

## **Culture Committee CC-12-01(min)**

### **MINUTES**

**Date:** Wednesday 4 July

**Time:** 10.30am

**Venue:** Town Hall, Denbigh

### **Attendance:**

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Plaid Cymru, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Chair)

Jenny Randerson (Liberal Democrat, Cardiff Central, Assembly Minister)

Owen John Thomas (Plaid Cymru, South Wales Central)

Lorraine Barrett (Labour, Cardiff South and Penarth)

Dafydd Wigley (Plaid Cymru, Caernarfon))

Rosemary Butler (Labour, Newport West)

Jonathan Morgan (Conservative, South Wales Central))

Alison Halford (Labour, Delyn)

### **Apologies**

Delyth Evans (Labour, Mid & West Wales)

### **Officials**

Julia Annand (Committee Clerk)

Stephen Thomas (Deputy Committee Clerk)

Richard Davies (Director, National Assembly's Education and Training Department)

### **Also in attendance**

Euryn Ogwen Williams (Committee's Expert Adviser on the Welsh Language)

**Declarations of interest:** none

### **Introductory remarks**

The Chair mentioned that he had recently attended a successful and positive event organised by Powys County Council on the Committee's review.

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### **Item 1: Committee's review of the Welsh Language**

#### **Papers: CC-12-01(ps.1-4)**

Organisation:

#### **Denbigh County Council**

Representatives:

Cllr Gwyneth Kensler

Sioned Bowen

The following points were made in presentation:

- Suitable structures and mechanisms must be in place for the development of the language. The language cannot survive on goodwill alone. 40% of Denbigh's working population work in the public sector and in partnership with others.
- It is important that the Council gives a lead in respect of bilingualism and that young people and adults who are keen to learn, receive the appropriate training. Early years provision is also important. There is a lack of continuity in Post-16 Welsh medium education.
- According to the 1991 census, only 57% of Denbigh's population were born in Wales.

People from outside Denbigh must be made to feel a part of the community and employment must be brought to the area to encourage the young people of Denbigh to remain in the area.

- There is a marked shortage of bilingual professional people such as speech therapists and this problem needs to be addressed.
- The promotion of the language should not be measured in financial terms. In Europe, bilingualism is accepted as a fact and totally natural. Wales can learn much from the European model.

The following comments were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In order to get to grips with in-migration and out-migration from the local authority, the Council have commissioned development impact studies and generally discourage large scale developments in villages. Land has also been set aside for industrial development.
- Cllr Kensler promised to furnish the Committee with information about the difficulties faced by Denbigh's young people in affording housing and on how the Council is using the home-buy schemes promoted by the Assembly. She also promised to send the Committee details of nursery provision in Denbigh.
- Careers companies should consider what training is currently available through the medium of Welsh and attempt to address the shortfall in Welsh speaking professionals in the NHS.

## **Gwynedd County Council**

Representative

Dafydd Iwan

Clive James

The following points were made in presentation:

- The Welsh language is not something peripheral which can be added onto other policies. The English language is so crucial that it does not need to be specifically addressed in policy documents; the language is taken for granted and we should aim to give Welsh a similar status.
- Mr Iwan made a plea for a stronger Welsh Language Act which recognises regional variations in language provision.
- One of the greatest challenges facing the Assembly is how to preserve areas where Welsh is the main language. We must find ways of devolving power, and jobs, from Cardiff to the regions.

- As a local authority, Gwynedd has had a great task in changing the image of its countryside and has done much to promote that the excellent outdoor sporting facilities that it enjoys. One of the Council's main roles must be to protect and defend local communities as has been achieved in the Lake District.
- A new Welsh Language Act would also give a firmer base to the language within the private and public sectors.
- However, a stronger Act will only come about by the goodwill of the people – the "bottom-up" approach.
- One group in Welsh society who are often forgotten are monoglot Welsh speakers, who have little English and when they become ill or senile, revert completely to their native language. When they are treated by a monoglot English-speaking doctor or nurse, they are often unable to communicate with that person.
- Judge Roderick Evans recently stated that there was a strong argument for Welsh speaking only, particularly in cases of child abuse where the child gives evidence in Welsh. It's important for the jury to understand Welsh in such cases.
- Gwynedd County Council works internally through the medium of Welsh and it is a skill which we can teach our children.

The following points were made in the question and answer session:

- The Chair welcomed the fact that Gwynedd's written evidence was drafted in Welsh and then translated. The normalisation of the language is one of the central aims of the review.
- Dafydd Iwan was not confident about Gwynedd's ability to keep Welsh speakers in Gwynedd, but wanted to make full use of Objective One funding in order to develop rural areas and allow Welsh people to enjoy the benefits of living in rural areas. The Council does use Clause 106 to restrict the award of planning permission, but applicants are able to re-apply for permission a few years down the line and to have that clause deleted.
- Improved transport links are needed between North and South Wales. We must resolve the currently difficulties in travelling from south to north.
- Post-16 Education in Wales remains in the English tradition. There are very few Welsh medium courses available; ELWA need to address this deficiency.
- The Workers Education Association is doing good work in ensuring that training courses are held in community settings. Some courses in Gwynedd have been held on housing estates and this has attracted people who would not normally attend training courses.
- There is little the Council can do about in-migration, but one of its main aims is to strengthen local communities, so that they are not threatened by in-migration.

## **Popeth Cymraeg**

Representative:

Ioan Talfryn

The following points were made in presentation:

- The demographic nature of the old county of Clwyd has changed significantly in recent years; the 1991 census showed that 41% of Clwyd's population were born outside Wales. However, many children born to people from outside Wales, attend Welsh medium schools.
- Education is a crucial factor in revitalising the language. The only way to ensure parity between the languages is by teaching subjects through the medium of Welsh.
- The number of in-migrants from England currently learning Welsh is very small (about 1% of the population). However that percentage is much higher in Welsh language strongholds such as Gwynedd and Ceredigion.
- Planning regulations can be used to make a contribution to the survival of the language eg regulations could state that the front of every shop has to be bilingual.
- Learning Welsh is difficult under the current social circumstances; we do not live in a climate of natural bilingualism that prevails on the continent.
- The current funding levels given to the Welsh Language Board is totally inadequate for the purpose of preserving and promoting the language.

## **National Language Centre (Nant Gwrtheyrn)**

Representative:

Aled Jones-Griffith

The following points were made in presentation:

- Encouraging people to use Welsh in the workplace is one way forward for the language.
- Letting people know about the availability of the provision is also crucial and Menter Iaith Gwynedd deserve much praise in this area. The latter send out a booklet to all people making enquiries about buying a home in Gwynedd, informing them of the Welsh classes that are available and about the particular culture of the area.
- The National Language Centre is located on the Llyn Peninsula where the availability of local employment is limited. Speaking Welsh is one way of binding these local

communities together, but there's also a need to draw in non-Welsh speakers so that they become fully integrated into these communities.

- Using Welsh as a medium to teach a subject is often more productive than teaching Welsh as a subject.

The following points were made in the subsequent question and answer session:

- In response to remarks made about the difficulty of learning Welsh, Ioan Talfryn compared Welsh to the Basque language. He said that the latter was a particularly difficult language to learn because it bore no relation to other languages, however people did make an effort to learn the language because the social context was completely different and the legislation supporting the language was strong.
- Ioan Talfryn felt that the whole structure of teaching Welsh to adults needed to be re-organised and that every county should have access to a language centre.
- Aled Jones-Griffith said it was difficult to estimate the precise cost of a training course for an individual, but reckoned it would cost about £1,000 to teach people to a competent level of fluency. Learning Welsh is often not that expensive for an individual: Individual Learning Accounts can often contribute up to 75% of the costs of a course. The Learning Centre is considering the options surrounding distance learning and are looking at the possibility of offering courses on the web.

Organisation:

**Cefn**

Representatives:

Eleri Carrog

Chris Jones

The following points were made in presentation:

- Cefn came into being as a civil rights movement in 1985 as a reaction to the mistake made by the Commission for Racial Equality when it prosecuted Gwynedd Council accusing it of racism because the Council wished to give a Welsh speaking service to old people with Welsh as their first language in an old people's home in Anglesey.
- Cefn is a voluntary, apolitical movement, with offices in Caernarfon, but whose work encompasses the whole of Wales.
- The Welsh language does not have equality of status as the language of the country because Wales was conquered by military force in 1282. With the killing of Llywelyn in 1282, a series of laws came into being against the Welsh and the use of the language,

yet this did not affect the use of the language by ordinary people.

- The turning point for the majority of people came with the Education Act of 1870, which made English, the language of education. There was now a direct compulsion on children to learn English and punishment for learning Welsh; English became the "norm" and the shadow of this history is a long one. The clearly stated intention was to force everyone in Wales to learn English and for the Welsh language to die. This oppression is clearly shown by the statistics: in 1801, 90% of the population of Wales spoke Welsh, by 1991, that figure was 18.7%.
- The present system does not expect children from homes where English is the spoken language to become bilingual, but there is both expectation and compulsion on children where the home language is Welsh to reach the same standard in English as children in England.
- People who speak Welsh have to use English in England, yet there is no compulsion on an English speaker to learn one word of Welsh before moving to Wales to live and work.
- Generally, Welsh is treated by civil servants, the police force and the court of law as secondary and those speaking the language as at best, a nuisance. Institutional racism is deeply ingrained in government services.
- The expectations of the majority of Welsh-speaking Welsh people and their self-image is extraordinarily low, because of the effect of what has happened and the institutional racism which they have had to face on a daily basis.
- In bilingual countries, such as Belgium, children are expected, by the time that they complete their education, to be fluent in both languages. The system does not allow this to happen in Wales, so incomers who are non-Welsh speaking cause the weakening of the native culture and a weakening of the national identity. This is not the fault of the incomers, but the fault of the system.

Cefn's main conclusions were:

- The present system is destructive to the continued existence of the Welsh language.
- There is a need for positive action on a substantial scale to safeguard the Welsh language in a number of ways.
- The National Assembly needs to declare that Welsh is an official language and also needs the commitment to ensure that is so. The declaration can be linked with an acknowledgement that the Welsh language has been treated unjustly because of the many twists of history.
- The Assembly, as the Government of Wales, should give an inspired leadership to renew the status of the language and secure its continued existence in Wales and the world.
- It is necessary to have positive discrimination for a period of time to remedy the situation.
- A Commission for Equality for Wales should be established for the purpose of research and analysis and to work in a positive manner to achieve equality.
- Those working in the civil service and its agencies should be bilingual, irrespective of their home language.

- Establish a system of twinning towns and villages within Wales.

Organisation:

## **North Wales Bilingualism Forum**

Representative:

Melangell Tegyd

The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- The Forum was established in 1997 and has proved to be good model for the achievement of bilingualism.
- In recent discussions, the Forum has noted several important themes which need to be addressed to ensure the strengthening of bilingual communities.
- There is a deficiency of bilingual training courses in Wales and there is also a failure to acknowledge bilingual skills. There's a lack of vocational training in a range of jobs and discussions are required to develop a national strategy.
- A recent meeting of the Forum under the chairmanship of Cynog Dafis AM discussed six recommendations in respect of training and recruitment. Ms Tegid asked the Committee to consider these recommendations and to include them in the final strategy.
- Provision of Welsh in certain key services (such as health and social services) is patchy. A number of bodies and organisations operated somewhat ad hoc bilingual recruitment policies.

## **Open microphone session**

The following comments were noted:

- Cllr Dafydd Jones felt that the Committee should have given over a full day for this meeting. He was disappointed that his enquires about the meeting had been dealt with by a monoglot English speaker.
- Helga Martin said that the Welsh language needs to be used naturally and that Assembly staff should learn to speak Welsh.
- Jill Roberts from Rhyl commented on the need for more language centres to be accessible to local communities. The development of Welsh medium schools has been a huge step forward for the language, but building on that for adults would mean considerable investment. She also commented that to reach fluency in the Welsh language takes a considerable amount of time and effort.



- The comment was made that the UK government spends considerable resources on teaching English to in-comers; a comparable amount should be spent teaching Welsh to in-comers to Wales.
- A member of the audience said that she was pleased that the Culture Committee had come to Denbigh and hoped that the Assembly would make the effort to reach out to all areas of Wales.
- Another speaker warned the Committee not to confuse concerns about the language with comments about institutional racism. He wanted a Language Commission to be established which would deal with complaints against both Welsh speakers and monoglot English speakers.
- John Les Thomas told the Committee to consider the language from the point of view of economics. He pointed to the fact that many Marston Pubs in Rhyl had bilingual signs and that unless bilingualism prevails in a home or social setting, it does not prevail at all. He was disappointed at the lack of Welsh speakers in key positions in Flintshire County Council and was not sure that this shortfall was being addressed despite assertions to the contrary. If the language is to survive it needs to be placed on the lips of nursery school children. He appealed to the politicians to place the language before political points scoring.
- Cllr Gwyneth Kensler requested a copy of the recently signed charter on European minority languages.

The Chair thanked those present for contributing to a lively and informative discussion on the language.

**Committee Secretariat**  
**July 2001**