

1. The perceived achievements and limitations of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 legislation

1.1 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the establishment of the Welsh language Commissioner has, from our perspective as a County Council, offered us more positive opportunities than negative challenges in our attempts to promote the Welsh language in the county. The existence of an external body with the ability to enforce has provided us with a stronger basis for our efforts to provide bilingual services and to promote the Welsh language in the county. The legislative backbone that the Measure has provided has raised the status of the Welsh language and has encouraged consistency and higher standards of provision of bilingual services in general.

It is also true that the shift from setting expectations on ourselves (as happened through the former Language Schemes) to having expectations placed on us has raised the status of those expectations within a large public body like ours.

The process of establishing the Welsh Language Standards (though a long process) was fit for purpose, as it gave an organization the opportunity to have input, initially by discussing, and then by challenging some of the Standards that were more difficult to implement practically.

We feel it is crucial to keep the legislative strength of the Standards. Losing the authority of the legislation by going too far towards encouraging public bodies rather than enforcing would be a step back in our view. Organisations have now gone through the process of responding to the Standards and although it has been a challenging experience in some cases we believe that it has begun to have a positive impact on the availability of Welsh-medium services and the awareness of Welsh speakers of those services.

1.2 The main challenge we as a county council faced as a result of the new legislation was that relatively minor matters that were actually very easily

rectified (such as a sign with grammatical errors) had to be dealt with through a long-winded official public enquiry by the Commissioner. This, in turn, created a great deal of administrative work for all involved. Indeed, we have had some examples where the mistake has been acknowledged and rectified even before the official enquiry has started. It would be far better to have a system whereby a minor matter could be dealt with differently to a more complex one that might involve staffing implications for instance.

- 1.3 We have also felt that the process of monitoring the Standards has relied too heavily on complaints. From our experience within a public body, it is the more minor matters that people generally lodge complaints about, such as signs and written materials, rather than the availability of services that have wider implications in terms of language use. We would suggest that more monitoring of the progress made with key Standards would better instigate consistent, national standards than paying heed to minor matters that arise from local complaints.
- 1.4 As a public organisation which has promoting the Welsh language in its remit, we perceived the emphasis put on regulating at the expense of promoting the Welsh language after the introduction of the Act as the main weakness of recent developments. As previously noted, the work of regulating is crucial, but there is also a need for focus on promoting the Welsh language. Since the dissolution of the Welsh language Board, there has been no leadership offered in terms of national language planning; no advice or assistance for organisations currently lacking in knowledge and understanding of language planning. There has been a distinct lack of leadership in terms of coordinating and linking up efforts to promote the Welsh language nationally, although there are a number of areas in which national coordination would be very beneficial, for instance useful data collection, measuring effect, and marketing.
- 1.5 We also feel that a support structure for public bodies has been lost in the period since the introduction of the Standards. It would have been extremely useful to have a network for officers and cabinet portfolio members to share good practise and to exchange experiences of implementing the Standards. As there was no such mechanism, we feel that individual organisations have duplicated a lot of the work of analysing the Standards and regulations, of creating materials, marketing campaigns and new forms of communication.

1.6 In some cases, we have found that the current legislation is not robust or far-reaching enough to assist us in our efforts to promote the language in the county. In matters involving the private sector, we have had to utilize legislation on other fields in order to enable us to insist on the use of the Welsh language in our communities. In this, we refer specifically to planning legislation which we used to ensure that a business in an Welsh speaking community used bilingual signs. The Welsh language Measure (Wales) was not robust enough to allow us to refuse monolingual English signs. In the end, it was the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act that provided us with the crucial legislation. It does not make sense that the legislation specifically introduced to safeguard the Welsh language is less effective than other legislation in terms of promoting the Welsh language.

2. The impact and effectiveness of Welsh language standards in improving Welsh medium services and access to those services.

2.1 Many of the Standards that are too extensive to be listed here have assisted us in our efforts to improve our provision of Welsh-medium services. In our opinion, not enough time has not passed to see if the standards have improved access to those services. There is still much work to be done to raise people's expectations of the services they can expect, in order to increase their demand and use.

2.2 One of the Standards that has initiated the greatest improvement in our procedures as a local authority is the Standard that requires us to identify the language skills of our staff. All our data collection processes have improved in order to enable us to update this information correctly.

2.3 All the Service Delivery Standards have been effective in challenging us to provide consistent services in Welsh, although there are a number that raise questions that require discussion on a national level to resolve e.g. how to provide Welsh / bilingual training of a suitable standard).

2.4 The Promotion Standards have also motivated us to formalize our efforts to promote the Welsh language across the county. Although we, as a council, have been taking purposeful steps to promote the Welsh language for some years now, we hope that this Standard has been a crucial driver for other councils to try act in order to stop the decline in the number of speakers in their counties.

3. 1. Does the legislative framework support the promotion and use of the Welsh language or does it limit this work?

3.1 In our experience, the legislative framework has been essential to support the promotion of the Welsh language, both internally and externally to our organisation. However, we feel the need for a timely review of Welsh Language Standards to ensure that organisations are progressing in their provision of services and are reaching higher expectation of Standards.

3.2 In our view, we need to provide the opportunity / time for the Standards to become well established. Time must be given for the expectations of the public to be raised, alongside the public knowledge of their rights. The public need to understand the principle that they have the right to access Welsh language services and it is for the bodies to meet the requirements of the Standards.

3.3 The Welsh Language Board's monitoring system was not robust enough and did not have legislative authority. We do not want to go back to the 'voluntary' nature of the Welsh Language Schemes. However, national support and guidance is needed alongside enforcement, especially in areas such as assessing the linguistic impact assessment of new developments.