

WALES & WEST HOUSING ASSOCIATION

REPORT TO BOARD – 11 APRIL 2024

WELSH LANGUAGE COMMISSIONER – ANNUAL UPDATE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Wales & West Housing (WWH) Welsh Language Scheme (WLS) was reviewed and approved by the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC) in February 2023. The revised WLS included minor administrative changes to reflect WWH's current structure, shape and size. The accompanying action plan has been incorporated within the annual action plan, available in [Appendix 1](#), to assist with future delivery, compliance and monitoring.
- 1.2 All housing associations in Wales are required to provide an annual update to the WLC. The annual update report covers the period from March 2023 to February 2024. This report includes all activities throughout the Group.
- 1.3 The Association continues to maintain its commitment to the Welsh language by providing bilingual communication and services to residents. The Association also actively encourages and promotes the use of the Welsh language within the Association.

2.0 Welsh language skills

- 2.1 There are currently 217 Welsh speaking staff in the Association, 83 of which are first language Welsh speakers. In addition, there are a number of Board members who have varying degrees of Welsh language knowledge.
- 2.2 All staff members within the Association have completed a self-assessment of their Welsh language skills. Fluency levels of new employees are captured as part of their pre-employment checks. The four categories speaking, listening, reading and writing skills have been recorded separately on the Association's HR system, Cascade and as this is a central portal, staff can update fluency levels as they change.
- 2.3 The WLC wishes to see greater consistency in the recording of employees' Welsh language skills to facilitate the collection of data about the bilingual workforce on a national level and has set out advice on how to do this in the WLC's Recruitment Good Practice advice guide. In line with recommendations in the Good Practice guide the Association agreed to adopt the European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). Work to develop and implement the adapted CEFR framework for new and existing employees remains ongoing with a view of implementation to all new staff by April 2024. The CEFR framework describes language proficiency at six levels in all four categories and it is expected that current staff proficiency will be mapped across in four of the six levels and a solution to capture the remaining two levels is currently being considered.
- 2.4 The Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language, Cymraeg 2050, sets out the vision for achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050. It also includes the target of doubling the daily use of the Welsh language during the same period, including using Welsh socially and in the workplace. To support the Association's commitment to the delivery of services through the medium of Welsh, and to assist with developing linguistic skills and increasing

the awareness of the Welsh language, a Grow Our Own Welsh Language Graduate was successfully recruited in May 2023.

3.0 Welsh language training

- 3.1 During the reporting period, six members of staff were registered on the 'Work Welsh' courses and two new learners commenced the twelve month 'Say Something in Welsh' (SSiW) option. In addition, two members of staff are learning via the Duolingo digital platform.
- 3.2 A number of Board members are still learning Welsh and are utilising the SSiW app and attending classes.
- 3.3 WWH has continued to support learning and increasing the use of the Welsh language through the online app SSiW and the Work Welsh programme. SSiW learning is funded by WWH.
- 3.4 The majority of learners suspended learning during 2022 and 2023 noting that learning had proved more difficult, in part due to changes in working practices and caring commitments, which resulted in a review of learning provisions. Work has commenced to contact all learners who suspended their learning to encourage and discuss the opportunities to recommence learning.
- 3.5 During 2023, WWH reviewed Welsh language learning options and, in addition to the Learn Welsh and SSiW, the three 30-minute internal taster training sessions, based on the Work Welsh learning material, was introduced. Two promotional events resulted in 31 members of staff signing up to the training sessions. The aim of the sessions is to reignite and encourage members of staff to commence or re-commence their Welsh language learning journey. The learning commenced in February 2024.
- 3.6 All learning opportunities within the 'Work Welsh' programme, SSiW and the three 30 minutes training sessions were promoted during the 'Defnyddia dy Gymraeg' (Use your Welsh) campaign in 2023. In addition, all learning opportunities, including the 'Work Welsh Welcome Introductory Course' to build courtesy Welsh language skills, were promoted on the internal announcements during 2023. During new starter conversations, Welsh language learning is promoted, and staff are encouraged to visit the designated Learn Welsh page.
- 3.7 To promote a bilingual workplace, the 'Learn Welsh' tile continues to be given a prominent position on the front page of the intranet and provides details of all learning and support opportunities including information on 'Say Something in Welsh', 'Work Welsh' and the taster training sessions. The 'Learn Welsh' tile is currently being reviewed to ensure that new resources and opportunities are captured. The glossaries have been updated to include greetings, phrases and housing specific terms to assist with learning and Menter Iaith glossaries will also be retained and made available. In addition, it provides details of all Welsh speakers within the Association which aids informal mentoring, useful resources, dates and details of Welsh cultural events, both internal and external, phrase of the week, a bilingual template for out of office emails and activities and opportunities to support and increase confidence levels in using the Welsh language.

- 3.8 During 2022/2023, the weekly 'Coffi a Sgwrs' mentoring sessions to support Welsh language learning were formalised and were promoted during the WWH Group Festival, however, participation decreased during this reporting period. A review of the mentoring provisions has been completed and solutions to support learners and to develop a network of Welsh Language speakers are currently being considered.
- 3.9 To increase incidental learning, everyday phrases and greetings have been placed around all three offices which will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.
- 3.10 Four members of staff completed a 'Gloywi Iaith' course which focused on grammar rules, whilst testing writing skills ability within everyday work and, in addition, one staff member attended a Planning & Managing Welsh in Bilingual Workplace course.

4.0 Promotion of the Welsh language

- 4.1 In the period covered by this report, there have been several instances where Welsh has been promoted internally and announcements to promote numerous cultural events, such as St David's Day, Santes Dwynwen, Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, "Hen Galan", "Defnyddia dy Gymraeg" and "Shwmae Su'mae" Day was celebrated with a Welsh lunch and promotion on social media. WWH also took part in the national Welsh Language Rights Day to celebrate and promote the Welsh language service offered by WWH by sharing a video to highlight the rights people have to use the Welsh language when dealing with WWH. Monthly internal announcements in the 'Did you know' section on SharePoint continued which included, word/phrase of the week, Welsh news and bilingual cultural facts, promoting Welsh language events, such as Menter Iaith events, and information in relation to Welsh history and Welsh traditions. The internal announcements are also used to promote Menter Iaith's phrases posters to assist with learning. During 2023/2024, the posts collectively received over 870 views.
- 4.2 WWH continues to support events and to develop partnership working with Menter Iaith and education sectors such as Mudiad Methrin and Secondary Schools.
- 4.3 The Welsh language has also been promoted in the following ways:-
- The promotion of Welsh language services by using the Iaith Gwaith brand to identify Welsh language speakers and Welsh language learners. The email footer showing that correspondence is welcomed in both Welsh and English is included on all fluent Welsh language speakers' external and internal emails. Welsh language learners are also able to identify themselves on internal emails, which assists and encourages the use of the Welsh language whilst working virtually. In addition, Iaith Gwaith badges and lanyards are offered to all staff who would be happy for others to start conversations in Welsh. Part of St David's Day activities included sharing a specific bilingual page on SharePoint raising an awareness of Welsh language. The page provided an overview of the Welsh Language team staff members and the Association's practices, providing links to key documents such as the Welsh Language Scheme, Welsh Language Protocols and translation procedures, information regarding WWH activities in relation to the Welsh language and, finally, promoted Welsh language learning opportunities including SSiW.

- WWH worked in partnership to deliver and support a number of bilingual community events which included:
 - Bilingual Stakeholder event at the new development in St Clears
 - Free weekly bilingual Summer of Fun events over the school holidays in Cardigan
 - Welsh story telling sessions at some of the play days at our schemes
 - Summer Play Box project (a storage box filled with fun activities) for the family, delivered by Welsh speaking staff which provided the opportunity for play through the medium of Welsh language
 - staff volunteered to assist with painting the outside of Ysgol Brynconin Llandissilio using their 'Giving Something Back Day'
 - Bilingual mobile office site visits
 - Bilingual craft activities at Clos Tawelan
 - Supported bilingual speaking school with career related events i.e., supported mock interviews (by staff using their 'Giving Something Back Day') at Ysgol Maes Garmon
 - Worked with WWH contractors and suppliers to attend Careers Events for Schools in Conwy, Wrexham and Haverfordwest
 - Bilingual carol singing and coffee morning at St Clements
 - Welsh language coffee morning at Maes y Môr

- WWH sponsored several groups during the reporting period to assist with the delivery and promotion of the Welsh language. WWH spent just over £10,000 on the following activities:
 - Sponsored Menter Iaith's Gŵyl Canol Dre in Carmarthen
 - Sponsored Tregaroc Welsh Music Festival
 - Sponsored a community Carnival at St Clears
 - Sponsored the Welsh Ploughing Championships in Ceredigion
 - Ysgol Gynradd Eglwysrwrw School and Ysgol Brynconin School both received support to turn overgrown areas into outdoor learning environments
 - Rugby kit sponsorship at Ysgol Bro Teifi
 - Sponsorship to complete a Welsh Cultural Mural 'Cynefin' at Ysgol Aberteifi

4.4 The Welsh Language Scheme was promoted during the reporting period on the staff intranet and a Welsh language information document has been produced, which is included within the Managers' Induction process, and provides information and links to the Welsh Language Scheme, Welsh Language Protocols and Welsh translation procedure. The Welsh language continues to be promoted within the Corporate Induction presentations.

4.5 An audit of the signage at all three offices and all extra care schemes has been undertaken and actions to address inconsistencies are currently receiving attention.

5.0 Communication in Welsh

- 5.1 A small number of residents (62 in total) have stated that they wish to communicate with the Association in Welsh and have identified their preferences in relation to written, spoken or both. In addition, there are 1,240 residents who receive bilingual copies of In Touch.
- 5.2 Work will be ongoing this year to gather information in relation to language preference as part of resident profiling as part of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy work. Language preference data is held for 67% of residents. Language preference is available for all staff to see, and correspondence initiated by WWH, is in Welsh or English as indicated by the resident where preference details have been captured. All correspondence is sent bilingually and will continue until full preference information has been obtained for these residents.
- 5.3 WWH continues to welcome calls and communication in Welsh. When callers contact the main WWH telephone number, the first front end message gives people a choice of language. All in-hours callers who select the Welsh option are diverted to first language Welsh speakers. The volume of calls requesting Welsh slightly decreased from the previous reporting period with 968 calls received during 2023/2024, compared to 1,153 in 2022/2023. The Welsh language calls account for 1.04% of all in-hours calls. Following the implementation of outcomes of the telephony service, a mystery caller exercise was undertaken, which resulted in a new telephony recording to inform residents that a Welsh language emergency out of hours service was not currently available.
- 5.4 WWH uses the services of professional Welsh translators in addition to utilising designated staff who respond and prioritise any work in line with the Association's needs. All proof reading is undertaken internally by a different translator which ensures that every piece of work is consistent and that standard terminology is used. The translation procedure, which was introduced following the publication of the WLC's advice document, 'Bilingual Drafting, Translation and using Welsh face to face' was reviewed during 2023 following the implementation of the internal translation memory software CyfieithuCymru (TranslateWales) which is available on the staff intranet and is included in all automated translation requests responses. The introduction of CyfieithuCymru assists with the facilitation of the translation process whilst meeting the Association's requirements.
- 5.5 A full content review of the WWH website was undertaken in 2023. Subsequently, a mystery shopper exercise was undertaken to ensure that the website continued to remain fully bilingual. Consideration was given to potential inconsistencies in the Welsh and English pages focusing on functionality in particular to Welsh language pages whilst ensuring that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably. All identified inconsistencies are currently being addressed and work focused on resolving identified anomalies on the Welsh pages within the recruitment section of the website remain ongoing. During 2023/2024 the English version received just over 333,000 page views and nearly 3,000 page views in the Welsh version compared to just over 283,000 (English) and 1,900 (Welsh) page views in 2022/2023. The page viewed most frequently in the Welsh language was in relation to the Home Page, followed by Privacy Policy and Care. The approved WLS document and the Welsh Language Annual Update Report are both available on the website.

- 5.6 The Association also uses a number of social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share corporate messages, news and jobs in Welsh and English. The social media mystery shopper exercise in relation to these platforms provided reassurance that equal consideration was given to both languages during the reporting period. During the reporting period, the Association also shared 19 internally produced bilingual videos on social media platforms.
- 5.7 The internal and external protocols on the Welsh language have been in place since September 2017 and were reviewed in 2024. The protocols, which are available on the staff intranet, provide guidance on how WWH delivers Welsh language services both internally and externally. The protocols build on the approved WLS with greater use of Welsh in both internal and external documents.
- 5.8 Consideration to introducing Welsh Language Awareness Training as mandatory training has commenced as this will form part of the Welsh Language Standards. The training will provide a greater understanding of Welsh language issues, such as the legislative and policy framework, and the rationale behind bilingualism. The training centres on appreciating language choice as an integral part of effective communication and optimising customer service. The aim of the training will also assist when considering service planning and resourcing considerations whilst increasing due regard to the consequences on the use of Welsh language when developing or updating policies and procedures.
- 5.9 Following a review of the guidance and self-regulation checklist issued by the WLC, the number of new and vacant posts during the reporting year has been included within the 2023/2024 annual update. Between March 2023 and February 2024, 95 new or vacant posts were advertised, all of which were advertised with bilingual job titles. All categorised the Welsh language as being desirable. A section to assess Welsh Language requirements for existing and new posts has been included within the internal Recruitment Request Form which requires Managers to give due consideration to Welsh language service delivery requirements. A translated glossary, which includes all current roles, phrases and terms for recruitment adverts, is updated on a regular basis and is available on the internal Welsh language page. As noted above, work remains ongoing to adopt a consistent approach in relation to advertising vacancies on the Association's website.
- 5.10 The work to compile information in relation to all internally produced documents and publications remains ongoing. The aim of the exercise is to ensure that all documents are available bilingually and that the Welsh language is not treated less favourably. During the reporting period the area of focus centred on corporate publications and Extra Care scheme documentation and publications. A mystery shopper exercise identified that all key corporate publications i.e., Annual Report, Business Plan, Impact report and Resident Newsletter are bilingual and available on the website. A review of the Extra Care documentation and publications resulted in an exercise to streamline documentation and publications, where possible, across all schemes to ensure that all documentation is available bilingually. The Association's Welsh Language commitments, included in the scheme and protocols, were also revisited during a Supported Housing team meeting to ensure that Welsh language service provision remains an area of focus. In addition, the Corporate Services team met with care providers within the schemes to offer support with translation services and to share Welsh learning resources.

6.0 Complaints

During the report period, one error was reported on a scheme sign and, as a result, the translation procedures have been reviewed to include all final draft design proofing and sign offs, relating to externally produced signs, are undertaken by the translation team. The updated procedures have been communicated to all relevant staff members.

7.0 Update on the implementation of Welsh Language Standards

Although no official timelines have been communicated, the Welsh Language Unit in the Welsh Government has confirmed that the preparation of the Standards for Housing Associations remains on the programme of work and anticipate that the work will progress during the course of the year. The unit also confirmed that they will communicate with Community Housing Cymru (CHC) on how best to engage with the sector as part of the process. CHC has also confirmed that there is an expectation that the Welsh Language Unit will commence work with the sector to develop standards after Easter 2024. With a view of adopting a proactive approach to the impending Standards, the Association has commenced discussions with Iaith Cyf, the Welsh centre for language planning. An update on the proposed timescales in relation to the consultation and the imposition processes will be included in future Corporate Services Board updates and communicated to staff during 2024.

8.0 Welsh Language Commissioner communication and action plan

There were no recommendations or amendments following the submission of the 2022/2023 annual monitoring report and action plan to the WLC. If approved by Board, the monitoring report and updated plan in Appendix 1 will be submitted to the WLC in the usual way. As reported above, the reviewed and the newly approved WLS is available on the WWH website and will be promoted internally shortly.

9.0 Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Board: -

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

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4 April 2024