

WELSH LANGUAGE STEERING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held in Via video conference on Wednesday, 15 March 2023 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard (Chair), Ann Davies, Gill German, Huw Hilditch-Roberts and Emrys Wynne

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Governance and Business (GW), Welsh Language Officer (MC), Staff Development Officer (MW), WESP Development Officer (MJ), Committee Administrator (RTJ)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Merfyn Parry and Huw Williams.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

None.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Welsh Language Steering Committee held on 8 November 2022 were submitted.

The Welsh Language Officer informed the committee that there was no staff Eisteddfod this year; the second year, it was virtual, and few people took part. Therefore the decision was not to host it until the following year, 2024.

RESOLVED that subject to the above, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 November 2022 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 MORE THAN WORDS UPDATE

The Staff Development Officer (SDO) introduced the 'More than just words' Framework report (previously circulated). The report describes the development of the 'Mwy na geiriau/ More than just words' framework.

The 'Mwy na Geiriau' framework sets out how, together, there would be a drive forward progress under the overarching theme of culture and leadership. The actions which the Council will implement in 2023-24 will include:

- Provide details on how services are currently meeting Welsh speakers' needs alongside targets to ensure improvement
- Supporting and developing the Welsh language skills of the current and future workforce
- Sharing best practice in providing Welsh language services and how to make an "Active Offer" with all staff employed directly or within commissioned services:
- Provide language training and resources for all staff and opportunities for Welsh speakers to increase their confidence in delivering services in Welsh.

The Welsh Government require an annual report from Denbighshire on the delivery of specific actions in implementing the framework. Further monitoring of the implementation of the framework will focus on users' experience of the service and existing monitoring systems (e.g. within Care Inspectorate Wales inspections).

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee queried the cost implication of the framework, and the SDO confirmed that there wasn't any additional cost to the council due to more than words framework.
- The committee raised learning costs and whether it could impact any services which would send team members for Welsh language lessons. In response, it was clarified that the only cost incurred would be replacement cost for the staff for the period of the lessons.
- The committee were informed the number of Welsh speakers within the care sector was 20% internally for Denbighshire, while in the private sector was 12%. Officers and members agreed that a change of nature was needed to increase the number of Welsh speakers.

RESOLVED that the Welsh Language Committee note the 'Mwy na geiriau / More than just words' Framework update.

6 WELSH LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

The WESP Development Officer introduced the Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan Update.

The WESP development officer informed members of the seven targets within the strategy. These were –

- (i) To increase the number of Welsh-medium schools and Welsh-language education places;

- (ii) To increase the number of children and young people attending Welsh-medium schools and receiving Welsh-medium education;
- (iii) To raise standards in Welsh-language education and to ensure that learners attain high levels of fluency in Welsh by the end of compulsory education;
- (iv) To ensure that Welsh was fully integrated into the curriculum in all schools, including non-Welsh-medium schools;
- (v) To provide support for teachers and other education professionals to develop their Welsh-language skills and teaching abilities;
- (vi) To increase the use of Welsh as a medium of communication within schools and to encourage parents and the wider community to use Welsh in their daily lives;
- (vii) To ensure that Welsh-language education was accessible to all, regardless of their background or circumstances.

These targets aim to ensure that Welsh-medium education was available and accessible to all who wish to access it and to raise standards in Welsh-language education across Wales.

Members discussed the following in further detail –

- Regarding the first target, members discussed the numerous placements being developed, the development at Ysgol Dewi Sant had been delayed due to concerns raised by Welsh Water. However, officers were hopeful the matter would be resolved, and development would continue of the ‘cylch meithrin’ at the site. There was also a bid to find a suitable location in Ruthin. Officers stated that the matter of Ruthin could take 12 months or more as it was challenging to find a site for a cylch in Ruthin.
- The challenges with education and the Welsh language were discussed. Members highlighted that the Welsh government understood the challenges; however, there was a challenge with having Welsh teachers, and the parental choice was another hurdle with the Welsh language and education.
- The committee agreed that there needed to be more emphasis put on the benefits of the Welsh language and that people should see the language as a skill which should be celebrated and encouraged.

The chair thanked officers for attending the meeting and updating the committee on the Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan. Members agreed that the Welsh language in education strategic plan be added to the agenda as an annual item.

RESOLVED *that the Welsh Language steering committee note the Welsh Language in Education Strategic Plan Update.*

At This juncture, the chair was informed that the committee was no longer in quorum; the committee then adjourned for a 10-minute comfort break. The meeting reconvened at 12:00 pm.

7 2021 CENSUS RESULTS

The Welsh Language Officer (WLO) presented the committee with a presentation highlighting the findings of the 2021 census results.

The census questions are based on an individual's self-assessment. Individuals choose all the options that were true for them. Several factors can influence how people assess and record their skills. The 2021 Census was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The details within the report highlighted that the number and percentage of Welsh speakers (aged three or older) had decreased from the 2011 census from 562,000 speakers to 538,000, which equated to a 1.2% drop. Across Wales, the highest percentage of Welsh speakers was in North West Wales, whilst it was the lowest in South East Wales. The WLO informed the committee that other than Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil, all other local authorities had seen a decrease in Welsh speakers. The biggest reduction was in Carmarthenshire for the second successive census.

Almost three-quarters of the population stated within the census that they had no Welsh skills. The WLO gave members information on the people of Wales, which could have impacted the census.

- The population of Wales has increased by around 1.4% since 2011
- More people born outside Wales living here in 2021 than in 2011
- The percentage of children and young people under 15 in Wales has fallen since 2011.

The WLO then informed the committee of the results in Denbighshire; in 2011, 22,236 people aged three years or older could speak Welsh, which equated to 24.5% of the 90,527 population total. Whilst on the 2021 census, 20,942 people aged three and older could speak Welsh, this decreased by 2.1%. The population total had also increased to 93,055.

Members thanked the WLO for the information; although there had been a decrease, the members agreed the drop wasn't as bad as many had feared. However, members did highlight that the impact of Covid 19 on the Welsh language still has not been fully realised.

RESOLVED that the Welsh Language steering group note the 2021 Census results.

8 DRAFT LANGUAGE STRATEGY 2023-28

The Welsh Language Officer (WLO) presented the Welsh Language Strategy 2023-28 (previously circulated) to the committee updating members on the proposed timetable of developing the new Welsh language strategy.

This report was about developing a new Welsh Language Strategy for Denbighshire to update on proposed timetable for developing the new strategy.

The Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 has enabled the Government to set standards relating to the Welsh Language and the Welsh Government expected all local authorities to adopt a Welsh Language Strategy, as part of their response to the Standards.

The current strategy, adopted by Denbighshire's Cabinet in March 2017, outlines the approach towards promoting the Welsh Language and facilitating its use within the county and there is an expectancy of the Council to revise its strategy, five years on from publication date.

The Council has looked at several examples of the best practices of other councils, the demographic information that's available and looks at the successes of the previous strategy.

Discussions with Members and the Senior Leadership Team on the current priority areas have already taken place and they have been approved in principle.

When drafting the strategy, the Council engaged and consulted with the relevant internal and external services and partnerships in order to draft the final report.

The Council has commissioned the Language Planning Centre to analyse data, carry out research, and draw up a success report on our Welsh Language Strategy 2017-2022. We are currently working together on the findings and some actions in the new Strategy will derive from these findings.

The Corporate Director: Governance and Business suggested to the WLO send the strategy to the members of the board who weren't present to allow them to give any feedback on the strategy.

RESOLVED that the Welsh Language steering committee approve the approach, associated timetable and actions associated with the strategy.

9 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

The committee discussed the following further –

- The committee agreed to have a Welsh Language in Education item be an annual item, it was also raised that if any pressing matter were to arise within Welsh Language in Education that it be brought back to the committee sooner.
- Officers confirmed there would be an item on the Welsh Language strategy at the next meeting.

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

The meeting concluded at 12:45