



Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

Welsh Language Annual Report 2022-23

Prepared in accordance with
the requirements of the Welsh
Language Commissioner

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

1.1 Regulatory framework

This is the eighth Welsh Language Standards Annual Report Blaenau Gwent Council has published. The report was written under **the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011** covering the financial period of April 1st 2022 to March 31st 2023.

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out the legal framework regarding the use of the Welsh language in the delivery of public services. Furthermore, under Standards 158, 164 and 170, all Local Authorities must publish a Welsh Language Annual Report that captures how the Council has been compliant with the service delivery, policy making, and the operational standards. As such the purpose of this report is to provide an evaluation of how our organisation has promoted and facilitated opportunities to use the Welsh language, and ensure we are compliant with our statutory duties to treat the language no less favourably than the English language.

1.2 Governance and accountability

Blaenau Gwent Council, as a public body, has a key role in helping to support and encourage the promotion of the Welsh language and is committed to meeting its Welsh Language Standards by being 'a fair, open, and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities' as outlined in our **Corporate Plan 2022/27**.

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 recognises the Welsh language as being a key policy area which helps us deliver against our priorities which are centred on improving the well-being of local people and communities.

Implementing the standards

All staff are responsible for helping to support the organisation in meeting the Welsh Language Standards and for supporting and encouraging the promotion of the Welsh language.

The Policy & Partnerships Team provides advice, guidance, and professional support across the organisation to ensure the Council is meeting its Welsh language commitments and statutory requirements.

During this reporting period development work has been undertaken to strengthen the Council's existing performance monitoring arrangements via business planning. For example, all directorates and service areas will be required to provide updates on contributions made to supporting Welsh Language Compliance and the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27.

Political and Professional Leadership

The Leader of the Council / Cabinet Member for Corporate Services continues to hold portfolio responsibility for the Welsh Language. The Welsh Language Annual Report is considered by Corporate Overview & Performance Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, and when appropriate the Council.

Each year the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report is presented to our Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). CLT is made up of the Managing Director, Directors, and all Heads of Service, and includes all the senior officers and is the decision-making body for the corporate element of the Council.

Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network, an external partnership group facilitated by Menter Iaith BGTm, was re-established in the past 12 months.

The network is made up of local Welsh language organisations and agencies and Blaenau Gwent Council service areas whose work directly centres on promoting the use of the Welsh language across the authority. The purpose of this group is to work collectively to help support the delivery and monitoring of the **Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27** our **Welsh Language Compliance Notice** and to share resources, learning, and good practice. The group will also work alongside the Council's Corporate Equality Welsh Network.

Examples of activities the group has supported this year includes mapping current and planned activities which contribute towards helping us achieve the 3 objectives within our Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27 and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/32 (please see Section 2.4 and Section 2.5 for further information).

Corporate Policy & Performance Workshops

During this reporting period the Corporate Leadership Team have agreed the establishment of quarterly, organisation-wide Corporate Policy & Performance Workshops. We aim to use the workshops as a community of practice to support the implementation of key statutory policy areas (E.g. Welsh, Equality etc.).

The Education Transformation Team

The Education Transformation Team review and monitor the **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)** monthly; providing termly reports to the Welsh in Education Forum (WEF) and provides annual reports to Welsh Government. In addition, WEF development and progress reports are taken via the Council's political processes annually. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan is also a key focus of the 21st Century Schools Programme Board and Admissions Forum.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Since 2016 Blaenau Gwent Council has had a statutory requirement to work in accordance with the **Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice** issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. It is the responsibility of all staff to consider the Welsh language and ensure it is treated no less favourably than the English.

Therefore, while consideration and inclusion of the language is a consistent thread through the Council's day-to-day activity below are several examples of how we have reinforced compliance over the past year in relation to our service delivery, policy and operational standards.

2.1 Service delivery standards

Standards 1-7

Correspondence sent by a body

All email accounts ending **@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk** must include a statement noting that we welcome correspondence in Welsh and assurance that it will not lead to a delay in response.

Regular internal communications campaigns have been promoted to ensure staff are made aware to include the Welsh language statement below within their email signature:

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn cyfathrebu gyda chi yn eich dewis iaith, dim ond i chi rhoi gwybod i ni pa un sydd well gennych. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn creu unrhyw oedi.

The Council welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English and we will communicate with you in the language of your choice, as long as you let us know which you prefer. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to any delay.

Blaenau Gwent - lle sy'n deg, agored a chroesawgar i bawb drwy weitho gyda a thros ein cymunedau:

Blaenau Gwent - a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities

Furthermore, staff access to the **cymraeg@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk** mailbox was extended to ensure we provide an effective Welsh Language service for those who wish to correspond with the Council in Welsh.

Standards 8-22

Calls made and received by a body

Since our last Annual Report, we have continued to review our Welsh language telephone procedure using insights received from our Customer Experiences Service Manager. For example, whilst the guidance for staff included audio files to assist staff, with lower Welsh language speaking ability, with the pronunciation of key phrases (a slowly recited version to emphasise key sounds and pronunciation; the phrase at a normal pace) it was felt that some of the words were still proving to be challenging for some staff. Therefore, changes have been made to ensure more simplified phrases are included. Furthermore, Welsh language training for customer-facing staff has been arranged, for more details please see Section 5 'Welsh Medium Training Provision'.

Standards 64-68

A body receiving visitors in its building

Standard 64-68 set the requirements relating to displaying a sign and wearing badges at reception to make it clear that the persons are welcome to use the Welsh language at reception and that staff are available to provide a Welsh language service. In June, self-assessments were undertaken by Facility Managers regarding compliance and to review any areas for improvement. This resulted in the Welsh Language Active Offer being across all Council building reception areas and within our Community Hubs to increase the use of the Welsh language. For example, better signage to promote our Welsh language service and reception staff to wear either the Welsh language speaker or learning Welsh lanyards.

Our receptionist at the General Offices, Sian (pictured below) is a dedicated learner who frequently practices words and phrases necessary for receiving Welsh speaking visitors.



'I first learnt a little Welsh because of the few occasions where a Welsh speaking person came into Reception I felt ashamed that I knew absolutely no Welsh vocabulary whatsoever, not even a simple greeting. When the Welsh Language Standards came into place I decided to do a 10 week course. I would now feel confident to have a limited interaction going forward if a Welsh speaking person visits the building'.

Promotion of the use of Active Offer Lanyards and Badges

The poster on page 11 was shared with all service areas and staff are offered free lanyards and badges that indicate they are Welsh speakers or are learning Welsh.

Also, to promote the use of Welsh during online meetings held either internally or externally Microsoft Teams backgrounds have been made available to staff who wish to indicate they have Welsh language ability. The templates below are available to all staff via the intranet.



Badges and lanyards for Welsh speakers and learners available for all staff!



Get yours from reception at Anvil Court and the General Offices!



Teams backgrounds that show you speak Welsh, or are learning, can be found on the Welsh language Intranet page.

For free Welsh language training please contact Katherine.watkins-hughes@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Beaufort Hill Primary School – ‘Helpwr y Dydd’

Promotion of the lanyards also went out to all Blaenau Gwent schools. This prompted engagement from the Welsh lead at Beaufort Hill Primary School to use the lanyards as part of the ‘Helpwr a Dydd’ scheme.

The- ‘Helpwr a Dydd’ scheme is where a pupil is picked each day as a Welsh language champion to ensure the Welsh language is being used. The ‘Helpwr y Dydd’ is responsible for role-modelling the use of Welsh by promoting the Welsh phrase of the week, writing the date and weather in Welsh at the beginning of class and using the language generally with staff and students.



2.2 Policy making standards

Standard 88 - 97 Relating to considering the effects of a body's policy decisions on the Welsh language

Integrated Impact Assessment

Standard 88 states that a body must consider what effects, if any (whether positive or adverse), a policy decision would have on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language, and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. A body must consider the effects when it formulates a new policy, or reviews or revises an existing policy.

All Council decisions, policy reviews or new policy developments require an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). The IIA has been reviewed and includes consideration of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 regulations to guarantee effective consideration of the Welsh language.

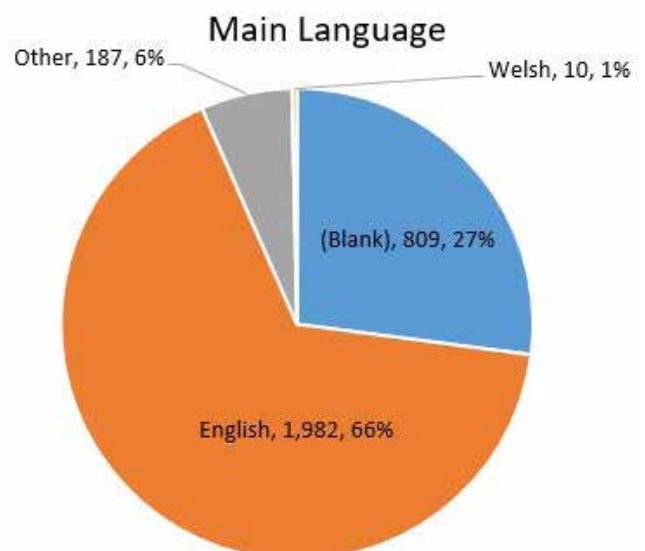
2.3 Operational standards

Standards 99 -104 relating to the use of the Welsh language within a body's internal administration

Integrated Impact Assessment

When an individual is offered a new post their correspondence preference for the contract of employment or contract for services is noted on iTrent by Organisational Development. iTrent is an online platform and database for workforce information (e.g., sensitive information relating to the Equality (Wales) Act 2010 as well as Welsh Language speaking, understanding, listening, and reading.

Currently there are 19 members of staff who wish to receive their correspondence in Welsh or bilingually. This is a significant increase of 14 members of staff since the last reporting period to disclose Welsh as their main language which shows a positive trend in staff embracing the language.



Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Standard 136 - Recruiting and Appointing

Managers are required to complete a Welsh Language Skills Job Assessment form when recruiting for a new or vacant post. This information shapes the job description, advertisement requisition, interview procedure and subsequently any employment. It is the Council's policy that all posts advertised, internally and externally must note Welsh as a 'desirable' skill as a minimum requirement. As such all 335 jobs advertised this reporting period have noted Welsh as a 'desirable' skill.

While only one position was advertised as Welsh language 'essential' the position itself of Welsh Language Support Officer is key in ensuring use, promotion and compliance with the Welsh Language Standards. As was noted in our last Annual Report the Policy & Partnerships Team had successfully participated in the Kickstart apprenticeship programme with creating the role of Trainee Welsh Language Support Officer. This apprenticeship led to the member of staff securing fixed-term employment in the Electoral Registration Team following its completion. This year having secured further funding to extend the role of Welsh Language Support Officer for a further 12 months.

The recruitment policy is undergoing an end-end review as part of the CS092 Action Plan covered in Section 3.

2.4 Meeting our Promotional Standards / Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27

Standard 145 states that every local authority must produce a strategy detailing how they intend on promoting the Welsh language every five years. Our second **Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27** was published during the period of this report and focuses on the following three strategic objectives:

Objective 1 - Family and Community

'Working with our partners we will promote and encourage the use of the Welsh language within families and the community.'

Objective 2 - Children and Young people

'To increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal activities for children and young people.'

Objective 3 - Welsh in the Workplace

'To increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace.'

Our Target

Within the promotion strategy the council must set out a target, Blaenau Gwent have aligned its target with the Government Million Speakers by 2050 strategy.

The 2021 Census identified 4,035 Welsh speakers living within Blaenau Gwent, which equates to 6.2% of its population.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

To meet the Welsh Governments goal of one million speakers in the next 28 years Blaenau Gwent would need a 46% increase. 46% being an additional 1,856 speakers, equating to 66 additional speakers annually.

Below are some examples of work that has taken place this year that feed into the Promotion Strategy's objectives.

Objective 1

Objective 1 of the strategy centres on the promotion and encouragement of the use of the Welsh language within families and community by working with our partners.

As noted in Section 1.2 'Governance and Accountability' of this report the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network has been re-established to support this work. This group is made up of our partner organisations and relevant Council service area representatives. Meeting quarterly to share best practice and monitor the progress of Welsh Language Compliance, the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/32 and the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27.

Partnership working is key to the delivery of Objective 1. Below are three examples of what are local Welsh language partners have delivered during the reporting period to support it.

Mudiad Meithrin

Established in 1971 **Mudiad Meithrin / Mudiad Meithrin** is a voluntary organisation passionate about celebrating and encouraging the use of the Welsh language. The organisation offers numerous Welsh-medium play and learning experiences for children from birth to school-age.

Cylch Meithrin Brynithel has held a series of activities with families this year to generate interest in Welsh and Welsh Education including Welsh courses for parents; a Martyn Geraint Show at Abertillery's Metropole Theatre and a free trip to the Dewin and Doti Festival

In July 2022 working with Blaenau Gwent Welsh-medium primary Ysgol Bro Helyg Mudiad Meithrin published a video regarding transport to the school.

The video 'My journey to School' shows the journey for local children on a bus to school, which aims to reassure parents who have been worried about sending their young children on a bus to travel to school.

The video was promoted on the Councils social media pages and website and is used to encourage families who send their children to Cylch Meithrin in Brynithel to continue their Welsh-medium education by sending them to this local Welsh School after they leave the cylch.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Menter iaith

Menter iaith / Menter iaith was established in 2007 making it one of the youngest Welsh Language Initiatives, or 'Mentrau iaith' amongst the 22 that exist across Wales. The Menter serves three counties – Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, and Monmouthshire.

The 'Mentrau iaith' were established to arrange a variety of events for people of all ages, background, and linguistic ability to enjoy and socialise in Welsh including parents, families, children and young people, adults, and learners.

Menter iaith BGTM have held numerous community events and activities throughout the reporting period that promote the use of the Welsh language. Below are a few examples:

MENTER IAITH BGTM
#HafOHwyl
#SummerOfFun


Dydd Mercher 10/8/22, 17/8/22
Wednesday 10/8/22, 17/8/22
11am - 2:30pm


Ymunwch â ni am sesiwn llawn hwyl, stondin gwybodaeth adloniant i'r teulu a sesiwn ffitrwydd gan Elin Wyn yn Nhy Bedwelty, Tredegar.


Join us for a Welsh language Family Fun day- information stalls, family fitness with Elin Wyn and entertainment at Bedwelty House, Tredegar

Bwciwch o flaen llaw drwy Eventbrite
Book in advance via Eventbrite
<https://hwylbb.eventbrite.co.uk>

Menter iaith Blaenau Gwent Torfaen Monmouthshire
Mentor for Welsh Language Cymdeithas Gymraeg Blaenau Gwent Torfaen Monmouthshire
Sponsoried by Welsh Government
Cofrestrwyd fel Sefydliad Elusen Cofrestrwyd
Charitable Incorporated Organisation Number 1191194

Rownd Blaenau Gwent / Gwent
Y Cwis Mawr


RTB Ebbw Vale Bwls Club
Newchurch Rd,
Glyn Ebwy / Ebbw Vale
NP23 5AZ
30/06/2022
6.30yh/pm
Am fey n wladwrth -
gwst@menterbgtm.cymru


Dws mwy na 4 ym mhob tîm. Mae cyfle i'r tîm buddugol fynd i'r rownd derynol yn Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Tregaron a chael tawcyn am y diwrnod am ddim!

Mentor for Welsh Language Cymdeithas Gymraeg Blaenau Gwent Torfaen Monmouthshire
Sponsoried by Welsh Government
Cofrestrwyd fel Sefydliad Elusen Cofrestrwyd
Charitable Incorporated Organisation Number 1191194

Cymdeithas Gymraeg
Blaenau Gwent


DEWCH I YMUNO GYDA NI AM BRYD O FWYD I AIL-LAWNSIO CYMDEITHAS GYMRAEG BLAENAU GWENT!

COME JOIN US FOR A MEAL TO RELAUNCH THE BLAENAU GWENT WELSH SOCIETY!

LLEOLIAD/LOCATION
8 KING ST, BRYNMAWR, EBBW VALE NP23 4RE
NOS FERCHER 18AIN O FAI 6PM
WEDNESDAY 18TH OF MAY 6PM

Bwciwch o flaen llaw / Booking essential
sioned@menterbgtm.cymru

Mentor for Welsh Language Cymdeithas Gymraeg Blaenau Gwent Torfaen Monmouthshire
Sponsoried by Welsh Government
Cofrestrwyd fel Sefydliad Elusen Cofrestrwyd
Charitable Incorporated Organisation Number 1191194

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Aneurin Leisure Trust

Aneurin Leisure Trust is a not-for-profit organisation which delivers leisure, learning and cultural services across Blaenau Gwent. Aneurin Leisure Trust offer a range of leisure activities through the medium of Welsh and courses to learn Welsh for adults.

Excitingly during their 'Haf o Hwyl' / 'Summer of Fun' the Welsh author Huw Davies presented free writing workshops and storytelling sessions at Tredegar and Abertillery libraries as pictured below:

The poster features the following text and graphics:

- Logos for Llyfrgelloedd Blaenau Gwent Libraries, Project TECLYHWYR, and Project GADGEJEERAS.
- Large stylized text: **Haf o Hwyl Summer of Fun**
- Author name: **Huw Davies**
- Event title: **Writing Workshop & Storytelling Session**
- Invitation: **Come and join us for a FREE workshop with renowned children's author Huw Davies**
- Photo of Huw Davies.
- Event details: **Tredegar Library, Wednesday 17 Aug 2.30pm, Call 01495 357869 to book**
- Age suitability: **Suitable for ages 6-11**
- Book covers for 'SŵPHERIDLO' and 'BEN LLESTRI'.
- Logos for 'Haf o Hwyl Summer of Fun', 'DAN LLEN', 'READING', and 'THE READING HUB'.



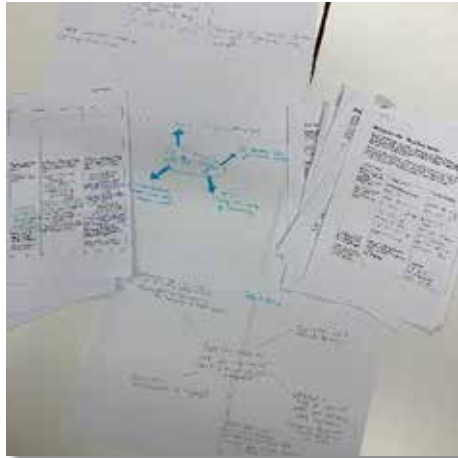
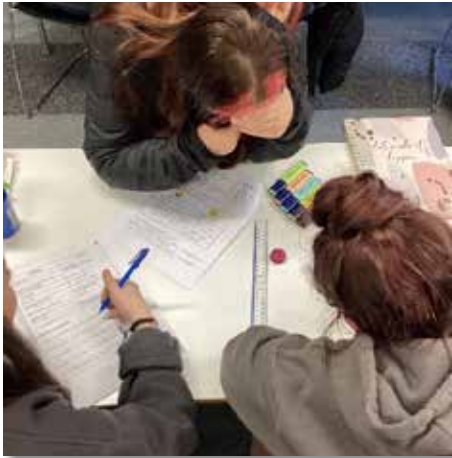
Objective 2

The second objective within the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy aims to increase the provision of Welsh language education and informal learning activities for children and young people. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/32 is aligned with the delivery of Objective 2. Please see Section 2.5 of this report for further information about the plan and its progress during the reporting period. Below are a few examples of work delivered by Coleg Gwent's Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone that has contributed towards Objective 2 during the past year.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Incorporating the language in courses at Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone - Coleg Gwent

The Welsh Language Facilitator for Health and Social Care in Coleg Gwent has been working with both Level 2 and 3 students to develop their Welsh language ability and confidence. The Welsh language has been incorporated into the general content of the course as well as running sessions on the More Than Just Words Framework (please see objective 3 for further information). Also, the Head of Welsh for Aneurin Bevan Health Board has frequented the college to deliver sessions on the importance and structure of implementation for More Than Just Words. Below are some images of the students' hard work surrounding the Welsh language within the Health and Social Care sector.



Dydd Gŵyl Dewi at Coleg Gwent

In addition to work within the classroom Coleg Gwent have also run Welsh events such as the Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Fair. This included playing Welsh music in the auditorium on Well Music Day. Events such as this give opportunity for the colleges' Welsh ambassadors to help out as well as raise the profile of the Welsh language and awareness about opportunities to learn Welsh to students attending the college.



Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Objective 3

Objective 3 aims to increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace.

Welsh language training is key aspect in helping to achieve Objective 3. Opportunities to learn Welsh have been extensively promoted during the past 12 months as is detailed in section 5 of this report.

As exemplified in Section 2 of this report this year we have taken a number of extra measures to ensure Welsh language visibility within the workplace to ensure those who speak Welsh encouraged to use the language.

Regular reviews and updates of the Welsh language guidance available to all staff on the intranet are made throughout the course of the year. Frequent posters, GIFS and videos surrounding Welsh Language Standards compliance are promoted to all staff. As can be seen below a logo and theme have been developed by the graphics department that has become synonymous with reminders of standard practice that apply to all staff within the Council.



Welsh Government's More than just words 2022/27

Our Welsh Language Promotion Strategy also sets out our commitments against Welsh Government's **More than just words 2022/27** Strategy More Than Just Words Plan 2022/27 and is focused on increasing the use of Welsh in the workplace.

Welsh Government's More than just words 2022/27 is a Welsh language plan for health and social care which aims to ensure people can access the care they deserve and require in the preferred language choice. It aims to improve and promote Welsh language services across all health settings. It aims to improve well-being outcomes for individuals in-line with the Social Services and Well-being- of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2014. Under the Act's Code of Practice, local authorities are required to ensure Welsh language services are included within service planning and delivery and that services are offered in Welsh, to Welsh speakers, without them having to request it as required by the 'Active Offer'. For example, taking steps to increase the Welsh Language skills of Social Services staff to improve our Welsh language services.

More than just words resources along with Learn Welsh courses as can be seen below are included in Blaenau Gwent's Social Care services weekly bulletin. Further awareness sessions are being commissioned as part of the 2023/24 work programme.

Mwy na geiriau More than just words

Resources available:

[Using Welsh at work | Social Care Wales](#)

[Understanding language needs | Social Care Wales](#)

Plus sign up to a free Welsh taster course

[SHORT ONLINE TASTER COURSES | Learn Welsh](#)



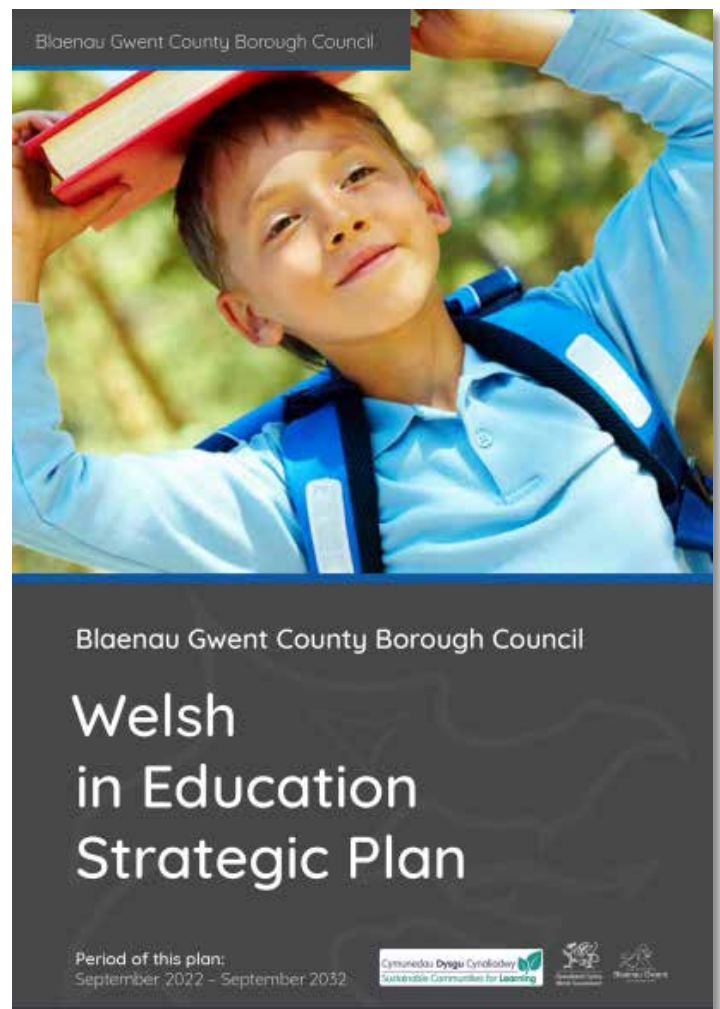
2.5 Welsh in Education Strategic Plan 2022/32

Objective two of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy states:

“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”.

Blaenau Gwent Welsh in Education Strategic 10-Year Plan 2022-2032 was approved in July 2022 by Welsh Ministers for implementation in September 2022. The plan is directly aligned to both the Welsh Government’s and the Council’s Welsh Language strategic frameworks. The strategic priorities highlighted in the WESP 10-year document can be summarised as follows:

- Raise the profile and levels of participation for Welsh-medium education across the County Borough by 2032 by 11% to contribute to the vision for one million speakers by 2050.
- Increase the early year’s provision offer to stimulate parental demand to enable growth across the County Borough.
- Continue to increase transition rates from Welsh-medium nursery provision to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg.
- Open a Seedling Welsh-medium Primary provision in Sirhowy Tredegar on Chartist Way for September 2024 with Nursery and Reception Pupils being admitted September 2023 on a temporary school site in Ty Bedwellty.
- Work regionally with Southeast Wales Local Authorities to secure places for Blaenau Gwent learners in Welsh-medium secondary provision.
- Improving Welsh medium learner outcomes so learners raise aspirations and improve their life chances.



Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

The Blaenau Gwent WESP 10-year plan came into force in September 2022 with Welsh Government Approval. Blaenau Gwent has been able to set ambitious but realistic targets for the short, medium and long term developments. Alongside a review of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum (WEF) structure, membership and associated documentation are reviewed and strengthened on an annual basis, there is a robust monitoring form and delivery plan to support the success of promoting Welsh-medium education. Such as the posters below that are displayed in the Integrated Children's Centre explaining the journey of Welsh medium education.



Welsh in Education Forum

The WEF meetings are now termly and have been referenced with Welsh Government and colleagues as good practice with strong partnership working. There are also dedicated workshops around Communication plans and Subgroup outcomes as per the WESP 10-year plan.

These Communication plans including working collaboratively with Health Visitors and the Council's Family Information Services (FIS). Flying Start Health Visitors work in areas of deprivation as designated by Welsh Government, they encourage children to attend Flying Start childcare and inform parents of the availability of Flying Start childcare through the medium of Welsh.



A hard copy of the 'Parent / Carer School Information Booklet' is sent out from the FIS to every parent in Blaenau Gwent in the months leading up to when admissions process opens, within the booklet Welsh medium education as well as early years' nursery settings like Mudiad Meithrin. The booklet also addresses the concerns of non-Welsh speaking parents' ability to support their child through their education.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

Welsh in Education Forum Impact

Partners commented on the effectiveness of the Forum, which in turn has had a positive impact upon membership, attendance, and outcomes. In addition, the Service Manager for Education Transformation and Business Change is the chair of the Regional Planning of School Places and Demand Sub-group of the WEF Strategic Forum. The group meets quarterly and considers the following areas of work:

- Regional Promotion and Communication Strategy Development
- Monitoring the Demand for and Uptake of Welsh-medium Education Places
- Regional Review of Welsh-medium Secondary School Provision
- Welsh Medium Grant and Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Proposals and Projects
- WESP and WEF Updates
- Immersion

The Council has updated its webpages to inform the wider community of the advantages of being Bilingual to support the WEF collaborative booklet called 'Becoming Bilingual' 'Becoming Bilingual' which promotes the benefits of speaking Welsh and English.

The graphic is set against an orange background with a faint network diagram of nodes and lines. On the left, there is a cartoon illustration of a young boy with brown hair, wearing a blue t-shirt and black shorts, with a backpack. On the right, there is a cartoon illustration of a young girl with dark skin and spiky hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt and white shorts, also with a backpack. In the top left corner, the Blaenau Gwent logo is visible, featuring a red dragon and the text 'Blaenau Gwent' and 'Dyffwrdd Bwrdeistrefol Blaenau Gwent'. In the top right corner, there is a small map of Wales with the text 'Mentor Iaith'. The central text is contained in two rounded rectangular boxes. The top box is orange with white text: 'Bod yn *ddwyieithog* Ydych chi'n ystyried anfon eich plentyn i ysgol cyfrwng Cymraeg?'. The bottom box is green with white text: 'Becoming *bilingual* Thinking about sending your child to a Welsh medium school?'. At the bottom left, there is a small orange speech bubble with the text 'Gweler rhagor o wybodaeth y tu mewn!'. At the bottom right, there is a small green speech bubble with the text 'Find out more inside!'. At the bottom, there are two website URLs: 'www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk' and 'www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/schools-learning/beingbilingual'.

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

The document is reviewed annually and shared with the families of prospective pupils. The booklet is also linked to the admissions process and is shared via health professionals, early year's settings, schools, and other relevant partners and professionals, to promote Welsh language opportunities and education locally.

Blaenau Gwent 2021-22 self-assessment against key progress was sustained at Amber, with the rate of completion against the 2021-22 action plan as follows:

- 84% (or 49 actions) are complete
- 7% (or 4 actions) ongoing; and,
- 9% (5 actions) actions in development

Continued management and monitoring are required to ensure that the plan and targets are reflective of need, and that the key objectives are achieved within each delivery plan period. 5 of the main achievements in the last academic session include:

1. Blaenau Gwent has successfully delivered against the Welsh Government Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B programme for remodelling works at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg in Autumn term 2022. The education transformation team are awaiting an official opening date for Ministers which is scheduled for May 2023. In addition, Education is taking forward a project to create a 210 place Welsh-medium primary school and associated childcare facility within the Tredegar/Sirhowy valley in September 2024. This will be open for pupils of Nursery and Reception age for September 2023 on a temporary location which is Ty Bedwellty for the first year until the school is completed in September 2024.
2. Numbers of pupils on roll, along with those applying for a place at Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg has continued to increase, with a positive trend noted over the last 3 years in relation to both nursery and reception pupil numbers. In addition, transition rates between primary and secondary for 2019/20 were 100%.
3. Blaenau Gwent Council has developed a strong marketing and communication plan, targeting and promoting the benefits of being bilingual, whilst also establishing appropriate methods of engagement and consultation with stakeholders, in order to inform key strategic priorities. Throughout December 2022 and Early January 2023, a mass postal campaign was launched which seen over 36,000 bookmarks (as can be seen below) being delivered to every household in Blaenau Gwent promoting the benefits of being bilingual and the new seedling provision in Sirhowy Tredegar.



Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

4. Partner representation, attendance and frequency of the Blaenau Gwent Welsh Education Forum continues to be strong, with partners firmly committed to and recognising the effectiveness of the Blaenau Gwent Forum. Partners have hailed the work of BG WEF as an example of good practice. Also, the WESP POSP Sub-group continues to meet regularly to support proposals for growth and development on a regional basis and again, to inform strategic planning.
5. Sabbatical Welsh figures are increasing annually with school staff uptake of courses increasing year on year demonstrating a continued commitment to the Welsh language.

Blaenau Gwent's Welsh in Education 10 Year Strategic Plan

Blaenau Gwent Council's Vision for Welsh-medium Education is as follows:

'To build upon the strong progress made to date, by creating a sustainable education system which enhances provision, uptake, and use of the Welsh language; creating skilled and empowered citizens who are proud to live and work both within and outside of Wales'.

The strategic aim of which will be to create:

'A community who embrace the Welsh language and culture with confidence and pride'. We will seek to achieve our vision by promoting, developing, and enhancing Welsh-medium education provision and services. We will do so by working closely with the Welsh in Education Forum, along with other key strategic partners including Welsh Government, and other Local Authorities. Our strategic objectives include:

- To raise the profile of Welsh medium Education, along with the benefits of being bilingual
- To create high quality, thriving learning establishments which support effective pupil, staff, community, and partner engagement
- To support integration of services and create an immersive experience for learners
- To secure improved school to school and partnership work, facilitating wider use and development of the Welsh language
- To create a skilled and sustainable workforce, committed to continuing professional development
- To ensure inclusive teaching and learning environments and opportunities for all learners; and
- To improve progression opportunities by reviewing and implementing a curriculum which is firmly aligned to further and higher education

Meeting our Welsh Language Standards

The Council seeks to achieve the following outcomes as set out by Welsh Government, which reflect the learner's education journey, and are consistent with the policy areas of **Cymraeg 2050** and **Education in Wales: Our National Mission**.

Outcome 1

More nursery children/three-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 2

More reception class children/five-year-olds receive their education through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 3

More children continue to improve their Welsh language skills when transferring from one stage of their statutory education to another.

Outcome 4

More learners study for assessed qualifications in Welsh (as a subject) and subjects through the medium of Welsh.

Outcome 5

More opportunities for learners to use Welsh in different contexts in school.

Outcome 6

An increase in the provision of Welsh-medium education for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) (in accordance with the duties imposed by the **Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018**).

Outcome 7

Increase the number of teaching staff able to teach Welsh (as a subject) and teach through the medium of Welsh.

To achieve our vision and objectives, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is committed to working towards the ambitious Welsh Government target, to increase the Year 1 cohort taught via the medium of Welsh to 75 pupils. When compared with the 2019/20 baseline data used by Welsh Government, this would equate to 10% (an increase of 6 percentage points) of the total Year 1 cohort being taught via the medium of Welsh by 2032.

Immersion Grant

Education, in partnership with a specialist contractor, the school and Welsh Government, has developed dedicated immersion provision within Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg, to accommodate late comers to Welsh-medium education. The 2021/22 pilot was a success and Welsh Government extended the programme for a further 3 years inviting Local Authorities to submit expressions of interests. Blaenau Gwent secured additional funding for a class teacher for 3 years with some small capital expenditure to promote immersion over both Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg and the seedling school in Sirhowy, Tredegar.

In line with the delivery of the project the Council worked closely with neighbouring authorities to compare models of immersion provision, identify, and address any gaps, whilst also gauging and developing best practice. In addition, the project has contributed to the development of the communication and promotion plan working in partnership with the BG WEF, in turn supporting implementation of the new provision in line with the BG WESP.

In addition, Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Helyg Primary School are planning on implementing a special needs resource base (SNRB) for up to 15 ALN pupils, subject to consultation. As part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme the Council can provide capital expenditure in 2023/24 to enable a classroom to be converted into a resource base to support a wider ALN direction of providing ALN support for Welsh-medium learners in 2024.

3.0 Corporate Compliments & Complaints Procedure

The **Corporate Compliments & Complaints** procedure is available for anyone who wishes to make a complaint related to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards and is used to help us identify and make any required service delivery changes. The procedure provides information on how people can refer a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales as well as the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

Complaints can be made in any format (e.g., email, letter, in person, telephone, social media etc.).

During this reporting period a total of 0 complaints were received via Corporate Compliments & Complaints regarding service delivery standards; policy making standards; or operational standards.

Standard Compliance Investigation CS092

The Welsh Language Commissioners Office (WLCO) opened the CS092 investigation in November 2021 following concerns raised when assessing Blaenau Gwent Councils compliance with the Welsh Language Standards surrounding telephone service.

The initial response the Council provided raised further concerns regarding standard compliance that widened the terms of reference. The terms of reference included the promoting of Welsh services, assessing the language skills of staff, providing training opportunities and the recruitment processes surrounding the language skills required.

In September 2022 the WLCO provided the Council with a final determination that outlines the steps required to reach standard compliance and expected delivery timeframes. This determination notice, also requested that the Council created an Action Plan that sets out these steps and establishes both timeframes and accountability.

The Council's Leadership Team made the decision to establish an organisation wide 'CS092 Core Officers Group' to support the Policy Team with the development and subsequent delivery of the Action Plan.

The group are responsible for:

- Holding a root and branch review of the arrangements for complying with the Service Delivery Standards that are included within the investigation
- Preparing a plan for how the organisation will ensure compliance with the Operational Standards across the organisation
- Identifying human resource requirements on how the Council is going to ensure adequate resources to comply with the Telephone Standards;
- Increasing the level of understanding across the organisation of the requirements of the standards relevant to the investigation (with reference to the language skills assessment, Welsh language training and assessing the language needs of posts)
- Preparation, development, and subsequent implementation of the CS092 Action Plan.

Several online meetings were held as a group to discuss the requirements of the investigation and to develop a draft Action Plan. This was complemented by further individual meetings between the Professional Lead for Engagement, Equality and Welsh, Welsh Language Support Officer, and Action Leads to finalise the key details of the draft plan.

A Microsoft Teams Channel was created for the Core Officer Group to be able to regularly share files, information and to provide progress updates as well as support preliminary implementation work.

The Council submitted the Action Plan to the WLCO on the 31st of January 2023.

The CS092 Action Plan was approved in March 2023 and is currently being implemented with all actions set to be completed by March 2024.

Welsh Language Commissioner's Office Annual Monitoring Visit - March 2023

Every year the Welsh Language Commissioners Office (WLCO) focuses on several areas of Welsh language compliance and undertakes a review of the Council's effectiveness, along with identifying areas for improvement.

WLCO praised the Council for their work surrounding the recent investigation and the Action Plan which had been developed to address the matters raised.

However, the following areas were identified for improvement:

- Website information (Standard 49, 52 & 56)
- Social media posts (Standard 48)
- Requirement to develop an Internal Welsh language policy (Standard 98)

Standards raised during monitoring:

Standard 49

If you produce a Welsh language version and a separate English language version of a document, you must ensure that the English language version clearly states that the document is also available in Welsh.

Standard 52

You must ensure that –

- a. the text of each page of your website is available in Welsh,
- b. every Welsh language page on your website is fully functional, and
- c. the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language on your website.

Standard 56

You must provide the interface and menus on every page of your website in Welsh.

Standard 58

When you use social media, you must not treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language.

Standard 98

You must develop a policy on using Welsh internally for the purpose of promoting and facilitating the use of the language, and you must publish that policy on your intranet.

Actions taken within the report period to address the matters raised:

Standard 49

The following poster was sent out to all staff to ensure that documents made available to the public must be available in both Welsh and English, including the official statement which must be used.

Welsh Language Document Statement

Standard
49



English versions of documents made available to the public must include a statement that they are also available in Welsh.

Please be sure to use the statement available under 'Welsh Guidance' on the Intranet.



Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

Complaints

Standard 52, 56 and 58

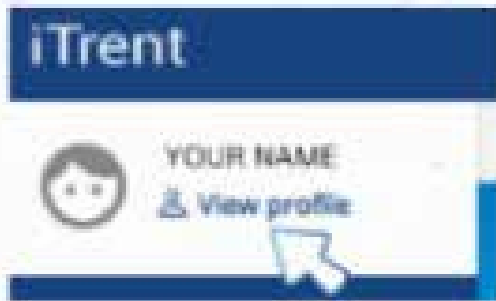
The Communications team have amended all non-compliant web pages in-line with the Welsh language standards. Regular monitoring of web content will be undertaken to ensure the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English on the Council's website and social media accounts.

Standard 98

Drafting of the policy on using the Welsh language internally began in March, and is being taken into consideration when completing the actions within the CS092 Investigation Action Plan. The policy will continue to be reviewed following publication to ensure that all content is up to date with any developments in relation to the Council's internal operations (i.e., recruitment processes, post-entry training policy etc).

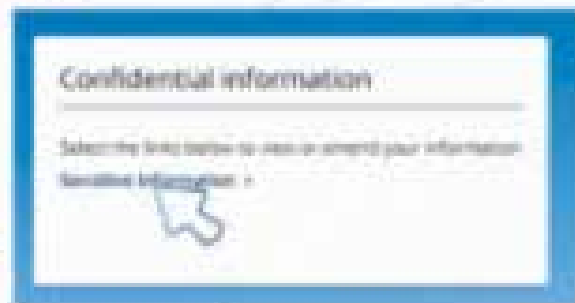
Is your iTrent info up to date?

Please tell us about your Welsh Language skills.



1) Log in to iTrent
Click 'View Profile'.

2) Click
'Sensitive
Information'.



3) Fill in your Welsh language skills.

4) Don't forget to click 'Save'.



4.0 Staff language skills

All councils must keep a record of the Welsh language skills of its staff under Standard 127. Blaenau Gwent Council record this via our human resources platform, iTrent. All staff are made aware that they need to complete a Welsh language skills self-assessment upon employment. Reminders to keep this information up to date have been sent out to all staff as can be seen below, as well as including reminders in managers' updates.

The information in this section has been provided via the Organisational Development Team using the Council's iTrent system and represents staff Welsh language ability as of 31st March 2022.

The base figure for the data is 2,959 staff on the Council's establishment list (an increase of 20% in comparison to 2021-22 records).

As of the 31st of March 2023 the number of employees who have Welsh language speaking skills ranging from 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately' to 'a little' is 537. This is an increase of 67 members of staff from the 470 identified in the 2021-22 reporting period.

The number and percentage of staff that can understand, speak, write, and read Welsh varies slightly between each comparator, which is illustrated in the graphs on page 37 and 38.

Chart 1 - Speak Welsh

Ability to speak Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	33 (1%)
Moderately	123 (5%)
Quite Well	17 (1%)
A Little	297 (12%)
No ability	1312 (53%)
No response	701 (28%)
Total	2,464

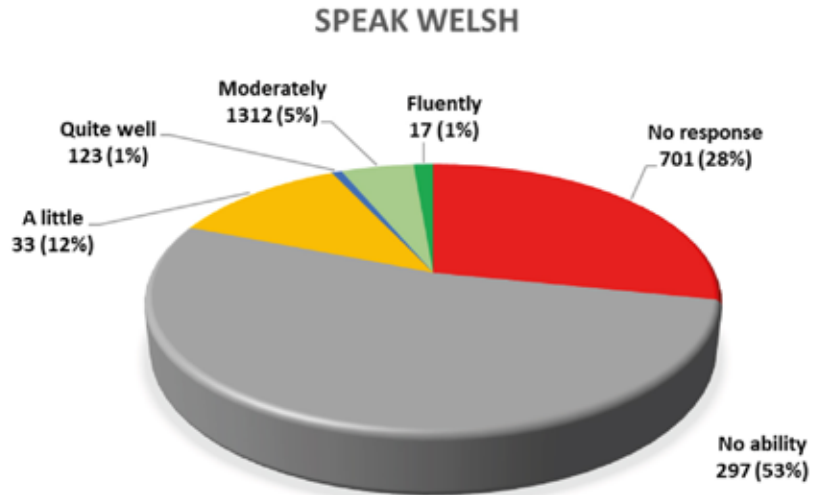
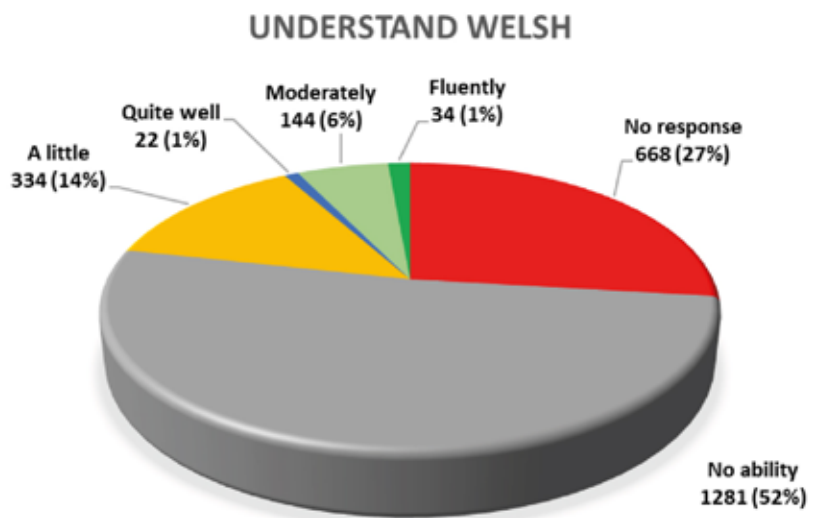


Chart 2 - Understand Welsh

Ability to understand Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	34 (1%)
Moderately	144 (6%)
Quite Well	22 (1%)
A Little	334 (14%)
No ability	1281 (52%)
No response	668 (27%)
Total	2,464



Staff Language Skills

Chart 3 - Write Welsh

Ability to write Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	29 (1%)
Moderately	100 (4%)
Quite Well	19 (1%)
A Little	242 (10%)
No ability	1344 (55%)
No response	748 (30%)
Total	2,464

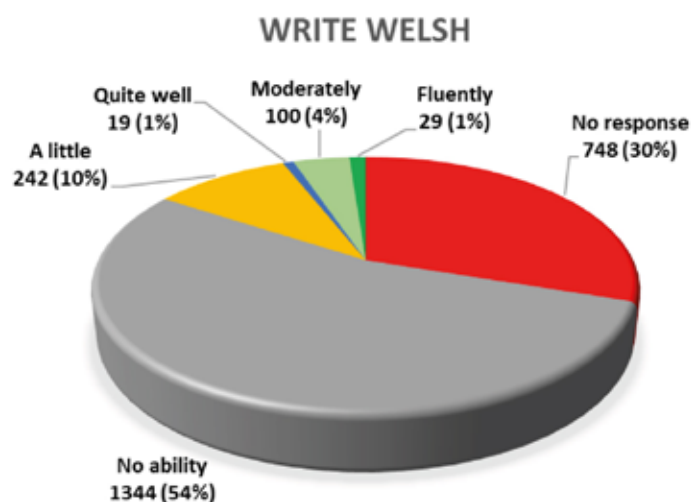
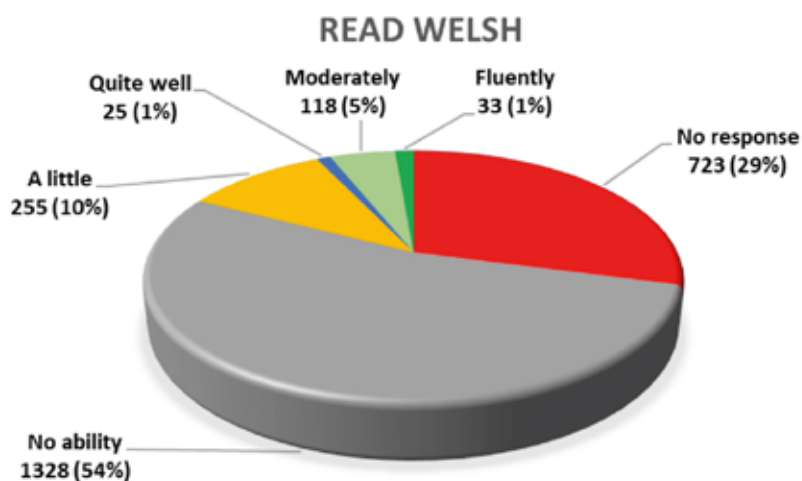


Chart 4 - Read Welsh

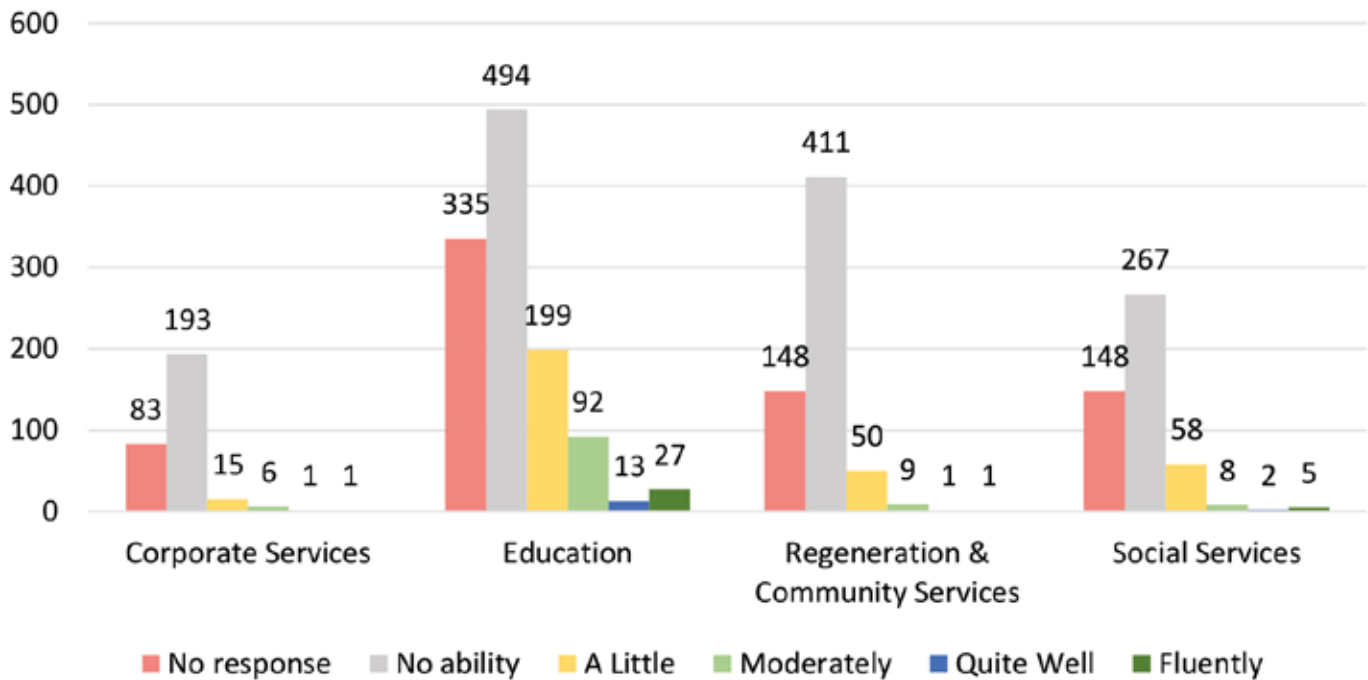
Ability to read Welsh	Number of Staff
Fluently	33 (1%)
Moderately	118 (5%)
Quite Well	25 (1%)
A Little	255 (10%)
No ability	1328 (54%)
No response	723 (29%)
Total	2,464



Welsh Speakers by Directorate

The following bar chart breaks down Welsh speaking ability by directorate.

Ability To Speak Welsh By Directorate



A total of 45 members of staff declare their ability as fluent under Welsh speaking skills, this is an increase of 11 members of staff in comparison to 2021-22 figures. This increase is consistent across the Council, with figures rising in all directorates.

Directorate	Number of fluent speakers gained against the 2021-22 Annual Report
Corporate Services	1
Education	3
Regeneration & Community Services	4
Social Services	3

As reported last year the Education directorate has the highest number of fluent speakers with 30 members of staff having gained a further 3 fluent speakers from the 27 reported in 2021-22.

STANDARD

130

 **Siarad Cymraeg**
Speak Welsh

Training Opportunity

Learning Welsh is a valuable skill.

 Cymraeg

Would you like to learn Welsh as part of your role? Or just fancy the idea of learning a little Cymraeg?

All Blaenau Gwent employees are entitled to receive free training during work hours.

Speak to your line manager about the Dysgu Cymraeg / Learn Welsh courses available today.

<https://learnwelsh.cymru/work-welsh/work-welsh-courses/work-welsh-taster-courses/>


Cwmwl Dunde Idris Gari
Blaenau Gwent

5.0 Welsh medium training provision

Staff Training


0 courses (available online) were delivered through the medium of Welsh, although this option is made available to staff if requested.

Welsh Language Training

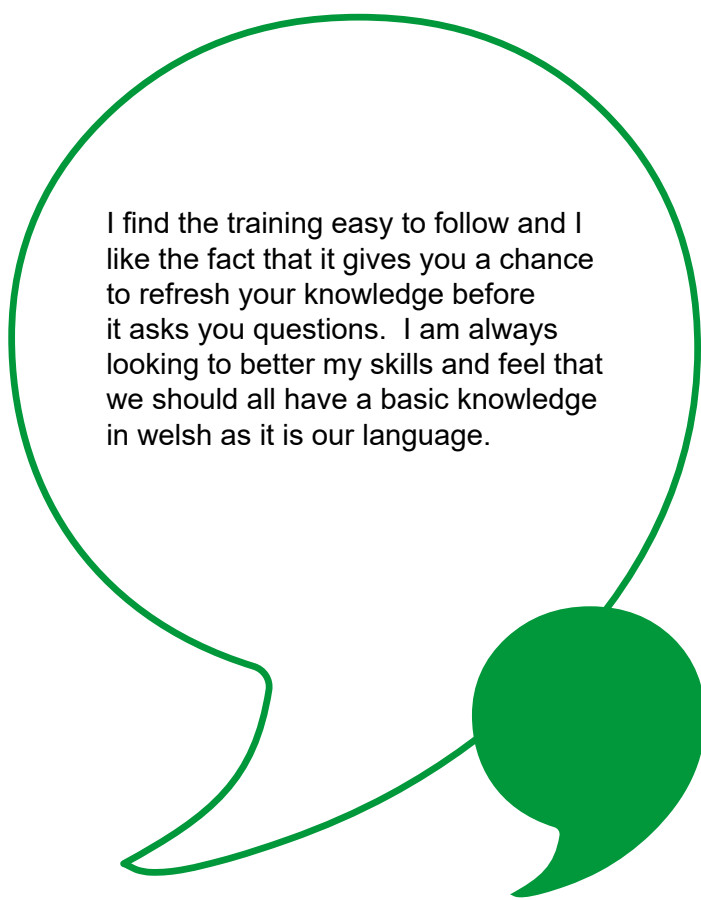
Training is consistently promoted to all Blaenau Gwent staff highlighting to all service areas the opportunity to receive Welsh Language training during working hours as per Standard 130.

We have seen a positive increase in engagement with the online recourses promoted with 31 additional members of staff utilising Dysgu Cymraeg/Learn Welsh online courses.

Staff feedback:



The reason why I started the course was because I provide Organisational Development support to the Welsh medium school and I thought it would be nice to have some welsh language skills to be able to understand and speak in welsh when I am there. I'd never have thought about starting this if it hadn't been promoted internally and being supported to learn in work time is a definate plus.



I find the training easy to follow and I like the fact that it gives you a chance to refresh your knowledge before it asks you questions. I am always looking to better my skills and feel that we should all have a basic knowledge in welsh as it is our language.

Welsh Medium Training Provision

Tutor led sessions for customer-facing staff

To ensure we are providing the best telephone service for Welsh speaking residents contacting the Council, arrangements have been made for 10 members of staff to begin a training course. This course will run from May 2023 until February 2024, meeting with a tutor virtually for two hours per week. The staff members attending these sessions deal with phone calls made to the Councils 'Connect 2 Blaenau Gwent' and benefits telephone lines, and those working in the Community Hubs. This course is being delivered as part of the Work Welsh Scheme provided by **Learn Welsh / Dysgu Cymraeg**. These sessions will run for 35 weeks accumulating 70 hours of training, with provisional in-person sessions in place for the final weeks of the training timetable.



Councillor Sue Edmunds (Cabinet Member for People and Education) - Learning Welsh

(Cabinet Member for People and Education)

Having lived in Wales for 30 years Councillor Edmunds has always enjoyed listening to the Welsh language and has found in recent years that it has become more apparent in her life. Councillor Edmunds was particularly inclined to learn Welsh to be able to use it when visiting schools, following receiving the email we sent out to staff was encouraged to try using Dysgu Cymraeg/Learn Welsh's online courses. Although due to her busy schedule found Duolingo to suit her schedule as an agile worker better, and is beginning to pick up the language. Here's what Councillor Edmunds had to say:



I work in the community and Welsh is always present. I want to be part of that, I want to be able to sing the National Anthem and greet people in their own tongue for example. My life is really busy so classes don't really suit, I found DuoLingo really works for me, I can spend a few minutes several times a day, may be when I'm waiting for the kettle to boil or between meetings.

6.0 Next steps

Blaenau Gwent Council will remain committed to meeting the duties set out under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and further promote and support compliance with the standards with the aim to continually better our Welsh language services.

As part of our work in the forthcoming year we will continue to take forward the following key actions:

- Implementation and monitoring of Welsh Language Promotion Strategy ensuring we continue to utilise our partners and share best practices at frequent Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network forums and external networks
- Delivering the CS092 Investigation Action Plan
- Continue to promote standard compliance internally to ensure we are providing high quality Welsh language services in line with the Code of Practice for the Welsh Language Standards (No. 1) Regulations 2015
- Consistent reviewing and updating of internal operations in relation to the Welsh language
- Further promotion of Welsh language training among staff and Members and ensuring staff who are committed to training are fully supported

Over the forthcoming period we aim to continue our progress, in relation to meeting our Welsh language duties, and make any necessary improvements to ensure we deliver the best possible services for our staff, residents, partners and stakeholders.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

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Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council