



Welsh Language Monitoring Report

2015 - 2016

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The previous statutory Welsh Language Scheme, approved under the Welsh Language Act 1993, has been replaced by the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards.

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 implement 171 of the 176 Standards. A phased implementation meant that 144 Standards had to be met by 30 March 2016 and the remaining 27 by 30 September 2016.

The 171 Standards are split into ‘Service Delivery’, ‘Policy-making’, ‘Operational’, ‘Record Keeping’ and ‘Promotion’. The full Standards are contained at Appendix B and the below table sets out the number of Standards across each area along with their effective from dates:

Area	Effective From Date		Area	Effective From Date	
	30 Mar 2016	30 Sept 2016		30 Mar 2016	30 Sept 2016
Service Delivery	75	7	Supplementary Service Delivery	6	-
Policy Making	10	-	Supplementary Policy Making	6	-
Operational	32	15	Supplementary Operational	6	-
Record Keeping	7	1	Supplementary Record Keeping	2	-
Promotion	-	2	Supplementary Promotion	-	2
Total	124	25		20	2

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.

Under Standards 158, 164 and 170 Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has a duty to produce a Welsh Language Annual Report in Welsh.

This report is the first Welsh Language Annual Report produced under the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, and covers the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. This report will be published no later than 30 June 2016, 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, and in each of our offices that are open to the public.

Challenge Applications

In March 2016, the Council submitted a challenge application, in relation to 15 of the Service Delivery Standards with the challenges focussing on the timeline for effective implementation, in relation to Standards 4, 5, 11, 19, 20, 26, 26a, 29, 29a, 30, 41, 46, 52, 62 and 64 (refer to Appendix B). Though outside the scope of this report, a further challenge application was submitted in April 2016, in relation to Standards 8, 9 14, 16, 17, 22 and 76.

As at 2 June 2016 the challenge applications were under consideration by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. As a result these Standards are 'on-hold' until a decision is taken. Nevertheless the Council has achieved implementation of nearly three quarters of the Standards and we continue to strive to fully implement the remaining standards, accepting that around 13% are subject to the challenge applications.

Requirements under Standards 158, 164 and 170

This report will consider some 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.

The report will consider 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.

The report will also consider 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.

Support to Implement the Standards

This Council remains committed to the preservation and development 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. Key areas of development have been the bilingual website, bilingual social media, Welsh language option at our Contact Centre as well as the fully bilingual newsletter which is sent to every household etc.

The implementation of the new 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:

- **Presentation/awareness raising sessions to elected members (full Council)**

This was a mandatory session for elected members and 2 separate presentations (one day and one evening) were delivered on the Welsh Language Standards in December 2015. The presentation introduced the Standards and then went into some detail on the Compliance Notice issued, its implications and the impact each Standard would have.

A question and answer session followed to allow members to improve their understanding and to also allow them to feed in to the consultation process.

- **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 therefore includes all of the most senior officers. CMT is the decision making body for the corporate element of the Council. A presentation was delivered on the implications of the Standards in December 2015, followed by a question and answer session. Wider CMT has been kept fully up to date of developments via internal reports.

- **Presentations and discussions to every Departmental Management Team**

It was agreed at Wider CMT that every Departmental Management Team (DMT) should have a tailored presentation pointing out the implications on their service areas. Every department has received at least one presentation/workshop during January and February 2016.

A significant number of other meetings/presentations have been held as a consequence of these DMT's where more detailed consideration was given to certain Standards. Significant time and resources have been invested in ensuring that all areas of the Council have been provided with every opportunity to consider their requirements.

- **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, translation guidance, basic greetings and correspondence disclaimers etc.

The Compliance Notice in its entirety and a full synopsis of the Standards which includes staff's responsibilities is 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.

- **Language Preference Project**

The Language Preference Project began in March 2016 and is a significant piece of work undertaken to identify the language preference of citizens, customers, partners and staff.

A letter has been sent to every single household and business in the county borough asking their language preference (Welsh, English or Bilingual). This information is logged and will be shared across the Council Departments. This project will continue to be developed going forward into 2016-17.

A similar Welsh Language Preference letter has also been 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.

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, we will ensure correspondence will be fully bilingual.

- **Data cleanse on staff information**

The Organisational Development department will continue to data-cleanse the information held on the staff iTrent system, which will capture and record staff's Welsh language ability in addition to language preference.

- **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)**

The EqIA process has long since included the Welsh language element. However, the document has been 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.

- **Job Descriptions**

It has been agreed by Corporate Management Team that all job descriptions will now include the 'Welsh Desirable' criteria. Additionally, Welsh language requirements will be assessed for each new role by the line manager and Organisational Development.

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.

During the reporting period there have been no complaints that the Council received, which related to our compliance duty under the *service making standards*, the *policy making standards* or the *operational standards*.

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.).

Two complaints were received, which followed the Corporate Complaints Procedure, in Welsh, during the reporting time period:

- 24 June 2015 – Accuracy of poster and information online – this was resolved.
- 3 August 2015 – Accuracy of signs at new multi-story carpark – this was resolved.

However, neither of the above complaints were directly related to the Welsh Language Standards as they were received prior to the issued Compliance Notice on 30 September 2015.

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 division and the Council's iTrent system and represents staff Welsh language ability as at 31 March 2016.

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.

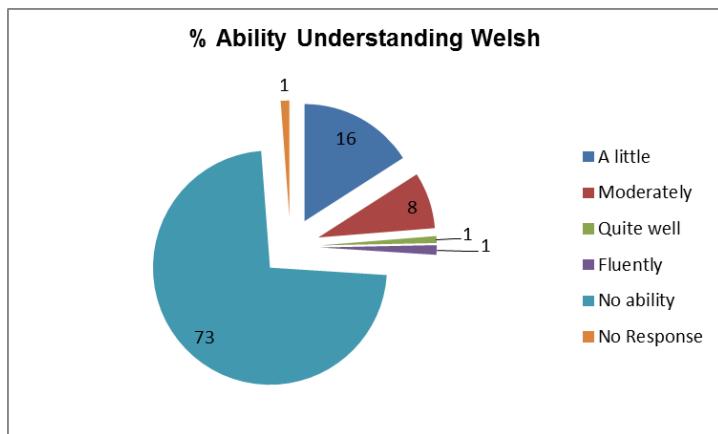
The base figure for the data is 3,334, representing the total number of employees within the Council. It should be noted that each data set has a non-response number of between 40 and 175 staff. The non-response number amounts to those who chose not to answer a particular question.

The number of employees who have Welsh language skills as at 31 March 2016 amounts to 750 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.

Welsh Speaking Ability	Total
A Little	476
Moderately	211
Quite Well	23
Fluently	40
No Ability	2485
No Response	99
Total	3,334

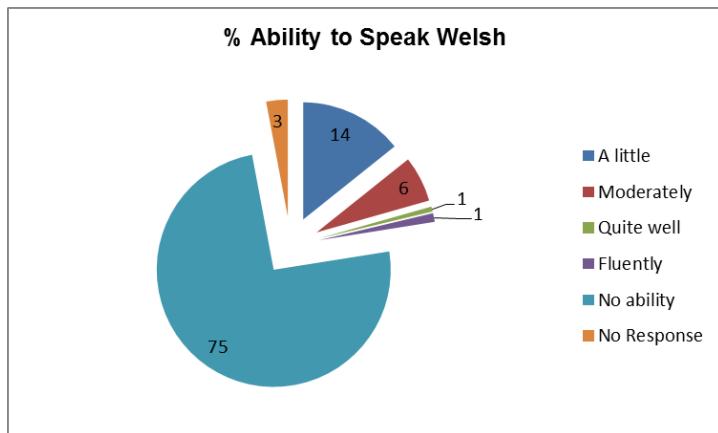
The number and percentage of staff who can understand, speak, write and read Welsh varies slightly between each comparator, which is illustrated in the graphs below:

Graph 1: Understand Welsh



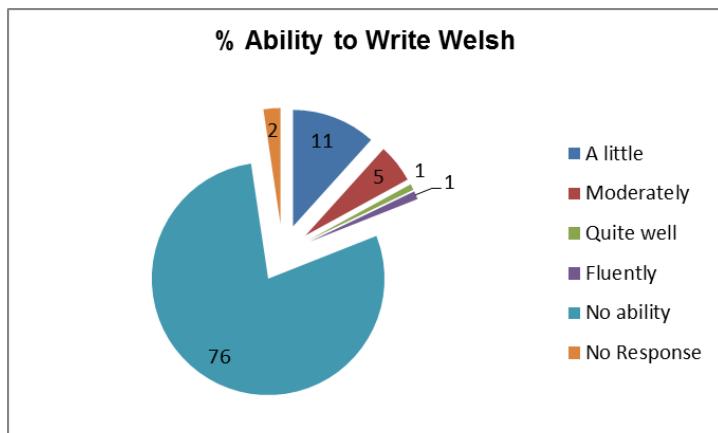
Understand Welsh	Total
A Little	531
Fluently	44
Moderately	260
No ability	2427
Quite Well	32
No information	40
Grand Total	3334

Graph 2: Speak Welsh



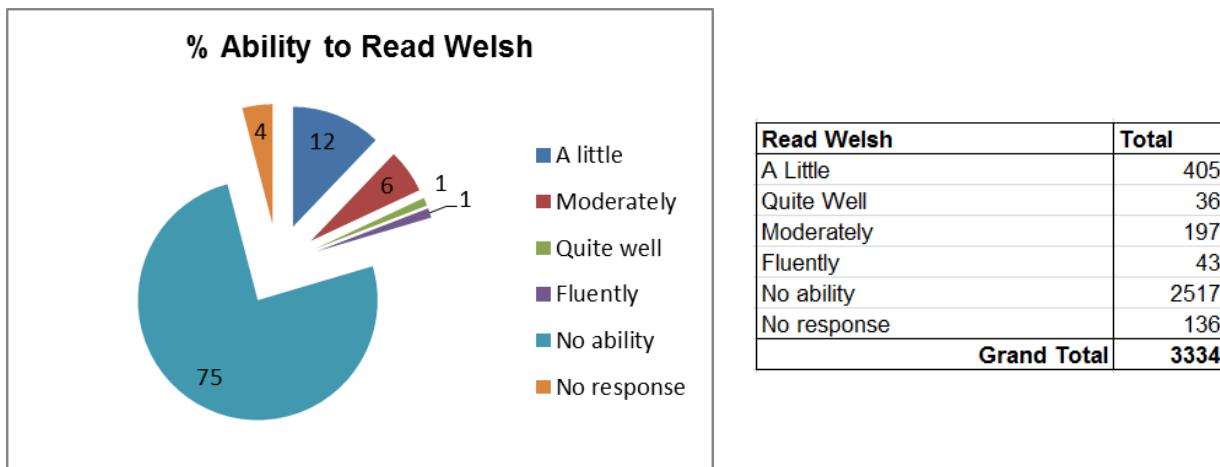
Speak Welsh	Total
A Little	476
Fluently	40
Moderately	211
No ability	2485
Quite Well	23
No information	99
Grand Total	3334

Graph 3: Write Welsh



Write Welsh	Total
A Little	378
Fluently	37
Moderately	173
No ability	2544
Quite Well	27
No information	175
Grand Total	3334

Graph 4: Read Welsh



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 Welsh in comparison to speaking and, in particular, writing.

The percentage of staff that declare, they are 'fluent' is typically around 1.3%, while the percentage who say they have 'no ability' is closer to 75%. This demonstrates that around 25% 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	1
Education	31
Environment	3
Social Services	5
Resources	0
Total	40

Fluent Welsh speakers by contract type:

Contract Type	Number
Fixed Term	9
Permanent	17
Relief	3
Temporary	11
Total	40

As documented above, of the 40 fluent Welsh speakers, only 17 have permanent contracts. This could be a risk in the future if a high number of contracts cease around the same period.

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, there were no training courses offered in the medium of Welsh; although Welsh Language Awareness courses were made available. A total of 170 members of staff attended these awareness training courses up to March 2016.

The purpose of the courses has been to raise staff awareness on the way that the Welsh Language Standards will impact on their areas of business on a practical level. The majority of the staff who attended deal with the public and it was felt that this cohort should be particularly targeted.

In addition to this, Welsh language courses have also been established, with more to come. It was identified that Reception and Contact Centre staff needed upskilling

and a joint course was established via Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Fynwy between this Council, Torfaen and Monmouthshire Councils.

The course was specifically designed for Reception and Contact Centre staff and was run for 2 x 2 hour sessions per week for 12 weeks. This course proved to be very successful and greatly improved staff's ability and confidence to use the Welsh language. Further courses have been planned for late Spring 2016.

During the reporting period, 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 184 posts were advertised by the Council. None of the new or vacant posts advertised identified that Welsh language skills were 'Essential' or 'not necessary'.

Further there were no posts identified, where Welsh language skills needed to be learnt when appointed to the post. Nevertheless, three existing posts were designated as needing further Welsh language skills, and training was organised for these staff (1 Receptionist and 2 x Contact Centre Staff).

It was agreed during this reporting period (15 February 2016) that all posts were to be made Welsh 'Desirable'. 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 are 'not necessary'.

During the period 15 February 2016 – 31 March 2016 there were 21 posts advertised of which 9 posts were advertised externally and all 21 were deemed Welsh 'Desirable'.

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 the numbers, usage and development of the Welsh language in line with the Welsh Language Standards and of Welsh Government's Future Generation Bill aspiring for "A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language".