

**WALES & WEST HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

**REPORT TO BOARD – 25 MARCH 2021**

**WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER – ANNUAL UPDATE**

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Wales & West Housing (WWH) Welsh Language Scheme (WLS) was approved by Board in September 2010 and had subsequent approval from the Welsh Language Board (WLB) in December 2010.
- 1.2 An annual update is required by the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC), in line with all other housing associations in Wales. The annual update report covers the March 2020 to February 2021 period. This report includes all activities throughout the Association. A separate paper will be presented to the subsidiary boards in May (Cambria and Castell Ventures) that will provide an overview of the current practices in relation to the Welsh language across those parts of the Group.
- 1.3 During 2020 the Association has maintained its commitment to the Welsh language and it has been more important than ever to communicate with residents in their preferred language. Despite the challenges the Covid 19 pandemic has presented over the last 12 months, WWH continued to provide a bilingual service and delivered bilingual communication whilst actively encouraging the use of the Welsh language to positively impact and promote the use of the Welsh language within the Association.

**2.0 Welsh language skills**

- 2.1 There are currently 147 Welsh speaking staff in the Association and 46 of these staff are first language Welsh speakers.
- 2.2 All staff members within the Association have completed a self-assessment of their Welsh language skills, both spoken and written. Fluency levels of new employees are captured as part of their pre-employment checks. Both spoken and written skills have been recorded separately on the Association's HR system, Cascade. By capturing the data in a central portal, staff can update fluency levels as they change. Welsh language speakers are promoted on a designated intranet page to identify and encourage the use of the language within the Association and to assist in practical ways such as mentoring and translation or interpretation.
- 2.3 In addition, there are a number of Board members who have varying degrees of Welsh language knowledge.

**3.0 Welsh language training**

- 3.1 23 members of staff, including the Group Chief Executive (GCE), have been learning Welsh during the last year. Two of these staff have been attending night classes and the remaining staff continue to utilise various resources including 'Say Something in Welsh' and attending

intensive courses and using apps and books. The two staff attending night classes have progressed to the Intermediate level.

- 3.2 A number of Board members are still learning Welsh. Classes have not been possible so they have been relying on apps such as 'Say Something in Welsh' and have expressed an intent to continue with their learning post the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 3.3 WWH has supported learning and increasing the use of the Welsh language through an online app. During 2020-21, ten new and existing learners joined the six month pilot 'Say Something in Welsh'. The online language course, which promises that all committed learners will be confident Welsh speakers in six months, includes weekly on-line tasks and group video calls. The pilot commenced in August 2018 and is funded by WWH. During 2020/21:
- Two members of staff successfully completed the 6 month option;
  - Two members of staff extended their learning to a 12 month option;
  - Five members of staff paused their learning; and
  - Four members of staff, two of whom are from the previous reporting period, continue their learning with the 'Say Something in Welsh' follow-on course 'In at the Deep End' and an additional two have enrolled during 2020.
- 3.4 Feedback from the two people who completed the 'Say Something in Welsh' course has been positive stating that the method of learning suited their preferred learning style. Feedback from learners in general has identified that learning has proved more difficult in part due to caring commitments, home schooling and the lack of ability to undertake their daily language learning routine because of Welsh Government (WG) guidelines and ensuing lockdowns.
- 3.5 To promote a bilingual workplace a 'Learn Welsh' tile continues to be given a prominent position on the front page of the intranet and, once accessed, it provides details of all learning opportunities including information on 'Say Something in Welsh'. In addition, it provides details of all Welsh speakers within the Association which assists informal mentoring, useful resources, dates and details of Welsh cultural and internal events, phrase of the week, a bilingual template for out of office emails and activities and opportunities to support and increase confidence levels in using the Welsh language.

#### **4.0 Promotion of the Welsh Language**

- 4.1 In the period covered by this report, there have been several instances where Welsh has been promoted including St David's Day, Welsh lunches at all three offices with the use of a video link, an announcement to promote Santes Dwynwen and a virtual Welsh quiz to celebrate "Shwmae Su'mae" Day, a national Wales-wide event to promote using Welsh. WWH also took part in the national Welsh Language Rights Day to celebrate and promote the Welsh language services offered by WWH and to highlight the rights people have to use the Welsh language when dealing with WWH. In addition, a 'Did you know' section on the main intranet page commenced in October 2020 and is updated on a monthly basis, which is available for all staff to view and includes bilingual cultural facts, promotes online

events, traditions and famous Welsh inventors and gives Welsh place names. The section has received nearly 2,000 views in total.

4.2 Due to the Covid 19 pandemic it was not possible to support all events (such as Ras yr Iaith) or to develop partnership working with Menter Iaith and Cylch Meithrin due to WG restrictions. However, supporting these events will continue to be included within the action plan as future actions and commence as and when practical.

4.3 The Welsh language has also been promoted in the following ways:

- The promotion of Welsh language services by using the Iaith Gwaith brand which identifies Welsh language speakers. The email footer showing that correspondence is welcomed in both Welsh and English is included on all Welsh language speakers' external emails. In addition, Iaith Gwaith badges and lanyards are offered to all staff who are learning or fluent, so they can be recognised so that other people can start a conversation with them in Welsh.
- WWH held a consultation event in Cardigan to give local people the chance to talk about the future regeneration of the town's hospital site; the majority of staff at the event were fluent Welsh language speakers and all information at the event was available bilingually.
- Delivered bilingual training on an 'Introduction to Play' in local communities e.g., Tregaron and Felinfach.
- Attended a careers event in Ceredigion which included a bilingual exhibition and with Welsh language staff in attendance.
- Welsh language speakers within the Association undertook welfare calls during 2020 and 2021 which provided the opportunity for residents to converse in Welsh.
- A bilingual community directory was developed for residents to assist during lockdown.
- Partnered with two primary schools through the medium of Welsh language to assist with choosing names for two new developments in their communities (the developments at Maenclochog and Johnstown).
- Partnered with Rural Action Cwm Taf Project to reconnect local place names and landscapes and understand their significance and the history behind their names <http://culturalconnections.wales/>
- Historically the Association has sponsored numerous events over recent years, however, due to the Covid 19 pandemic the opportunities have been limited. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, the Association sponsored a number of groups, which cost a total of £19,000, to assist with the delivery and to promote the Welsh language:-
  - A donation to Tarian Cymru's community campaign to help shield carers in Wales so they could buy much needed PPE for health and care workers.
  - Supported a reading initiative in Merthyr Tydfil by providing sponsorship to fund 80 reading packs for children as part of the Stephens & George Trust Love Reading Festival.
  - Contributed towards the Police & Crime Commissioner 'Participatory Budget Grant Scheme' to support projects in local communities such as Lampeter, Cardigan and Aberystwyth.

- Ysgol y Frenni, Crymych received a grant for equipment for their radio station and to purchase iPads.

## **5.0 Communication in Welsh**

- 5.1 A small number of residents (79 in total) have stated that they wish to communicate with the Association in Welsh and have identified their preferences in relation to written, spoken or both. In addition, there are 1,344 residents who receive bi-lingual copies of In Touch.
- 5.2 Information continues to be gathered in relation to language preference as part of resident profiling. Language preference data is held for 67% of residents and this can be updated easily by staff via Resco, the mobile working app, or updated directly on the Dynamics database. Language preference is available for all staff to see and correspondence initiated by WWH is in Welsh or English as indicated by the resident where preference details have been captured. All correspondence in West Wales is sent bi-lingually and will continue until full preference information has been obtained for these residents. During the reporting period the language preference question contained in the Resident Profiling questionnaire was reviewed and simplified to capture accurate data.
- 5.3 WWH continues to welcome calls and communication in Welsh. When callers contact the main WWH telephone number, the first front end message gives people a choice of language. All in-hours calls that select the Welsh option are diverted to first language Welsh speakers. As a result of WG guidelines, in March 2020 all calls were diverted to staff members' mobiles, therefore it was not possible to collect data between March and September 2020 and hence comparing against historical data has not been possible. The main telephone system was reintroduced and reverted to normal operation in September 2020 and 343 calls were received via the Welsh line between October 2020 and February 2021 compared with 24,290 on the English line.
- 5.4 WWH uses the services of professional Welsh translators in addition to utilising designated staff who respond and prioritise any work in line with the Association's needs. All proof reading is undertaken internally and by a different translator to have an independent opinion which ensures that every piece of work is consistent and that standard terminology is used. The translation procedure introduced following the publication of the WLC's advice document, 'Bilingual Drafting, Translation and using Welsh face to face' was reviewed during 2020 and is available on the staff intranet.
- 5.5 The WWH website is fully bilingual and mobile friendly. During 2020 it has been viewed by external visitors in English 68,758 times and in Welsh 810 times. The mostly viewed page in the Welsh language was in relation to Covid 19 with 203 views followed by Find a Home page (154) and Careers page (144). The WLS document and the Welsh Language Annual Monitoring Report are both available on the website. The Association also uses a number of social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share corporate messages, news and jobs in Welsh and English.
- 5.6 The internal and external protocols on the Welsh language have been in place since September 2017 and are reviewed on a biennial basis. The protocols, which are available

on the staff intranet, provide guidance on how WWH delivers Welsh language services both internally and externally. The protocols build on the approved WLS with greater use of Welsh in both internal and external documents. All signs in WWH offices are bilingual.

- 5.7 Following a review of the guidance and self-regulation checklist issued by the WLC the number of new and vacant posts during the reporting year has been included within the 2020/2021 annual update. Between March 2020 and February 2021, 54 new or vacant posts were advertised, all of which were advertised bilingually. All categorised the Welsh language as being desirable in the role profiles although no roles during this reporting period had a specific requirement for the Welsh language.

## **6.0 Complaints**

No complaints were received in relation to the Welsh language during the period.

## **7.0 Update on the implementation of Welsh Language Standards**

The programme of preparing standards was delayed in 2018-19 due to the re-examination of Welsh language legislation and, as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic and WG reprioritising resources, there have been further delays. WG has confirmed that the review of the programme and timetable of introducing standards for new bodies and sectors will commence following the Senedd elections in May. The Association will continue to monitor developments and how this may potentially impact the Association.

## **8.0 Welsh Language Commissioner communication and action plan**

There were no recommendations or amendments following the submission of the 2019/20 annual monitoring report and action plan to the WLC. If approved by Board, the monitoring report and updated plan in Appendix 1 will be submitted to the WLC in the usual way. The Association has written to the WLC to seek approval to update the WLS in line with staffing and other changes. On approval the new version will replace the existing version on the website.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Board: -

- i. notes the report; and
- ii. approves the action plan in Appendix 1.

**Alex Stephenson**  
**Executive Director (Technology and Transformation)**

18 March 2021

Welsh Language Commissioner – Annual Update 2020/21 - Welsh Language Action Plan

Action	Task	Target date	Group responsible
<b>Welsh Language Training</b>	Continue to promote Welsh learning opportunities	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team
	To encourage all employees to participate and learn the Welsh language	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team
	To continue to promote 'Say Something in Welsh' training	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team
	To continue to obtain and collate feedback of the Welsh language training facility 'Say Something in Welsh' and 'In at the Deep End' if relevant	December 2021	Learning and Development Team
<b>Welsh Language Skills</b>	To continue with informal mentoring to assist in practical ways, such as to develop and support Welsh language learners	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team and Corporate Services Team
	To review the self-assessment document in relation to new employees' Welsh language skills	September 2021	Corporate Services Team and HR Team
<b>Promotion of Welsh Language</b>	Compile a programme of events throughout the Association that will include Welsh at Work Days on 'Shwmae Su'mae' Day and St David's Day to continue the promotion of the Welsh language throughout the Association	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	To review the Welsh language protocols and to promote across the Group	August 2021	Corporate Services Team
	To support events and Welsh language initiatives in the community that promote the Welsh language e.g., Ras yr Iaith, a Welsh Language fun-run to raise awareness, and to support and promote Welsh in the community	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team

Action	Task	Target date	Group responsible
	To continue and develop our partnerships with partners Menter Iaith, schools and Cylch Meithrin within the community	Ongoing	Housing Team and Corporate Services Team
	Continue to update staff on the developments of the Welsh Language Standards which may impact on how the Association delivers services externally and internally as appropriate	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	To continue with the commitment to sponsor 'Clwb Miliwn' over the next two years to assist with the development of the project	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	To review the Welsh language pages on the staff intranet and promote, once completed, across the Group	September 2021	Learning and Development and Corporate Services Team
	To undertake and facilitate a Welsh language Session at the WWH virtual Festival	May 2021	Corporate Services Team and PR and Communication Team
<b>Language Choice</b>	To review current practices in relation to collecting resident profiling data to increase information held, particularly in relation to Language preferences	September 2021	Corporate Services Team
	Record and monitor the Welsh option telephone requests	Ongoing	ICT
<b>Reporting on Welsh Language</b>	Report to Board annually and submit to the Welsh Language Commissioner	March 2022	Corporate Services Team
<b>Monitoring</b>	To monitor that the systems in place support a consistent approach to deliver language preferences across the Association	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team