

Draft Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Date: 24 June 2022

Time: 10:00am

Venue: Council Chambers- Hybrid Meeting

Present: Councillors P. Hourahine (Chair), M. Al-Nuaimi, M. Evans, L. James, G. Horton

In attendance: Gareth Price (Head of Law and Regulation), Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation & Corporate Centre), Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager), Hywel Jones (Welsh Language Officer).
Neil Barnett (Scrutiny Officer), Leanne Rowlands (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

Pamela Tasker (Governance Support Officer), Emily Mayger (Governance and Support Officer), Anne Jenkins (Governance Team Leader)

1. Apologies

Councillor Paul Bright and Councillor Claire Baker-Westhead

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting 21 January 2022

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the 21 January 2022 were moved as a true record.

4. Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report 2021-22

Invitees:

Rhys Cornwall (Strategic Director – Transformation & Corporate Centre)

Janice Dent (Policy and Partnership Manager)

Hywel Jones (Welsh Language Officer)

The Chair requested that Members referred to Section A of the report, at the recommendations where the Committee was asked to focus on whether the Annual Report reflected a true and fair account of the councils Welsh Language Performance over the period in question 2021-2022 and whether the report highlighted the ongoing commitment to the Welsh Language effectively.

The report was presented to the Committee by the Strategic Director.

Main Points:

The Strategic Director informed the Committee that this was a draft report to go to Cabinet and Council following committee member comments today.

The Annual report was required as part of the Councils Welsh Language standards imposed by the Welsh Language Measure. There was a series of standards imposed on Newport City Council by the Welsh Language Commissioner which had to be adhered to.

The report covered specific requirements and gave a broad overview of performance during the year and there was also a series of specific data sets required such as staffing figures in relation to the Welsh Language, standards of Welsh spoken, complaints received and general staffing levels, training, and recruitment processes.

The Strategic Director reminded the Committee that this report was a reflection on the 2021/2022 financial year where there were Covid restrictions in place and this had an impact on the ability to provide face to face training and any face-to-face community activities.

Highlights:

- The Welsh In The Community Grants
- An update in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan
- A refresh of the 5-year promotional strategy to promote Welsh .
- Welsh Language Skills Policy.

The Strategic explained that for Newport one of the key pressures in the Welsh Language was being able to recruit fluent Welsh speakers to deliver services.

The report had information on a number of Complaints received in relation to Welsh Language Standards and if a complaint was received and the complainant was not satisfied with the response, they could then report to the Welsh Language Commissioner. The Welsh Language Commissioner could then instigate an investigation.

There were some complaints received from the Commissioners Office but the Council were in line with other Welsh Local Authorities so there was nothing of concern. The Welsh Language Commission were also happy so far with the responses given by Newport City Council.

Questions:

Cllr Al-Nuaimi commented on the target of 1 million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 and asked what the percentage of the population in Newport would be.

The Strategic Director stated that there were 2 mechanisms to measure the amount of Welsh speakers in Newport. One was Census data, but the analysis was not complete on this data yet. Looking back at the data from 2011, the data figures were skewed due to the percentage of under 18s who were recorded as fluent Welsh speakers as they were studying

Welsh for GCSE so there was a big difference in over and under 18s. The exact data figure was not available but could be provided to the Committee if needed. The other mechanism was the number of pupils in Welsh medium education which was the basis for planning over the next 5 years.

The Welsh Language Officer confirmed that in terms of the numbers it was 90% based on the census data in 2011 and there was an analysis to be completed on this. In terms of the number of Welsh speakers the annual monitoring report would work closely with the Strategic Plan. To increase speakers, you would need to look at who was going through Welsh medium education. There was a focus on development of Welsh in the community working with stakeholders and partners to look at increasing the amount of Welsh speakers. In the Council there was an increase in training to increase Welsh speaking staff.

The Strategic Director confirmed that there was no specific percentage target in Newport as Newport City Council were not in a position to do this. The promotional standards for the Council in relation to this report would be, are we doing what we need to do to promote the use and take up of the Welsh Language.

Councillor Al- Nuaimi commented that this report could be accepted this year but for future years it was a very ambitious target for 2050 to achieve 1 million Welsh speakers. Councillor Al- Nuaimi suggested that it would be useful to have comments on this target on the annual report and it would be a useful exercise for the Council to attempt to provide figures on the percentage of Newport Welsh speakers.

The Policy and Partnership Manager confirmed that this would be taken on board and would be included in the report for next year.

Councillor James asked what level of Welsh fluency was the aim.

The Welsh Language Officer confirmed that the tables in the report were for staff and there was a breakdown on the establishment list in terms of levels of Welsh that staff had such as None, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced. Going forward the team wanted to look at framework to measure linguistic ability in Welsh to standardise the Council alongside other Public Bodies.

The Policy and Partnership Manager commented on the key 2021-22 achievements and that there was lot of progress despite the challenges of Covid.

- The Welsh Language Promotion Officer was really supportive in Education in raising awareness.
- The Welsh in the Community Grants really helped community groups in the increase of use of the Welsh language. One in particular was a Hungarian Community group who was supporting families and children to learn Welsh in school.
- The Many Faces of Welshness campaign. Welsh was historically seen as a White British language, but the aim was to engage all communities in Newport which was a priority for next year.

- The Welsh In Education Strategic Plan, the Promotional plan, and the 5 Year Promotional Policy showed that there was a lot of work ongoing, and these would be reported on.
- Employment skills and increasing people's confidence as well as fluency, to try to encourage staff to use Welsh but not to be perfect.
- Monitoring report: it was a challenge for Newport to recruit staff who were Welsh speakers. The Council was low in relation to this, but it was a recruitment that was ongoing. Vacancies were published as Desirable in Welsh in every post. A lot of time was spent speaking to schools and colleges to speak to fluent Welsh speakers who might wish to work for the Council.
- At one time there was only one Welsh medium high school in Bargoed, now we have many more Welsh medium schools, so a lot of work was happening.
- There was a break down in the tables of work to be completed. A video shared with the Committee before the meeting was another way to increase knowledge and understanding of Welsh.
- Key Activities in 2021/2022: there was work with refugee, migrant and minoritized ethnic groups to be completed to increase Welsh in other minorities. Next year the aim was to fully embed the Welsh Language skills policy to be able to report on progress.
- Building on creative partnerships. Recently the Welsh Language Officer and a colleague were involved in a Welsh language rhymes exercise with school children and children from Ysgol Casnewydd to raise Newport's profile.

Councillor Evans stated that he was impressed with the production of the Welsh Video but was not impressed with some of the content and felt that there was some political content in the video but that this was a personal view. Councillor Evans commented on the number of complaints received which was excellent.

Councillor Evans noted that no one had wanted training in Welsh only and that it would be useful to have the training figures in percentages the whole way through. Councillor Evans made a reference to the Community surveys and that it would be useful to have a summary of the residents comments from the 600 responses received.

Councillor Evans commented on the grants and stated that it was a great idea but how were they monitored as it stated in the report some of the grant was used for rent, cleaning products etc so how much of this was monitored and was it used for the correct purpose.

The Strategic Director explained that the monitoring of grants was very important to make sure this had a correct impact and the information around the data included. In relation to the Video the Strategic Director requested that if Councillor Evans had any specific issues, he could speak to the Strategic Director and the Monitoring Officer, and this would be looked at.

The Chair commented on the Hungarian choice and was it chosen due to Welsh being in the same language family.

The Policy and Partnership Manager agreed that it was a similar area and that it was an open bidding process. Councillor Hughes and the Welsh Language Officer was on the panel. It was also about helping people to feel at home and to feel part of Wales and part of Newport and to be able to practice Welsh with their children.

The Welsh Language Officer explained that there was a grant instruction, and the grant applications were panel assessed with an open process and a number of those were postponed due to Covid. There was a monitoring process and a follow up process where receipts and expenditure would be provided.

Councillor Evans mentioned Welsh church funding and grants, and the issue of rent was not something the Council did.

The Welsh Language Officer stated that rent was added due to the community having to rent a venue due to not having a venue of their own so they would not have been able to hold the event otherwise. In terms of the 600 responses this was work completed as part of the 5 Year Strategy so they were included in the Appendix, but Councillor Evans's comments on referencing them in the report would be taken on board.

The Strategic Director stated that this plan was being delivered in a very multi-cultural and diverse Newport where lots of different languages were spoken, so this was about reaching out to Communities and including lots of different ethnic groups.

Councillor Al- Nuaimi commented on the key achievements where it mentioned the Promotional Officer and their engagement with the Black Asian and ethnic minorities in Newport. Councillor Al-Nuaimi stated that they felt the report did not mention what had been achieved with this engagement and what were the results. Councillor Al-Nuaimi stated that the promotion of Welsh in general to staff and residents of Newport was a sweeping statement but there was nothing specific there. Councillor Al-Nuaimi also commented on the surplus places for Welsh Medium Nurseries and that the Promotion Officer may need to work with Welsh Medium Schools to look at this surplus.

The Strategic Director commented that they would ensure that there would be some detail added to the report on the key achievements but in relation to the nursery provision this point would need to be raised with the Chief Education Officer. The Corporate Director and the Policy and Partnership Manager would look to incorporate the work of the Promotional Officer into this report and subsequent reports.

The Corporate Director thanked the Welsh Language Officer for all their hard work as they were leaving the authority to take up a new post in Audit Wales.

5. Conclusion of Committee Reports

Actions:

To monitor the outcomes of the grants provided to various organisations.

To receive an executive summary of responses from the Community resident surveys.

Conclusions:

The Committee agreed that the report was a fair reflection of what had occurred over the past year.

The Committee agreed that the Annual Report highlighted the ongoing commitment to the Welsh Language.

The Committee noted that where it was asked to consider whether the report highlighted the ongoing commitment to the Welsh Language effectively and focused on the appropriate areas for development, the Committee agreed that there was an absence of specific achievements and that they needed to be evidenced clearer.

The Committee agreed that the comments and recommendations made should be submitted to Cabinet.

The Committee requested a comment from the Chief Education Officer regarding the surplus of Welsh Medium Nursery places.

6. Scrutiny Adviser Report

Actions Received

The Scrutiny Advisor assured the Committee that a comment would be requested from the Chief Education Officer regarding the surplus of Welsh Medium Nursery places.

The Digital Services Strategy Report would be discussed at the next Committee.

The Draft Annual Forward Work Programme would be discussed at the next Committee.

7. Date of the Next Meeting

29th of July 2022 at 10am- Hybrid Meeting