



Welsh Language Annual Report 2016 - 2017

Introduction

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out to modernise the legal framework regarding the use of the Welsh language in the delivery of public services.

The previous statutory Welsh Language Scheme, approved under the Welsh Language Act 1993, has been replaced by the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards.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

- Improve the services Welsh-speakers can expect to receive from specified organisations in Welsh;
- Increase the use people make of Welsh-language services;
- Make it clear to organisations what they need to do in terms of the Welsh language; and
- 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 Making	6	–
Operational	32	15	–	–	–	Supplementary Operational	6	–
Record Keeping	7	1	–	–	–	Supplementary Record Keeping	2	–
Promotion	–	–	–	2	–	Supplementary Promotion		2
Total	123	18	5	2	1		20	2

Challenge Applications

According to the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, if the authority is of the opinion that the duty to comply with a standard or to comply with a standard in a particular way (and that can include the imposition date) is unreasonable or incommensurable, the authority can make a formal application to the Commissioner to challenge that standard and ask the Commissioner to adjudicate on that question.

Within the scope of this report, on 22 September 2016, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council made an application to the Commissioner in relation to standards 2, 3, 21, 145, 146. On 1 December 2016, the Commissioner made her final determination as follows:

- Standards 2 and 3: The Council does not need to comply with these Standards as the requirements will be met under Standard 5.
- Standard 21: The Commissioner varied the imposition date by six months.
- Standard 145 and 146: The Commissioner varied the imposition date with compliance required by the 1 April 2017.

¹ <https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/council/equalities-welsh-language/the-welsh-language-in-blaenau-gwent/>

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 duties around the service delivery standards, policy making 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 second Welsh Language Annual Report produced under the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, and covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This report will be published no later than 30 June 2017, at which point we will publicise the fact that we have published an annual report. Copies of the annual report will be made available on our website, in our main reception office and will be available in every other reception downloadable from the intranet.

Support to Implement the Standards

This Council remains committed to the preservation and promotion of the Welsh Language having operated bilingually as part of the Welsh Language Schemes and has invested considerable time and resources to be well placed to meet the requirements of the Compliance Notice.

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:

- **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.

- **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 placed to meet the requirements. The Policy team continue to support all departments to monitor compliance with the standards.

- **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.

- **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 citizens, customers, partners and staff.

A letter was sent to every single household and business in the county borough asking their language preference (Welsh, English or Bilingual). The Council is currently developing a centralised database to store this information that will be accessible across the organisation.

A total of 6632 households responded with usable data to the Welsh Language Preference Project which resulted in the Council being aware of the language Preference of 11,073 residents in Blaenau Gwent. These 6632 represent about a fifth of the population of Blaenau Gwent. Of these 6632 households, 3237 of them were single occupancy.

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.

- **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 the Council's iTrent HR system. Only two staff members in the Education Division requested Welsh only and one staff member requested bilingual correspondence.

- **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)**

The EqIA process has long since included the Welsh language element. The EqIA framework is currently being reviewed. The document was previously amended to stress the importance of identifying 'positive' impacts in addition to adverse impacts, in line with Welsh Language Standards requirements, with note of the Policy Making standards.

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.

- **Recruitment**

When recruiting for new or vacant posts, managers must complete a Welsh Language Job Assessment form. The information influences the job description, advert requisition, interview procedure and subsequently any employment. In-line with the requirements of Welsh Language Standards the Council must keep appropriate records of each assessment, which will be reported on annually. Corporate Management Team has decided that all roles within the Council are designated as being a minimum of 'Welsh Language Desirable'.

- **The Welsh Language Promotion Strategy**

Standard 145 requires Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to produce a strategy detailing how it will promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language over the next five years.²

Following a challenge application from the Council in September 2016, the Welsh Language Commissioner varied this standard in accordance with the provisions of Section 49 of the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011, making it a requirement for the Council to comply with this Standard by 1 April 2017.

The aims of Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Language Strategy are linked with the Welsh Government's vision to create a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050.

In order to meet a target of 44% increase of Welsh speakers by 2050, we would need to gain an additional 2,324 Welsh speakers against the 2011 Census' Blaenau Gwent baseline of 5,284. Therefore this represents an average annual increase of 70 additional Welsh speakers i.e. 3% of the target figure of an additional 2,324 in Blaenau Gwent for the next 33 years.

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http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Council/Equalities/Welsh_Language_Promotion_Strategy_2017-2022.pdf

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. Increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace.

To achieve this target, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council will need to work in partnership with a broad range of key stake-holders to promote Welsh language in educational settings, promote and facilitate more easy-to-access opportunities to learn Welsh in communities; and promote the use of Welsh in the workplace.

Complaints

Standard 158, 164 and 170 requires that the annual report must include the number of complaints you received during the year which related to your compliance with the service delivery standards, policy making standards and the operational standards with which you were under a duty to comply.

The Corporate Complaints procedure logs all complaints related to the Welsh language and Welsh Language Standards. Complaints can be made in any format (e.g. email, letter, in person, telephone, social media etc.). No complaints were received via the Corporate Complaints system during the reporting period.

However during the reporting period there has been one complaint received by the Council's Policy Team, which related to our compliance duty under the *service delivery standards*. The complaint was received on the 18th November 2016 and concerned a possible non-compliance issue with Standard 62 which states: "When you erect a new sign or renew a sign (including temporary signs) which conveys the same information in Welsh and in English, the Welsh language text must be positioned so that it is likely to be read first".

The complaint was concerning a sign painted on the road in the Abertillery area. The authority had painted the Welsh first on the road with the English above it so the Welsh would be seen first as you drive up towards the sign. The Legal department and Highways Department of the authority supported the positioning of the sign and the interpretation of the standard. The complainant felt that the Welsh should be placed above the English.

The Policy team referred this matter to the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office on 04/01/2017 for further guidance. The Policy team received a reply from the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office on 16/03/2017 stating that so long as the Authority could demonstrate that the location and positioning of the sign means that the Welsh is likely to be read first then the authority was compliant with the standard.

Swimming Lessons Investigation Standards 81, 84 & 86

Standard 81

You must promote any Welsh language service that you provide, and advertise that service in Welsh.

Standard 84

If you offer an education course that is open to the public, you must offer it in Welsh. You must comply with standard 84 in every circumstance, except:

- When an assessment carried out in accordance with standard 86 comes to the conclusion that there is no need for that course to be offered in Welsh.

Standard 86

If you develop an education course that is to be offered to the public, you must assess the need for that course to be offered in Welsh; and you must ensure that the assessment is published on your website.

Bridging this reporting period and the last, Blaenau Gwent was subject to an Investigation by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office (WLCO) regarding Standards 81, 84 and 86 and the provision of swimming lessons.

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 near future. Staff will then have the ability and responsibility to maintain their own staff records, making them more resilient.

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.”

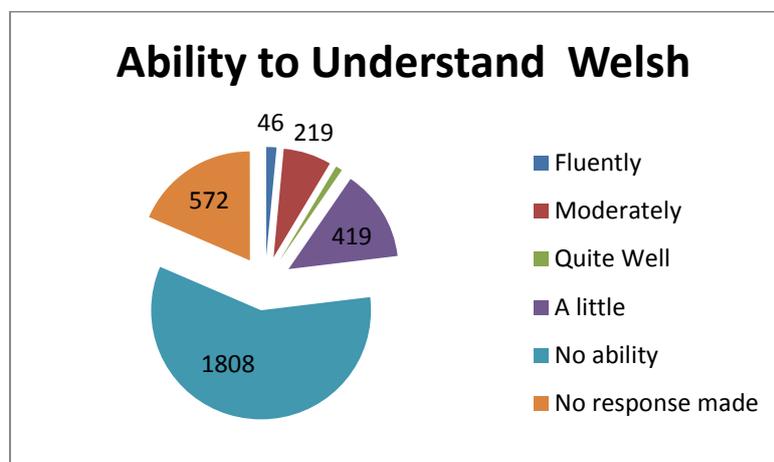
Speak Welsh

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.

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

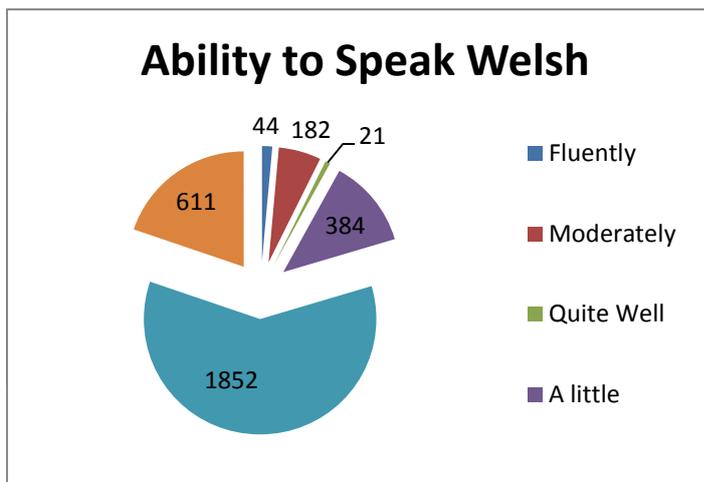
The number and percentage of staff that can understand, speak, write and read Welsh varies slightly between each comparator, which is illustrated in the graphs below:

Graph 1: Understand Welsh



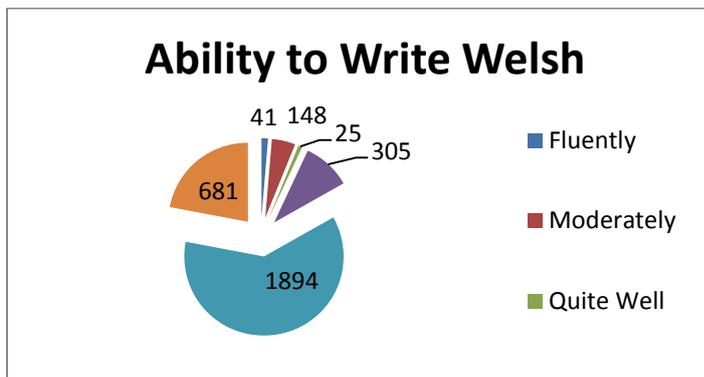
Understand Welsh	Total
Fluently	46
Moderately	219
Quite Well	30
A little	419
No ability	1808
No response made	572
Grand Total	3094

Graph 2: Speak Welsh



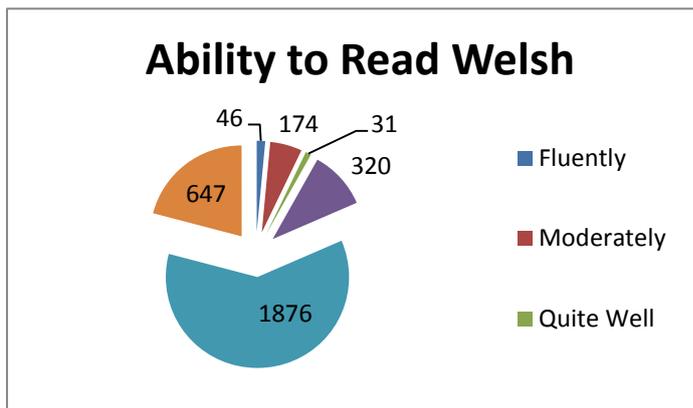
Speak Welsh	Total
Fluently	44
Moderately	182
Quite Well	21
A little	384
No ability	1852
No response made	611
Grand Total	3094

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 the percentage who say they have 'no ability' is around 75%. This demonstrates that around 23% of staff say they have some Welsh language ability, albeit 'A Little' contributes significantly more than 'Moderately', 'Quite Well' and 'Fluently' combined.

It is also interesting to look at Welsh ability by division and contract type, although it should be reiterated that this information is somewhat incomplete as iTrent data fields continue to be cleansed and updated.

We anticipate that there are in fact more fluent Welsh speakers than documented below, in particular in Education (school based staff) and the on-going work to update records will be able to show this in future reports.

Fluent Welsh speakers by division:

Division	Number
Corporate Services and Strategy	2
Education	34
Environment	4
Social Services	4
Resources	0
Total	44

Fluent Welsh speakers by contract type:

Contract Type	Number
Fixed Term	9
Permanent	26
Relief	1
Temporary	8
Total	44

As documented above, of the 44 fluent Welsh speakers, 26 have permanent contracts. This will help with resilience in compliance with the Standards as we have a core of Welsh speaking staff.

Employee Training Courses

Standard 170 requires:

- The number of members of staff who attended training courses you offered in Welsh during the year;
- 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 12th May 2016 at the Civic Centre. Also, 15 people attended a two day Welsh language taster course on the 28th and 29th June designed for front line staff. One staff member has enrolled on a Coleg Gwent Mynediad Course which started in September 2016.

Further courses will be undertaken in the late summer and in the academic year 2017/18 to ensure that all other reception areas are compliant with Standard 64 by 30th September 2018 as per Blaenau Gwent's Compliance Notice.

During the reporting period, there were no training courses offered in the medium of Welsh and no requests were received for any courses to be made available in the medium of Welsh.

Recruitment - Welsh Language Skills Requirements

Standard 170 required the number of new and vacant posts that you advertised during the year which were categorised as posts where:

- Welsh language skills were essential,
- Welsh language skills needed to be learnt when appointed to the post,
- Welsh language skills were desirable, or
- Welsh language skills were not necessary

During the scope of the reporting period a total of 116 posts were advertised by the Council. Two of those posts were identified Welsh as 'essential'. The rest of the posts were identified Welsh as desirable as it was agreed during the last reporting period (15 February 2016) that all posts were to be made Welsh 'Desirable' as a minimum requirement.

As a result, all job descriptions identify Welsh Language as a 'Desirable' requirement and therefore no posts will ever feature that identify Welsh language skills as 'not necessary'. Also, no posts were listed in the reporting period where Welsh language skills were identified as skills that needed to be learnt when an individual was appointed to a post.

Conclusion

This report has set out the highlights and significant pieces of work which demonstrate how we as a Council have endeavoured to meet the requirements set by the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice issued in September 2015.

Whilst this report does not document every piece of work undertaken to meet the requirements of the Compliance Notice, it is hoped that it provides a worthwhile indication.

There were a number of key findings that emerged from the Annual Report, and these will be taken forward in discussions and business planning as we seek to further embed the Standards.

Blaenau Gwent Council is committed to improving and facilitating the use of the Welsh language and the further development of the provision of Welsh language services in line with the Welsh Language Standards and the Welsh Government's Future Generation Bill aspiring for "A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language. In addition to this, Blaenau Gwent Council will work alongside its partners to increase the number of Welsh speakers in the borough thus supporting the Welsh government in their aim to have a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050.