

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Welsh Language Standards

Annual Report 2016-2017

This document is also available in Welsh

The Welsh Language Standards Annual Report for 2016-2017 is produced in accordance with the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015.

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The Welsh Language Standards

The Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015 imposed on Count Councils and County Borough Councils, national parks and Welsh Ministers a range of standards of conduct in respect of the Welsh Language. The standards were grouped into the following areas:

- service delivery
- policy making
- operational
- promotion
- record keeping

Under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 the Welsh Language Commissioner was enabled to apply standards, considered reasonable and proportionate, along with imposition dates; dates by which compliance was required.

The Council lodged a challenge against 54 Standards in January 2016 on the grounds they were unreasonable and disproportionate in terms of timescale, staffing levels, or the additional finances required to comply. As a consequence, and in accordance with section 60(2) of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, the requirement for the council to comply with these standards has been postponed until:

- a) the Commissioner has determined whether or not the requirement is unreasonable or disproportionate, and
- b) the council's rights to appeal are exhausted

The Welsh Language Standards with which the Council has a duty to comply is appended to this document **Appendix 1** (which also identifies the standards which are part of the challenge and as a result are not included in this report)

Implementing the Standards

The Council has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the standards, with the Chief Executive having responsibility for ensuring arrangements are in place to secure compliance. In addition, we recognise that each member of staff has a role to play in 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.

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

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

All Senior Management Teams received a presentation on the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards, the similarities to the previous Welsh Language Scheme, the differences as well as information on those standards which the subject of our challenge.

The existing Welsh Language Employee Guide was revised and publicised, along with other support materials, through the Council's usual mechanisms including the internal newsletter, 'In the Loop'. All information and support materials relating to the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards are available on the intranet.

Service Delivery Standards

Service Delivery Standards affect all aspects of delivering services from correspondence to meetings, from the website to all documentation we produce. However, as the standards, with which we had to comply during the year, were very similar to the commitments made in our previous Welsh Language Scheme there was limited additional work involved to ensure their implementation.

Never the less various methods have been utilised to raise staff awareness of the requirements of the Standards. These have included the use of internal publicity, briefing senior management teams, team meetings, and support on the implementation of the standards available corporately and from peer support groups.

While there were similarities with the previous Welsh Language Scheme, the standards have also highlighted limitations particularly due to advances in technology. As a result it has been necessary to amend some practices or put new practices in place.

Meeting the Standards

Correspondence

The previous standard text welcoming correspondence in both languages, 'The council welcomes correspondence in English and Welsh', has been amended to 'We welcome correspondence in Welsh and will deal with Welsh and English correspondence to the same standards and timescales' to reflect the additional requirements of the standards.

This revised standard text has been included on all letterhead templates and is available electronically via the Intranet.

Language preference

A form for individual completions linked to a databased has been developed which will allow a person's language preference to be recorded and that information used when contacting the person in future. Email signatures have been amended to include appropriate text inviting people to use Welsh in their dealing with the Council. The email signatures are standardised and have been made available via the Intranet.

Main telephone number

Previously the Council utilised separate Welsh and English telephone numbers as its main contact number. However, the Welsh language number was withdrawn and, in accordance with the standards, a single telephone number was introduced which provided touch tone access to a Welsh language service.

An additional Welsh language speaking member of staff was recruited in order to help manage the likely increase in Welsh language telephone calls through the main telephone number.

During 2016-2017 there were 1364 (0.94%) recorded calls to the Welsh language service via the main telephone number. The total number of calls received for the seam period through our main telephone number was 144,785. This compares to 2015-2016 where the figures were 103 (0.064%) and 158,847 respectively. The Council's performance in answering Welsh language calls compared to English language calls during the period:

	Welsh Calls	English Calls
Average time to answer	18 seconds	21 seconds
Abandoned rate (adjusted for call abandoned within 5 seconds)	11.14%	3.71%

Direct Line Telephone calls

The requirements of the Standards in relation to answering direct line telephone calls mirror established practice and procedures within the Council and these have been reinforced to staff through guidance notes, team meetings, and other internal publicising methods.

Staff who were highly proficient in Welsh were contacted and encouraged to use their language skills to help provide services to the public in Welsh either in their own area of work or more generally across other services. Out of the 322 staff contacted (staff indicating fluent/ fairly fluent language skills as at March 2016) 63 responded positively with 42 willing to use Welsh only for their own service area.

The employee directory was updated with this information and is accessible to all staff to ensure a Welsh speaker can be located easily to provide a Welsh language service as and when required.

Theatre address system

Housekeeping information which is played at the beginning of shows etc., in the theatres has been translated with the Welsh language information being played first.

Social media

In response to the Welsh Language Standards, corporate Welsh language Twitter and Facebook accounts have been created. As at 31 March 2017:

Twitter

English corporate account	-	10,705 followers
Welsh corporate account	-	98 followers

Facebook

English corporate account	-	4,783 followers
Welsh corporate account	-	22 followers

In addition individual services areas have their own social media accounts and these total 75 across the Council.

Website updated and bilingual

As part of the Council's ongoing drive for clearer and more accessible information, work has been undertaken to update and streamline the website as well as to ensure that the content for which the Council is responsible is bilingual.

As at 31 March 2016, 91% of our webpages were available in Welsh. This percentage has since increased, with 99.9% bilingual webpages now available on the website (31 March 2017). This is a significant improvement given that only 39% of our webpages were fully bilingual in August 2014.

During 2016-2017 there were 2,838,679 hits on our website, with 21,230 (0.75%) of these on the Welsh webpages; this compares to 2015-2016 where there were 2,896,429 hits with 19,738 (0.68%) of these on the Welsh webpages.

Grants

Staff have been made aware of the requirements in relation to grant applications. Application forms and/or information relating to grant applications have been updated to include, where appropriate, text to meet the requirements. Revision of the Third Sector Grant 2017-2018 application process is nearing completion and will include all relevant considerations under the Welsh Language Standards.

Public meetings and events

Since its first Welsh Language Scheme, the Council has been committed to the use of Welsh at public meetings in those areas where the language is predominant, with simultaneous translation where necessary. Procedures for arranging such meetings have been long established and largely remain unchanged. However, the more detailed requirements of the standards have necessitated some minor revisions which have been included in the revised staff guidance.

While the number of public events held by the Council has reduced over recent years procedures for arranging events remain and, as with the procedures for arranging public meetings those for arranging public events has been updated to reflect the Standards and have been publicised to all staff.

Reception areas

Badges indicating Welsh speaker/Welsh learner, have been made available to all staff including those at reception, while signs welcoming the use of Welsh are displayed in the main reception areas of Neath and Port Talbot Civic Centres.

To help manage the likely increase in the number of callers to the One Stop Shops who would require a Welsh language service a Welsh speaking modern app was recruited. Although the standard relating to the provision of a Welsh language reception service is being challenged, during 2016-2017 26 people (0.03%) wished, and were able, to conduct their enquiry through Welsh, out of a total number of 71,589 enquiries.

Operational Standards

The Operational Standards relate to primarily to the human resources functions and the internal administration of the Council. A number of these standards reflect commitments expressed in the previous Welsh Language Scheme; including training, language requirements, and advertising, of posts. However, the requirements of the standards exceed these previous commitments, particularly in relation to the human resources functions.

The Council is currently developing an employee portal which will allow staff to update/edit their existing details e.g. name, address language skills and other personal information. This information was previously held on a central HR system which allowed only restricted access by managers and HR personnel. This portal will allow staff freedom to update personal information instantaneously and at a time convenient for them. It is intended that the portal will be available to staff via the internet, on mobile phones and other devices

Meeting the Standards

Policies

All policies identified within the Standards have been translated and have been made available for staff to access via the Human Resources section on the Intranet.

Email signatures and out of office messages

During the spring 2016, email signatures were redesigned to publicise the Council's move to a more digital way of working as part of the 'Switch' campaign. As a result there was an opportunity to revise the content of email signatures to also include the requirements of standards relating. Two versions of the email signatures have been produced, for Welsh and non-Welsh speakers; the 'Cymraeg' logo being included in the signature for Welsh speakers.

These revised email signatures, both for Welsh and non-Welsh speakers have been made available on the Intranet as well as being publicised through the usual channels, e.g. internal newsletter, team meetings and senior management briefings. These email signatures can be found at **Appendix 2**.

Members have been encouraged to use these standardised bilingual email signatures. The updated email signatures are to be referred to in the new member induction programme developed for those taking office following the local government elections in May 2017.

A variety of 'out of office' messages to cover a range of circumstances have been translated, and publicised, and are available on the Help and Support pages in the Welsh Language Standards section of the intranet. In addition current job titles have been translated for use in email signatures and other means of correspondence.

Information and support

All documentation relating to the Welsh Language Standards are available on the Intranet. Support documentation which includes for example, email signatures, staff guidance, the compliance notice and how to access the translation services, are available on the Welsh Language Standards section of the intranet. The HR pages which include information on policies, job vacancies and other related documentation are also available on the Intranet.

Assessing Welsh Language Skills

Language skills continue to be captured for new starters via the job application form. As part of the new requirements staff who had previously identified as having Welsh language skills have been asked to confirm/update their language ability. This exercise has resulted in a more accurate reflection of current ability amongst staff.

In addition, those who identified themselves as fluent/fairly fluent were asked to indicate their ability and willingness to use their language skills in their own or any service area in order to provide a service to members of the public if required to do so.

Vacant posts

During the year all new or vacant posts have been assessed for the need for Welsh language skills via a 'post details form' which is submitted by managers to, and recorded by, the Workforce Information Team. Details as to the number and category of posts assessed for language skills can be found in the 'specific requirements' section below

Posts categorised where Welsh language skills were essential or desirable, 94 in total, have been advertised in Welsh and the requirement specified in the advertisement.

Computer software

Welsh spell checking software is available Windows and Microsoft and has been installed on pcs and laptops on request.

Welsh language training

A section on the Training & Development intranet is currently under development to provide information to staff including links to guidance documentation (e.g. Active Offer, More than Just Words etc.) and Welsh Language chat group 'Sgwrs' and Welsh language training and development opportunities.

10 week (20 hour) 'Introduction to learning Welsh' courses have been made available for staff interested in learning Welsh, including managers. 'Welsh for Adults' courses have also been made available for staff which offer training from entry to advanced level. The cost of attendance is met by training budgets, and day release to

attend is provided. Opportunities to access 'Learning Welsh for Work' through National Centre for Learning Welsh are currently being explored, with the intent to increase Welsh learning opportunities in the area. An informal group/forum 'Sgwrs' has been established for staff who speak Welsh in order to encourage the use of Welsh in the workplace, at home and in the community. All abilities from learners to fluent speakers are encouraged to attend.

Several publications are available for loan from the Learning, Training & Development Team. They include phrasebooks, course books, dictionaries and story books.

Welsh Language awareness courses are provided from Social Services employees involved in the role of providing assessment to social work students. All social work students hosted by the Council must attend Welsh language awareness training as mandatory.

Welsh language awareness e-learning is being explored through the All Wales Academy for Local Government.

Information for new employees

Our corporate induction includes information on Welsh language resources and encourages managers to discuss and make new employees aware of the Welsh Language Standards and Welsh language awareness. Other sections of the induction including set up of bilingual signatures, answering the telephone bilingually etc. are also covered.

Specific requirements

The number of employees with Welsh language skills at the end the year 2016-2017 is as follows:

Fairly Fluent Speaker and Writer	181
Fairly Fluent Welsh Speaker	131
Fluent Speaker and Writer	425
Fluent Welsh Speaker	101
Welsh Learner	716
Total	1554

In order to assist with accurate record keeping an employee portal is being developed for staff to update their records themselves, allowing for greater accuracy in the data held.

The number of new and vacant posts that were advertised during 2016-2017 were categorised as follows:

Welsh language skills were desirable	79
Welsh language skills were essential	15
Welsh language skills were not necessary	313
Welsh language skills needed to be learnt when appointed to the post	0

Policy Making Standards

Assessing the impact of new and revised policies on people who share protected characteristics has been key feature in policy development over many years. While previously there was no legal requirement to consider the Welsh language when assessing impact it has been Council practice to include it as a 'protected characteristic' and treat it accordingly.

However, with the introduction of the Welsh Language Standards consideration of the impact on Welsh language is now a legal requirement and the Equality Impact Assessment form and associated guidance has been amended accordingly thus ensuring that the requirements are effectively and consistently taken into account when developing new or revising existing policy.

The assessment section of the framework has been strengthened to allow those developing or revising policy to fully explore the impact(s) of the policy in relation to the opportunities to use, and the equal treatment of, the Welsh language.

In addition the consultation section of the guidance has been expanded to cover the subject more fully with the requirements in relation to the Welsh language being included for the first time.

The revised Equality Impact Assessment form and associated guidance is available to all staff via the Equality Impact Assessment page of the Performance Hub on the intranet.

Complaints

There have been three complaints received during 2016-2017; two relating to compliance with the Service Delivery Standards and the third relating to the Welsh language. Two complaints were received via the Welsh Language Commissioner and one direct to a service area.

The complaints received in August 2016 via the Welsh Language Commissioner continue to make their progress through the Commissioner's own complaints process and while the Council has responded to the various information and recommendation requests a final decision has yet to be made.

Although the third complaint was received via a telephone call and not via written correspondence as according to the standard, it is considered appropriate to refer to it in this report. The complaint challenged the use of Welsh used in a waste services leaflet but was not upheld as the Welsh text was grammatically correct.