



Welsh Language Annual Report 2016 - 2017

Introduction

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out to modernise the legal

The previous statutory Welsh Language Scheme, approved under the Welsh Language Act 1993, has been replaced by the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards.

The aim of the Welsh Language Standards is to:

- x Improve the services Welsh-speakers can expect to receive from specified organisations in Welsh;
- x Increase the use people make of Welsh-language services;
- x Make it clear to organisations what they need to do in terms of the Welsh language; and
- x Ensure that there is an appropriate degree of consistency in terms of the duties placed on bodies in the same sectors.

Following the creation of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, 176 Welsh Language Standards were produced. In September 2015, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council was issued with a Compliance Notice, which set out a requirement to comply with 171 of the 176 Standards.

The 171 Standards are split into ‘Service Delivery’, ‘Policy-making’, ‘Operational’, ‘Record Keeping’ and ‘Promotion’. The full Standards are contained in the Compliance Notice¹. The below table sets out the number of Standards across each area along with their imposition dates.

Area	Effective From Date					Area	Effective From Date	
	30 Mar 2016	30 Sep 2016	30 Mar 2017	1 Apr 2017	11 Jul 2017		30 Mar 2016	30 Sep 2016
Service Delivery	74	2	5	-	1	Supplementary Service Delivery	6	-
Policy Making	10	0	-	-	-	Supplementary Policy		

On 29 March 2017, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council submitted an application to challenge Standard 41 under Section 54 (2) Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, which was deemed valid. This means the need to comply with the standard has been postponed pending the Commissioner's final determination, which remains outstanding at the time of this report.

Welsh Language Annual Report

Under Standards 158, 164 and 170 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a duty to produce this Welsh Language Annual Report. This report needs to include the following information:

- i. Examples of the significant progress made in considering the requirements and the broad range of ways the Council has been supported to effectively implement the Standards.
- ii. The number of complaints received during the report period which relate to compliance with the standards and the operational standards.
- iii. The key requirements in relation to employee Welsh language skills, staff training courses including any provided in Welsh, as well as recruitment in the context of Welsh Language Skill requirements.

This report is the Welsh Language Annual Report produced under the

requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, and
to

There continues to be regular engagement with our democratic elected members, the Council's Corporate Management Team and the Departmental Management teams as well as engagement and consultation with key stakeholders such as Welsh language service providers, the Welsh speaking community and schools.

Key areas of development have been refreshing staff guidance, developing the Welsh Language Preference Project, producing and publishing a Welsh Language Promotion Strategy, updating the bilingual website, bilingual social media, as well as the bilingual newsletter available in a digital format from the Council's website.

The implementation of the Standards has been led by the Council's Policy Team, which has supported the Council on the following key actions, noting that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list:

x Reports through Democratic Processes

The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy was presented to Scrutiny, Executive and Full Council. One of the three objectives relates to the commitment to support "Welsh in the Workplace". This five year Strategy seeks to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language and bilingualism in Blaenau Gwent.

x Leadership and Political Engagement

The Wider Corporate Management Team (CMT) is made up of the Lead Director and Head of Paid Services, Directors and all Heads of Service and includes all of the senior officers. CMT is the decision making body for the corporate element of the Council. Wider CMT has been kept fully up to date of developments via internal reports, which recently included the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.

Departmental Management Team

Responsibility for effective implementation of the standards rests with staff across directorates and departments. The relevant heads of service have been fully involved in discussions relating to each of the challenge applications to ensure they are well plac

x Welsh Language Guidance for staff

A range of short, practical and easy to follow guides, have been produced and feature on a designated Welsh Language page on the Council's intranet (<http://intranet/policies-plans-strategies/welsh-language-guidance.aspx>). These guides will assist staff to effectively implement many of the Service Delivery, Policy Making and Operational Standards. The guides include describing how staff should answer the telephone bilingually, using bilingual out of office templates, basic greetings and correspondence disclaimers and translation guidance, which is currently being reviewed, etc.

The Compliance Notice and a synopsis of the Standards which includes staff's responsibilities are also available on the intranet page. This intranet page has been widely promoted via a number of mechanisms, including the Corporate Equality Network, Wider CMT and the Lead Director and Head of Paid Services' Message via internal email to all staff.

x Welsh Language Preference Project

The Welsh Language Preference Project began in March/April 2016 and is a significant piece of work that sought to identify the language preference of

The majority (10,690) of the respondents stated their language preference as English which equated to 96.54% of all respondents. There were 89 (0.8%) residents who requested correspondence in Welsh; and a total of 284 residents (2.56%) requested Bilingual (Welsh/ English). There were also some other languages stated which included 5 English and French (0.045%) and 2 Polish (0.018%); two returned that did not state a preference for any language.

There were 53 multiple occupancy households where their language choice was mixed. Of those 45 requested their correspondence in both English and bilingually, 4 requested their correspondence in both English and Welsh, 3 requested their correspondence in Welsh and bilingually, and 1 requested English and French.

Additionally, many service areas are sending out questionnaires to their partners/customers to ascertain their language preference. All of this information is supporting the Council to build up an evidence base to deliver Welsh language services to all who request it. Where we have not been able to identify language preference, each department is responsible to ensure correspondence will be fully bilingual.

x **Staff Welsh Language Preference**

A Welsh Language Preference letter was sent to every staff member. This information was coordinated by line managers so that they understood their staff's language choice and the preferences will continue to be logged centrally on

Additionally, the EqIA is a clear requirement for all corporate/directorate Business Plans and the Financial Efficiency Project proposals, which identify financial savings for the Council.

x

Blaenau Gwent has identified the following three Welsh Language Promotion objectives:

- i. promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within families and the community;
- ii. increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language;
- iii.

In May 2016, a query was made by email by a member of the public stating that the Council didn't offer any swimming lessons in Welsh. The WLCO was not satisfied that the complainant was acting on behalf of persons who have been directly affected by the alleged conduct and because of that it was felt that the complaint was **not valid** but the complaint did create "a suspicion of a failure" by the Council to comply with some of the Welsh language standards imposed on it. Therefore, the WLCO decided to investigate Blaenau Gwent's swimming lesson provision.

Following submission of evidence, the Council received the Commissioner's proposed decision notice in February 2017 that set out there was not a failure to comply with Standard 81 and Standard 86.

However, it was determined that there was a failure to comply with Standard 84 as the Council doesn't offer swimming lessons in Welsh at any level although swimming lessons are offered in English. At the time of writing this Annual Report, the Council are still awaiting the Commissioner's final investigation report and advice document, which will assist the Council in preparing an Action Plan that, will set out the steps it will take to comply with Standard 84 in relation to swimming lessons.

Welsh Language Skills and Ability

Standard 170 requires the number of employees who have Welsh language skills at the end of the year in question.

The information in this section has been provided via the Organisational Development team and the Council's iTrent system and represents staff Welsh language ability as at 31 March 2017.

It should be noted that the data held is not fully complete. As noted earlier, the data held on the iTrent system is being updated and this will continue to improve in line with the Language Preference Project and a new Self Declaration Module in the very

The base figure for the data is 3,094 posts on the Council’s establishment list, (a decrease from the last year’s baseline figure). It should be noted that each data set has a non-response number of between 572 and 681 staff. The non-response number amounts to those who chose not to answer a particular question.

It is worth noting that the number of fluent Welsh speakers employed by the Borough has grown from 40 in the last reporting period to 44 during this Reporting period. This will aid the Council with their resilience as they work towards the commitments contained in the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy’s objective 3, “Welsh in the Workplace.”

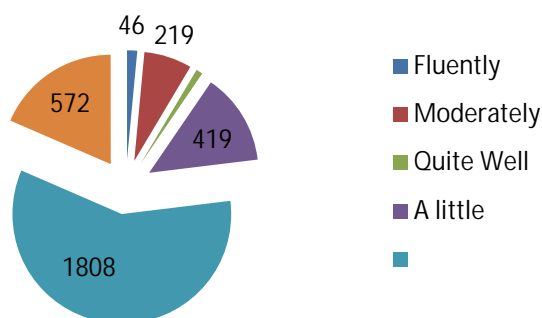
Speak Welsh

The number of employees who have Welsh language speaking skills as at 31 March 2017 amounts to 631 people, who are categorised as staff who can speak ‘a little’, ‘moderately’, ‘quite well’ or ‘fluently’. However three quarters of staff declare they have no Welsh Speaking ability.

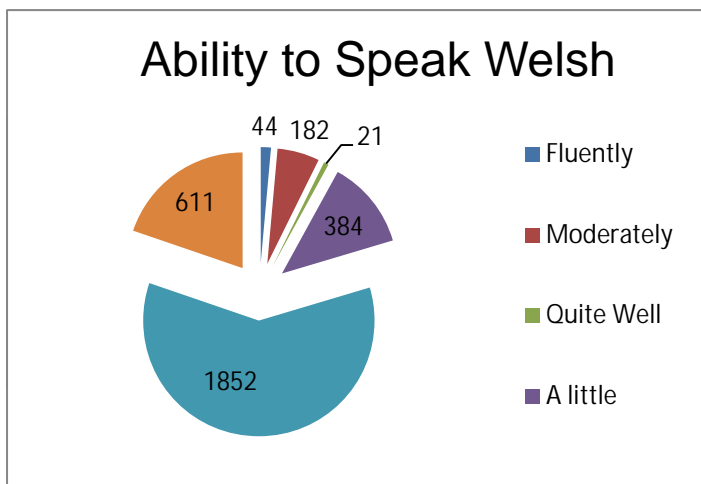
The number and percentage of staff that can understand, speak, write and read Welsh varies slightly between each comparator, which is illustrated in the graphs below:

Graph 1: Understand Welsh

Ability to Understand Welsh

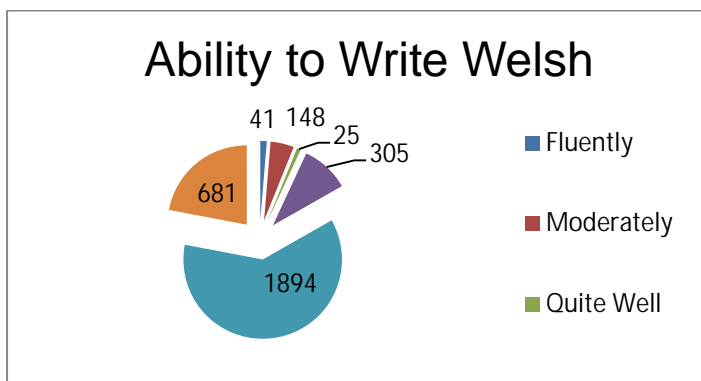


Graph 2: Speak Welsh



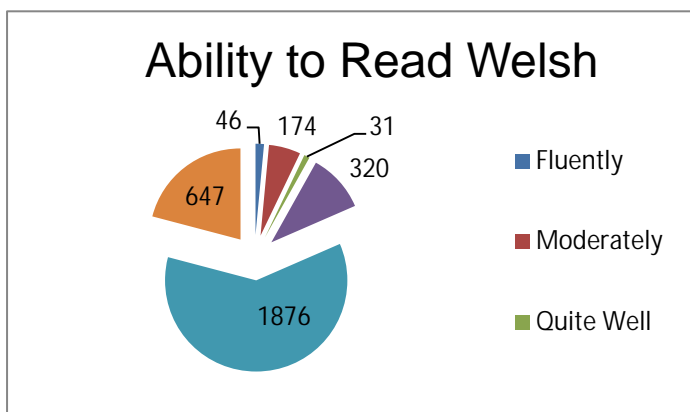
Speak Welsh	Total
Fluently	44
Moderately	182
Quite Well	21
A little	384
No ability	1852
No response made	611
Grand Total	3094

Graph 3: Write Welsh



Write Welsh	Total
Fluently	41
Moderately	148
Quite Well	25
A little	305
No ability	1894
No response made	681
Grand Total	3094

Graph 4: Read Welsh



Read Welsh	Total
Fluently	46
Moderately	174
Quite Well	31
A little	320
No ability	1876
No response made	647
Grand Total	3094

As these graphs demonstrate, the figures are very similar across all 4 comparators, but it is interesting to note that more people have a higher level of skill in understanding and reading Welsh in comparison to speaking and, in particular, writing.

The percentage of staff that declare, they are 'fluent' is typically around 1.7%, while

Employee Training Courses

Standard 170 requires:

- x The number of members of staff who attended training courses you offered in Welsh during the year;
- x If a Welsh version of a course was offered by you during that year, the percentage of the total number of staff attending the course who attended the Welsh version

During the reporting period, 17 people attended a 10 week Welsh language course commencing on 10/09/10 and ending on 10/12/10. The course was offered in Welsh and English.

