

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

1 February 2018

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services - K. Jones

Matter for Information

Wards Affected:

All Wards

Welsh Language Standards Update

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update in relation to the current position regarding the Council's Welsh Language Standards and the work being undertaken to prepare for the implementation of bilingual agendas and minutes.

Background

2. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 established a new framework in relation to compliance with legal standards relating to the Welsh Language.
3. These new standards replaced the Council's previous Welsh Language Schemes established under the Welsh Language Act 1993.

4. Between January and April 2014 a standards investigation was undertaken by the Welsh Language Commissioner, the conclusions of which were reported to Welsh Government.
5. Following further consultation the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015 were given royal assent in March of that year.
6. With the introduction of the new regulations the Welsh Language Commissioner issued the Council with a draft compliance notice in June 2015.
7. In response to the notice the authority outlined in detail which standards it felt would require a longer period of transition to achieve full compliance, as well as those it was currently unable to comply with.
8. Subsequently, a final compliance notice was issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner in September 2015 which indicated which standards would be applied to the Council.
9. As a result of the notice and, following authorisation from Members, a challenge was submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner in relation to 55 standards, 54 of which were subsequently considered as a valid challenge by the Commissioner's office.
10. The remaining 122 standards were considered achievable by the authority as they mirrored, or were very similar to, the commitments made in the Council's existing Welsh Language Scheme.
11. In June 2016 the Council received correspondence which detailed the Commissioner's initial consideration of the challenge to the 54 standards that had been included in the Council's compliance notice.
12. During July 2016, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Board gave detailed consideration to the issues raised by the Commissioner resulting in some changes being outlined in the subsequent formal response.
13. A further response from the Commissioner's office was received in October 2016 with the Chief Executive meeting with the Commissioner later that month to discuss the issues around compliance with the standards.

14. Further follow-up meetings were also arranged between officers and the Commissioner's representatives to try and agree a resolution during November and December 2016, with Cllr Arwyn Woolcock attending the latter meeting.
15. After additional review the Council submitted an exchange of correspondence with the Commissioner in February 2017. In this latest response the Council accepted a number of standards, some with modifications, including extended imposition dates, while a significant number still remained subject to challenge, with supplementary evidence provided.
16. As of September 2017, a total of nine challenged standards remained outstanding with further consultation required.
17. A further meeting between officers and representatives to continue discussions has been tentatively arranged for February 2017.
18. It should also be noted that where standards are challenged the imposition date is postponed until such time as the Commissioner makes a determination or the Council's right of appeal is exhausted. Consequently the Council's compliance notice has been modified to reflect the changes since 2016.

Bilingual Agendas and Minutes

19. In order to comply with Welsh Language Standards (Nos.41 and 48) preparatory work is currently being carried out by officers to assess what adjustments will be required to the Council's current committee document management system (Modern.Gov) to enable regular production of bilingual agendas and minutes for future council meetings.
20. In the interim, arrangements are currently available to allow for the manual translation and availability of individual agendas and minutes prior to the activation of the new bilingual semi-automated process.
21. Based on the advice provided by officials from other local authorities, as well as guidance from specialist software developers, it is estimated that the time required to design, draft and deliver the necessary framework to enable a bilingual system to operate effectively will take between 3-5

months, depending heavily on the level of staff resource devoted to the project.

22. Initial work has already begun to scope the project and it is hoped that the system will be ready for initial testing in March/April 2018 with a tentative 'Go Live' date currently scheduled for the start of the new civic year on 26 April 2018.

Financial Impact

23. The introduction of new Welsh Language standards and the requirement for increased volumes of translation will inevitably result in an increased pressure on current budgets. The basic translation charge will be £65 per 1,000 translated words with an average set of minutes being around 2,000 - 3,000 words. Additional monitoring will be required following the implementation of any new administrative arrangements.

Equality Impact Assessment

24. A screening assessment has been undertaken but a full equality impact assessment is not warranted.

Workforce Impacts

25. Due to the requirement for the introduction of additional administrative system arrangements there will be some workforce impacts associated with this report although it is currently unclear how significant this impact will be. Additional monitoring during the transition period will be required.

Legal Powers

26. Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/1/contents>

Risk Management

27. There are no significant risks associated with this report.

Consultation

28. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

29. That the Committee note the report.

Appendices

30. Appendix 1 - Welsh Language Standards (Extract)

List of Background Papers

31. None

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