It showed the positive effect of music on mental health. Most of the artists in the music video were former Ysgol Glan Clwyd pupils
- **Promotion of the Welsh language standards** – documents/checklist had been created to promote Welsh language standards to share on Denbighshire Today, LINC, visiontime and staff facebook page and ensure compliance with standards
- **Vocabulary for meetings** – to encourage the use of Welsh in meetings, including starting and finishing in Welsh, a useful vocabulary had been created shared on facebook together with recordings to hear the pronunciations
- **Pancake Day** – a useful vocabulary of terms had been created for staff
- **Next steps: Proposed timetable of activity for 2021** – a table of planned activities each month throughout 2021 had been provided for consideration and further elaborated upon at the meeting.

At the close of the presentation the Corporate Director Communities paid tribute to the excellent work undertaken by the Welsh Language Officer in extremely difficult circumstances providing a range of engaging activities for staff in order to promote the Welsh language. Those sentiments were echoed by the committee who thanked the Welsh Language Officer for all her hard work in that regard.

Members discussed various issues arising from the report in more detail –

- Councillor Arwel Roberts suggested a press article be produced on the excellent work undertaken to promote the Welsh language for inclusion in the local Welsh newspapers, such as Papyr Bro. The Welsh Language Officer agreed and also considered it a good way of promoting the council's social media channels
- the Welsh Language Officer responded to questions regarding staff induction confirming reference was made to the Welsh language standards as part of that process for new staff and that all staff were required to complete an e-module on Welsh language awareness which also included a section on the Welsh language standards together with the Welsh Language Commissioner and Welsh language strategy, so all the necessary information was made available
- the Chair asked that a link to the Welsh vocabulary for meetings be shared with the chairs of all committees to encourage the use of Welsh in council meetings
- Councillor Emrys Wynne asked that consideration be given to reviewing the situation in Denbighshire with regard to Welsh names given to topographical places and dwellings to ensure the Welsh language element was maintained. It was agreed that Councillor Wynne complete a member proposal form on that topic for submission to the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs' Group to determine how that matter should be progressed.

RESOLVED that the activity during 2020 be noted and the proposal for the 2021 promotional activity be approved.

8 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

- there was some discussion about progress with the Welsh Language Strategy 2022 – 27 and potential investment in that regard and it was confirmed that the intention was to submit a draft document to the committee for consideration prior to submission to Cabinet in February/March 2022
- it was agreed that an update on Eisteddfod yr Urdd be confirmed as an item for November but in the event of any developments before then the update be brought forward for consideration to the July meeting; it was also agreed that an update on the National Eisteddfod be submitted to a future meeting of the committee at the appropriate time as more information became available
- following a suggestion by Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts it was agreed to invite some staff members to a future meeting to talk to the committee first-hand about how the council had supported them on their Welsh language journey.

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

The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.