

Culture Committee - CC-12-01(p.1)

Date: 4th July 2001

Time: 10.30am-13.00pm

Venue: Town Hall, Denbigh

DRAFT PAPER FROM DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CULTURE COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE

The following brief draft response is submitted based on the themes outlined in the consultation package in support of the verbal presentation to the Committee.

1. ENABLING

1.1 In order to empower and enable people to use either language or both in all aspects of national life and in the community the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms must exist. The County Council can and does play a vital role in this both as employer and provider of public services.

1.2 A significant and above average (for Wales) proportion of the workforce in Denbighshire is employed in the public sector (42%) - working in white collar management admin./professional jobs. With an emphasis on working with partners and a legislative requirement to prepare a community strategy, the County Council must lead in this important future policy area. All partners, both in the public and business sectors should be encouraged to sign up to a commitment to bilingualism. The impact of such a commitment should filter down to the local communities in the process.

1.3 Taking "Betterwales.com" as a template the emphasis must be on "inclusiveness". The Housing, Planning and Economic Development departments do consider the impact that their policies have on language and culture. It is noted that by March 2003 all partners should work with the Assembly to achieve the result of stabilising the proportion of Welsh speakers.

1.4 We must sustain the growth in the number of young people who speak the language and support adult learners. The Council must endeavour, by developing its own staff development programmes, continue to encourage its staff to learn and improve their Welsh and thereby increase and enhance the public's ability to exercise its choice as to which language to use when conducting business.

1.5 The Unitary Development Plan seeks to protect and promote the language and culture by:-

- restricting the number of houses that can be built in rural areas

- preparing land for industry in order to provide opportunities for local people to work in their communities

- where there is the danger of a harmful effect on the language and culture, ask the developer to assess the implicationse

1.6 The Welsh Language Board has contributed to the Unitary Development policies and the County Council has agreed to prepare additional detailed Planning Guidelines on the Welsh language.

2. SUPPORTING THE WELSH LANGUAGE IN THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

2.1 In medium/long term the future of Welsh as a family and community language will depend on the availability and quality of bilingual pre-school provision and of sustainable adult learning provision. Assuming that the mainstream 5-16 year old education provision is continuing to prepare local children and young persons to have essential skills in Welsh and English, the community and workplace must be environments where Welsh is seen and used not only as a vibrant spoken medium but also written and that all levels of competence are catered for.

2.2 With movements of population in and out of our rural and urban areas those who move in, should they so desire, be integrated so that, by suitable age-group targeting, e.g. pre-school and nursery provision and an early introduction to the Welsh language and later high quality training in the workplace there ia a sustainability for the Welsh language despite constant pressures caused by demographic changes. Special initiatives in this regard could benefit from external funding subject to current rules and regulations e.g. Euro/Objective One funding opportunities.

2.3 Employment is a key factor in sustaining communities. When marketing Denbighshire, we emphasise bilingualism and the cultural diversity of the area. Employers tend to lay more emphasis on skills levels in the workforce and the availability of sites within easy reach of good transport links etc. The availability of good quality jobs for young people to enter is necessary to ensure the survival of a vigorous community. The trend of out migration from rural Denbighshire has gathered pace since the first World War and results from the lack of job opportunities.

2.4 The survival of the Welsh language in Denbighshire is dependent on the location in the County of vigorous companies able to develop and market their products to global standards.

In this way we can ensure that there is sustainable work for our young people and through this that the benefits of the local education system in teaching Welsh to pupils can be used locally during their adult careers in Denbighshire.

3. LEARNING WELSH

3.1 As a major employer in Wales, the Council's training strategy includes provision for workplace training for staff. This provision is monitored and is currently under review to ensure that opportunities are there for those who want to learn. Staff are encouraged to use the language and the Council's bilingual policy states the right to an equal service in either language. Training is an evolving activity and up-skilling whether in learning Welsh or in other aspects is something to be positively encouraged. The ability to speak and communicate in writing through the medium of Welsh is increasingly viewed as an essential skill.

3.2 Plans are well advanced to pilot new training opportunities to ensure more extensive use of the Welsh language in all of Denbighshire's offices. These plans follow on from the constructive and timely report received recently from the Welsh Language Board. These plans will be presented to Cabinet and the Full Council in July 2001.

4. RESPECT AND GOODWILL TOWARDS BILINGUALISM - BELIEF, PRIDE AND CONFIDENCE

4.1 The following reflect the Council's existing and future development work in building an ethos of respect and goodwill towards the Welsh language and bilingualism. In Denbighshire, this is seen as developing an existing culture of bilingualism. There are also listed below suggested areas of national policy which would be influential in realising a vision for the future:-

- Always have simultaneous translation available for meetings - even where these are less formal.
- Always ensure documentation is bilingual;
- Approach our partners in other sectors in the community business to adopt bilingualism e.g. by advertising bilingually and by carrying prominent bilingual signage.
- Encourage local businesses small and large to have bilingual staff available.
- Tie up (via contractual) arrangements to ensure contractors adhere to the Council's policies.
- If Members of the Council or Officers are Welsh-speaking - encourage them to use the language in conducting their official business and take responsibility for the success of the bilingual policy.
- Use the media to promote bilingualism via in-house P.R. mechanism.
- Investment in bilingualism should not be measured monetary terms .
- Making full use of the corporate strength of County Council should ensure that

bilingualism is a cross- cutting issue and permanently "on the agenda".

- The County Council can and should pro-actively "drive" on bilingualism in the community to create a positive impact on other organisations.

NATIONAL

- Raise the status of the language and culture and put them at the same level as environmental matters. This could be done through issuing new Regulations which require that any major development would have to through vigorous checks particularly in areas of linguistic and cultural sensitivity - like the Environment Impact Assessment.
- Revise the Technical Advice Note that is published by the Assembly and include practical examples of how to assess the impact of development on language and culture.
- Issue new regulations to make it essential for each Council to assess the effects of potential policies in the Unitary Development Plan on the language and culture i.e. similar to the requirementd in the environmental appraisal.
- Ensure that the National Assembly for Wales intervenes where the Unitary Development Plan does not show clearly that effects on the Welsh Language have not been taken into account.
- Change Planning Circular on Section 106 Agreements to allow Councils legally to ask developers for a financial contribution or other contribution towards promoting local culture e.g. help maintain schools, local community newspapers (Papurau Bro), community shops etc.

29/06/01