



**To/  
Councillor Robert Smith  
Cabinet Member for Education &  
Learning**

**Councillor Elliott King  
Cabinet Member for Culture, Human  
Rights & Equalities**

**BY EMAIL**

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**SPC/2023-24/18**

**09 July 2024**

cc: Cabinet Members

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Members following the meeting of the Committee on 14 May 2024. It is about the Council's Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24 and Welsh Language Strategy. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor,

**Scrutiny of Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24 and  
Review of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy 2017-22.**

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session with you on the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report covering the period April 2023 – March 2024. The session enabled the Committee to understand how well the Council is doing regarding compliance with Standards, and ask questions to provide challenge to progress, performance, and improvement.

We thank you, Ness Young (Director of Corporate Services) and Rhian Millar (Consultation Co-ordinator) for attending the meeting and for providing the annual report so quickly. We appreciate there were issues with the preparation of the previous annual report, which as you know the Committee discussed in March.

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The main issues from the March meeting concerned:

- visibility of the Annual Report to improve both staff and public awareness
- the way in which some of the Welsh Language complaints received had been dealt with
- the value for money of the in-house Welsh Translation Service and opportunities for greater efficiency
- simultaneous interpretation provision, including current arrangements for the interpretation of School Governor meetings in Welsh-medium schools

Having only recently had a conversation about Welsh Language Standards and your response to queries that arose from that meeting, it resulted in a shorter discussion in May. Nevertheless we had the opportunity to look at the Council's compliance with the nationally defined Welsh Language Standards, and key actions taken over the past year.

The Committee noted the key points from the 2023/24 report:

- Welsh Language Calls – a reduction in the number of calls, compared with 2022/23, with the winding down of pandemic-related services.
- Translation Workload – a 10% increase.
- Staff Self-Reporting Welsh Language Skills – an increase in both the number of employees reporting Welsh language skills, and employees with Welsh language skills.
- New Posts with Welsh Language Skills Requirement - 149 (31%) stated that Welsh language skills were either desirable or essential, indicating a commitment to bilingual recruitment.
- Formal Welsh Language Training Participation – a drop in the number participating, however a notable increase at the intermediate level.
- Welsh Language Complaints – slight decrease in complaints related to compliance with standards.
- Welsh Medium Education – the percentage of students in Welsh language streams remained stable numbers showing consistency in Welsh medium education enrolment.

Overall it was reported to the Committee that the Council's efforts in 2023-24 have shown progress, a commitment to linguistic accessibility, and growing linguistic diversity. The Annual Report showed that the Council remains focused on promoting Welsh language use and inclusivity. However, there were areas for ongoing attention, such as staff development and training participation. We noted that ongoing efforts will ensure continued progress in meeting Welsh language standards and serving Welsh-speaking citizens effectively.

We were also invited to discuss the Review of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy 2017-22, and thank you for bringing a report to the Committee on this, providing analysis of the effectiveness of the Council's Strategy which is required by Welsh Language Standards. We noted the Strategy aligns with

the Welsh Government's language strategy and wider objectives concerning education, well-being, and health and social care. The Strategy addresses both community language promotion and fostering Welsh language usage within the Council workforce.

The Committee was told that the Council's Welsh Language Standards had been instrumental in maintaining a focus on Welsh language promotion within Swansea and the Council itself. The analysis of key data points, including census statistics, education trends, staff language skills and job advertisement indicates both successes and areas for improvement. The 2021 Census reveals a decline in Welsh speakers and language skills in Swansea, with variations by age and locality; lower proficiency compared to the Wales average. Whilst there had been a notable increase in Welsh-medium education enrolment and efforts to promote language skills amongst staff, challenges such as declining proficiency levels and potential mismatches in job requirements persisted. Council job adverts demonstrate a commitment to bilingualism, but it is possible that more posts could state Welsh language skills would be desirable to promote the language use further within the Council. Efforts to promote Welsh language skills among staff were acknowledged, but there may be room for improvement in incentivisation and training.

Moving forward, a more robust strategic and targeted approach to address these challenges, coupled with robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms would be essential to ensure the new Strategy's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. It was noted that the 2022 Strategy had been rolled forward due to the Covid pandemic and progress was being made to develop a new Strategy for the period 2024-2029. A Co-production event was planned in both Welsh and English.

It was a very valuable and useful session, and this letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - key issues are summarised below.

### **Annual Report - Future Actions**

The Annual Report identified an aim to revise promotion strategies with the development of a revised Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, integrating insights from the review of previous strategies and guidance from the Welsh Language Commissioner. We heard that the guidance highlighted building blocks for the development of an effective strategy, provided some examples of effective practice, and detailed the areas to avoid. You stated that analysis of data allowed the Council to develop its own agenda and target resources towards better proficiency.

## **Review of Welsh Language Strategy - Welsh Speaking Staff / Welsh Lessons**

The report indicated challenges around the recruitment of Welsh Language speaking staff. We asked how the Council is working to address this challenge and develop the number of Welsh speakers within the Council. We asked about the drop off in the number of employees engaging in Welsh lessons, and what more can be done to encourage staff, particularly in public facing roles to improve their Welsh language skills.

We were told that the Council was working to address this challenge and develop the number of Welsh speakers within the Council, including encouraging Welsh speakers to apply for posts, promoting things like career opportunities, remote working, and looking at incentives such as paid time off to attend Welsh classes and looking at their accessibility, and developing peer support groups and mentoring, e.g. informal sessions with Welsh speakers and developing a supportive, encouraging environment, as well as promoting and celebrating the successes to increase the profile. We noted the challenge was getting staff started in Welsh lessons, as those who were on board were progressing though the levels. **Learning from other Councils was important to see what works, to inform our improvement.**

## **Review of Welsh Language Strategy - Trends in Welsh Medium Education**

There was discussion on Welsh Government targets on the number of Welsh speakers, trends in Welsh-Medium Education and what bearing this might have on the Council's new Welsh Language Strategy. We know the Welsh Government is targeting the number of Welsh speakers to reach one million by 2050 and the percentage of the population that speak Welsh daily and can speak more than just a few words of Welsh to increase 20% by 2050. Clearly that would have a significant implication on future Welsh Medium education provision. The 2021 Census revealed that 11.2% of individuals aged 3 and over in Swansea can speak Welsh, lower than the Wales average of 17.8%. Despite the percentages you felt there was a critical mass of Welsh speakers in Swansea to build on. For example, you mentioned a focus on developing opportunities for young people to speak Welsh outside of the school setting.

Comparing the data from 2016-17 to 2022-23, you reported that there is a noticeable increase in the number of students attending Welsh-medium education in Swansea. While the percentage of students in Welsh language streams remained relatively stable, there is a significant rise in absolute numbers. This indicates a growing preference or accessibility of Welsh-medium education within the community. However, the data should be examined in conjunction with demographic changes and educational policies to draw more nuanced conclusions.

## **Recommendations arising from the Review of Welsh Language Strategy**

We noted recommendations for the 2024-2029 Strategy included a focus on:

- Enhancing youth language programmes to sustain and increase proficiency levels.
- Delivery on the Councils Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/2032.
- Targeting resources towards areas with lower Welsh language proficiency to address disparities.
- Strengthening partnerships with organisations like Menter Iaith Abertawe to expand community language initiatives.
- Implementing strategies to support Welsh language usage in public services, education, and cultural events.
- Reviewing the Councils recruitment process in relation to Welsh language requirements.
- Using emerging data sources like the Annual Population Survey to inform language policy decisions.

**We were told that the new Strategy would be ready for consultation shortly, with anticipated approval in the Autumn. The Committee will want to feed into the consultation stage of the new Strategy, so would appreciate communication from you / lead officer(s) to ensure we are able to do this. We look forward to seeing the draft Strategy.** One of the issues we felt the Council needed to address was in-house capacity to provide simultaneous interpretation for meetings and events.

### **Your Response**

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within, however, we do not expect you to provide a formal response.

We look forward to seeing the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report for 2024/25, and can schedule for our Committee meeting on 13 May 2025, unless requested otherwise. We will follow up on the contents of this letter as appropriate then.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK**

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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