

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

14 JULY 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 introduced Welsh language standards which impact 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:

- Priority 2: Helping people to be more self-reliant;
- Priority 3: Smarter use of resources.

3. Background

3.1 Following receipt of its final compliance notice on 30 September 2015, the council has been working to determine the implications involved in implementing all 171 standards by 30 September 2016. An update on progress was provided to Cabinet Equalities Committee on 28 April 2016. That report is referenced as a background document to this report.

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1 The council has continued to prepare for compliance with the standards. Key progress/updates from 28 April 2016 can be summarised as:

- continued with the Welsh Language Standards Implementation Board meetings to continue working on interpreting the standards and discussing/reporting on compliance. Since May 2016, the board is now meeting on a fortnightly basis;
- developed an action plan for the September standards as well as continuing to monitor and report on compliance of the March standards;
- as part of developing the action plan for September 2016, standards have been placed into one of six themes with an appointed lead officer responsible for ensuring standards are communicated and that plans are in place to ensure, where appropriate, these are met. The themes and lead officers are outlined in appendix 1.

- continued to ensure that information is filtered through the organisation via a communications plan involving e mail and newsletters. Fortnightly Bridgend's emails will be issued to employees over the next few weeks as reminders about key March standards e.g. answering the phone bilingually;
- continued to work with the University of South Wales to provide meet and greet training to frontline staff to support them in dealing with Welsh speaking customers on a day to day basis. At the time of writing this report 379 frontline employees had received this training with a further 25 scheduled to attend;
- commenced work on producing a five year strategy outlining how the council will promote the use of the Welsh Language in Bridgend County Borough and to its employees. The strategy also highlights how we will aim to maintain the number of Welsh speakers in the area and within our workforce;
- published the first Annual Report under the Welsh Language Standards on 30 June 2016;
- received its first formal complaint from the Welsh Language Commissioner in relation to non-compliance with a correspondence-related standard. This is currently being investigated by BCBC;
- updated the compliance document to reflect the requirements of the September 2016 standards;
- received confirmation that compliance with nine of the ten March 2016 standards appealed (appendix 2) were not considered to be disproportionate or unreasonable by the Welsh Language Commissioner as part of their initial considerations. The council submitted further supporting evidence on these nine appeals to the Welsh Language Commissioner on 27 June 2016 and the final decision is awaited. Compliance with the tenth standard appealed (standard 64 in appendix 2) has been delayed to September 2017. During the appeals process the council is not required to comply with those standards under appeal;
- since the March standards came into effect on 30 March 2016 and at the time of writing this report, the council has not received a higher level of phone calls or face to face queries in the telephone/customer contact centre from Welsh speakers;
- the council continues to have 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 has been required.

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

Date: 29 June 2016

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Background documents: Update report to Cabinet Equality Committee dated 28 April 2016 on the Welsh Language Standards.