

Committee: Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Report Subject: Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Steven Thomas, Leader / Executive Member for Corporate Services

Report Submitted by: Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance & Partnerships

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	06/06/24				27/06/24	04/09/24		

## 1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the Report is to present the Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 for the Council.

## 2. Scope and Background

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 set out to modernise the legal framework regarding the use of the Welsh language in the delivery of public services. This Measure resulted in the Welsh Language Standards. The aims of the Standards are to

- Improve the service Welsh-speakers can expect to receive from specified organisations in Welsh
- Increase the use of Welsh-language services
- Make it clear to organisations what they need to do in terms of the Welsh language
- Ensure that there is an appropriate degree of consistency in terms of the duties placed on bodies in the same sectors.

Under Standards 158, 164 and 170, the Local Authority must produce a Welsh Language Annual Report that deals with the way in which the Council has complied with the service delivery standards, policy-making standards and the operational standards.

The Welsh Language Annual Report for 2023/24 (Appendix 1) sets out the highlights and key pieces of work, which demonstrate how we as a Council have endeavoured to meet the requirement set by the Welsh Language Standards Compliance Notice issued in September 2015.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 *To include Recommendation(s) / Endorsement by other groups, e.g. CLT/Committees/Other groups)*

CLT considered the draft Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 at their meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> June and approved the document and noted the progress that has been made in this area.

**Option 1**

Consider and submit the draft Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 to Cabinet for continued monitoring.

**Option 2**

Provide comment or amendment to the draft Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 for consideration by Cabinet.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The Council has a statutory requirement to produce and publish an Annual Report from the Welsh Language Standards under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

The Corporate Plan recognises meeting our Welsh language requirements as a key policy area which will enable the Council to deliver its ambition.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

Failure to comply with the requirement to produce an annual report could lead to financial penalties issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner. The quoted figure is £5,000 by breach. There is a small financial requirement for translation of the Annual Report into Welsh. This will need to be met from the Policy & Partnerships budget as there is no longer a corporate budget for Welsh language translation.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a reputational risk to the Council if the Annual Report is not published, or it is not published on time.

The Welsh Language Commissioner can investigate without warning and has the authority to gain power of entry. Any evidence of failure to comply with a Standard could lead to a penalty.

5.3 ***Legal***

The Council has a statutory requirement to produce and publish an Annual Report from the Welsh Language Standards under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

Organisational Development has provided the raw data for the staff analysis. The data shows that the Council has identified 45 members of staff from 2,971 staff who are fluent Welsh speakers, this is an increase of 11 members of staff in comparison to 2022/23 figures.

The total number of staff who have Welsh language speaking skills ranging from 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately', 'foundation' to Courtesy/Entry Level, is 605 (20%). This is an increase of 68 members of staff from the 2022/23 reporting period.

## 6. **Supporting Evidence**

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Notable findings that emerged from the Annual Report:

- There was 1 Welsh Language Commissioner's Office Investigation open (CS092) and 0 complaints received from the public.
- The number of employees who have Welsh language speaking skills as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 amounts to 605 (20%) staff; they can speak 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately', or 'a little'. However, 40% of the total number of staff declare they have no Welsh language speaking ability, which is a 5% positive reduction since the last reporting period.
- As reported last year the Education directorate has the highest number of fluent speakers with 29 members of staff.

### 6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The production and publishing of the report exemplifies the Council's commitment to the Welsh language speaking community within the area.

### 6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Blaenau Gwent Welsh Network, a group made up of local Welsh language community groups and partner organisations considered the annual report and provided case study examples of work undertaken during the reporting period which contributed towards us achieving our Welsh language commitments.

The Council engages with all divisions to ensure that the Welsh Language Standards are understood. A dedicated intranet page is available with key guides for staff that are simple to use.

### 6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Blaenau Gwent has had a Welsh Language Strategy since 1993 demonstrating a long-term commitment to the Welsh language. Blaenau Gwent is committed to safeguarding and promoting the Welsh language within the borough and a Promotion Strategy and forward work programme has been produced in-line with Standard 145. Promoting the Welsh language is also in-line with the Welsh Government's Future Generations Bill goals, specifically, the goal to provide 'A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language.'



6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Meeting the requirements set by the Welsh Language Standards, which includes completing the Annual Report, will aim to prevent reputational and financial risk.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Blaenau Gwent continues to work with neighbouring and regional local authorities to support the promotion of the Welsh Language, including regional partnership forums and networks (for example, Rhwydiaith, Deddff etc).

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

By considering a corporate approach to Welsh Language the Council is demonstrating it is taking an integrated approach.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

This report has no direct implications towards decarbonisation or reducing carbon emissions.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment (IAA)***

No IIA is required for annual reporting. Even so, the report considers equality throughout and seeks to ensure the Welsh language is valued and not treated less favourably across the Council.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

7.1 The Welsh Language Annual Report for 2023/24 is to be presented to Cabinet.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

*Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 presented in Appendix 1.*