

WALES & WEST HOUSING ASSOCIATION
REPORT TO BOARD – 31 MARCH 2022
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 A review of the WLS was undertaken during 2021 and minor administrative changes to reflect WWH's current shape and size in addition to updating contact details have been submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC) for approval. A response is expected in due course.
- 1.3 All housing associations in Wales are required to provide an annual update to the WLC. The annual update report covers the period from March 2021 to February 2022. This report includes all activities throughout the Association. A separate paper will be presented to the subsidiary boards (Cambria Maintenance and Castell Ventures) in May 2022.
- 1.4 The Association continued to maintain its commitment to the Welsh language in 2021 as communication with residents in their preferred language remained more important than ever. Despite the challenges the Covid 19 pandemic has presented WWH has continued to provide bilingual communication and services, 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 161 Welsh speaking staff in the Association and 46 of these staff are first language Welsh speakers.
- 2.2 In addition, there are a number of Board members who have varying degrees of Welsh language knowledge.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 An initial review of the self-assessment questionnaire was undertaken during 2021 and consideration was given to adopt an adapted version of the Association of Language Tester in Europe (ALTE) framework. The ALTE framework provides a good reference for employers since it is based on recognition of what individuals can achieve linguistically

(Welsh in this context). The ALTE, a widely recognised skills framework is a way of measuring language skills according to the types of communication tasks that a person can achieve in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Further consideration in relation to the implementation of the adapted ALTE framework will be given during 2022.

3.0 Welsh language training

- 3.1 During the reporting period five members of staff commenced learning Welsh. Two attend college courses and three new learners joined the six or twelve month 'Say Something in Welsh' option.
- 3.2 A number of Board members are still learning Welsh and have expressed an intent to continue with their learning post the Covid 19 pandemic. Where classes have not been possible apps such as 'Say Something in Welsh' have been utilised..
- 3.3 WWH has continued to support learning and increasing the use of the Welsh language through the online app. The online language course, which promises that all committed learners will be confident Welsh speakers in six or 12 months, includes weekly on-line tasks and group video calls. The pilot commenced in August 2018 and is funded by WWH. During 2021/2022:
- Two members of staff successfully completed level 1;
 - Two members of staff restarted their learning with the 12 month option;
 - Seven members of staff paused their learning; and
 - One member of staff, from the previous reporting period, paused the 'Say Something in Welsh' follow-on course 'In at the Deep End', nevertheless, continues to learn with the use of other resources at an intermediate level.
- 3.4 Feedback from learners in general has been similar to the previous reporting period and 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 Feedback also identified that additional learning resources including physical resources would assist learning. As a result of the feedback WWH has signed up to the Work Welsh Programme which is designed to strengthen Welsh language skills in the workplace by offering fully funded relevant and flexible training. All learning opportunities within the Work Welsh Programme and 'Say Something in Welsh' were promoted during the WWHG Group Festival in March 2022. In addition, the Work Welsh 'Welcome Introductory Course' to build courtesy Welsh Language skills was promoted on the 'Did you Know' section on the internal announcements. To assist with physical resources a glossary is currently being compiled which will include greetings and phrases to assist with learning and will be available on the Learn Welsh Tile.
- 3.6 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 and support opportunities including information on 'Say Something in Welsh'.

During 2021 the Learn Welsh tile was reviewed and updated to capture new resources and opportunities for learning. 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.

- 3.7 During 2021, the weekly 'Coffi a Sgwrs' mentoring sessions to assist and support Welsh language learning were formalised and the sessions were promoted during the WWH Group Festival. During 2021/2022 nine members of staff from across the group have taken advantage of the opportunity to practice their Welsh language skills at these Wednesday meetings. Feedback from staff attending has been positive and ideas from the group, such as sharing Welsh words and phrases during specify events such as Santes Dwynwen have been captured in the 'Did you Know' internal announcements. One staff member commented that they "look forward to their Wednesdays".

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 internally including St David's Day and announcements to promote numerous cultural events such as; Santes Dwynwen, Mari Lwyd, Eisteddfod AmGen Week, and Owain Glyn Dŵr. During "Shwmae Su'mae" Day, WWH celebrated by holding a virtual Welsh lunch and tweeted a "Shwmae Su'mae" video from staff members across Wales. 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. Monthly internal announcements in the 'Did you know' section continued which included bilingual cultural facts, promotion of online events including Wales Climate Week and information in relation to Welsh inventors and Welsh traditions. It has not been possible to collect viewing data during 2021 due to Microsoft newsfeed issues, however, this issue has now been resolved and data will be collated during 2022.
- 4.2 Due to the Covid 19 pandemic it was not possible to support 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 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 to identify Welsh language speakers. The email footer showing that correspondence is welcomed in both Welsh and English is included on all fluent Welsh language speakers' external emails and during 2021 this was also included on internal emails. Welsh Language learners are also able to identify themselves on internal emails which assists and encourages the use of the Welsh language whilst working virtually. 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 Group Festival 2021 included a Welsh bilingual session which was attended by 20 staff. The session provided an overview of WG Cymraeg 2050 vision, an update in relation to the current status of the Welsh Language Standards for the sector, highlighted the key documents, such as the Welsh Language Scheme, Welsh Language Protocols and translation procedures, information regarding WWH activities in relation to the Welsh language and finally promoted Welsh language learning opportunities including 'Say Something in Welsh'.
- WWH worked in partnership to deliver a number of bilingual community events, which included: -
 - Family and fun activities at Tai Pedr and Golwg y Castell (Lampeter and Cardigan).
 - Provided bilingual advice and support in Lampeter together with the Lampeter Food Project and Incredible Edible to encourage communities to grow their own vegetables.
 - Assisted, delivered and promoted Arts and Crafts sessions in conjunction with Tir Coed at a Sheltered Scheme.
 - Supported Welsh and bilingual speaking schools with career related events i.e., supported mock interviews (by staff using their Giving Something Back Day) at Ysgol Calon Cymru.
 - Worked with our contractors and suppliers to produce a collage of videos for Careers Wales to share with schools, some of which are also available in Welsh.
- 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 just over £4,000 to assist with the delivery and to promote the Welsh language: -
 - Supported Ysgol Maenclochog with works to the front of the school.
 - Supported Tredoc bach which provides local musical performers with an opportunity to promote local and Welsh entertainment which assists with educating and inspiring people.
 - Ysgol Feithrin Felinfach received a grant for four tablets to assist with their bi-lingual learning.

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 1,370 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.
- 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. The volume of calls requesting Welsh has decreased by 57% since 2018 to 759 in February 2022. The Welsh language calls account for 0.68% of all in-hours calls. As a result of the changes within the Customer Service Centre a project to review Welsh language telephony services is currently being undertaken to ensure that an equitable service is maintained during in-hours calls.
- 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 which was introduced following the publication of the WLC's advice document, 'Bilingual Drafting, Translation and using Welsh face to face' was reviewed during 2022 and is available on the staff intranet. The publication of the WLC's advice document has also led to communication with the Language Technologies Unit at Bangor University who created the translation memory software CyfieithuCymru (TranslateWales) with a view of utilising the resource in the future.
- 5.5 The WWH website is fully bilingual and mobile friendly. During 2021/2022 it was viewed by external visitors in English 61,750 times and in Welsh 776 times compared to 68,758 (English) and 810 (Welsh) views in 2020/2021. The page viewed most frequently in the Welsh language was in relation to Find a Home with 155 views followed by Careers page (106) and Contact Us (104). The WLS document and the Welsh Language Annual Update 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 were reviewed in 2021. 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

2021/2022 annual update. Between March 2021 and February 2022, 78 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 with WG reprioritising resources, there have been further delays. WG and WLC are currently working to reduce barriers to setting Welsh Language Standards; simplifying the process for implementing standards, without weakening their impact and are committed to begin the implementation of standards for housing associations during this current term.

8.0 Welsh Language Commissioner communication and action plan

There were no recommendations or amendments following the submission of the 2020/2021 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. As reported above the reviewed WLS is awaiting approval. On approval the new version will replace the existing version on the website and promoted internally.

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 (Corporate Strategy and Services)

23 March 2022

Welsh Language Commissioner – Annual Update 2021/22 - Welsh Language Action Plan

Action	Task	Target date	Group responsible
Welsh Language Training	Continue to promote all Welsh learning opportunities (at all levels).	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team/Corporate Services Team
	To encourage all employees to undertake the Work Welsh Welcome Introductory Course to build courtesy Welsh language skills within the workplace.	March 2022	Corporate Services Team
	To encourage all new employees to participate and learn the Welsh language by outlining and signposting all opportunities within the induction process.	May 2022	Learning and Development Team/Corporate Services Team
	To continue to promote 'Say Something in Welsh' training.	Ongoing	Learning and Development Team/Corporate Services 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 2022	Learning and Development Team
	To capture internal data in relation to enrolment activity and engagement on the Welsh language learning offered by the National Centre for Learning Welsh (Work Welsh).	February 2023	Corporate Services Team
Welsh Language Skills	To continue with weekly Coffi a Sgwrs mentoring sessions to assist in practical ways, such as to develop and support Welsh language learners.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	To introduce the adapted Association of Language Tester in Europe (ATLE) framework as part of the pre-employment checks and consider implementing and circulating to existing employees.	September 2022	Corporate Services Team/HR Team

Action	Task	Target date	Group responsible
	To commence a monthly Clwb Clonc across the group to provide a network for staff to engage with other learners and Welsh speakers.	December 2022	Corporate Services Team
	To complete the review of the Welsh language telephony service during operational hours in light of the changes in relation to the Customer Service Centre.	May 2022	Corporate Services Team/Housing Team/ICT
	To continue discussions with Language Technologies Unit in relation to the translation memory software CyfieithuCymru and commence the Translation document review project.	November 2022	Corporate Services Team
Promotion of Welsh Language	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 with the inclusion of external events to continue the promotion of the Welsh language throughout the Association.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	To promote the reviewed Welsh Language Scheme once approved by the Welsh Language Commissioner.	August 2021	Corporate Services Team
	To support events and Welsh language initiatives in the community that promote the Welsh language as and when appropriate.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	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 continue with the monthly 'Did you know' announcements on the internal platform and collate feedback and data.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team

Action	Task	Target date	Group responsible
	To conduct a Welsh language session at the Group Staff Festival and collate any feedback and suggestions from the session and action accordingly.	May 2022	Corporate Services Team
	To develop bilingual videos or Welsh versions when producing recruitment/staff related videos.	Ongoing	HR Team/Corporate Services Team/Communication Team
Language Choice	To review current practices in relation to collecting resident profiling data to increase information held, particularly in relation to language preferences.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team
	Record and monitor the Welsh option telephone requests.	Ongoing	ICT
Reporting on Welsh Language	Report to Board annually and submit to the Welsh Language Commissioner.	March 2022	Corporate Services Team
Monitoring	To monitor that the systems in place support a consistent approach to deliver language preferences across the Association.	Ongoing	Corporate Services Team