

**WALES & WEST HOUSING ASSOCIATION**  
**WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER – ANNUAL UPDATE**

**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Wales & West Housing (WWH) Welsh Language Scheme (WLS) was reviewed and approved by the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC) in February 2023. The revised WLS included minor administrative changes to reflect WWH's current shape and size, in addition to updating contact details. The accompanying action plan has been incorporated within the annual action plan, available in Appendix 1, to assist with future delivery, compliance and monitoring.
- 1.2 All housing associations in Wales are required to provide an annual update to the WLC. The annual update report covers the period from March 2022 to February 2023. This report includes all activities throughout the Group.
- 1.3 The Association continues to maintain its commitment to the Welsh language by providing bilingual communication and services to residents. The current undertaking of capturing language preferences in west Wales will ensure that residents receive communication in their preferred language in the future. The Association also actively encourages the use of the Welsh language within the Association.

**2.0 Welsh language skills**

- 2.1 There are currently 214 Welsh speaking staff in the Association, 83 of which are first language Welsh speakers. In addition, there are a number of Board members who have varying degrees of Welsh language knowledge.
- 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.
- 2.3 An initial review of the self-assessment questionnaire was undertaken during 2021 and consideration was given to implementing an adapted version of the Association of Language Tester in Europe (ALTE) framework. The WLC wishes to see greater consistency in the recording of employees' Welsh language skills to facilitate the collection of data about the bilingual workforce on a national level and has set out advice on how to do this in the WLC's Recruitment Good Practice advice guide. In line with recommendations in the Good Practice guide the Association will adopt the European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). Work to develop and implement the CEFR framework for new and existing employees is ongoing with a view for implementation by October 2023 to all staff.
- 2.4 The Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language, Cymraeg 2050, sets out the vision for achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It also includes the target of doubling the daily use of the Welsh language during the same period, including using Welsh socially and in the workplace. To support the Association's commitment to the delivery of services through the medium of Welsh, and to assist with developing, implementing, and

monitoring the Association's WLS and action plan, a Grow Our Own Graduate Welsh Language post is currently being advertised. The successful candidate will also provide support in coordinating the translation service, assisting with mentoring and the Welsh language telephony services.

### **3.0 Welsh language training**

- 3.1 During the reporting period, eight members of staff commenced learning Welsh on the 'Work Welsh' courses and two new learners commenced the twelve month 'Say Something in Welsh' (SSiW) option.
- 3.2 A number of Board members are still learning Welsh and are utilising the SSiW app and attending classes.
- 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.
- 3.4 There are currently 18 members of staff enrolled on SSiW. During 2022 feedback received noted that the majority had suspended learning noting that learning had proved more difficult, in part, due to changes in working practices and caring commitments. During 2023, WWH will review and discuss learning options with each individual member of staff to assist the recommencement of their Welsh language learning journey.
- 3.5 As a result of feedback from learners during 2021/2022 WWH signed up to the Work Welsh Programme during 2022 to offer additional and varied learning resources. The programme is designed to strengthen Welsh language skills in the workplace by offering fully funded, relevant and flexible training in addition to offering sector specific modules, such as housing. During 2022/2023, eight learners registered on the programme and the work to capture and evaluate feedback will be undertaken during 2023. All learning opportunities within the 'Work Welsh' Programme and SSiW were promoted during the WWHG Group Festival in March 2022. In addition, all learning opportunities, including the 'Work Welsh Welcome Introductory Course' to build courtesy Welsh language skills, were promoted on the internal announcements during 2022. During new starter conversations, Welsh language learning is promoted, and staff are encouraged to visit the designated Learn Welsh page.
- 3.6 To promote a bilingual workplace, the 'Learn Welsh' tile continues to be given a prominent position on the front page of the intranet and provides details of all learning and support opportunities including information on 'Say Something in Welsh' and 'Work Welsh'. The 'Learn Welsh' tile and the Welsh language page is reviewed and updated to capture new resources and opportunities and includes a glossary of greetings and phrases to assist with learning. In addition, it provides details of all Welsh speakers within the Association which aids informal mentoring, useful resources, dates and details of Welsh cultural events both internal and external, 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 2022/2023, the weekly 'Coffi a Sgwrs' mentoring sessions to support Welsh language learning were formalised and were promoted during the WWH Group Festival. During 2022/2023 nine members of staff from across the Group have taken advantage of the opportunity to practice their Welsh language skills at these meetings. Feedback from staff attending has been positive and a review is currently underway to explore how to increase participation across the Group.

#### **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 and announcements to promote numerous cultural events such as St David's Day, Santes Dwynwen, Dylan Thomas International Day, Eisteddfod Genedlaethol and Welsh Music Day. "Shwmae Su'mae" Day was celebrated with a Welsh lunch and promotion on social media. 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 on Sharepoint continued which included bilingual cultural facts, promotion of online events such as Digital Communities Wales, free digital skills sessions, and information in relation to Welsh history and Welsh traditions. The internal announcements are also used to promote Menter Iaith's phrases posters to assist with learning. During 2022/2023, the posts collectively received over 1,200 views.

4.2 WWH continues to support events and to develop partnership working with Menter Iaith and education sectors such as Mudiad Methrin and Secondary Schools.

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 and 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 would be happy for others to start conversations in Welsh.
- WWH Group Festival 2022 included a Welsh bilingual session which was attended by over 20 staff. The session provided an overview of WWH practices, 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 SSIW.
- WWH worked in partnership to deliver and support a number of bilingual community events which included:-
  - Community meetings at three new developments at Maenclochog, Eglwyswrw and Clos y Porthmyn, Abergwili;

- competition for residents to win family tickets to gain free entry to the National Eisteddfod at Tregaron;
  - summer Play Box project (a storage box filled with fun activities) for the family, delivered by Welsh speaking staff to 9 estates, which provided the opportunity for play through the medium of Welsh language;
  - staff volunteered to steward at the National Eisteddfod in Tregaron using their 'Giving Something Back Day';
  - staff volunteered to assist at Menter Iaith's Gŵyl Canol Dre in Carmarthen,
  - 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, Ysgol Dyffryn Taf and Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf; and
  - worked with WWH contractors and suppliers to attend a Careers Festival for Schools across North Wales and attend site visits.
- WWH sponsored several groups during the reporting period to assist with the delivery and promotion of the Welsh language. WWH spent just over £6,500 on the following activities:-
    - Sponsored Menter Iaith's Gŵyl Canol Dre in Carmarthen;
    - main sponsor for Carmarthenshire Schools' Football Tournament (Bilingual/Welsh speaking event as many Welsh medium schools attend) and Academy kit sponsorship;
    - sponsored Urdd Cymru in Cardiff under 15s football and training kits;
    - supported Cylch Meithrin Nant Lleucu to purchase ICT equipment to support and improve children's language skills by watching/listening to the Welsh language through digital platforms; and
    - Rubicon Dance received support to assist with the delivery of Welsh language dance activities for the over 60s, deliver preschool workshops and Holiday Club Activities.

## **5.0 Communication in Welsh**

- 5.1 A small number of residents (95 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 1,238 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. An exercise to collate preferences in west Wales is ongoing. To date over 500 residents have been contacted and their language preference recorded, a letter to obtain language preference to all remaining residents has been sent.

- 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 callers who select the Welsh option are diverted to first language Welsh speakers. The volume of calls requesting Welsh is reverting back to pre-pandemic numbers, with 1153 calls received during 2022/2023 compared to 759 in 2022/2021. The Welsh language calls account for 1.13% of all in-hours calls. The project to review Welsh language telephony services has been completed and solutions to accommodate Welsh language calls between 17:00 and 18:00 are currently being considered.
- 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 by a different translator 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 sourcing translation memory software CyfieithuCymru (TranslateWales). The Language Technologies Unit at Bangor University has commenced the process of developing the platform for the Association and its anticipated implementation in the summer will follow staff training and a review of the translation procedures.
- 5.5 The content on the WWH website is currently being reviewed and will continue to be fully bilingual and mobile friendly. During 2022/2023 the English version received nearly 283,000 page views and nearly 1,900 page views in the Welsh version compared to just over 449,000 (English) and 3,600 (Welsh) page views in 2021/2022. The page viewed most frequently in the Welsh language was in relation to Contact Us (142 views), followed by Find a Home (106 views) and About Us (91 views). The newly approved 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 2023. 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 2022/2023 annual update. Between March 2022 and February 2023, 79 new or vacant posts were advertised, all of which were advertised with bilingual job titles. All categorised the Welsh language as being desirable in the role profiles and one role during this reporting period had a specific requirement for the Welsh language. A translated glossary, which includes all current roles and phrases and terms for recruitment adverts, is updated on a regular basis and is available on the internal Welsh language page. A review of current practices in relation to advertising vacancies on the Association's website will be undertaken during 2023 to ensure a consistent approach is adopted.

## **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 have worked in partnership 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.

The Welsh Language Commissioners will be asking housing associations to review the submissions made in 2015 over the next 18 months and resubmit. It is anticipated this will move the Association forward in the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards.

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

There were no recommendations or amendments following the submission of the 2021/2022 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 and the newly approved WLS is available on the WWH website and will be promoted internally shortly.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

It is RECOMMENDED that the Board: -

- i. Notes this report; and
- ii. approves the action plan in [Appendix 1](#).

**Alex Stephenson**  
**Executive Director (Corporate Strategy and Services)**

20 March 2023