

OFFICIAL ATTENDANCE OF RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL'S WELSH LANGUAGE CABINET STEERING GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group on Wednesday 30th November, 2016 at 3pm at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale.

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

G Hopkins – Chairman

R Bevan E Hanagan C Davies

Officers in attendance

Mrs W Edwards – Head of Community Learning

Mrs E Thomas – Temporary Director, Education & Lifelong Learning

Mr S Gealy – Service Manger – Welsh Language Services

Ms E Siôn - Menter Iaith

Ms Heledd Morgan – Public Services Partnership Manager

Ms Hannah Williams – Cabinet Business Officer

17 APOLOGIES

Apologies for attendance were received from County Borough Councillor M Webber and the Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr C Hanagan.

18 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pertaining to the agenda.

19 MINUTES

The minutes of the 10th October, 2016 were approved as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN WITH THE FFORWM IAITH ON THE DRAFT WELSH LANGUAGE PROMOTION STRATEGY

The Head of Community Learning provided the Steering Group with the results of the consultation undertaken with Fforwm Iaith in respect of the draft Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.

The Group were reminded of the meeting which took place on 10th October, 2016, where it was decided that the draft Strategy would be referred to the County's Fforwm Iaith. This would give the opportunity for the organisations to identify whether the targets outlined within the strategy were realistically achievable or whether further support would be required.

Ms E Siôn, Menter Iaith advised the Group that a meeting took place on the 4th November, 2016 where the Promotion Strategy was reviewed. It was explained that, overall, Fforwm Iaith members spoke positively on the strategy, commenting that it was encouraging to see an ambitious target for increasing the number of Welsh speakers in the County.

The Fforwm Iaith members felt that the current format of the draft action plan placed responsibilities on them which exceeded their remit. The Group were referred to the recommendations, where it was asked that the plan be split into two parts in order to identify areas of accountability in respect of what the Council is responsible for and what the organisations are able to contribute to.

Ms Siôn explained that by making these amendments to the strategy, it would give clarity to both the Council and partners as to what is expected of them individually, whilst further highlighting any gaps which may need to be addressed within the plan.

The Group recognised the issues raised by Fforwm Iaith, with the Chair stating that the contribution of the partners would be a key factor in helping the Council meet its target.

The Group acknowledged that the strategy would continue to be envisioned as a whole by both the Council and its partners but that the new format would work on a more practical level.

Questions arose around Welsh Government's involvement in the Council's Promotion Strategy. The Acting Director, Education & Lifelong Learning explained that there was no clear direction given from WG which meant the suggested split approach would be acceptable if it was the best method for the County.

Following discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- a) Receive an amended version of the strategy highlighting the division of responsibilities in the New Year.

21 WELSH IN EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (WESP) 2017-2020

The Public Services Partnership Manager provided the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group with the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) 2017-2020 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet on the 15th December, 2016 and submission to Welsh Government by 20th December, 2016. Members were advised that the deadlines were very tight this year and that the draft would likely change prior to its final submission.

Members were pleased to see an improvement in education standards and were referred to the guidelines outlined in Section 4.4 of the report:

Welsh Medium Education Strategy outcomes:

- i. More seven year old children being taught through the medium of Welsh as a percentage of the Year 2 cohort;
- ii. More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary school to secondary school;
- iii. More learners studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh;
- iv. More learners aged 16-19 years old studying Welsh and subjects through the medium of Welsh; and
- v. More learners with improved skills in Welsh.

In addition, Welsh Government also asks that Local Authorities seek to address through their WESP:

- vi. Welsh medium provision for learners with additional learning needs; and
- vii. Workforce planning / continuing professional development for Education Authority staff.

Members spoke positively of the WESP outcomes, questioning whether these could be reviewed throughout the three years. It was advised that the report goes to Cabinet annually with the opportunity to be reviewed by the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group also.

The officer explained that much like the previous item, the WESP had been presented to the meeting of the Fforwm Iaith on 4th November, 2016, providing the opportunity for them to comment.

Ms Siôn welcomed the opportunity for Fforwm Iaith to scrutinise the draft strategy and referred Members to a tabled document (attached) which outlined 11 areas in which they believed the WESP could be improved.

Ms Siôn stated that education remained a key priority in raising the number of Welsh speakers in the County and that a strategic plan needed to be in place to ensure the growth of schools. Fforwm Iaith also placed emphasis on the importance of post-16 education and career routes, commenting that focussing on the development of this would have a snowfall effect on the number of Welsh speakers in the work place.

Members spoke positively of Fforwm Iaith's response to the draft strategy, commenting that it identified areas which could be developed to make a more successful vision for the future.

Discussions embarked around Welsh Medium schools and the barrier placed on them in respect of transport. The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning commented that although it is to the conviction of parents to decide which school is best for their child, the school journey can often deliver a positive experience with social interaction for the children. Members of the Group agreed that transport does have an adverse effect on children attending Welsh Schools and that it would continue to be a challenge to convince parents to steer from what is often considered the most convenient option of English speaking schools. Ms Sion commented that there is strong need for the WESP and the Welsh Language Promotion strategy to tie together to tackle issues such as these.

Concerns were raised in respect of the transition from Meithrin to primary school with Members agreeing that the number of speakers would improve at a younger level if the children were encouraged to attend the Welsh-medium schools. It was advised that this was a positive step which the Welsh Government were currently looking into.

Members queried the use of social media in relation to the Welsh language and were advised that there were currently projects underway on both a local and national scale to enhance the use of both mediums.

Following further discussions, it was **RESOLVED** to:

- a) Note the contents of the report

22 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

With the agreement of the Chairman, the next meeting of the Welsh Language Steering Group will take place on Wednesday 25th January, 2017.

This meeting closed at 4pm

**Cllr G Hopkins
Chairman.**