

Welsh Language Scheme: Annual Monitoring Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner 2022-2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is our Annual Monitoring Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner, submitted in Welsh and English. It outlines our performance in fulfilling our Welsh Language commitments during 2022-2023.

2. Background

- 2.1 In 2011, we made a commitment to fully support the principle of promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language in a proportionate and reasonable way and treating the language no less favourably than the English language.
- 2.2 The context for this commitment is the demand for Welsh among our customers and the linguistic profile of the County Borough in which we work. We know demand for Welsh language services is currently low. However, we welcome dealings in either Welsh or English, and we respect the right of our customers to communicate with us in the language of their choice. The scheme outlines the services we are committed to providing through the medium of Welsh.
- 2.3 We are committed to working with the Welsh Language Commissioner in relation to the forthcoming Welsh Language Standards for the housing sector. We are not aware of any updates relating to this and would welcome news.

3. Management and administration of the Scheme

3.1 Reporting on progress

Our Equality & Diversity Partner reports to Board every year, prior to sending this report to the Welsh Language Commissioner. In preparing this report, we have referred to 'The Welsh Language Commissioner's Regulatory Framework' which explains how Welsh Language Schemes are regulated.

3.2 Monitoring & reviewing

Monitoring our Welsh Language Scheme is an ongoing process. We have a dedicated resource in our Equality & Diversity Partner who is responsible for promoting, monitoring and reporting on its compliance.

Our Equality Impact Assessment process ensures the impact of any policy, practice or service provision on the Welsh Language is considered at the earliest stage of their development.

Our complaints process records and deals with complaints in relation to our Scheme. This ensures any complaints can be addressed, monitored, lessons learnt and shared within the business. During this period, no complaints about the Welsh language were received.

4. Compliance with our Welsh Language Scheme

4.1 Contact with our customers

Our customer hub answers the main telephone line using a bilingual greeting. We have a process in place available on our staff intranet site, to ensure colleagues know how to respond to telephone calls from Welsh speakers. We use an external language interpretation provider where calls are received from Welsh speakers.

When we arrange for customers to attend meetings, measures are in place to ensure they receive a Welsh language service if they wish. This can be with an interpreter present (booked in advance), or through the use of on-demand video interpreting. Simultaneous translation is available for public meetings.

Our existing service level agreement with Torfaen County Borough Council's Welsh Language team is still in place. This means we have an efficient and effective process for the translation of written material. This provides Welsh to English and English to Welsh translation, editing, checking and proofreading for us, to ensure there is no delay when a Welsh written response is required.

Our customer experience work to ensure customer channels are accessible and inclusive continues. At the time of reporting, we have two confirmed Welsh speaking customers.

Developments this year:

- Our customer experience work continues. Our letter writing process for sending a letter to twenty or more customers has been reviewed. There are some essential rules to follow which includes the Welsh Language. Where a letter needs translating into Welsh, colleagues need to build translation time into timescales to ensure that providing correspondence in Welsh does not in itself lead to any delay.
- Information on how to access translation and interpretation services is included in job-specific inductions for new colleagues.
- Raising awareness amongst customer hub colleagues of our obligations under the Scheme through their team meetings and the development of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion e-learning modules for colleagues.
- Using customer feedback to make improvements to customer facing information provision in Welsh.

4.2 Corporate Identity and signs

Bilingualism is integral to our brand guidelines, so all signs (including temporary signs, notices, on-site health and safety signage) are bilingual.

Developments this year:

A review of our brand guidelines was carried out. This reaffirms our commitment to the Welsh Language. We have a process in place, co-ordinated by our communications and marketing team to ensure bilingualism is achieved.

4.3 Promotional material and customer facing information

We have a process in place, co-ordinated by our communications and marketing team to ensure such material is bilingual.

4.4 Our reception

Signage and customer facing material in our reception area are available in Welsh and English. Assurance checks highlighted a lack of awareness following staffing changes, so a process is in place for the future.

4.5 Our website and social media

Our website is available in English and Welsh. Through our service level agreement with Torfaen County Borough Council, work continues to quality check this.

The primary purpose of our social media is to encourage feedback and engage with our customers. When anyone contacts us in Welsh, we have a duty to provide the response in Welsh. We share public information messages bilingually across our social media platforms. For example, Bank Holiday shutdowns, Christmas, Easter and public events we are attending.

4.6 Staffing and recruitment

Monitoring forms continue to be sent to new colleagues to identify Welsh Language skills, which helps us to build our knowledge of Welsh speaking colleagues.

Our Welsh Language Scheme is on our website and staff intranet to ensure there is access to and use of the Scheme.

Developments this year: With one Welsh speaking colleague in our customer hub, any vacancies in this area seek to attract Welsh speakers. So the ability to speak Welsh is advertised in the role profiles as a desirable criterion.

4.7 Welsh Language lessons and language awareness

Colleagues can access a 32-week Welsh Language course for free (through Coleg Gwent) within work hours to help and encourage them to learn and use Welsh in the workplace.

Developments this year:

- One colleague starts the entry level – Mynediad 1 (compared with five last year).
- Four colleagues continue with their learning.
- Supported Shwmae Day (15 October 2022) with aim of raising awareness of the language and encouraging colleagues to start conversations with 'Shwmae'. This involved sharing information about our commitments and a 'Give it a Go – Shwmae Day' quiz.

5. **What's next?**

- **Contact with customers:** Our customer experience work will continue as we focus on customer data collection and how it's used to ensure customers' language and communication needs are continually met.

- **Welsh Language awareness:**
 - For this year's Shwmae Day we are working with Torfaen County Borough Council's Welsh Language Officer. We are holding a Welsh Language taster session for colleagues, who wish to learn useful workplace-related Welsh phrases and questions.
 - Inclusive communication sessions for colleagues are taking place every 3 months starting in September. The sessions will help colleagues to understand the importance of tailoring services to customers to ensure inclusivity and accessibility; this includes our approach to communicating with Welsh speaking customers.
 - Continue working with our customer hub so they consider the needs of Welsh speakers when they come into contact with them.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 We remain committed to our Welsh Language Scheme ensuring we treat the Welsh and English languages equally. We will continue to use, learn from feedback and develop the services we offer to ensure compliance.