

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language
and Communications Committee
Ymchwiliad Strategaeth Iaith Gymraeg / Welsh Language Strategy Inquiry
CWLC(5) WLS30
Ymateb gan Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen / Evidence from Torfaen
County Borough Council

A million Welsh speakers by 2050;

Changing the current status of the language will take a radical approach and Torfaen Council welcomes the Welsh Government recognition that this can only be done over a generation.

The target is challenging, and means doubling the number of Welsh speakers over the life of the strategy, and for this to be achieved will require significant, additional and ongoing resourcing and investment. Torfaen is a committed and willing partner to increasing the use of the Welsh language and hosts a Welsh Language medium Secondary School and has invested in additional Welsh Language education provision for our children through the recent building of a new state of the art primary school at Ysgol Panteg, this will support the overall direction in meeting the target.

The strategy must recognise the importance of the areas where the percentage of Welsh language speakers is low and the particular challenges faced by organisations in these areas. In recognition of this statement, Welsh Government must also recognise that we operate within the current climate of continuing financial constraints on Local Authorities; providing and promoting services in Welsh where demand is presently low will require appropriate additional resourcing whilst continuing to provide front line services in the here and now.

Policies, strategies and initiatives of the Welsh Government should reflect the vision, and ensure consistency and also importantly generate and sustain 'buy in' from the public across Wales – perhaps most importantly in those areas where Welsh is spoken by a significant minority of people and where parents are not choosing Welsh medium education for their children currently.

People learn Welsh for many reasons and at different stages within their lives, with the establishment of the National Centre for Learning Welsh, targets should be set, in conjunction with providing regional Centres with funding to deliver the courses at affordable rates. While parents can choose Welsh medium education for their children, it remains the case that most parents make this choice within (and typically at the beginning of) the primary phase. As a nation, we need to invest in immersion facilities that enable any child to begin their Welsh medium education at any point during their statutory education. This will be expensive to develop and sustain and will require significant support and resourcing from Welsh Government.

Torfaen County Borough Council will contribute through ensuring compliance of the Welsh Language Standards and fulfilling its obligations under other statutory legislation. With this in mind, it is important that the work of the Welsh Government, in relation to Welsh language is aligned with the Welsh language Commissioner, and vice versa, recognising that Local Authorities throughout Wales can assist in achieving this ambitious target and a partnership of encouragement rather than enforcement would be a good base to start.

Culture and leadership;

The requirement for the Council within the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure to produce a 5 year local strategy on maintaining/increasing the number of Welsh speakers has been undertaken but there is no guidance to offer reliable mechanisms for measuring growth/decline from Welsh Government. The Council in response to this requirement has grown capacity in Welsh language medium education and alongside informing parents that there is a choice, we expect to meet the existing/future demand but this demand will be determined by parents. Promotion of the Welsh language will also be a measure and will support the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards.

The Council would want to draw Welsh Governments attention to the potential for existing policy conflict. There is a real danger that in reducing child places, which Torfaen has undertaken in consultation with its residents and in compliance to existing Welsh Government policy that there may not be enough places in schools to meet a different policy driver. Welsh Government should review its criteria around 21st Century Schools and the requirements on Local Authorities to manage surplus placements in order that these do not conflict with the aspiration to meet the 2050 target.

Categorisation / Language continuum;

The areas within the “A living language: a language for living” strategy put people into categories, which were far too ambiguous. This strategy focuses on the individual, with emphasis on how to support Welsh speakers and the importance of all organisations working together.

Councils are one of the major public service employers with any given area of Wales. Councils and in the future health boards, the Police, Fire and Rescue Services and other public bodies will become subject to the Welsh Language Standards. As a consequence, advertised jobs will need to be identified as requiring varying job essential or otherwise Welsh language use and this will help promote the use of the language. Job opportunities will inevitably drive people to those areas where jobs exist and this will likely impact on our ability to retain those who use Welsh language following welsh language medium education to remain in Torfaen.

In part, we want to avoid the language being seen as being elite, and every learner and native speaker should be encouraged to use the language regardless of ability, and these positives should be encouraged. By creating the opportunities to use the language, we will create the confidence in our speakers. This however will take time over generations to achieve. It is vital that investment is made to address the reasons, which is mainly due to the social opportunities, and recognise the excellent work that the Mentrau Iaith,

the Urdd and Mudiad Meithrin do in creating these opportunities, albeit with very little resources.

This must be a multi-agency approach and through the policies of the Welsh Government, each sector should be accountable for ensuring that services are available and that the use of the Welsh language is encouraged. Welsh Government should incentivise / provide training with support for a range of professional qualifications through the medium of Welsh if this is to change.

Apprenticeships are on the increase and within the Welsh Governments apprenticeship policy, each employer should offer support that Welsh skills are recognised or learnt, however this should be by choice rather than a mandatory requirement.

Community engagement;

The Welsh Government must ensure that the language belongs to us all, not only Welsh speakers. By strengthening the role of non-Welsh speakers in promoting and use of the language, will ensure that the language is seen and heard within communities, but also mindful that you cannot force people to learn Welsh.

By having a national awareness Campaign for Councils and other organisations to implement, highlighting the benefits of bilingual education, identity and Welsh as a brand in commerce, this would also have the desired effect of people wanting to use their language.

Torfaen Council agree that the quickest and most sustainable way to increase the number of Welsh speakers is through our Education system. Clarity, guidance and a steer is needed by Welsh Government, allowing LA's to promote Welsh medium education/bilingual education.

With pressure from WG to reduce surplus places within our schools, it is difficult to be showing disparity, and creating surplus places within our Welsh Medium schools to satisfy the "build and they will come" ethos

Working together and building on what is already being done is key. Whilst recognising the fine balance in some parts of Wales, as here in Torfaen, where a “heavy handed” approach will tip the balance between accepting the language as part of our culture and Welsh as a barrier to growth.

Welsh is a Community language and children should be educated as near as possible to their homes. By locating Welsh medium schools outside those communities, children do not play with their friends through the medium of Welsh, and therefore Welsh Communities aren’t nurtured. We create individuals not Communities

Integration.

With information technology a significant part of our daily lives, the WG should include within the strategy a more focused objective that will ensure the development of packages, here in Wales, being available bilingually.

As an Authority, we support our partners, with Welsh language translation, guidance and advice. The strategy should ensure that this support is given too small businesses who would otherwise struggle to offer their services in Welsh, either directly by WG or through local Councils.

A national publicity campaign around the use of the Welsh language should be developed to convey the clear message that all public services are there in Welsh to be used. The rights of Welsh speakers remain uncertain, especially through this period of challenges, appeals, and tribunals of the Welsh Language Standards by Public Bodies.

Having a positive campaign that reflects the strategy, would empower Welsh speakers to use their language in everyday life.

The Welsh Government is seen as best practice when it comes to language planning. This strategy has the potential to influence much further afield than the content of the strategy itself and the WG immediate partners.

To realise the Million Welsh speakers by 2050, there must be resources and investment given to the language, both on a local and national level.

Recognising that the heartlands of the language need protecting, whereas the growth areas of Wales need nurturing.