

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

28 APRIL 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - OPERATIONAL AND PARTNERSHIP SERVICES

UPDATE REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE (WALES) MEASURE 2011 AND WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

1. Purpose of Report

To update Cabinet Equalities Committee on the implementation of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 has replaced the council's Welsh Language Scheme with a set of standards impacting upon the work of the whole council. The standards link to the equalities agenda, form a key component of the council's Customer Care Programme and link to the following corporate priorities:

- working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement
- working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent
- working together to make the best use of our resources

3. Background

The Welsh Language Standards give Welsh speakers improved, enforceable rights in relation to the Welsh language. The council received its final compliance notice on 30 September 2015 and has since been working to determine the implications involved in the implementation of the standards. The compliance notice requires 144 of the standards to be implemented by 30 March 2016 and a further 27 standards by 30 September 2016.

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1 Since September 2015 the council has been preparing for compliance with the standards and in summary has taken the following strategic steps:

- held initial awareness raising sessions for staff July-September 2015;
- established a Welsh Language Standards Implementation Board, chaired by the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, comprising directorate representatives sharing responsibility for interpreting standards and collating/disseminating data in line with working towards compliance. The board currently meets on a weekly basis;
- developed an action plan for the March standards so progress can be monitored;

- developed a communications plan to ensure information is filtered through the organisation;
- produced a risk register to identify what actions need to be put in place to ensure compliance with the standards;
- identified which of the March standards the council feels are disproportionate or unreasonable and put forward appeals on these grounds;
- developed a team of Welsh Language Champions to help raise awareness of the standards and provide support and guidance to staff;
- developed intranet pages enabling employees to reference information on the standards and access resources to assist them in their work;
- developed a training programme for frontline staff to support them in dealing with Welsh language speakers on a day to day basis;
- issued regular employee communications via email and newsletters;
- developed a DVD of the Chief Executive talking about the implications of the standards as part of a series of further staff briefing sessions held during March 2016;
- developed a suite of staff FAQs from the briefing sessions;
- introduced a Welsh Language Standards email account for staff to ask questions.

4.2 As part of developing the action plans each standard was placed into one of ten themes with an appointed lead officer responsible for ensuring standards are communicated and that plans are in place to ensure they are met. The ten themes and lead officers are outlined in appendix 1.

4.3 The council is working with RCT to provide Welsh language training for frontline staff. The two hour training sessions target employees in posts requiring them to 'meet and greet' customers or answer the telephone bilingually. Staff will also be able to undertake further higher level Welsh language training up to and including the level required for the council to comply with the Welsh Language Standards.

4.5 The Welsh Language Commissioner has introduced an appeals process enabling councils to challenge the proportionality and reasonableness of the standards and compliance timescales. A list of standards that the council has appealed for March 2016 is attached in appendix 2.

The council was required to submit each appeal separately and to provide supporting evidence. At the time of writing this report, the outcome of the appeals is unknown. However, should the Welsh Language Commissioner determine that it is not unreasonable or disproportionate to comply with any of the standards that have been appealed, then there is a right of appeal to the Welsh Language Tribunal to determine the same question. Following a determination by the Tribunal, the Commissioner or the Council can appeal to the High Court on a point of law only. During the appeals process the council is not required to comply with those standards under appeal.

4.6 The council has also been in regular contact with neighbouring councils to establish their interpretation of certain standards and also with the Welsh Language Commissioner where clarification on points of law and interpretation has been required.

4.7 Since the March standards came into effect on 30 March and at the time of writing this report, the council has not received a higher level of phone calls/face to face queries in the customer contact centre from Welsh speakers and has not received any complaints.

4.8 The Welsh Language Implementation Board will be continuing to monitor and review compliance against the March standards with a view to focusing on the September standards from the end of April onwards.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

There are no proposed changes to the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

This is an information report. As such, no Equality Impact Assessment is required.

7. Financial Implications

A recurrent budget pressure of £313,000 and a one-off pressure of £81,000 for 2016/17 to meet the estimated costs of implementing the majority of the Welsh Language Standards have been identified. The pressure does not take into account the financial implications of a number of standards for which the council is appealing on the basis that they are unreasonable or disproportionate. Standards which are considered to be significant in terms of financial impact will be funded corporately and these are outlined in appendix 3. The cost of implementing the Welsh Language Standards will be reviewed during 2016/17 and, if the costs are deemed to be significantly higher than budget; a decision will be made corporately as to how this shortfall will be met.

8. Recommendation

It is recommended that Cabinet Equalities Committee receives and considers this report.

Andrew Jolley

Corporate Director – Operational and Partnership Services

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Contact Officers:

Sarah Kingsbury

Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Email: Sarah.kingsbury@bridgend.gov.uk

Telephone: 643212

Paul Williams

Equality Officer

Email: Paul.williams2@bridgend.gov.uk

Telephone: 643606

Background documents: None