

PARTNERSHIP AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 21 June, 2022,

PRESENT: Councillor Dylan Rees (Chair)
Councillor Gwilym O. Jones (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Non Dafydd, Paul Ellis, Euryrn Morris, Trefor Lloyd Hughes, MBE, John I. Jones, Pip O'Neill, Derek Owen, Margaret M. Roberts, Ken Taylor

Portfolio Members

Councillors Llinos Medi Huws (Leader), Carwyn Jones (Portfolio Member for Economic Development, Leisure and Tourism), Dafydd Rhys Thomas (Portfolio Member Highways, Waste and Property), Gary Pritchard (Portfolio Member for Children - Social Services, and Youth Services), Alun Roberts (Portfolio Member for Adults' Services – Social Services)

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Function (Resources)/Section 151 Officer
Director of Social Services
Head of Adults' Services
Policy and Welsh Language Manager (FO)
Scrutiny Manager (AGD)
Committee Officer (ATH)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Ieuan Williams (Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language)

ALSO PRESENT: Bethan E. Griffith (Business Support Manager - Democratic Services)

The Chair welcomed everyone present to this meeting of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee and he took the opportunity to thank Councillor Gwilym O. Jones, the Committee's previous Chair for his sterling work in that role saying that he looked forward to working with him in his new role as the Committee's Vice-Chair. Members and Officers then introduced themselves.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence by Councillor Ieuan Williams, Portfolio Member for Education and the Welsh Language were submitted and noted.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Euryrn Morris declared a personal but not prejudicial interest in item 7 on the agenda as the contact point for Gwynedd Council's ITC provision for the North Wales Economic Ambition Board.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Partnership and Regeneration Committee held on the following dates were presented –

8 March, 2022

31 May, 2022

It was resolved -

- **To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 8 March, 2022**
- **To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 31 May, 2022.**

4 ANNUAL REPORT WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS 2021/22

The Welsh Language Annual Standards Report was presented for the Committee's consideration and comment prior to its submission for delegated approval by the Portfolio Member for publication. The report evaluates the Council's compliance with the Welsh Language Standards in 2021/22 and documents the ways in which the Council promoted and facilitated opportunities to use the Welsh language during the year ensuring that the language was treated no less favourably than English.

Councillor Llinos Medi, Leader of the Council in presenting the report in the Portfolio Member's absence commented that despite the continuing need to respond to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic which compelled the Authority to adapt its usual working practices to react at pace to the exceptional challenges, its high standard of Welsh language services was unaffected thanks in large part to the Authority's officers. She spoke about the continued development of the Council workforce's Welsh language skills with over 90% of officers able to use Welsh and she referred also to the development and utilisation of technology to promote and to facilitate use of the language at a time when opportunities to distribute promotional materials were few. This reporting period saw the launch of a new section of website all about the Welsh language as well as the adoption of a new domain name; this microsite brings together a wealth of information and resources about the language. To conclude it was a pleasure to be able to report on an exciting area of Council business where progress is being driven by a heartfelt desire to see the Welsh language and its use within the Council develop and flourish.

The Chief Executive said that although the Authority is duty bound to operate through the medium of Welsh, it does so because it believes that doing so is important and because it sees bilingualism as an integral part of its work. It is also important that the Council operationally reflects the fact that over half the Island's population speaks Welsh. The Council embraces bilingualism and strives to replicate this in all its written and oral communications with the public. It also regards bilingualism as a particular strength and as an aspect of service delivery which it seeks to develop. In terms of noteworthy successes, the Chief Executive referred to the investment which the Council has made over the past three years in bilingual fitness equipment at its leisure centres and also to the role of the Welsh Language Forum in bringing partners together in an area where collaboration is essential. The challenge moving forwards is to continue to build on this body of positive work and to preserve the Council's good name as a fully bilingual organisation. The Council's

Strategic Leadership Team is committed to this task and to meeting the language choice of the people whom the Council serves as well as to developing the organisation's Welsh language skills and proficiency still further.

The Committee welcomed the report and its revised format; in considering the overview of the Council's endeavours during the year both in complying with the Welsh Language standards and in promoting the use of the Welsh language, the Committee sought assurance on the following points –

- Whether the rise in complaints about the Council's use of Welsh in 2020/21 signified any trend that may be a cause of concern.

The Policy and Welsh Language Manager confirmed that despite remaining low at 5 complaints, the figure for complains about service delivery standards was a marked increase on the one complaint the previous year. Similarly 4 complaints were received about policy making standards as opposed to none the previous year. She advised Members that one reason may have been a change in the way that complaints about the language are recorded; previously, complaints were mostly resolved by the responsible service as part of the first stage of the Council's complaints procedure; since July 2021, complaints about the Council's use of Welsh are referred to the Policy and Welsh Language Manager for consideration and to be recorded. The Policy and Language Manager provided assurance that although minor slips can occur she did not believe the complaints received signified any systemic issues of significance. However, the Council needs to be alert to complaints within the community with three complaints having been made about non Welsh house and property names. National planning policy limits the Council's authority in this regard meaning it is only able to encourage the use of Welsh names in this context.

- In noting and welcoming the high number of officers within the Council able to speak Welsh, the Committee wanted to know what more could the Council do to help staff further develop their Welsh language skills.

The Leader of the Council and the Policy and Welsh Language Manager were agreed that one of the best ways to facilitate the use of the Welsh language is by creating the conditions whereby individuals whatever their Welsh language skills level can practice using the language in an inclusive, welcoming and non-judgemental environment. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager advised that informal learning opportunities are as important in practising and improving Welsh language skills as more traditional lessons and the Council does have a range of training options which can be accessed year round. Of importance as well is the culture within teams and workplaces that staff can try out their skills without fear of negativity or judgement; in areas where staff might be lacking in confidence – in written Welsh for example, then it is the Council's duty to ensure it has the resources to support and enable staff to develop those skills.

- The Committee noted that the number of visitors using the English version of the Council's website was significantly higher than the number who chose to use the Welsh version. The Committee wanted know whether with the implementation of the Welsh language policy in schools and the use of Welsh therefore as something that comes naturally to young people, it is expected that the number of people using the Council's Welsh language website will grow.

The Policy and Welsh Language Manager confirmed that that is the hope and objective and with an increasing number of young people having received their education through the medium of Welsh, they will be familiar with the technology and

will not be daunted by switching from the one language to the other. In investing in Welsh language services, the Council needs to ensure that they are accessible and appealing and that people can use them with confidence.

The Chief Executive advised for clarification purposes that the Council assesses the language requirements of all new and vacant posts on a scale of 0 to 5 where 5 is wholly fluent in oral and/or written Welsh; this practice is applied across the Council's services and is a key administrative process. Where there is a request not to apply language requirements to a post then the Council will ask for evidence and the rationale for why a bilingual appointment is not considered necessary. The Council seeks to enable officers to attend Welsh language training in work hours and encourages staff to take advantage of the range of courses provided both to improve language skills and quality. It is just as important that where non Welsh speakers are appointed, the Council continues to support them to learn Welsh and allows them the time to do so.

- The Committee questioned whether any specific risks had been identified in terms of compliance with the Welsh Language standards.

The Chief Executive advised that the labour market – specifically the upheaval created by the Covid pandemic – is seen as both a risk and an opportunity as more people take advantage of hybrid working conditions to work closer to home. The challenge lies in people using this flexibility to make a career change and to seek different and alternative career paths and is something the Council will need to monitor. Although recruitment is not a particular issue at present the labour market remains challenging. Also, the Council's trainee programme provides an opportunity to bring young people into the Council at ground level and to provide them with the support thereafter to progress within the organisation. Should the Council find itself unable to appoint bilingual staff and consequently have to have recourse to agency staff or to staff from across the border working on a remote basis, then that could pose a risk in terms of undermining what is seen as one of the Council's main strengths.

- With regard to maximising the use of Welsh in the Council's administration, the Committee sought clarification of the main challenges in terms of mainstreaming Welsh throughout the organisation.

The Policy and Welsh Language Manager advised that mainstreaming means going beyond meeting the Welsh Language standards. She advised that the Council respects the chosen language of service users and that English and Welsh have equal status within its work and administration. However, in fulfilling its duty to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh, she considered confidence to be a key factor particularly with regard to Welsh writing skills. She believed it important therefore that the Council ensures that it has the resources to support staff to improve their skills and that it makes the most of developing technology and translation provision to make Welsh a natural part of the Council's day to day work. Given that the pandemic severely restricted the opportunities for staff to exercise their Welsh language skills in an informal work setting, the Council can provide support to enable them to regain the confidence to resume practising their skills and to return to programmes that were running prior to the pandemic.

In response to a further question the Leader confirmed that opportunities to learn and improve Welsh language skills are also available to Elected Members.

Members commented that they appreciated the availability of the “Cysgliad” software package to help with Welsh language and grammar accuracy and were also grateful for the Council’s comprehensive translation service. It was also suggested that language awareness sessions might be a useful way of encouraging Welsh speakers as well as Welsh learners to reflect on the language and on Welshness.

- In welcoming the annual report and the clarity with which it was set out, the Committee questioned what additional data would add value to the report.

The Chief Executive responded by saying that he believed a new HR system is needed which would give the data added granularity leading to more effective analysis and the generation of better quality data across Council services. The Policy and Welsh Language Manager confirmed that it would be helpful to be able to track the progress of individuals as they develop their skills and confidence in the Welsh language as their career progresses and to report annually thereon. On the point of Welsh language awareness she advised that this does form part of new appointees’ induction to the Council who are given factual information about the Welsh language standards and requirements hand in hand with the element of awareness raising to inspire them to commit to learning and/or improving their Welsh language skills. Such sessions have been delivered in-house and in collaboration with Menter Iaith Môn and additionally sessions have also been held at team level within services.

In concluding the discussion on this item, the Chair thanked the Committee for its thoughtful scrutiny of the matter and Officers for the assurances provided. He confirmed that the points made by Scrutiny would be forwarded to the Portfolio Member when the report is submitted for delegated approval and subsequent publication.

It was resolved to accept the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report for 2021/22, to note its contents and that Scrutiny’s comments be forwarded to the Portfolio Member as part of its submission for delegated approval and subsequent publication.

5 NOMINATION OF SCRUTINY MEMBERS TO SERVE ON BOARDS AND PANELS

The report of the Director of Function (Council Business)/Monitoring Officer and the Scrutiny Manager inviting the Committee to nominate representatives from among its members to serve on the Social Services Scrutiny Panel/Corporate Parenting Panel; Finance Scrutiny Panel and the Education Scrutiny Panel was presented for consideration. The report detailed the scope, function and remit of each panel and set out their reporting arrangements.

It was resolved to nominate the following members to serve on the Panels as noted below –

- **Social Services Scrutiny Panel/Corporate Parenting Panel (4 members from the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)**

Councillors John I. Jones, Euryrn Morris, Pip O’Neill and Jeff Evans (with Councillor Trefor LI. Hughes, MBE as substitute)

- **Finance Scrutiny Panel (3 members from the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)**

Councillors Paul Ellis, Dylan Rees and Ken Taylor

- **Education Scrutiny Panel (4 members from the Partnership and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee)**

Councillors Non Dafydd, Gwilym O. Jones, Derek Owen and Margaret M. Roberts

6 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The report of the Scrutiny Manager setting out the Partnership and Regeneration Committee's indicative Forward Work Programme for 2022/23 was presented for consideration.

The Scrutiny Manager advised that the Forward Work Programme is a standing item on the agenda of the Committee's scheduled meetings and is reviewed on that basis. She referred to the Committee's next scheduled meeting in September and confirmed the items for that meeting.

It was resolved –

- **To agree the current version of the Forward Work Programme for 2022/23.**
- **To note the progress thus far in implementing the Forward Work Programme.**

7 ITEM FOR INFORMATION – NORTH WALES ECONOMIC AMBITION BOARD QUARTER 4 PROGRESS REPORT

The report of the Chief Executive incorporating a Quarter 4 2021/22 update on the progress of the North Wales Growth Deal programmes and projects was presented for the Committee's information.

It was resolved to note the progress made during Quarter 4, 2021/22.

**Councillor Dylan Rees
Chair**