

**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 Monday 19th June 2017 at 10am at the Council Headquarters, Clydach Vale.

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

G Hopkins - Chairman

R Bevan J Rosser S Rees-Owen

Officers in attendance

Mrs W Edwards – Head of Community Learning

Mr S Gealy – Service Manger – Welsh Language Services

Ms E Siôn - Menter Iaith

Ms E Thomas – Temporary Director, Education & Lifelong Learning

Mr G Colombo De Menezes – Graduate Officer

Ms K Herbert – Graduate Officer

Ms Hannah Williams – Cabinet Business Officer

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome new Members and the two Graduate Officers to the meeting of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group. Apologies for attendance were received from County Borough Councillor M Webber and the Secretary to the Cabinet, Mr C Hanagan.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the 25th January, 2017 were approved as an accurate reflection of the meeting subject to the following amendment:-

26. The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy – paragraph 13 – ‘at a time where the population is savvier’ to be removed and amended to ‘The Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Tourism and Planning explained the difficulty of developing new buildings due to a lack of land and a change in demographic.’

4. WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS COMPLIANCE REPORT TO THE WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER 2016-17.

The Head of Community Learning took the opportunity to provide new Members of the Steering Group with the background of the Welsh Language Act, the newly introduced Standards and the work of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group.

The Officer explained that in 1993, the Welsh Language Act was passed, which put the Welsh Language on an equal footing with the English Language in Wales; and in 2011, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure was passed by the National Assembly for Wales to give the Welsh Language official status in Wales.

In 2015, the Welsh Language Commissioner introduced the Welsh Language Standards, established by the Welsh Government under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. The Officer explained that it was the Council's duty to comply with these standards, or a fine would be issued following each complaint upheld. The Steering Group were reminded that 14 of the Standards were challenged by Rhondda Cynon Taf due to issues with time scales etc, and as a result, the Commissioner had extended certain deadlines to March 2018. The Officer explained that since the appeal, six simultaneous translators had been trained to relieve the pressure on the service and that the Council remained committed to its duty to promote the Welsh Language and to consider it no less favourably than the English Language.

The Officer explained that Cabinet approved the Action Plan in 2016; thanking Fforwm Iaith for their extensive partnership work in ensuring the standards are met and thanking all Members, commenting that the cross-party Steering Group highlighted that the Welsh Language isn't political, but rather a cross-cutting theme in the Council's Corporate Plan as a whole.

Members of the Steering Group were advised the report before them was the second annual monitoring report published by the Council in respect of the way it has complied with the Statutory Standards. It was explained that Standards 158, 164 and 170 of the Compliance Notice issued under section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 requires the Council to produce a report in relation to each financial year which underpins the way in which the Council has complied with the service delivery standards, the policy making standards and the operational standards.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her report, commenting that it was pleasing to see progress being made across service areas of the Council. The Chair queried the complaints received during the financial year 2016-17, and in particular, those relating to swimming lessons. The Officer advised that there had been three investigations:-

1. Swimming Lessons conducted in the medium of Welsh
2. One non-translated out of office email response
3. An email response delivered in the medium of English

With regard to swimming lessons, the Officer explained that the Leisure department had been pro-active in their response to the complaint, with positive meetings taking place. It was explained that there was an ongoing attempt to develop staff language skills but unfortunately not all were fully qualified; however, an ongoing advert had been released, offering a programme to 16-18 year olds, who would be trained and paid for delivering swimming lessons.

Councillor S Rees-Owen referred the Group to page 51 of the report, where Recruitment and Advertising information was displayed; asking which posts in the Council wouldn't require Welsh Language skills. The Officer explained that this was an issue for each individual service, but provided an example of internal staff in the Finance department, who may not require skills but staff working with the public or at reception may need to be able to converse in the medium of Welsh.

The Councillor also noted that there was no mention of the number of Welsh speakers among the Elected Members. The Service Manager, Welsh Language Services advised that this wasn't included as it wasn't a requirement by the Commissioner. The Officer added that there were currently thirteen Elected Members with an understanding of the Welsh Language and that it was pleasing to note that others had shown an interest in learning.

Ms E Siôn, Menter Iaith, referred back to the recruitment aspect of the Council, commenting that there was an opportunity for service areas to revisit the application process, ensuring that more public posts include information on the Welsh Language skills required.

The Officer advised that the report had to be published to the Council's website by no later than 30th June 2017.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report, commenting that future reports should inform the Council's plan.

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

- a) Note the contents of the report
- b) Approve the report for publication on Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's website and in each of the authority's offices that are open to the public by no later than 30th June 2017.
- c) Make arrangements for publicising the fact that the annual report has been published.

5. PROMOTION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Graduate Officers, Ms K Herbert and Mr G Colombo De Menezes provided the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group with information in respect of a project they were undertaking to support the Council in its requirement to meet all relevant statutory standards as noted in the Statutory Compliance Notice under the new Welsh Language Standards, 2015.

The Officers explained that the aim was to Create a delivery plan that identifies how the recommendations made in the 'Welsh language services within tackling poverty programmes in RCT' can be addressed to support the Council's wider 5 year strategy for promoting the Welsh language in RCT.

It was explained that a number of methods were used to collect information and data in respect of Welsh language users throughout RCT, including staff skills surveys and internal and external discussions.

The results of the survey were as follows:-

- A total of 85 staff members were interviewed
- The vast majority (80%) have said they have little or none overall understanding
- Only 6% (5 people) have a good knowledge and 9% (8 people) were considered fluent
- The Cynon Valley had the highest number of Welsh language speakers (or residents who perceived themselves as confident enough to use the language)

The Officers went on to provide the Steering Group with the main issues related to Welsh Language promotion in the County:-

- Lack of staff with Welsh Language Skills
- Welsh language is associated with School / Education
- Mindset that the Welsh language is not required in this area
- Limited resources and funding
- Understanding of the Standards and how they apply to the voluntary organisations

Recognising the issues and opportunities presented to organisations and clubs within RCT, the Officers recommended that:-

- An 'information pack' is distributed to each organisation/ work club setting for ease of reference and provision of complimentary resources
- Discussions be held with the Youth Engagement and Participation Services (YEPS) to find out more about their activities and learn from their approaches and techniques.
- A website/app/shared space on RCT website for members of each voluntary organisation/work club be developed

The Chair commented that the work conducted by the Graduate Officers recognised that there was a need for balance between creating demand and providing for demand, adding that this would be an ongoing issue to progress due to the demographic of RCT.

Members of the Steering Group were provided with a draft example of the information pack which would be distributed to organisations and work clubs, recognising that it would be a useful resource for quick translation.

The Chair queried the inclusion of cultural factors in the draft pack, suggesting that it would be more streamlined if it were to contain more specific reference to compliance issues.

The Chair also raised a query in respect of the Welsh Language Unit and the support they offer, with the Service Manager, Welsh Language Services confirming that the unit would translate for those organisations commissioned by the Council.

The Temporary Director, Education & Lifelong Learning was disappointed to see that a vast amount of people surveyed were not confident in their knowledge of the Welsh Language and had therefore underscored themselves. The Temporary Director commented that there were four Welsh Medium schools in RCT, with all English schools providing Welsh Language education. Members of the Steering Group agreed that confidence issues are an integral part in the way a person perceives themselves.

Conversations ensued around methods to raise confidence levels in those who possess Welsh Language skills at different abilities. Ms E Sion suggested that a short language awareness session would be useful as part of any future language surveys, allowing people to have a better understanding of their knowledge. The Head of the Welsh Language Service, S Gealy reassured the Group that the Welsh Government are in the process

of launching an assessment tool which will allow users to self-assess their Welsh abilities in a comfortable environment. It was also advised that the Translation Service had recently employed a Tutor who is able to offer a service to those wishing to develop their language skills.

Councillor Rees-Owen expressed the importance of the Council conveying the support it has to offer to organisations, staff and residents, in order for them to have a broader understanding of the opportunities.

Discussions ensued around the role of the Voluntary Sector, where the Group recalled the duties being separated from those of the Council under the Action Plan. The Graduate Officers advised that if the voluntary organisation or work club provider is commissioned by the Council, there is a need for them to comply with the Standards. The Cabinet Member for Education & Lifelong Learning, Councillor J Rosser, added that although the figures of Welsh Language users within the Voluntary Sector were low, there was a positive attitude and willing to learn amongst them.

Ms E Siôn suggested that it would be useful if more services within each work club were included and that 'Gyfer Cymru' would be a valuable and local addition to the list.

Discussions again formed around the recruitment process of the Council, with Members commenting that there was a need for more robust definition of the Welsh Language aspect of the person specification. The Head of Community Learning agreed that the requirements, 'essential' and 'desirable' do not have the same meaning for every role. For example, a receptionist post may require essential Welsh skills orally, but to communicate Welsh in written form may be a desirable requirement. Members of the Steering Group unanimously agreed that this is something which both the Human Resources department and the Heads of Service recruiting need to have a stronger understanding of prior to advertising a post.

The Graduate Officers concluded by reassuring the Steering Group that they would continue their work with the Welsh Language Unit and the Tackling Poverty Programmes, taking into account the comments made by Members.

The Chair thanked the Graduate Officers for their informative presentation, suggesting that they return to a future meeting of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group to present an update on the progress made.

***At 11am, Members of the Steering Group stood for a national minute's silence to remember the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire.**

As a new Member of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group, Councillor S Rees-Owen raised several questions in respect of the new translation arrangements for Committee meetings of the Council. The Councillor was advised that translation equipment will be made available at all future relevant meetings, with there being no need to give notice.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Welsh Language Cabinet Steering Group was due to take place on Tuesday 14th November, 2017, providing a meeting isn't needed at an earlier date.

This meeting closed at 11:10am

**Cllr G Hopkins
Chairman.**