

**TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH**



**BWRDEISTREF
SIROL
TORFAEN**

Annual Report 2023 - 2024

Welsh Language Standards Compliance

Prepared in accordance with the requirements of

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011

June 2024



Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

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1. Introduction

Torfaen County Borough Council strives to deliver a high quality Welsh language service to its residents and visitors.

Throughout 2023/24, the team have worked with Directorates to raise awareness and advise on the legal requirements of the Standards. Work has commenced on the Corporate Welsh language Training to ensure that new employees are aware of the importance and ethical requirements when implementing the Welsh language (Wales) Measure 2011.

The Council has continued to support partners and external organisations who provide services on behalf of the Council with the aim of improving the quality and availability of their Welsh services.

This report sets out our compliance with the Standards and submits the necessary data for the 2023/24 financial year. We have removed barriers that may prohibit the progress of implementing the Standards and will allow increased promotion and the recruitment of staff to deliver our Welsh language services.

This report was presented to full Council and ensures that Elected Members are fully aware of the corporate responsibilities and statutory obligations under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

The Council approved Annual Report will be published on the Council's corporate website (www.torfaen.gov.uk), under the Welsh Language section and available at local offices where the public have access, no later than 30 June 2024.

The current Welsh Language Commissioner, Mrs Efa Gruffudd Jones has been in the role since January 2023.

2. Background

This Annual Report is produced under the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 and Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015. The legal framework requires Torfaen County Borough Council to report on five statutory areas.

Areas	Relevant Standard and/or Sub-section
Compliance	158, 164, 170
Complaints	147, 148, 149, 156, 158 (2), 162, 164 (2), 168 (a), 170 (2) (d)
Welsh Language Skills	170 (2) (a), 151
Welsh Language Training	170 (2) (b) (c), 152
Recruitment	170 (2) (ch), 154

The Councils' Welsh language standards are detailed within its Compliance Notice dated 30 September 2015. The Council is subject to 170 standards contained within the Compliance Notice. A copy of Torfaen County Borough Council Compliance Notice can be found [here](#)

The Welsh Language Team are part of the Public Service Support Unit, which sits under the Adult and Communities Directorate. We currently have four members of staff working on corporate Welsh language delivery on behalf of the Council:

Welsh Language Officer
Welsh Translation Co-ordinator
Welsh Language Translators (1 x F/T, 1 P/T)

Adult & Communities Directorate
Public Service Support Unit
Civic Centre
Pontypool
Torfaen NP4 6YB

Telephone: (01495) 766096

The appointed Executive Member for Corporate Governance & Performance (including Welsh Language) for 2023/24 was Cllr Peter Jones

3. Compliance

Guidance and the Council's interpretation on the requirements of the Service Delivery Standards are published on the Council's staff intranet. The council carries out their own mystery shopper exercise to ensure consistent compliance with the Standards.

Service Delivery Standards

Standards Group	Action taken during 2023/24	Action to be taken during 2024/2025
Standards 1 - 7 Correspondence sent and received	<p>Guidance issued through the Staff Bulletin</p> <p>Corporate email addresses have been translated and will continue to work with SRS to adopt the new bilingual addresses</p>	Monitor general correspondence with the public to ensure compliance.
Standards 8 - 22 Telephone calls made and received	<p>The Council has tested the automated recorded messages and have been made compliant with the relevant Standards</p> <p>From April 2023 to March 2024 the Council's main call centre received a total of 77,678 calls. 0.84% (650 calls) of these callers chose the Welsh language option.</p>	<p>Ensure members and staff are aware of the protocol when dealing with Welsh language calls.</p> <p>Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner on action taken following investigation CS1149</p>
Standards 24 – 36 Meetings with the Public	<p>The advances by Microsoft in introducing simultaneous translation within Teams has ensured that all requests can be accommodated where required.</p> <p>Although there was some issues with sound quality during 2023/2024</p>	Continue to work with our directorates on the requirement to assess the language skills of their audiences.
Standards 37 - 51, 69 - 70 Other bilingual documents	All directorates have been informed on the Standards relating to producing public documents.	Monitor samples of documents to ensure compliance.

Standards 52 – 60 Websites, Social Media and Apps, and Self-service Machines	The Welsh pages of the corporate website received 6,411 hits during 2023/24, in comparison to 2,122,148 hits on the English pages. This is almost double the visits during the previous year.	Monitor Council owned websites to ensure compliance
Standards 61 – 63 Signs	There were no new housing developments during 2023/24. Existing nameplates are not translated.	Monitor the further refurbishment of the Civic Centre and Tŷ Blaen offices to ensure compliance.
Standards 64 – 68 Reception Services	Periodic visits during the year to ensure compliance.	Work with the recruitment team and managers to ensure that all new reception posts are evaluated with the appropriate as Welsh language skills.
Standards 71 – 75 Awarding Grants	Internal Audit assess performance of any funding awarded as part of a grant in line with the awarding grants Standards. No assessments have been carried out during 2023/2024 in relation to grants and their compliance with the requirement	Work with Internal Audit to ensure assessments are carried out
Standards 76 – 80 Awarding Contracts	All procurement Invitations include Welsh language element scoring. All successful tenders are offered Welsh language support.	Continue to work with third party providers on Welsh language requirements and support
Standards 81 – 82 Promoting Welsh Language Services	guidance issued to staff on promoting services via social media	Monitor social media to ensure that Welsh language services are actively promoted.
Standard 83 Corporate Identity	The Council's corporate identity is bilingual.	Monitor for compliance

Standards 84 & 86 Educational Courses	Courses offered were advertised and a language choice offered. All courses are assessed in terms of attendee numbers and delivery.	Ensure that the assessment of courses are publicised on our website
Standard 87 Public Address Systems	Announcements made in all lifts within Council Offices are bilingual.	Monitor for compliance

Policy Making Standards

Guidance and the Council’s interpretation on the requirements of the Policy Making Standards are published on the Council’s staff intranet.

Standards Group	Action taken during 2023/24	Action to be taken during 2024/2025
Standards 88 - 93	The Council’s integrated impact assessment, linked to the 7 national well-being goals is used to ensure that the Welsh language has been considered in policy decisions. The Welsh Language Unit has oversight of each policy decision that requires an integrated Impact assessment prior to presenting to Elected Members	Develop an on-line training module (by July 2024) to inform staff of the requirement and guidance on how to implement “conscientious consideration” for the Welsh language at every stage of the process.

Operational Standards

Guidance and the Council's interpretation for staff on the requirements of the Operational Standards are published on the Council's intranet. The council will carry out their own mystery shopper exercise to ensure consistent compliance with the Standards.

Standards Group	Action taken during 2023/24	Action to be taken during 2024/25
Standards 99 – 104 Employment Documents	All electronic HR documents are bilingual. Automated system for arranging leave / absences and staff expenses, are in English only.	Monitor to ensure compliance
Standards 105 – 111 Human Resources Policies	All Council HR policies are provided in Welsh on the staff intranet (SWOOP).	Monitor to ensure compliance
Standards 112 – 119 Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures	7 (0.4% of those who have completed their preferred language) employees have indicated their preferred language of communication is Welsh	New campaign to encourage staff to complete their language skills and preferred language.
Standards 120 – 125 Staff Intranet and IT Resources	The Welsh 'language pack' is installed on all new and replacement computers	Review all resources on the Welsh intranet pages
Standard 127 Staff Language Skills	Please see section on <i>Welsh language skills</i> .	New language levels will be introduced (CEFR) to bring language skills in line with Welsh Government, the centre for learning Welsh and other local authorities.
Standards 128 – 133 Staff Training	Please see section on <i>Welsh language skills</i> . No staff attended HR training offered in Welsh During 2023/2024, 12 employees undertook Welsh language training.	Continue to promote learning Welsh as a valuable skill. Develop an on-line Welsh awareness module and look to mandate for every new starter

<p>Standards 134 – 135 Wording and Logo for Staff Email Signatures</p>	<p>All staff are reminded, via line managers, to have a bilingual email signature in line with corporate standards.</p> <p>The “Work Welsh” logo is available for staff to download on the intranet.</p>	<p>Update all resources on the Welsh intranet pages.</p>
<p>Standards 136 - 140 Recruitment Process</p>	<p>Please see section on <i>Recruitment</i></p>	<p>New/vacant post assessment form to be introduced.</p> <p>Monitor compliance following removal of internal charging.</p>
<p>Standards 141 – 143 Internal Signage</p>	<p>Direct training has been given to staff who commission highway signage and street nameplates.</p> <p>Elected Members seminar held to raise awareness of the statutory Welsh language requirements in the context of the Street Naming and Numbering Policy.</p>	<p>Monitor the refurbishment of Council offices to ensure compliance.</p> <p>Welsh Language Unit to continue to sign-off all highway signage and street nameplates translations to ensure compliance.</p>
<p>Standard 144 Workplace announcements</p>	<p>Announcements made in all lifts within Council offices are bilingual.</p>	<p>Continue to monitor</p>

Complaints

All complaints received from residents through the medium of Welsh or relate to a failure to comply with the Welsh language Service Delivery Standards are dealt with in line with the Council's corporate complaints policy. Complaints are categorised in three stages

- **Stage 1** - Informal resolution to a complaint within 10 working days
- **Stage 2** - Escalated Stage 1 complaint or a complaint that involves more than one service area. Complaints are formally investigated and responded to within 20 working days.
- **Public Services Ombudsman / Welsh Language Commissioner** - Escalated Stage 2 complaint which may undertake an independent review on the complainant's behalf. The Ombudsman would expect the complainant to have exhausted the Council's complaints process prior to contact, except in exceptional circumstances. Under section 71 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, the Welsh Language Commissioner is able to accept complaints sent directly to the Commissioner's office and investigate on their behalf, if a complaint is deemed valid.

During 2023/2024, 6 complaints were received. The following table shows the number of complaints received at each stage:

Stage 1	Stage 2	Welsh Language Commissioner
1	0	5

Stage 1

Complaint from a member of the public on the 09/02/2024
Lack of Welsh play provision. The complaint was not upheld.

Welsh Language Commissioner

There were 5 new investigations carried out by the Welsh Language Commissioner during 2023/2024

- CS1130 - (ongoing from 2022/2023) - Complaint from a member of the public on 27/03/2023
English only cycle path sign located on the junction of Ty Coch Way and Hollybush Way in Cwmbran. The Commissioner did not conduct a full investigation.
- CS1145 - Complaint from a member of the public on 25/04/2023
Councils Twitter account not in Welsh and temporary traffic signs in Pontnewydd, Cwmbran
- CS1163 - Complaint from a member of the public on 12/06/2023
Street signs that used to be bilingual have changed to be in English only / road traffic signs in English only. The Commissioner did not conduct a full investigation.
- CS1061 - Complaint from a member of the public on 28/09/2022
This complaint refers to a complaint raised in September 2022, but was not investigated and referred to the Welsh Language Tribunal for determination. The case was re-opened in June 2023. The complaint relates to street name plates and Welsh language consideration when making Council decisions, The Investigation is on-going.

- CS1149 - Complaint raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner on 25/11/2023.
Four telephone calls made as part of the Commissioner's mystery shopper exercise were unanswered. This investigation is ongoing.
- CS1216 - Complaint from a member of the public on 27/11/2023
No reply sent to a request for Council Tax information in Welsh.
The Commissioner did not conduct a full investigation.

Welsh language skills

The Human Resources employee portal (iFOR) captures, records and reports on the language skills of staff, within the learning and development module, where staff are able to update their skills as necessary. 28% of staff have completed the assessment. Here is the most recent data held on staff Welsh language Skills and preferred language choice.

The table below shows each service area and the level of fluency using the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) scales for speaking Welsh.

0 = No Welsh Language Skills (this also includes staff who have not completed the assessment)

5 = Proficient

Number of Welsh speakers by Department

	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Adults and Communities	633	48	7	3	2	7	700
Economy & Environment	342	6	0	1	3	1	353
Children and Family Services	1220	63	3	2	0	4	1292
Resources Directorate	240	40	9	5	4	2	300
Shared Resource Service	203	22	5	0	1	1	232
Grand Total	2638	179	24	11	10	15	2877

Percentage (%) of Welsh Speakers by Department

		1	2	3	4	5	Total
Adults and Communities		13.6	6.9	0.4	0.3	1.0	22.2
Economy & Environment		1.7	0.0	0.3	0.8	0.3	3.1
Children and Family Services		4.9	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.3	5.6
Resources Directorate		13.3	3.0	1.7	1.3	0.7	20.0
Shared Resource Service		9.5	2.2	0.0	0.4	0.4	12.5
Grand Total		6.2	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5	8.3

Preferred Language of Staff

	English	Welsh	
Adults and Communities	243	3	
Economy & Environment	119	2	
Children and Family Services	137	2	
Resources Directorate	246	0	
Shared Resource Service	133	0	
Total	878	7	0.4%

During 2024/2025, the recording levels for Welsh language skills will change to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR organises language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2, which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User, and that can be further subdivided according to the needs of the local context. The levels are defined through 'can-do' descriptors.

CEFR do not exactly align with the ALTE scales we currently use. Therefore, we will be launching a campaign to collect this data from new and existing staff, which will inform us of where our language skills are situated currently and help address any areas where we may struggle to provide Welsh language services.

Welsh language training

The Council run a number of Welsh Language training courses, aimed at increasing the capacity of Welsh speakers within the organisation and raise the confidence of staff who are reluctant to use their Welsh skills. All courses are centrally funded.

During 2023/2024, 5 employees attended Welsh language training through the National Centre for Learning Welsh (delivered by Coleg Gwent).

2 members of staff from our customer care section will be attending the intensive Welsh Language Course in July. (not included in this years figures)

8.3% of our workforce are able to speak Welsh (Levels 1-5)

2 members of staff studied Welsh through “Say Something in Welsh” on-line audio course.

5 Members of staff completed the on-line awareness training offered by the National Centre for Learning Welsh

Standard 128, requires the Council to provide training in Welsh for staff in the following areas, if they are provided in English:

- Recruitment and interviewing;
- Performance management;
- Complaints and disciplinary procedures;
- Induction;
- Dealing with the public; and
- Health and safety.

Some training within these areas was provided during 2023/24, invitations to training offered attendees a language choice. No requests were received for training through the medium of Welsh.

Recruitment

During 2023/24, **885** new or vacant Torfaen County Borough Council posts were advertised.

The number of posts that were categorised as requiring Welsh language skills were as follows:

Category	Number of Advertisements	Percentage of Advertisements
Essential	30	3.39
Desirable	48	5.42
Need to be learnt	2	0.23
No Welsh skills required	805	90.96

As part of the recruitment process, and a requirement of Standard 136, each post advertised must be assessed for their Welsh language skills.

From April 2024, the internal charging for translations will be removed. Thus, allowing a greater number of posts to be advertised with Welsh language skills and the promotion of the language easier, removing the barriers to translation and balancing other budget pressures.

4. Conclusion

5 Year Promotion Strategy

The Council's new 5-year strategy (2024 – 2029) was approved by Council on 27 February 2024. Torfaen, will aim to increase the percentage of Welsh speakers from 8.24% in 2021 (2021 Census) to 17% by 2029.

The Strategy is closely aligned to the Welsh Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and the Welsh Government Strategy – Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers.

Staff Skills Audit.

We have many staff who have gone through Welsh medium education in the borough, but we know that often skills are forgotten, and confidence lost. We would like to support our staff to continue to use those extremely valuable life skills. This will also allow us to understand where we have skills gaps so we can look to fill these by recruiting and/or training in the future.

The Council currently records the Welsh language skills of staff on its main employee platform (iFOR) using the ALTE scale of measuring the skill levels in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding Welsh.

In order to align the skills with other public sector organisations, we aim to move to the CEFR levels of recording. The 7 skill levels ranging from 'no skills' (A0) to 'fluent' (C2) are also linked to recognised qualification and other assessment frameworks.

The new survey to encourage staff to record their language skills will be conducted during the Summer.

Removing Barriers

From April 2024, the internal charging of directorates for translations will be eliminated, removing the barriers faced by managers in balancing budget pressures.

This will allow for increased promotion of the language and our Welsh language offer to residents.

The increased use of technology will also assist the team to increase capacity and mitigate any increase demands on the translation service.

Cultural Events

To celebrate St Davids Day, in partnership with Menter Iaith Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen a Mynwy, the Council continued to support the 'Torf-hwyl' festival. The Council also raised awareness of St Davids Day, Santes Dwynwen and the various Eisteddfodau throughout the year.

Policy Development

The Welsh Language Unit continues to be part of the Intergrated Well Being Assessment on policy decisions.

However, the need to assess these impacts earlier in the policy development process has been recognised. During the latter part of the year, the unit has worked closely with colleagues to inform Directorates of the requirements of the Standards and assist in advising managers of the positive and adverse effects of the policy, both directly and in-directly.

A new training module will be launched in July 2024, aimed at managers who are involved in making policy decisions.