

**NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL CASTELL NEDD PORT TALBOT**

**WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2016**

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**This document is also available in Welsh**

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## 1. Introduction

The Welsh Language Commissioner issued a [Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice](#) to the Council on 30 September 2016, with standards being imposed from 30 March 2016 and 30 September 2016.

In accordance with the Standards the Council has to 'produce a report (an 'annual report')... in relation to each financial year...' dealing with the way in which the Council has complied with service delivery, policy and operational standards during the year.

For this first 'annual report' the 'financial year' is defined in the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015 as "the period beginning with the day from which a body is under a duty to comply with a standard and ending with the following 31 March", i.e. 30 March 2016 to 31 March 2016.

The report contains limited information, due to the reporting timescale, in respect of both service delivery and operational standards that the Council was under a duty to comply. However, as the policy standards come into force on 30 September 2016 these do not form part of this annual report.

Key components of the operational standards are not able to be reported due to the staggered imposition date of particular standards. Therefore the information available is even more limited.

As a number of standards are being challenged compliance with these standards has been postponed until the Commissioner has determined whether or not the requirement is unreasonable or disproportionate, and the Council's rights to appeal are exhausted.

## 2. The Council's Position

While the Council remains committed to the Welsh language and culture, there are barriers to meeting the full range of Standards required in the Compliance Notice due to the current, and ongoing, financial situation which is impacting on the Council's financial and human resources

Of the 171 Standards identified in the compliance notice, the Council agreed that 116 of the Standards mirrored or were very similar to the commitments made in the previous Welsh Language Scheme. As a matter of principle, the Council has maintained its commitment to these Standards, even though the prevailing financial climate makes this requirement challenging.

Fulfilment of the remainder of the standards contained in the Compliance Notice requires significant financial investment which, at a time of austerity, would mean significant savings in other areas would need to be found and this is not considered to be a priority at this present time.

For clarity, the Council's challenge is that full compliance with those standards is not reasonable or proportionate. However, in many instances partial compliance is achievable and a compromise position, based on partial compliance in the short term, forms the basis of the Council's position to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

In addition to the financial implications the Council's ability to meet the staffing requirements is 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.

It is important to note that the following information is provided against this backdrop of financial and staffing limitations.

### **3. Service Delivery Standards**

116 Standards mirrored or were very similar to the commitments made in the Council's previous Welsh Language Scheme and as such systems have already been put in place to facilitate their compliance.

The existing guide for staff was updated to take into account new, and reinforce existing, practices in line with the Welsh Language Standards.

A corporate briefing programme and a Members' seminar for all Members of the Council has been arranged to promote the standards and their requirements

The Council's dedicated Welsh language telephone number has been withdrawn and a single main telephone number now offers a Welsh language service option.

Providing a Welsh Language Service via direct dial telephone calls has the potential of being more difficult as there are 348 staff with Welsh language skills and 53 willing to use their skills in work. The internal staff directory has been updated to identify staff with Welsh language skills thus providing a simple tool to help staff provide as good a Welsh language service as possible.

## **Website**

There has been extensive work to bring the content of the Council's website up to date. In order to ensure the website is fit for purpose a systematic review of the most frequently viewed web pages has been undertaken and officers not only have updated service information but ensured the content has been translated and is available on the appropriate Welsh web pages.

By concentrating our efforts to ensure the most frequently viewed web pages are relevant, up to date and available in both languages we are will be able to provide a more effective service which meets people's needs.

However, full compliance is not immediately possible due to the limitations in staff language skills, English only software applications and internal databases, and the ever present financial constraints which limit the Council's ability to seek immediate remedy.

## **Social media**

Social media plays an important role in all aspects of people's lives, including that of the Council and its numerous service areas. The Council uses social media to provide service information, to gather views, to invite comment and to encourage participation and while planned bilingual postings are possible, spontaneous bilingual postings are more problematic.

Separate English and Welsh corporate Twitter and Facebook accounts have been created to allow for ease of use for both the public and the Council.

The section that administers these corporate accounts is able to provide bilingual planned as well as spontaneous postings. The continuation of spontaneous postings however will prove more difficult for individual service areas given the limited language skills of staff.

#### **4. Operational Standards**

The [Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Welsh Language Standards 2016-2017](#) provides information on how the Council will utilise its usual communication and engagement channels to promote services, the standards and the availability of bilingual services as well as encourage staff to use Welsh in their work and to support access to services through the medium of Welsh wherever possible.

All support materials as well as information on the Welsh Language Standards and is available for on the Performance Hub pages of the intranet.

Templates for email signatures, contact details and out of offices messages, with the former indicating officers' ability to speak Welsh, has been circulated to all staff.

#### **5. Help and Support**

The Council has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the standards. On a day to day basis the Chief Executive is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place to secure compliance.

Each member of staff is responsible for the successful implementation of the standards.

The Heads of Service Equality and Community Cohesion Group has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the standards and consists of representatives from each of the Council's directorates along with the Cabinet Member Equality Champion.

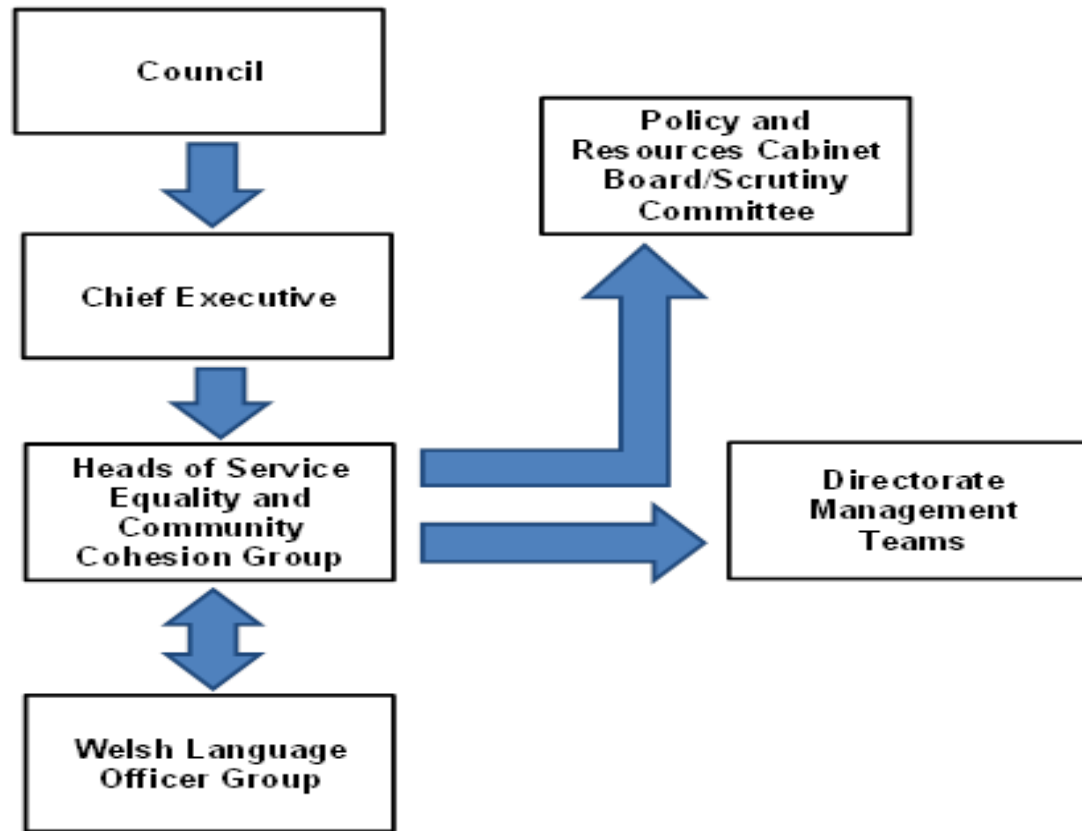
A Welsh Language Officer Group has been re-established in order to support the administration of the standards, to help with the early resolution of any issues that may occur and to support staff in the delivery of services in accordance with the duties placed on the Council.

Notes of the Welsh Language Officer Group will be reported to the Heads of Service Equality and Community Cohesion Group, whose notes in turn will be reported at individual directorate management teams for action/information.

The Council's Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet Board will keep the implementation of the standards under regular review and will be responsible for monitoring performance against the standards.

The following diagram illustrates this framework:





All tools and support documents for staff are available electronically on the internal intranet. Information on the provided by the Welsh Translation Unit, a service shared between Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and City and County of Swansea, is also available electronically.

## 6. Complaints

Two complaints were received on 31 March 2016; one complaint, from a member of the public via a number of elected Members, related to an English only advertisement for an event in Victoria Gardens and one relating to the lack of Welsh posts on the Council's corporate Twitter account.

Advertising at Victoria Gardens - The advertisement was neither authorised nor placed by the Council and was removed immediately. A reply was forwarded to the complainant via elected members with the assurance that the area would be closely monitored to ensure that would be no re-occurrence of this nature, but if such an instance was to occur the notice, etc., would be removed immediately.

Twitter – The complainant was advised that the Council was already in the process of establishing Welsh language corporate Twitter and Facebook accounts and was advised within a week of the complaint that these accounts were live. The Council received a reply praising its quick response.

Both complaints were dealt with in accordance with the Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy and within set timescales.