

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD**

### **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**23<sup>rd</sup> JULY 2015**

#### **SECTION A – MATTER FOR DECISION**

**WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL**

#### **WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS – COMPLIANCE NOTICE CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To seek agreement on a response to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice consultation.

##### **Background**

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 established a framework for introducing duties on persons to comply with statutory standards relating to the Welsh language. The standards will replace the current system of Welsh language schemes established under the Welsh Language Act 1993.

A Standards Investigation was undertaken by the Welsh Language Commissioner between January and April 2014, the results of which were reported to Welsh Ministers. Further consultation was undertaken on proposed regulations in December 2014 with The Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015 being passed in March.

We have responded to all consultations and written separately to the First Minister setting out our commitment to both the Welsh language and culture. However, we have also stressed that with the financial and staffing constraints we currently, and will continue to face, we would be unable to meet the Standards in their entirety.

## **Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice**

The Welsh Language Commissioner issued our draft Compliance Notice on 22 June. We now have a further opportunity to respond to these Standards – the deadline is 20 July (however the Commissioner has agreed for our response to be sent on 23 July, due to our reporting cycle).

Our Compliance Notice includes 168 Standards covering service delivery, policy, operational, record keeping and promotion activities. Of these, compliance is required on 155 standards within 6 months of the issue date (expected to be at the end of September) and on the remaining 13 standards within 12 months.

### **Compliance Notice Analysis**

There are a number of Standards where we consider can we should accept the requirement to comply because they are either already in our Scheme or they would require little or no cost to do so; **92** Standards indicated as green in the analysis. However, Members are asked to note that even in some of these areas, full compliance will be challenging.

Some Standards could be met either within different timescales or in part within existing resources; **25** Standards indicated as amber in the analysis.

The remaining Standards are considered practically impossible to comply with due to both financial and operational reasons; **51** Standards indicated as red.

The analysis is attached at Appendix 1.

### **Consultation Response**

The consultation response, Appendix 2, is set against a background of the current, and anticipated, austerity measures.

While we remain committed to the Welsh language and culture, we recognise there are limitations in meeting the full range of Standards required in the Compliance Notice due to the current, and ongoing, financial situation.

We will be able to meet a number of the Standards but there will be others which we will need to ‘park’ until such time as public sector funding returns to

a position of growth and others which will remain practically impossible to meet in full.

Fulfilment of the Compliance Notice would require significant financial investment which at a time of austerity would require significant savings in other areas; savings from frontline services could not be ruled out.

In addition to these financial implications our ability to meet the staffing requirements would also be problematic primarily due to the number of staff leaving the council over recent years and the ongoing recruitment freeze which combine to limit linguistic capability in our workforce.

While we can provide Welsh language training for staff reaching a level of fluency to provide a service in Welsh would take considerable time, something that does not appear to have been taken into account in the Standards.

### **Recommended**

To agree a response to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice consultation.

### **Reasons for the Proposed Decision**

To enable the Council to respond to the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice consultation taking into account current austerity measures and seeking a renegotiated Compliance Notice.

### **Appendix**

Appendix 1 – Compliance Notice Analysis

Appendix 2 – Compliance Notice Response Form

### **Officer Contact**

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## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

### DRAFT STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

#### **(a) Implementation of Decision**

The decision is proposed for immediate implementation

#### **(b) Sustainability Appraisal**

Economic Prosperity	-	Neutral
Education & Lifelong Learning	-	Neutral
Better Health & Wellbeing	-	Neutral
Environment & Transport	-	Neutral
Crime & Disorder	-	Neutral

#### **Other Impacts**

Welsh Language	-	Positive
Sustainable Development	-	Positive
Equalities	-	Neutral
Social Inclusion	-	Neutral

#### **(c) Consultation**

This item is not subject to external consultation but has been subject to consultation and discussions with relevant officers.