

Blaenau Gwent Council
Welsh Language Standards
Annual Report for 2021-22

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This document is also available in Welsh.

1. Introduction

This report is the seventh Welsh Language Standards Annual Report produced under the requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The report considers 4 key areas (complaints; Welsh language skills; Welsh language training; and recruitment) and provides an overview of how we have met our relevant requirements as set out in the table below:

Areas	Relevant Standard and/or sub-section
<u>Complaints</u> The report details the number of complaints we have received during the year in relation to our compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.	147, 148, 156, 158(2), 162, 164(2), 168(a), 170 (2), (d)
<u>Welsh Language Skills</u> The report outlines the number of employees who have Welsh language skills between 1 st April 2021 to 31 st March 2022	170(2)(a), 151
<u>Welsh Language Training</u> The report provides information on the number of Blaenau Gwent Council staff who attended Welsh Language training courses we provided (the percentage of the total number of staff attending a Welsh version of the course.	152, 170 (2) (b)
<u>Recruitment</u> The report outlines the number of new and vacant posts that we advertised during the year whereby: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.	170)(ch), 154

2. Background and current situation

This report has been produced in-line with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out the legal framework regarding the use of the Welsh language in the delivery of public services. Furthermore, under Standards 158, 164 and 170, the Local Authority must produce a Welsh Language Annual Report that outlines how the Council has complied with the service delivery standards, policy-making standards and the operational standards.

Further information on Blaenau Gwent's requirements is available on our Council [webpage](#) and also outlined in our [Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice](#) provided by the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner including information on how we promote and facilitate the use of Welsh language services through our [Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2017-22](#) – with our new strategy currently under development.

Accountability

The following are responsible for the Welsh language within the organisation:

Political Leadership

The Leader of the Council / Executive Member for Corporate Services continues to hold portfolio responsibility for the Welsh Language. Where appropriate, Welsh Language is considered politically through Corporate Overview Scrutiny, Executive and when appropriate the Council.

Strategic Leadership

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) is made up of the Managing Director, Directors and all Heads of Service, and includes all of the senior officers and is the decision-making body for the corporate element of the Council.

The Education Transformation Team review and monitor the [Welsh in Education Strategic Plan](#) (WESP) monthly; providing termly reports to the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and provides annual reports to Welsh Government. In addition, WEF development and progress reports are taken via the Council's political processes annually. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is also a key focus of the 21st Century Schools Programme Board and Admissions Forum.

Implementing the standards

The Policy team support, advise and guide the political and professional leads on all matters relating to the Welsh Language. The Council's Policy Team continue to offer

views and experiences on any key consultations and are the main point of contact for discussing this report.

All staff across our directorates and departments are responsible for the efficient implementation of the standards and for supporting and encouraging the promotion of the Welsh language.

Each year the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report is presented to our Corporate Leadership Team and is to be presented to our Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee, for information, later this year.

Whilst every effort is made to ensure as an organisation, we meet the Welsh Language requirements we recognise there is always room for improvement. The Corporate Compliments & Complaints procedure is available for anyone to make a complaint related to the Welsh language and the Welsh Language Standards and is used to help us identify and make any required changes. We welcome complaints to be made in any format (e.g., email, letter, in person, telephone, social media etc.)

For further information about our [Corporate Compliments & Complaints](#) procedures please visit our website.

Staff Welsh Language Preference

As noted in the previous annual report a Welsh Language Preference letter was sent to every staff member with the introduction of the Welsh language standards. This information was coordinated by line managers so that they understood their staff's language choice and the preferences which were logged centrally on the Council's iTrent Organisational Development (HR) system.

The Council has since introduced a 'MyInfo' employee self-service access to their personal information held on the iTrent system. This function means that staff have every opportunity to update this information, which includes any information on protected characteristics and language preference.

3. Matters arising during the reporting period

Staff training

0 courses (available online) were delivered through the medium of Welsh, although this option is made available to staff if requested. This is perhaps not surprising given that only 10 of the 2,946 staff identified their language preference as Welsh, and 5 people who want to be corresponded with in Welsh. This is a slight decrease since the last reporting period 2020-21 (14).

Promotion of Cymraeg yn y Gwaith Course (“Welsh in Workplace”) is encouraged with staff given the time to complete the training as well as other further training opportunities from external learning providers.

Arrangement for user feedback / complaints

During this reporting period a total of **0 complaints** were received via Corporate Compliments & Complaints regarding service delivery standards; policy making standards; or operational standards.

For further information about our [Corporate Compliments & Complaints](#) procedures please visit our website.

Notable events during the year

In December 2021, our Annual Welsh language monitoring visit was held with the Welsh Language Commissioner’s Office. The meeting considered several key areas where we could strengthen our existing arrangements for meeting the Welsh Language Standards, such as:

- Reviewing our Corporate website, including documents and forms.
- Ensuring all our courses are made available in Welsh, as well as those commissioned by a Third Party, such as the Aneurin Leisure Trust.
- Any consultation activity seeks views on the potential effects any decision will have on the Welsh language and opportunities to use it.
- Producing a new policy on Awarding Grants.
- Ensure when commissioning or undertaking research that the potential effects on the Welsh Language and opportunities to use it is considered.
- Review of our recruitment processes.
- Review of our Corporate Complaints procedure.

This led to a full review of our corporate website and a work plan being developed to address any areas where compliance could be improved as part of our corporate website redesign project.

Checks were made to ensure any courses being delivered by us or those commissioned by Third Parties are offered and promoted as being made available in Welsh.

The Council launched a new Integrated Impact Assessment (screening template and full assessment) in August 2021 which requests any new policy or policy decision considers and deals with the effect that decision will have on the Welsh language and on the opportunities to use it. Therefore, strengthen our arrangements for commissioning or undertaking research.

Organisational Development began taking steps to review our recruitment processes to ensure they are compliant with the Welsh Language Standards as well as consideration of proactive ways the Council can encourage, enable, and support the increased use of Welsh language skills via future workforce campaigns, as well as encouraging, enabling, and supporting the increased use of Welsh language skills across our existing workforce (e.g., promotion of statutory Welsh language training and supplementary courses for Welsh language speakers etc.)

Other notable areas of work included:

The Policy & Partnerships Team, under their commitment to support Children and Young People's Participation, enrolled on the Kickstart Scheme apprenticeship programme to provide opportunities to young people to gain direct skills and experience within the public sector. The placements included a Welsh Language Trainee Officer, in recognition of the value of bilingualism and using Welsh language skills in the workplace. The opportunity was used to support the Council in meeting its Welsh language requirements, but also used to scope creative ways to encourage the use of Welsh in the workplace. The placement was extremely successful and resulted in the young person securing fixed term employment within the Electoral Registration Team.

All 'Welsh Language Guidance' on Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's intranet has been reviewed ensuring the content is up to date and provides sufficient information on how to meet our Welsh language requirements within the workplace. The guidance simplifies our Welsh language procedures making it easier for staff to implement effectively. The primary changes made were in relation to our simultaneous translation procedures and how they have been adapted to meet online working requirements in-line with the Council's new Operating Model, following the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, under standards 4.3 and 4.4 we included more details on how to use and book a simultaneous translator using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

The format and content for the 'Answering Telephone Procedure' has been edited to encourage a more proactive approach to using the Welsh language. The guidance includes audio files of key words and phrases to ensure staff with little to moderate skills in speaking Welsh can be confident dealing with customer enquiries in Welsh. As such the 'Telephone Answering Procedure' includes two recordings of all key phrases:

slowly recited version to emphasise key sounds and pronunciation; the phrase spoken at a normal pace. These slides are included as part of our training sessions for staff members with public facing roles.

Similarly, we have also incorporated audio files within our 'Bilingual Greetings' and 'Useful Phrases' documents, alongside phonetic spellings, which are made available to staff on the intranet. Staff have provided feedback on this being beneficial to supporting learning and increasing confidence levels in using Welsh more effectively and are used to reinforce and refresh learning, alongside use of the audio files as well as other Welsh language training resources which are promoted.

We send regular communications and reminders to all staff regarding our Welsh language requirements and promote and encourage everyone to utilise the resources available to them as part of a rolling campaign to promote and encourage the use of Welsh in the workplace. For example, different standards are featured in our internal Well-being Wednesday staff newsletter as well as promotion of our informal Hoffi Coffi sessions for staff wanting to use and improve their existing Welsh language skills as well as provide fun ways to increase social interaction opportunities. The sessions are open to all linguistic abilities with the aim of boosting everyone's confidence levels in using Welsh in the workplace.

Meeting our commitment to 'further promote the use of Welsh in the workplace and increased training opportunities for staff; particularly staff who are key in supporting the upholding of our operational delivery standards' we developed new in-house training Welsh language sessions.

These training sessions have been tailored specifically to support customer services staff from key service areas such as our Connect2Blaenau Gwent Contact Centre and Community Hubs, Housing Benefits Services and Social Services IAA team to ensure a Welsh language service is effectively provided which supports enquiries made in Welsh. The training begins with establishing the phonetics of the language as we work through the Welsh alphabet with a focus on the sounds that aren't present in the English language like the 'll' and 'ch' letters and ends with staff feeling competent in dealing with telephone enquiries made in Welsh through group and peer-to-peer learning. During the sessions, Welsh language learning resources such as Dysgu Online are promoted, and staff are encouraged and supported to continue learning Welsh for use inside or outside of the workplace.

Meeting our service delivery 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 Guidance page on the Council's intranet.

These guides assist staff to effectively implement our service delivery standards, operational standards and policy making standards. For example, the guides include information and advice on how staff should answer the telephone bilingually, using bilingual out of office templates, basic greetings, correspondence disclaimers and guidance on how to obtain translation. These working documents are reviewed and updated periodically.

Our [Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice](#), along with a synopsis guide for staff for upholding them is made available on our staff intranet. This intranet page continues to be promoted via Corporate Communication and our Wider Corporate Leadership Team and is also reviewed and updated periodically.

Meeting our policy making standards

The Council has a duty to comply with a number of policy making standards. For example, the Council has implemented a new Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) which is used to support policy and service development, procedures, and functions, and proposed financial efficiency saving proposals etc. The IIA process ensures there is appropriate consideration of the Welsh language in terms of identifying 'positive' as well as 'adverse' impacts and opportunities for mitigation in line with our Welsh language requirements.

The Council approved and promoted a new Policy on Awarding Grants which provides a framework, alongside guidance, for ensuring Welsh is not treated less favourably and its use is encouraged. This was developed as part of a regional piece of work with other neighbouring local authority areas to ensure consistency in practice in terms of applying the standards.

A new Corporate Welsh Language Standards Communications Campaign has been developed which will provide reminders to staff of our requirements and the practical ways in which they can support them and signposting them to further help, and guidance made available on our intranet. Such as Welsh Language Standards 91-93 on undertaking Consultations.

Meeting our promotion standards

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.

The aims of the [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.

The Council has three Welsh Language Promotion objectives:

- i. Promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within the 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.

Below are some of the key pieces of work being taken forward to promote the Welsh Language within the Council and communities of Blaenau Gwent:

Objective one of the *Welsh Language Promotion Strategy* states that: *"The Council will promote and encourage the use of Welsh language within families and the community"*.

Objective two of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy states: *“To 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”.*

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2017-20 is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government’s and the Council’s Welsh Language strategic frameworks. The strategic priorities highlighted in the draft WESP document can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2022, to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year’s provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Continue to increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.
- Work regionally with Southeast Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes so learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.

The Blaenau Gwent WESP was formally approved by Welsh Government in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent was the first and only Council within the Southeast Wales region at the time, to have the plan approved with no further amendments.

Alongside a review of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened on an annual basis.

4 WEF meetings took place throughout the course of the 2021/22 academic session, along with additional dedicated workshops focused on the development of the new Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (2022-32). Partners commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which in turn has had a positive impact upon membership, attendance, and outcomes.

In addition, the Education Transformation Manager is the chair of the Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Sub-group of the WEF Strategic Forum. The group meets quarterly and considered the following areas of work:

- Regional Promotion and Communication Strategy Development
- Monitoring the Demand for and Uptake of Welsh-medium Education Places
- Regional Review of Welsh-medium Secondary School Provision
- Welsh Medium Grant and 21st Century Schools Band B Proposals and Projects
- WESP and WEF Updates

- Immersion

The Council and Welsh in Education Forum has worked with neighbouring authorities to develop a booklet called '[Becoming Bilingual](#)' which promotes the benefits of speaking Welsh and English. The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and is shared via health professionals, early year's settings, schools, and other relevant partners and professionals, to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally.

We continued to make good progress, following the Covid-19 pandemic, and reopening of schools, in relation to the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan throughout 2021-22, along with the associated processes and partnerships including the Welsh in Education Forum, which underpin its delivery. Blaenau Gwent 2021-22 self-assessment against key progress was sustained at Amber, with the rate of completion against the 2021-22 action plan as follows:

- 84% (or 49 actions) are complete.
- 7% (or 4 actions) ongoing; and,
- 9% (5 actions) actions in development.

Continued management and monitoring are required to ensure that the plan and targets are reflective of need, and that the key objectives are achieved within each delivery plan period. 5 of the main achievements in the last academic session include:

1. Blaenau Gwent has successfully secured Welsh Government approval for a 21st Century Schools Band B Project involving remodelling works at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg. In addition, Education is taking forward a project to create a 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility within the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley.
2. Numbers of pupils on roll, along with those applying for a place at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg has continued to increase, with a positive trend noted over the last 3 years in relation to both nursery and reception pupil numbers. In addition, transition rates between primary and secondary for 2019/20 were 100%.
3. Blaenau Gwent Council has developed a strong marketing and communication plan, targeting and promoting the benefits of being bilingual, whilst also establishing appropriate methods of engagement and consultation with stakeholders, in order to inform key strategic priorities.
4. Partner representation, attendance and frequency of the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum continues to be strong, with partners firmly committed to and recognising the effectiveness of the Blaenau Gwent Forum. Partners have hailed the work of BG WEF as an example of good practice. Also, the WESP POSP Sub-

group continues to meet regularly to support proposals for growth and development on a regional basis and again, to inform strategic planning.

5. Sabbatical Welsh figures are increasing annually with school staff uptake of courses increasing year on year demonstrating a continued commitment to the Welsh language.

Blaenau Gwent 10 Year Plan

In 2017, Welsh Government carried out a rapid review of the proposed Local Authority plans. The review acknowledged the need for change, not only in terms of individual plans' ambitions, but also in terms of the legislative framework set out by Welsh Government. The review highlighted a need to change the regulations and guidelines, along with a significant change in the Welsh Government and Local Authority approach to planning. Consequently, Welsh Government reviewed the legislative framework associated with the WESP, with the key focus being the creation of a framework which enables Local Authorities to develop long-term strategic plans.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government required Local Authorities to submit their first draft 10-year plan to the Welsh Ministers by 31 January 2021; however, considering the pandemic and associated emergency response requirements, the submission timeline has been updated. Following the drafting and subsequent consultation period, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019, along with the draft guidance were laid on 5 December 2019 and came into effect on 1st January 2020. Local Authorities must submit their first draft 10-year plan to the Welsh Ministers on 31st January 2022, with the plan operational from September 2022. The current BG WESP will remain in force until that date.

The Welsh Government expects Local Authority 10-year plans to encompass the following:

- A clear and concise vision based on the target agreed.
- Local education profile (numbers of school age learners, the number of each school under each category, and the number of learners within each school category).
- Key data for each outcome (current baseline and projections).
- Any high-level plans or factors which impact education in the county
- Clear aims and objectives under the 7 outcomes.
- A clear link between how each aspect of the plan contributes to the vision and the overarching target; and,
- A clear link between the plan and other Local Authorities strategies and relevant policy areas.

Blaenau Gwent Council's Vision for Welsh-medium Education is as follows:

'To build upon the strong progress made to date, by creating a sustainable education system which enhances provision, uptake, and use of the Welsh language; creating skilled and empowered citizens who are proud to live and work both within and outside of Wales'.

The strategic aim of which will be to create:

'A community who embrace the Welsh language and culture with confidence and pride'.

We will seek to achieve our vision by promoting, developing, and enhancing Welsh-medium education provision and services. We will do so by working closely with the Welsh in Education Forum, along with other key strategic partners including Welsh Government, and other Local Authorities. Our strategic objectives include:

- To raise the profile of Welsh medium Education, along with the benefits of being bi-lingual.
- To create high quality, thriving learning establishments which support effective pupil, staff, community, and partner engagement.
- To support integration of services and create an immersive experience for learners.
- To secure improved school to school and partnership work, facilitating wider use and development of the Welsh language.
- To create a skilled and sustainable workforce, committed to continuing professional development.
- To ensure inclusive teaching and learning environments and opportunities for all learners; and,
- To improve progression opportunities by reviewing and implementing a curriculum which is firmly aligned to further and higher education.

The Council seeks to achieve the following outcomes as set out by Welsh Government, which reflect the learner's education journey, and are consistent with the policy areas of Cymraeg 2050 and Education in Wales: Our National Mission:

Outcome 1

More nursery children/three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 2

More reception class children/five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 3

More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another.

Outcome 4

More learners study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 5

More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school.

Outcome 6

An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) (in accordance with the duties imposed by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018).

Outcome 7

Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh.

To achieve our vision and objectives, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is committed to working towards the ambitious Welsh Government target, to increase the Year 1 cohort taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils. When compared with the 2019/20 baseline data used by Welsh Government, this would equate to 10% (an increase of 6 percentage points increase) of the total Year 1 cohort being taught via the medium of Welsh by 2032.

The Education Transformation team implemented an engagement plan to ensure that, key stakeholders and partners, effectively contributed to and informed development of the 10-year plan. This included:

- Developing and regularly reviewing a stakeholder map and engagement plan
- Undertaking reflection sessions with WEF members and key partners, with the aim of reviewing the development and implementation of the BG WESP (2017-2020) including an appraisal of: outcomes, achievements, targets, barriers, challenges, progression opportunities, partners, and data
- Establishing a sub-group of the WEF to agree a timeline and approach to drafting and reviewing the 10-year plan, whilst also monitoring developmental progress
- Working with neighbouring authorities via the Regional WEF Planning and School Places and Demand Group, to ensure alignment whilst also identifying and exploiting opportunities

Working closely with Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Education Forum, along with other key stakeholders e.g., Health and neighbouring Authorities, the Education Transformation team produced a draft 10-year WESP. The document was developed in accordance with Welsh Government regulations and guidance. The team then initiated a formal consultation process, whereby the document was issued to all consultees identified within the Welsh Government WESP Guidance, whilst also being made available on the Council's Webpage. A Communications plan was drafted, which included Corporate Communications regularly promoting the consultation via the Council's social media pages, and Education doing so via schools and key partners. The consultation period commenced on Friday 5th November 2021 and concluded on Monday 3rd January 2022.

The outcome of the consultation processes was reflective of the effective engagement undertaken by both the Welsh Education Forum and the Education Transformation team, in ensuring that stakeholder views were captured and incorporated within the final draft. During the 8-week consultation process:

- 6 written Responses were received, including one out of time
- 6 survey responses, of which 5 strongly supported the plan

Several respondents referenced the positive progress made to date, whilst also recognising the commitment of the Council in line with the development and growth of both Welsh Education and the Welsh language. All responses were considered, including areas whereby consultees had suggested that the draft plan could be strengthened, and the document was updated accordingly. Education, along with the WEF also plan to take account of the comments in line with development of the WESP delivery plan.

The draft document was submitted on Monday 31st January to Welsh Government and approved by Executive Committee 2nd March 2022.

Welsh Medium Grant Proposal

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16th January 2018 that £30 million would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education, (the grant will be administered in addition to the capital allocations confirmed in Band B). Proposals were required to create additionality and contribute to meeting the Welsh Government's aim of one million Welsh speakers by 2050. The grant application process was initiated in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6.2 million in creating additional primary and childcare provision.

The project was put on hold in early 2019 pending discussions between the Council and Welsh Government at a senior level, regarding revenue implications. Post a detailed financial review, it was determined at an informal Executive/Corporate Leadership team meeting in February 2020, that the project could proceed to statutory consultation stage

- subject to a report to the Executive Committee in the autumn-term 2020. The consultation process was initiated in December 2020, concluding in January 2021.

The consultation process determined that there was widespread support for the proposal among consultees, with over 93% of respondents in favour of the new school development, citing the positive impact that the proposal is likely to have upon the Welsh Language, education, employment, the local community, and the economy. In summary, during the 42-day consultation period the Council received:

- 8 email response; and,
- 190 survey responses.

The responses can be broken down as follows:

- Fully support the proposal - 177 (93%)
- Partially support the proposal - 2 (1%)
- Do not support the proposal - 11 (6%)

In line with the outcome of the consultation, it was determined by Council's Executive Committee that the proposal should proceed to Statutory Notice. The Statutory Notice period, therefore, commenced on Monday 1st March 2021 and concluded on Monday 29th March 2021. Support for the proposal was further demonstrated during this period, with only 1 objection letter having been received. The response detailed concerns regarding the potential impact upon the individual as a local resident, rather than stating a formal objection to the proposal. Subsequently, the Executive Committee approved the proposal, and the decision notification process was initiated. The project is currently progressing to tender stage, with the new seedling school and associated childcare programmed for occupation from the autumn-term 2023.

Immersion Grant

Education, in partnership with a specialist contractor, the school and Welsh Government, has developed dedicated immersion provision within Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, to accommodate late comers to Welsh-medium education. A project was developed in line with Welsh Government funding to:

- Scope out and develop immersion resources i.e., age specific packages and for Years 2 - 6.
- Undertake a staff training programme to embed the principles and practices and effectively use resources to facilitate immersion provision.
- Plan the development of a short-term transitional pilot programme using existing facilities, to run between 2022 and 2025.
- Secure education resources to support the delivery of teaching and learning in an immersive way; and,
- Support the development of a schedule of accommodation to inform capital project development.

In line with the delivery of the project the Council worked closely with neighbouring authorities to compare models of immersion provision, identify, and address any gaps, whilst also gauging and developing best practice. In addition, the project has contributed to the development of the communication and promotion plan working in partnership with the BG WEF, in turn supporting implementation of the new provision in line with the BG WESP.

The resources have been developed and piloted to support WM pupils at the school, whose language acquisition has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with the Headteacher and ALNCo at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg to assess the impact of the pandemic, the project group established that, the bottom two groups in each class from Year 2 - Year 6 would benefit from immersive language intervention. The resource packs and interventions are being piloted with these groups between April – July in the first instance. 8-10 pupils in each class have been identified for support, therefore between 40 and 50 pupils will realise immediate benefits because of the immersion project.

A formal pilot will then take place in line with in-year transfer demand from September 2021, ensuring that the school are able to accommodate and promote immersion alongside the benefits of being bi-lingual.

In addition to the above, capital funding has been sought to establish a 2-storey extension on Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Primary School, in order to facilitate the delivery of an immersion unit for up to 10 pupils across Years 2 – 6, along with a special needs resource base (SNRB) for up to 10 ALN pupils, with the capacity to grow to a split phase provision.

Objective three of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy state the Council will aim: “To increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace”.

The Council continues to promote a range of external courses both accredited and non-accredited, along with events for staff in close working partnership with external partners such as the Education Achievement Service and Aneurin Leisure Trust Adult and Community Learning team.

From a school’s perspective, all headteachers are aware of the need to plan for staff language development and the need to include Welsh language in School Development Plans. In addition, BG schools have participated in an audit of staff language skills and training needs via the Education Achievement Service (EAS) and engage with centrally led professional learning.

Over the last 3 academic sessions increasing numbers of practitioners have been recruited to attend the full-time Cardiff University Welsh in a Year Sabbatical Scheme.

Review and development of a new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27

During 2021-22 the Council began steps to review and develop a new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27. This included setting up a Welsh Language Forum, made up of key internal and external stakeholders, working collaboratively in partnership with Menter Iaith. An initial workshop was held on 17th November 2021 to begin evaluating the former strategy, in terms of what had been achieved, as well as identifying key areas for development and improvement as well as considering key targets and outcomes. The session was framed using survey feedback received from attendees prior to the session.

Positive outcomes of the session included re-establishing a Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network and for the group to meet quarterly with the purpose of supporting the development of Blaenau Gwent's Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27.

In agreement with the Welsh Language Commissioner's Officer, development of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy has been aligned to the 2022 election process and subsequent setting of a new administration for Council. Therefore, sign-off of our new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27 is scheduled to be considered democratically in October 2022, following recess.

Meeting our operational standards

Employees Welsh Language Skills

The information in this section has been provided via the Organisational Development Team using the Council's iTrent system and represents staff Welsh language ability as of 31st March 2022.

Staff have the ability and responsibility to maintain their own staff records. The base figure for the data is 2,464 staff on the Council's establishment list (a decrease of 16.3% in comparison to 2020-21 records).

Speak Welsh

The number of employees who have Welsh language speaking skills as of 31st March 2022 amounts to 470 (19%) staff who can speak 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately', or 'a little'. A slight increase of 1% (17 staff) in comparison to 2020-21.

However, just over half of the total number of staff declare they have no Welsh Speaking ability (53%) which is a slight increase compared with the last reporting period (50%, 2020-21). Although, just over a quarter of staff (28%) chose not to disclose their Welsh language speaking ability via iTrent.

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:

Chart 1: Speak Welsh

Ability to speak Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	33 (1%)
Moderately	123 (5%)
Quite Well	17 (1%)
A Little	297 (12%)
No ability	1312 (53%)
No response	701 (28%)
Total	2,464

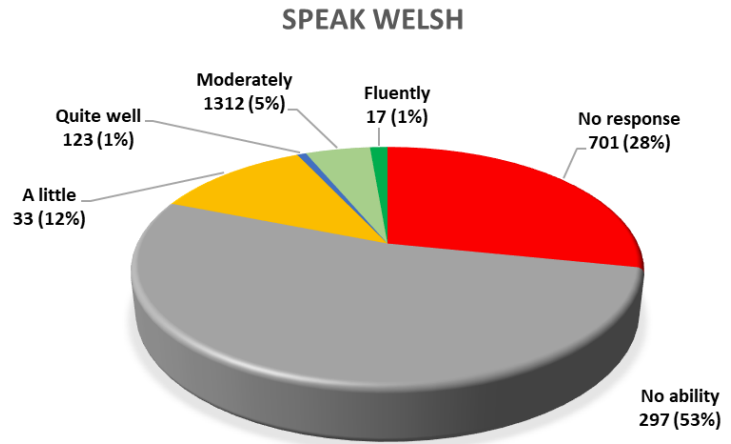


Chart 2: Understand Welsh

Ability to understand Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	34 (1%)
Moderately	144 (6%)
Quite Well	22 (1%)
A Little	334 (14%)
No ability	1281 (52%)
No response	668 (27%)
Total	2,464

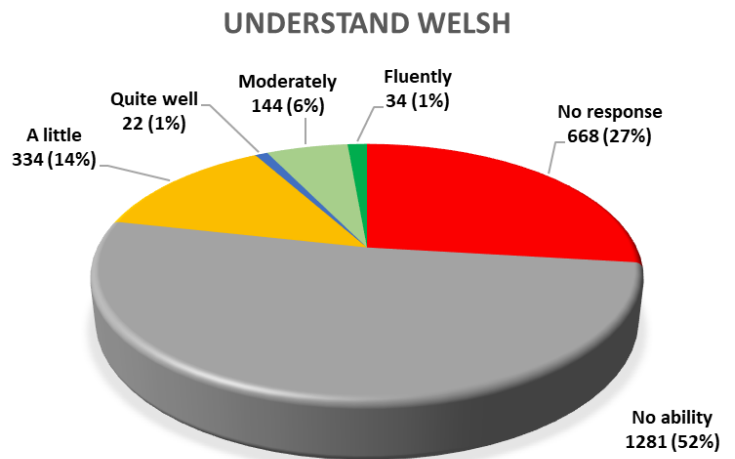


Chart 3: Write Welsh

Ability to write Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	29 (1%)
Moderately	100 (4%)
Quite Well	19 (1%)
A Little	242 (10%)
No ability	1344 (55%)
No response	748 (30%)
Total	2,464

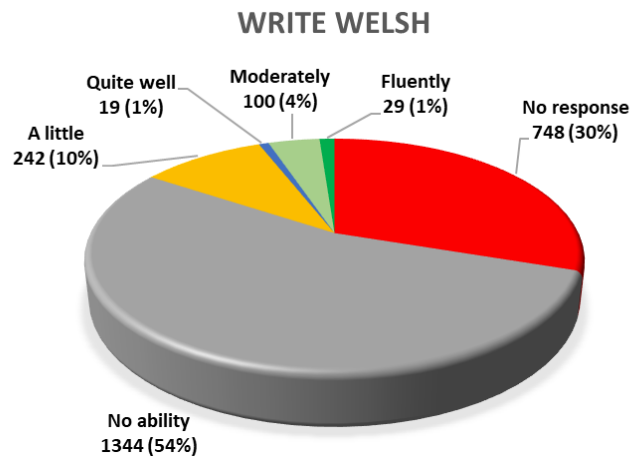
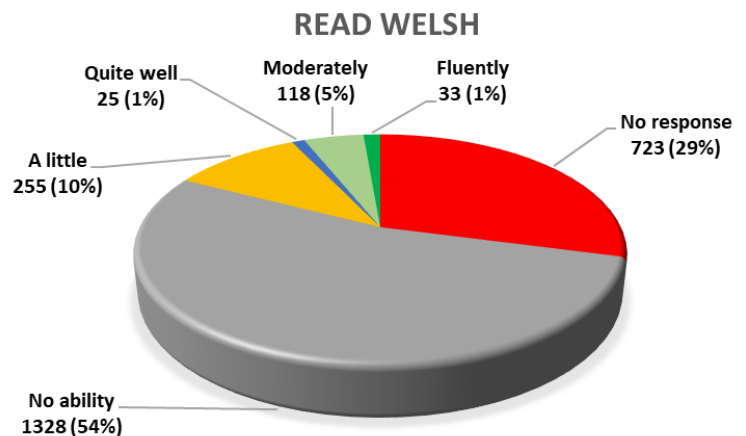


Chart 4: Read Welsh

Ability to read Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	33 (1%)
Moderately	118 (5%)
Quite Well	25 (1%)
A Little	255 (10%)
No ability	1328 (54%)
No response	723 (29%)
Total	2,464

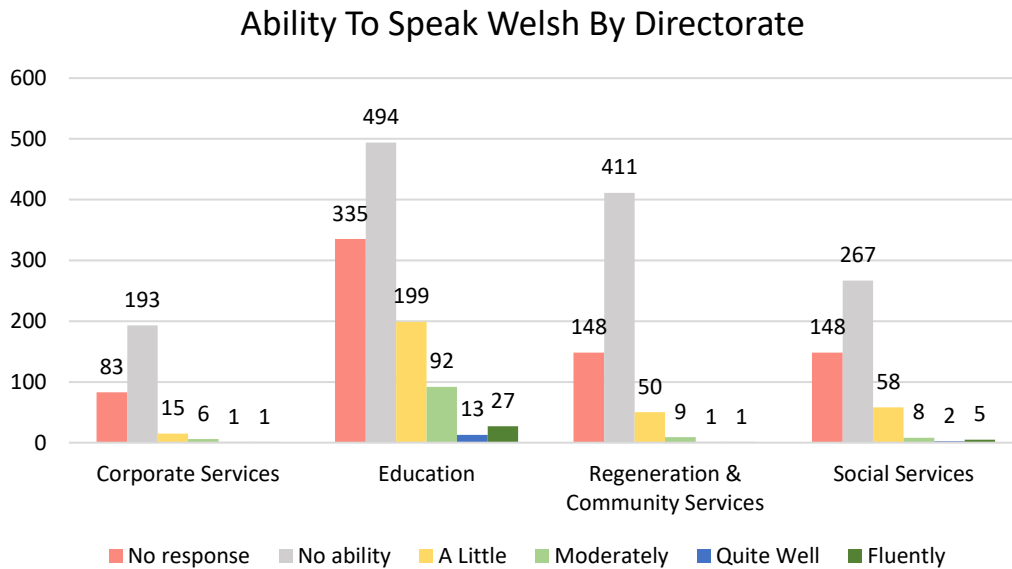


The above graphs show that the figures regarding ability are very similar across speaking, understanding, writing, and reading skill areas. The percentage of staff that declare they are 'fluent' is 1% while the percentage of staff who say they have 'no ability' is between 52% to 55%.

Nearly a quarter of staff (22%) consider themselves as having an ability to Understand Welsh, while only 16% have an ability to Write Welsh, with 16% noting an ability to Read Welsh and 19% being able to Speak Welsh (a slight increase from 2020-21). These figures are comparably like last years' reporting period.

Fluent Welsh Speakers by Directorate and Contract Type

The following graphs and tables reflect the total number of Fluent Welsh Speakers by Directorate and Contract Type across the organisation.



A total of 34 staff declare fluency which is a decrease of 10 staff (22%) in comparison to 2020-21.

The Education Directorate has the most fluent Welsh Speakers (27), and there is 1 member of staff who declares fluency in the Corporate Services Directorate which is a positive uplift as in previous reporting periods 0 declared Welsh language fluency.

Recruitment - Welsh Language Skills Requirement

When recruiting for new or vacant posts, Managers are required to complete a Welsh Language Skills Job Assessment form. The information shapes the content of the job description, advertisement requisition, interview procedure and subsequently any employment. In line with the requirements of the Welsh language standards, the Council maintains appropriate records of each assessment.

During the scope of the reporting period a total of 493 posts were advertised by the Council; of which 3 posts stated that Welsh Language Skills were '**essential**' and according to records 418 posts identified Welsh as '**desirable**'.

The Council's policy is that all posts are to be made Welsh 'Desirable' as a minimum requirement. Also, 0 posts were listed in the reporting period where Welsh language skills were identified as a skill that needed to be learnt following an individual's appointment to a post.

In response to our Annual Welsh Language Monitoring Visit 2021-22, Organisational Development are reviewing all its recruitment processes to ensure compliance and to increase and retain Welsh language skills across the workforce.

4. Conclusions and recommendations/actions

Blaenau Gwent Council will continue to respond positively to the Welsh Language Standards and is committed to meeting its duties under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. We recognise that there is still further work to be done around reinforcing the requirements and seeking to continually improve the quality and availability of services through the medium of Welsh.

As part of our work in the forthcoming year we will continue to take forward the following key actions:

- Development and publication of our new Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27, as well as supporting and developing Blaenau Gwent's new Welsh Language Forum.
- Promotion of use of Welsh in the workplace and increased training opportunities for staff; particularly staff who are key in supporting the upholding of our operational delivery standards. Including development of informal sessions for staff to use Welsh via 'Hoffi Coffi'.
- Support the review of our policy making standards, including the new Policy on Awarding Grants.
- Strengthening of our existing recruitment processes to increase our current and future workforces Welsh language skills.

Over the forthcoming period we aim to continue our progress, in relation to meeting our Welsh language duties, and make any necessary improvements to ensure we deliver the best possible services for our staff, residents, partners and stakeholders.