

Assessment of Objectives and Actions WLPS 2017-2022

(Evidence/Data retrieved from WESP, BG Annual Reports 2016-2022, Partnerships feedback)

Objective 1 – We will promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within families and the community

Action 1:1 - Promote informal Welsh / bilingual social activities provided in Blaenau Gwent through a range of channels i.e. website, social media, posters etc.

Action 1:2 – Promote opportunities for formal learning i.e. Cwrs Myndiad etc

Action 1:3 – Promote leisure opportunities through the medium of Welsh

Action 1:4 – Promote Welsh medium or bilingual services in line with e.g. national guidance such as ‘More than words..’

Action 1:5 - Promote and evaluate access channels (i.e. website, social media, C2BG etc.) to local authority services in the medium of Welsh in line with the Welsh Language Standards

Action 1:6 - Increase the number of children, young people and adults who declare their language preference (Welsh/English/bilingual) in relation to how they engage with local council services

In order to encourage the use of the Welsh language within the community we need to ensure that the language is visible and accessible within the area. To do this we must, as stated in Action 1:5, ‘evaluate access channels to local authority services in line with the Welsh Language standards’, this has been actioned with a detailed review of the Blaenau Gwent website, with all pages and sub-sections being evaluated. This evaluation ensured all pages and related documents were available in Welsh with appropriate translation. Any areas that failed to present their information in line with the Welsh Language Standards were flagged and sent to their respective department heads for immediate amendments. This is intended as a continuous process not only from a legislative perspective but a desire to make our Welsh language version of the website as user friendly as possible. Thus encouraging Welsh language users to opt for the Welsh medium version of the site.

Internally the 'Welsh Language Guidance' on the Intranet has been updated in the past 6 months to make it more user friendly for those with little Welsh language ability. This includes amendments to the 'Standards Overview Document' to reflect procedures as we shift into the working from home model we have adopted on the back of the COVID-19 Pandemic. These revisions ensure our service delivery does not treat the Welsh language any less favourably. The telephone procedures also have been evaluated and developed to ensure a proactive approach to using our services through the medium of Welsh. Members of the call centre staff received in-house training from the Welsh Language Support Officer prioritising compliance with Standards 8-22. This training covered how to make and answer calls effectively promoting the option to continue the call/access the service in Welsh, as well as general conversational Welsh to use when interacting with Welsh speaking members of the public.

In terms of the promotion of informal Welsh language activities we have identified this as an area to build on. There is provision in place for these activities and much work has been and is continuing to be done by our partners to provide opportunities for families and the community to use the Welsh language. The Aneurin Leisure Trust provides a range of leisure activities through the medium of Welsh, there is a Welsh society in place (Cymdeithas Cymraeg Blaenau Gwent) that promote activities through social media, Menter Iaith host numerous activities throughout the year from nature walks to quizzes to name a few. Despite the large amount of opportunities for Welsh language use socially when reviewing our position against objective 1 we acknowledge a need for mapping and monitoring of these opportunities in order to promote them effectively. This has been incorporated into the 2022-2027 plan and is a key action to be taken moving forward. We will achieve this by strengthening our existing partnerships and inviting prospective partners to play a part in the implementation of our new objectives over the coming five-year period. The council has recently reinstated the Welsh Language Support Officer role, and as such have the provision to have more consistent presence with the BG Welsh Network Forum, and aims to work more collaboratively with the surrounding councils while we implement the 2022-2027 Welsh Language Promotion Strategy. We aim to have updates on the 2022-2027 Promotion Strategy (for example a Welsh activity calendar update) as a statutory item on the agendas when meeting with our partners. This will aid the identification of successes against our objectives, and any challenging areas as we progress in order to rectify them as soon as they become apparent.

Objective 2 - To increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people and to increase their awareness of the value of the language.

Action 2:1 - Increase the early year's provision offer to stimulate parental demand

Action 2:2 - Increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg

Action 2:3 – Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium learners

Action 2:4 – Improve Welsh medium learner outcomes

Action 2:5 - Work regionally with South East Wales Local Authorities and to promote Welsh medium opportunities in further and higher educational institutions

Action 2:6 - Promote extra-curricular Welsh language/bilingual activities and social opportunities for children and young people from both Welsh medium and English medium schools

Action 2:7 - Promote opportunities for parents/carers/grandparents to improve their Welsh language / bilingual skills to support their children through Welsh / bilingual education

Over the five-year period of the 2017-2022 WLPS there is consistent evidence that the provision provided for children and young people that increases awareness of the value of the Welsh language. Promotion of Welsh language awareness and the opportunities to further your learning and use your existing skills is promoted to parents from the early stages of their child's life beginning with the role the health visitors play. Health Visitors have access to online modules through our Aneurin University Health Board Provision to develop their Welsh language skills and training surrounding language awareness can be delivered internally upon request as well as free Welsh language courses. It is made clear that it is the role of the Health Visitors to provide information on Welsh medium education by directing new parents to the Family Information Service. The Family Information Service provide information on the childcare, nursery and informal activities such as the Cymraeg i Blant services available. Furthermore, providing Welsh book start bags to new parents to encourage the use of Welsh as a family and contribute to the uptake of the Cymraeg i Blant provision.

Cymraeg i Blant is a Mudiad Meithrin project that has been growing since the publication of the 2017-2022 Promotion Strategy. They offer a range of weekly classes such as, Welsh Rhyme time and sign, Baby Massage and yoga, Cuppa & Cymraeg (online) and Me and my baby sessions for prospective and new parents on advantages of being bilingual (online) and more. In the past three years there has been a significant increase of 229% in the number of groups on offer, with projections of further increase with the development of an additional Meithrin group in Tredegar.

There has been a steady upward five-year trend in the % of Welsh medium nursery places available within the Blaenau Gwent. Of these places there has similarly been an upward trend of places being filled, rising from 3% in 2017 to 6% in 2021 of the cohort. Therefore, it is evident that there has been more engagement with early year's provision (Jan 2021 PLASC Data). This is a clear indication of the fulfilment of Action 2:2 of the 2017-22 Welsh Language Promotional Plan to 'increase early years' provision offer to stimulate parental

demand.' Places remaining available have broadly sat at 3% indicating that at present there is sufficient capacity to meet parental demand within Blaenau Gwent's Welsh medium nursery place availability. In addition, transition rates between primary and secondary for 2019/20 were 100%.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced on 16th January 2018 that £30 million would be allocated to support capital projects dedicated to and growing Welsh language in education. The grant application process was initiated in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation in October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million in creating additional primary provision. Following revenue implications, the project was put on hold early in 2019 pending discussions between the Council and Welsh Government. The Consultation process was then able to be initiated in December 2020 through till January 2021 post a financial review, it was determined at an informal Executive/Corporate Leadership team meeting in February 2020, that the project could proceed to statutory consultation stage - subject to a report to the Executive Committee in the autumn-term 2020. The response of the consultation process was positively in favour of the new school development with 93% of email and survey responses noting their support of the proposal. (8 email and 190 survey). This primary school is now scheduled to open in September 2023 admitting 210 students, a step that will needless to say contribute to our five-year target.

We believe we are in a good position for progression considering the factors above and aim to use our successes as springboards for increasing the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people. Our improvements surrounding the mapping of activities available in the area detailed in Action 1:1 of the 2022-2027 Promotion Strategy will also play a part in succeeding with this objective. Using the mapping we will be able to identify areas with less engagement with informal social activities and target said areas leading to stimulation of parental interest in Welsh medium Education.

Objective 3 - To increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace

Action 3:1 – Increase the number of employees who can use Welsh and encourage them to wear the ‘Dysgu’ and badges to help Welsh learners socially and improve their confidence.

Action 3:2 - Encourage employees to improve their fluency in Welsh and encourage them to wear the ‘Cymraeg’ badges to help promote bilingual services.

Action 3:3 - Promote Welsh training courses and encourage more employees to attend these

Action 3:4 - Provide a range of guides and support materials to increase engagement with and confidence in the use of Welsh language in the workplace.

Action 3:5 - Support all departments to effectively implement the Welsh language standards as per the Council’s Compliance Notice.

Action 3:6 - Effectively monitor the jobs within the Council advertised that go through the Welsh language assessment process.

Action 3.7 - Promote more opportunities for colleagues to engage with each other in the medium of Welsh

In accordance with Standard 127 stating that ‘a body must assess the Welsh language skills of its employees’ and by extension document this tracking in their Annual Report as per Standard 170. Looking at this data we can see some indication of the progression in the opportunities provided for staff to use their Welsh language skills in the Blaenau Gwent Council workplace.

Following the introduction of the promotion strategy, 2017, we saw an increase, 3%, in the number of employees who have categorized themselves as being able to speak, a little, moderately, quite well or fluently, from the previous annual report in 2016. 2017-2018 annual report does not report language preferences. The following report, 2018- 2019, noted, on the councils iTrent Organizational Development System, 3 employees as having as their language preference as Welsh. 2019-2020 saw a significant increase in this number with an additional 12 employees indicating a Welsh language preference. Since this increase, a self-service system has been introduced enabling staff to amend their language preferences freely. The following years have seen a consistent number of employees with Welsh Language speaking abilities. Remaining at a steady 19% of the staff body. Since 2016, all roles within the council are advertised as Welsh Language Skills desirable, this has remained a policy throughout the 5-year promotion plan. A number of roles (25) have been advertised as Welsh Language essential. In 2021, the Policy and Partnership Team, under their commitment to support Children and Young Peoples Participation, enrolled on the Kickstart Scheme apprenticeship programme to provide opportunities to young people to gain direct skills and experience within the public sector. Recognising the importance and need for Welsh language support, a trainee Welsh language support officer role was

introduced. Following its success this has since become a fixed term role within the council itself.

While training has been consistently promoted throughout this five-year period there has been little uptake in online session with averaging 1-2 members of staff making use of these training opportunities during this five-year period. Although in house training was delivered to 19 members of staff in 2022 that prioritised the effective implementation of the updated telephone procedure, said updates coming into place when the Welsh language guidance for staff was updated. In 2018 in accordance with action 3:4 of the 2017-2022 Promotion Strategy 'a range of guides and support materials to increase engagement with and confidence in the use of Welsh language in the workplace' was published internally. These guides have since been amended to make sure the content actively promotes the use of the language within the workplace with their improved accessibility. Incorporating the slides from the training sessions in the 'Answering the Telephone' procedure, these include two recordings of all key phrases a slowly recited version that emphasises key sounds and pronunciation and the phrase spoken at a normal pace. Similarly, we have also incorporated audio files within our 'Bilingual Greetings' and 'Useful Phrases' documents, alongside phonetic spellings. Staff have provided feedback on these updates being beneficial to supporting learning and increasing confidence levels in using Welsh more effectively.

Whilst assessing our progress against the actions in place over the past five years there are clear indicators to where we need to improve our promotion the primary indicator being the low engagement with training opportunities. While Blaenau Gwent, according to the Annual Population Survey (Oct 2020 to Sept 2021), does have the lowest percentage of Welsh language speakers at only 15.5%, we do currently have 19% of our staff identifying as having some Welsh language ability. We want to target those who have already declared any level of ability for refresher and confidence building courses on the basis of staff expressing an apprehension to use their language as they 'feel out of practice'. In the same vein we feel a need is evident for more promotion of courses for those with no ability. Arguably promoting awareness of Standard 130 that states that these training opportunities are to be provided during work hours will be of benefit in increasing our numbers of attendees as the responsibility to find the time to complete training does not fall into their free time. Increase in training will in turn contribute to the use of 'Dysgu' and 'Cymraeg' badges, lanyards and Microsoft Teams backgrounds as confidence in using the language increases as such contributing to the fulfilment of Actions 3:1 and 3:2 of the 2017-2022 strategy.

Qualitative Assessment – Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network Forum

1) Do you have any feedback or comments regarding the current Welsh language promotional strategy 2017-2022?

- *It was acknowledged that there had been more emphasis on promoting Welsh language services and bilingual signage since the standards came into force. It was noted that no members of the group were aware of the existence of a formal strategy.*
 - We have added stakeholders to the list to review the new plan.
BG workforce has appointed a Welsh Language Support Officer and as such we will have further capacity for engagement.
Make our partners more aware more aware of the indicators to ensure the plan Strategy is being consistently considered throughout the 5-year period. A review of progress to be included on agendas for BG Network Meetings
- *High staff turnover of many partners has made it difficult to maintain momentum
Need for measurable targets and regular evaluation of the progress of the strategy. The language forum should prioritise this work.*
 - The 2022-2027 Strategy includes more measurable targets with indicators for monitoring purposes. Work collaboratively with Welsh Forum to develop shared monitoring systems, with updates being addressed within the meetings.
- *An interesting document with lots of good ideas. However:
No details of how to approach in practice the objectives and actions e.g. Objective 2 states "Increase early years provision to stimulate parental demand"
Demand has already been proven in the Tredegar area. A decision was also made that a new Cylch Meithrin is needed in the area. Why then has this not happened and why is the Council not supporting the development. And why isn't this mentioned in the Strategy?*
 - Provision has been increased (including the establishing of a Cylch Meithrin Group within Tredegar) and further information is available in depth in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and explored within the Assessment Appendix of the 2017-2022 Promotion Strategy, and further action incorporated within the new 2022-2027 Plan.
- *A decision had already been made to open a second Welsh-medium primary school in the Tredegar area as emerging schools for Bro Helyg. Why not mention this in the strategy. The timetable for this development must surely be included in the strategy.*
 - The previous plan was published in 2017. The grant application process for funding of the Welsh-medium primary was initiated in March 2018. Blaenau Gwent Council received confirmation, October 2018, that they were successful in securing £6 million in creating additional primary provision. Scheduled to open in September 2023 admitting 210 students. As such this development has been included in 2022-2027 Welsh Language Promotion Plan.
- *FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES - Disappointing non-recognition of the existence of the BLAENAU GWENT WELSH SOCIETY founded after the Heads of the Welsh National Eisteddfod in 2010. The group has been meeting monthly since then until March 2020. A little support from the Council would go far*

- We recognise the dedicated and consistent work for the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Society/Cymdeithas Cymraeg Blaenau Gwent and plan to have more involvement with their work.
- *FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES - Coleg Gwent is named but there is no mention of all the various Welsh language classes being held across the Borough or the increase in the numbers learning Welsh. For me there is no point in having a strategy if it does not recognise the work that is already happening and the same applies to the Urdd and the Menter Iaith.*
- The increase in Welsh language learning opportunities is explored in the new promotion strategy.
- *If they aim to secure 70 New Welsh speakers annually for the next 33 years the Strategy MUST detail the actions. The Strategy dates are 2017 - 2022. One year on to achieve the aims and actions and no record of what has already been achieved.*
- Some allowances for lack of records during the Covid-19 Pandemic can be made, however, we acknowledge shortcomings in the monitoring in some areas of the plan. We are putting monitoring steps in place to ensure the strategy is being consistently considered within work and reviewed throughout its entire five-year period.

2) Do you have any suggestions for specific targets for the following areas:

- The family
- Community Use
- Infrastructure (policies)
- Children and young people
- The workplace

Do we need to prioritise a particular aspect of the strategy?

- *Prioritise the workplace so that adults do not have to use their spare time to learn the language. However, employers have to give the employees time to attend the class and it would be great to then hold informal clubs in the workplace for people to practise and socialise in Welsh. There is a need to communicate with high level managers to prioritise and enable staff to attend lessons over the long term.*
- *It was stated that the workplace needed to be prioritised - it was noted by some working in the public sector that things had improved since 2017 but the pandemic has had a negative impact on opportunities to use and learn Welsh at work although there are more opportunities available online.*
- *Need more community events e.g. guest speakers, trips, folk dancing, cooking lessons and so on.*
- We intend on increasing our engagement with our Welsh language community networks in order to increase the promotion and as such attendance to the opportunities already available.
- *Promoting Welsh-medium education - the new Strategy needs to be consistent with the aims and objectives of the new WESP.*

- The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan has been a key plan in the development for the new Welsh Language Promotion Plan 2022-2027. Using the past figures/information, future projections and how they intend on achieving these objectives to shape our plan.
- *Collaboration between partners targeting specific areas and holding community events to promote Welsh-medium education - we had good numbers for a Summer of Fun in Parc Bryn Bach but weaker online engagement in Blaenau Gwent compared to neighbouring areas.*
- We have evaluated the partners we already work with and have identified key areas that need support, such as Mudiad Meithrin and Dysgu Cymraeg to engage non-Welsh speaking parents with Welsh language education. Promoting the benefits of the language and the support they can receive as non-Welsh speakers to encourage the use of Welsh-language Education facilities.
- *Need to make parents aware of the support available to parents and how attending extra-curricular and community activities can help their children develop their confidence and ability in speaking the language - it is important that the activities are accessible and open to non-Welsh speaking parents.*
- The Cymraeg i Blant Officer works closely with local Midwifery and Health Visiting teams, signposting parents to the groups, and general provision available to them. Over the next five years we intend to further promote this provision and form connections between partners to strengthen the promotion and the support itself available to parents.
- *Community groups who want to resettle in the post-Covid-19 need help - many people have started learning Welsh during the pandemic but need social space to use the language. Possibly set up a community fund for groups?*
- We have considered the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the increase in online learning and aim to use the steps in the upcoming plan to promote the community groups that target learners and those who want to practice their skills further.
- *Need to regularly map opportunities for young people and ensure that the local authority works with a wide cross section of partners who can provide services.*
- This is an area we are prioritising, we want to facilitate the monitoring of Welsh language opportunities, both formal and informal across all partners. The first steps in doing so will be keeping engagement tracking as a statutory item on the agendas for Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network Forums.

3) Do you have any ideas or suggestions on how to change attitudes towards the Welsh language?

- *Tough, but generally, by trying to normalise the language, perhaps by holding events in the community as well as behind closed doors, as it were – I am aware that this is already happening.*
- Within the Council we will continuously promote the use of conversational Welsh among colleagues, including those with very little ability and promote how this can be transferred during community events. Having taken on board comments from Welsh language users within the Council who feel apprehensive when using the language if they are out of practice, we aim to promote a positive and supported approach to using the language within all settings in Blaenau Gwent.

- *Creating promotional, English language videos, showing the stories of people in the area who have links to the language, even historically and showing local people talking about they are proud of the language a case study of a film kind of thing. Showcase them in the community and on YouTube etc.*
Create materials about the history of the area, which emphasise the importance of the language there historically. Show individuals who have a history in the area, who may have lost the language but have now reclaimed their Welsh. Anything that shows local people recapturing the language and thus shows that it is still relevant to the people of the area.
 - Taking this note on board from Dysgu Cymraeg we intend on exploring their ideas and how they feel they could be delivered.

- *Difficult but need to focus on changing the attitudes of children and young people by ensuring they have understanding and awareness of the history of the Welsh language locally, in Wales and in Britain.*
 - We too want to change the attitudes of the younger generation towards the Welsh language and intend on exploring ways of going about this such as work with '1Miliwn'.

- *Raise the confidence and pride of the children and ensure that every child in the area has the opportunity to learn the national anthem.*
 - A very constructive suggestion that can be applied to both Welsh Medium and English Medium Schools. We can consider implementing into work with the Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Forum.

- *Continue to ensure that the Welsh language is visible, prominent and treated equally on Council materials and in the public domain - place and building names, public announcements in order to normalise the language.*
 - With the reinstating of the role of Welsh language Support Officer we will have even more support in monitoring that the Council as a whole in complying with the Welsh Language Standards that ensure that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably.

- *Need resources and video content in English tailored for the area's residents to show the benefits of learning and using the Welsh language. Case studies - local people who have benefited from the Welsh language.*
 - We can see the potential of using ex-pupils from Blaenau Gwent who attended Welsh Medium education to work with us to create promotional resources that truly exemplify the benefits of the Welsh language in social, employment and well-being terms.

- *Language awareness sessions for local authority employees tailored to different sectors - set a quantitative target?*
 - Following the in-house training for call centre staff being tailored to aid them in the telephone answering procedures in place we aim to further increase training opportunities provided and taken across the different sectors.

- *Offer language awareness sessions to all local schools to ensure that children are aware of the context and local history of the Welsh language.*

- Working with our partners and alongside the Blaenau Gwent Education forum taking their targets noted in the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan we aim to aid the increase in Welsh Language awareness.

4) Do we need to invite any additional partners not identified in the 2017-2022 Strategy?

- *Possibly Gwent Police?*
- *Blaenau Gwent Welsh Language Society*
- *Local businesses, cafes, shopkeeper's association*

5) How could the Local Authority assist local groups to increase community use of the language?

- *Hold joint events? Offering free / discounted facilities for Welsh language events looking for a venue to host a group? Offer grants for projects that will help achieve areas that need a boost in terms of the Welsh language?*
- Funding opportunities will be promoted to Welsh language services more proactively where applicable.
- *Make funding and support available to community groups looking to develop projects
More help for adults learning Welsh e.g. chat groups at council offices.
Public presence for the language e.g. set up treasure hunts for families in Blaenau Gwent's parks.*
- Funding opportunities will be promoted to Welsh language services more proactively where applicable.
- *Ensure a presence at the Language Forum in order to stimulate co-operation between local organisations and scrutinise the Strategy*
- Given the Welsh Language Support Officer Role being reinstated the Policy and Partnerships Team should have consistent presence at the Welsh Language Forum.
- *Establish a 'Promoting the Welsh Language' fund for community projects that are consistent with the aims of the new strategy*
- Funding opportunities will be promoted to Welsh language services more proactively where applicable.
- *Follow the example of other local authorities and support the annual Welsh Language Festival*
- We aim to work more collaboratively with neighbouring authorities to share resources and best practices.