

Welsh Language Standards Annual report 2023/24

This document is also available in Welsh.

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1. Introduction

The Welsh Language Standards require Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) to produce and publish an annual report by 30th July each year.

This 2023/24 annual report covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and outlines how the council continues to be compliant during this period as well as highlighting any new developments/areas of progress.

2. How the council complies with the Welsh Language Standards

- 2.1 The council is not under challenge for any standards at this time.
- 2.2 The council is currently reliant on the Equalities, Welsh language, and Engagement manager to oversee the commissioner requirements since the post of the Welsh Language Office became vacant last October. Employees continue to receive regular updates and information regarding the Welsh language in terms of compliance, access to resources such as training and raising the profile of the language and culture. In April 2023 the Welsh Language e-learning training module was made mandatory to all staff
- 2.3 In May 2023 a project begun to review the Welsh telephony options available to all customers calling. Currently work is ongoing to provide service areas with the relevant options to ensure full compliance to the Welsh language standards is achieved. Additionally, the Welsh translation page with the new framework details has been updated for staff alongside a message circulated via Bridgendors to ensure staff are aware of this updated provision.
- 2.4 Support to the Welsh Education Strategic Plan is ongoing in order to achieve the commitments outlined. This includes the launch, promotion, and ongoing marketing of the Welsh-medium education journey video as part of the Welsh in Education Forum. Significant communications, across various networks have been specifically designed to promote the Welsh language with ongoing work to enhance the Welsh Education pages of our website.
- 2.5 The Welsh Language Manager attends quarterly meetings with partners and voluntary organisations that deliver services through the medium of Welsh. These meetings are an opportunity to share information, ideas and experience whilst helping to identify Welsh language related priorities for Bridgend County Borough across partner agencies.
- 2.6 As part of the manager induction programme, the Equalities and Welsh Language manager delivers a presentation on the Welsh Language Standards and what this means in practice for managers. This is to ensure there is a full understanding of the council's obligations and their management responsibilities to ensuring staff are aware of the Welsh Language compliance standards. Staff intranet pages remain available to access any guidance required around the Welsh Language compliance. There is also the dedicated Welsh email inbox (WLS@bridgend.gov.uk) for staff to utilise for any Welsh Language queries or guidance required.

- 2.7 The council provides a range of Welsh language training and resources to staff, including support with community courses on Welsh language training which is regularly communicated via staff messages. There continues to be a compliance document available, which details how we will provide the relevant service delivery, operational, record-keeping, promotional and policy making standards. Our complaints procedure is also available on our website as well as previous annual reports.
- 2.8 We provide information to the Welsh Language Commissioner as requested, investigating complaints, and providing support to service areas to address any escalated issues. We continue to take part in audit procedures internally and externally that are carried out by the Commissioner's office to ensure that we are compliant as and when presented.

3. Service delivery

During 2023/24 the Council maintained our service delivery commitments by:

- 3.1 Ensuring any responses to correspondence received in Welsh are reciprocated where a reply is required. Additionally, we issue generic bilingual or separate English and Welsh versions of correspondence, treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English depending on declared language choice. All departments are required to provide a bilingual greeting over the telephone and, where relevant, conversations continue in Welsh until they are concluded or callers are passed to Welsh speaking staff (if available), or to English speaking staff if no Welsh speaker is available and the customer is agreeable to this.

The operation of a single main telephone number (01656 643643) is available for those wishing to speak to someone in Welsh or English. If a Welsh speaking member of staff is not available at the time of calling, callers are advised, in Welsh, when such a service will be available. Those wishing to speak to someone in Welsh can also leave a message in Welsh and we state on materials that advertise a BCBC telephone number that calls are welcomed in Welsh and English.

- 3.2 We continue to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language on any advertising materials. When we invite attendees to a meeting, it is instilled that staff offer the Welsh language option at the meeting and put the necessary arrangements in place to facilitate this. This process is also reflected when sending bilingual invitations to BCBC public meetings/events (where relevant) and those meetings/events funded by BCBC (50% or more funding). Anyone presenting at meetings will be asked if

they wish to use Welsh as well as attendees being advised that they are welcome to use the Welsh language (if we are advised in advance) at the meeting. Materials used for advertising these meeting/events or for display at the meetings/events are bilingual also.

- 3.3 We ensure that we produce public-facing marketing, advertising, and publicity materials (including press releases and statements) bilingually. This is also applicable to public-facing corporate documents such as policies and rules as well as consultation documentation. These documents aim to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English. Separate English versions of documents that are available in Welsh (where they are required to be) state this on the English version. Also, any publicly available forms are bilingual or available as English and Welsh versions. If separate versions are in place, we state on the English version of the form that a Welsh form is available.
- 3.4 BCBC respond to Welsh language social media messages in Welsh where a reply is required. We also replace street, place and direction signs (including temporary signs where applicable) following damage or normal wear and tear, with bilingual signs with the Welsh text appearing first. In addition, we also produce official notices bilingually with the Welsh text always appearing first.
- 3.5 We have Welsh speaking reception staff wearing lanyards to show customers they are able to provide a Welsh language service and bilingual audio announcements are done with the Welsh announcement first at all times. We continue to produce our agenda and minutes for Cabinet and committee meetings bilingually (standard 41) and these are available on our website.
- 3.6 During this period we have continued to develop bilingual content and functionality on the website as required (standard 52 and 56). We post bilingually on social media and respond to Welsh queries received in Welsh, where a response is required as standard.

4. New developments

- 4.1 We have continued to improve and develop our online platform 'My Account', enabling subscribers to report issues such as pest control and street lighting via the platform through the medium of Welsh. Work is underway to implement a bilingual staff intranet.

- 4.2 By changing the Welsh Language e-learning training to a mandatory module for staff this allows Learning and Development to have access to completion figures and the ability to send out reminders to staff that have the training outstanding.

5. Policy-making standards

- 5.1 Staff are required to use our equalities impact assessment (EIA) process to ensure consideration is given to the Welsh Language when policies are revised or developed. This process ensures a thorough risk assessment is carried out and requires evidence-gathering and investigation to ensure the Welsh language is not at detriment. This is a consideration for those taking part in any consultation, engagement and research activity the Council carries out whereby views on whether a policy decision (if applicable) could impact on the use of the Welsh language.
- 5.2 An Awarding Grants Protocol has been approved, which ensures that decisions on awarding grants identify the effects on the Welsh language, and then consider how negative effects can be minimised and positive effects maximised. This has been shared with officers who administer grants and published on the intranet as a guide for BCBC staff. The Protocol is in line with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, which must be considered.

6. Operational standards

- 6.1 In February 2024 Internal Audit carried out an inspection on our Welsh Language adherence against the operational standards. During the audit a number of strengths and areas of good practice were identified as follows:
- Guidance is available to all staff members on the Welsh Language Standards via Bridgenders, which is a staff magazine produced on a quarterly basis.
 - The Council have published a 5-year strategy to promote and facilitate the Welsh Language in addition to an Annual Report on the Council's compliance with the Standards.
 - Step-by-step guidance is available to staff members via Bridgenders detailing how the Welsh Translation Framework must be followed.

- A record of complaints received by the public relating to the Council's compliance with the Standards is maintained.
 - All internal policies sampled by the Auditor which were required to be translated in accordance with Welsh Language Standards 105-111, were available in Welsh.
- 6.2 There is ongoing work taking place to expand on bilingual services available to staff, this includes access to computer software for staff to check Welsh spelling and grammar. Also, employees have access to bilingual email signatures and out of office messages and Welsh speakers and Welsh learners are encouraged to identify themselves as such on their email signature, using the relevant recognised logos.
- 6.3 Human Resources assess the Welsh language skills of our employees and staff are encouraged to update their personal development and language skills on an ongoing basis. Training is available such as 'meet and greet' and Cwrs Mynediad which are available to all staff. There are multiple e-learning packages available to staff from Welsh language awareness and culture to Welsh language standards guidance. The language preference of employees is always captured in order to provide correspondence relating to their employment, and various employment related forms in Welsh as required.
- 6.4 All Council buildings have bilingual signage in place including at our main reception areas and customers can be expected to be greeted bilingually with the Welsh language taking precedent. Customers and visitors are welcomed to utilise our services through the medium of Welsh and all front-line staff can greet the public in Welsh.
- 6.5 We provide a report on the five year strategy at our Cabinet Equalities Committee on an annual basis. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) was implemented in September 2022. We have continued to work with Education and other members to progress with the objectives set in the 5-year plan. We have continued to make progress in the development of the Welsh Medium childcare settings across the County Borough. A steering group made up of childcare professionals and third sector colleagues has been established and meets regularly to ensure effective delivery over the next three years.

7. Record-keeping standards

- 7.1 All complaints received relating to our compliance are recorded as part of our corporate complaints system. The Welsh Language officer also maintains

records of any queries or initial investigations that are received by the Local Authority.

- 7.2 Human Resources monitor and record the number of employees accessing training courses through the medium of English and Welsh - see section 9 for further details. Additionally keeping a record of the Welsh language skills of employees and assessments of new and vacant posts – see section 10 for further details.
- 7.3 A record is kept of the number of Welsh interactions that take place over a number of channels (telephone, face to face and digital) within the customer services contact centre.

8. Complaints

- 8.1 A complaint was received by the commissioner on 18/04/2023 relating to English-only signs. The complaint relates to 4 road signs between Cwmfelin and Ysgol Gyfun Cymraeg Llangynwyd where it was claimed that all signs declared "Bridgend" in English only. BCBC submitted a response to the commissioner to evidence the signs in question have been in place since between 2008 and 2011 therefore before the implementation of the Standards. No further investigation was required by the commissioner.
- 8.2 The Council received notification from the commissioner on 17th May 2023 that problems with the Welsh telephone line were reported. It was noted that there would be a full review of the IVR including regular tests to ensure that any problems are resolved quickly. Finally, it was noted that the department would endeavour to recruit Welsh speakers wherever possible which has now been achieved.

9. Employee skills and training

9.1 Welsh language skills as of 31 March 2024:

	BCBC excluding Schools				Schools			
Description	Female	Male	Total	%	Female	Male	Total	%
Total Headcount	2334	746	3080		2387	548	2935	

Welsh Speaker				
0 - No Skills	1165	371	1536	49.87%
A1 - Entry Level	514	164	678	22.01%
A2 - Foundation Level	3	1	4	0.13%
B1 - Intermediate Level	53	16	69	2.24%
B2 - Advanced Level	0	1	1	0.03%
C1 - Proficiency Level	94	25	119	3.86%
C2 - Fully proficient	0	2	2	0.06%
Not Declared	504	166	670	21.75%
Prefer not to say	1	0	1	0.03%

Welsh Speaker			
363	85	448	15.26%
396	79	475	16.18%
0	0	0	0.00%
86	13	99	3.37%
0	0	0	0.00%
143	23	166	5.66%
0	0	0	0.00%
1398	348	1746	59.49%
1	0	1	0.03%

	BCBC excluding Schools			
Description	Female	Male	Total	%
Total Headcount	2334	746	3080	
Welsh Reader				
0 - No Skills	1144	370	1514	49.16%
A1 - Entry Level	515	160	675	21.92%
A2 - Foundation Level	3	0	3	0.10%
B1 - Intermediate Level	66	24	90	2.92%
B2 - Advanced Level	0	1	1	0.03%
C1 - Proficiency Level	100	21	121	3.93%
C2 - Fully proficient	0	2	2	0.06%
Not Declared	505	168	673	21.85%
Prefer not to say	1	0	1	0.03%

	Schools			
Female	Male	Total	%	
2387	548	2935		
Welsh Reader				
353	85	438	14.92%	
399	76	475	16.18%	
0	1	1	0.03%	
97	13	110	3.75%	
0	0	0	0.00%	
139	24	163	5.55%	
0	0	0	0.00%	
1398	349	1747	59.52%	
1	0	1	0.03%	

	BCBC excluding Schools			
Description	Female	Male	Total	%

	Schools			
Female	Male	Total	%	

Total Headcount	2334	746	3080	
Welsh Writer				
0 - No Skills	1274	427	1701	55.23%
A1 - Entry Level	411	109	520	16.88%
A2 - Foundation Level	3	0	3	0.10%
B1 - Intermediate Level	49	21	70	2.27%
B2 - Advanced Level	0	1	1	0.03%
C1 - Proficiency Level	92	18	110	3.57%
C2 - Fully proficient	0	2	2	0.06%
Not Declared	504	168	672	21.82%
Prefer not to say	1	0	1	0.03%

2387	548	2935	
Welsh Writer			
407	92	499	17.00%
364	71	435	14.82%
0	1	1	0.03%
84	13	97	3.30%
0	0	0	0.00%
132	22	154	5.25%
0	0	0	0.00%
1399	349	1748	59.56%
1	0	1	0.03%

	BCBC excluding Schools			
Description	Female	Male	Total	%
Total Headcount	2334	746	3080	
Welsh Listener				
0 - No Skills	61	11	72	2.34%
A1 - Entry Level	41	7	48	1.56%
A2 - Foundation Level	3	0	3	0.10%
B1 - Intermediate Level	3	1	4	0.13%
B2 - Advanced Level	0	1	1	0.03%
C1 - Proficiency Level	2	0	2	0.06%
C2 - Fully proficient	2	1	3	0.10%
Not Declared	2219	725	2944	95.58%
Prefer not to say	3	0	3	0.10%

	Schools			
Description	Female	Male	Total	%
Total Headcount	2387	548	2935	
Welsh Listener				
3	0	3	0.10%	
9	3	12	0.41%	
1	3	4	0.14%	
1	1	2	0.07%	
1	0	1	0.03%	
0	0	0	0.00%	
2	0	2	0.07%	
2369	541	2910	99.15%	
1	0	1	0.03%	

Please note:

- The 'Schools' category covers employees directly employed by governing bodies. Inclusion staff are included under the 'BCBC excluding schools' category.
- The 'Not Declared' category covers employees who have not provided details of their Welsh language skills.
- The skill levels identified are based on individual self-assessment.
- 194 employees hold a school position and an 'All other services' position and are counted once in their highest contracted hour position across BCBC.

Number of employees who attended training courses in Welsh between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

- 12 employees have attended 'Cwrs Mynediad' training in 2023/24, enabling them to develop their language skills further. This includes those undertaking year 1, based on two hours per week over 30 weeks.
- 14 employees have been supported to attend Welsh Language courses in the community. These courses included Foundation, Sylfaen Part 1 and Sylfaen Part 2, Sylfaen Part 3.
- There were no requests for face-to-face training materials to be made available in Welsh during the year.
- There have been 2165 e-learning completions for Welsh Language Awareness e-Learning (English – 2164, Welsh - 1) and 34 for Welsh Language Standards e-Learning (English - 34 Welsh - 0).
- 548 new employees completed the corporate induction e-learning module, and 61 new starters completed it via a workbook. Total completions 609. Corporate induction includes a section on the introduction to Welsh Language, the Welsh Language Standards and links to the Welsh Language E-Learning Modules and Welsh Language Training Opportunities.
- 24 new managers completed the manager induction e-learning module. Manager induction includes an introduction to Welsh Language and the Welsh Language Standards and links to the Welsh Standards E-Learning Module and the Welsh Language Awareness E-Learning Module.

10. New and Vacant Posts

Number of new and vacant posts advertised during 2023/24 where Welsh language skills were:

Category	Number of posts categorised	Percentage of posts categorised
Essential	16	1.86%
Desirable	845	98.14%
Need to learn Welsh	0	0%
No Welsh skills required	0	0%

11. Reception services: contact centres and telephone contact centres

Demand for Welsh services in the Customer Contact Centre between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

Face to face interactions in Welsh	0
Total visits	11,539
Welsh requests as % of total interactions conducted	0.00%

Demand for Welsh services in the Telephone Contact Centre between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

Volume of calls during normal working hours (Welsh and English)	79,146
Volume of calls received out of hours (Welsh and English)	1,361
Total calls received (Welsh and English)	80,507

Volume of calls in Welsh	122
Welsh requests as a % of total calls	0.15%

Whilst the council offices remain open for customers to access council service, demand continues to be low for face-to-face channel across all languages.

Telephony requests decreased this from 115,671 to 114,241 (normal working hours (Welsh and English). Volume of calls received out of hours (Welsh and English) also decreased from 5,112 to 1619.

Welsh requests as a % of total contacts also decreased from 0.05% to 0.02% (Welsh line did encounter issues early 2023)

Customers demand for the online channel continues to increase which in turn has impacted the customer demand on both our telephone and face-to-face channels.

There is still a low number of requests to contact us in Welsh. We also have a low number of staff who can speak Welsh and whilst we do all we can, recruiting Welsh speakers continues to be difficult.

In addition to this we will also carry out regular reviews of our IVR system to ensure we are routing calls to the correct department, whether Welsh or English is selected. We are also working with some front-line services and reviewing their inbound channels to make sure the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language.

12. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Six full EIAs were carried out and considered the impact of the policy/strategy on people's opportunity to use the Welsh language in a positive or negative way and treat both languages equally. No negative impact was identified and as a result, no amendments were made to the proposed policies/strategies assessed.

13. Promoting and raising awareness of the Welsh language and Welsh culture

The council is proud to promote, celebrate and raise awareness of the Welsh language, the culture and any events taking place locally to raise the profile of the language. Below are just some of the events and activities we have promoted between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

- Welsh Language Rights Day
- Shwmae Shwmae

- Mudiad Meithrin and Cymraeg i Blant
- Welsh Language Standards Annual Report
- St David's Day
- St Dwynwen's Day
- Welsh-Medium playgroup or school
- Childcare Offer Wales
- Dydd Miswg Cymru
- Dylan Thomas Day
- Celebrated the success of our local Welsh medium and English schools with the achievements they received from the Siarter Iaith awards.