

Committee: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 4th September 2024

Report Subject: Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Steven Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member for Corporate and Performance

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

To present the Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 for the Council.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 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.

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

2.3 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 CLT considered the draft Welsh Language Annual Report 2023/24 at their meeting on 6 June and approved the document, noting the progress that has been made.

The Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee supported Option 1 at its meeting on 27 June 2024:

Option 1

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

Option 2

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

Furthermore, following comments from scrutiny in querying the presentation of the statistical information provided in the report, amendments were duly made as presented in the Section 6 of this report.

Recommendation to Cabinet

It is therefore, recommended that Cabinet agree to receive continued monitoring of the Welsh Language Annual Report.

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 by end of June each year.

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 supplied the data for staff analysis. These figures indicate that out of 3,002 employees, the Council has recognised 45 staff members (1%) as fluent in Welsh, marking an increase of 11 individuals compared to the data from the year 2022/23.

According to the data, 605 staff members (20% of the workforce) have Welsh language speaking skills at various levels, ranging from 'fluent' to 'entry/courtesy level,' marking an increase of 68 people since the 2022/23 report period.

41% of staff recognise themselves as having no ability and the remaining 39% gave no response.

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.
- 41% 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 was published on the 30 June 2024 and presented to Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee on the 27 June 2024.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

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