



**To:**  
**Councillor Louise Gibbard**  
**Cabinet Member for Supporting**  
**Communities**

**And**

**Councillor Robert Smith**  
**Cabinet Member for Education**  
**Improvement, Learning & Skills**

*Please ask for:*  
*Gofynnwch am:*  
  
*Direct Line:*  
*Llinell Uniongyrchol:*  
  
*e-Mail*  
*e-Bost:*

*Date*  
*Dyddiad:*

**Overview & Scrutiny**

**01792 636292**

**scrutiny@swansea.gov.uk**

**22 July 2021**

**BY EMAIL**

**Summary:** This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities and the Cabinet Member for Education Improvement, Learning and Skills. The letter concerns the meeting held on 23 June 2021 and the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2020-21.

Dear Cllr Gibbard and Cllr Smith,

On the 23 June, the Panel met to discuss the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2020-21. The Panel are grateful to yourselves and to Sarah Lackenby, Chief Transformation Officer, for attending to discuss the report and contribute to discussions.

Officers highlighted the new format of the report this year, in line with new guidance issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner in September 2020. We also heard that 2020-21 was a challenging year due to the pandemic restrictions, however, in general the Council has continued to make improvements on implementing the Welsh Language Standards.

Officers explained that the report aims to highlight updates across the *Standards Groups* (Service Delivery, Policy making, Operational, Promotional and Record-Keeping Standards). We understand that the *Service Delivery* standard continues to be a priority, and this is also the main area for which complaints are received. Officers explained that the complaints policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect helpful feedback from both the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Ombudsman.

The main points from our discussion encompassed the translation services department and staff Welsh language skills, as follows:

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## **Translation Services**

We asked about the Welsh Translation Services use of automated systems and were pleased to hear about increased rates of translation; noting that the unit translated 2.4m words during 2020-21, an increase of half a million words compared with the previous year.

We queried whether the translation service had now reached the point of maximum efficiency and whether any more savings could be made. Officers explained that this is a joint service with Neath Port Talbot Council and, pending review later this year, the service is not likely to make any further savings. We therefore understand that this service is now working at maximum efficiency and there will be no further cost-savings.

The Panel asked whether a virtual translation service was available during live meetings. Officers explained that funding had been awarded to Swansea Council by Welsh Government (E-Democracy grant) to enable upgrades of technology within the Council Chamber, including improved technology for simultaneous translation.

Members queried whether a rapid translation service was available to schools, citing an example of a job advert for Pentrehafod School that took six weeks to translate. Officers undertook to look into this particular case and revert with further information.

## **Mandatory Welsh Language Skills**

Members queried the intention for the Council to review whether more jobs can be recruited with mandatory Welsh skills, and the possible effect on recruitment. Officers assured the Panel that this will not apply to all posts, based on skills and job markets, although some posts could be made mandatory Welsh in the future. The Panel raised concerns over whether this could jeopardise the availability of the right candidates, should Welsh language skills become mandatory. Officers highlighted that regard would be had to the five year strategy, enhancing training for existing staff.

The Panel requested more information about Welsh language training available to councillors in general; officers undertook to better promote available training.

Councillors acknowledged the hard work and efforts of staff, working at speed to turn around work within ambitious targets. It was acknowledged that the Welsh Translation unit played an important part during the pandemic response, helping to translate a huge amount of information within tight deadlines.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter but, in this instance, we require no formal written response.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Chris Holley**

**Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel**

✉ [cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.chris.holley@swansea.gov.uk)