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Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24

September 2024



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This document is also available in Welsh.



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Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2023/24



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Foreword

I am delighted to present this annual report detailing our compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

At PSOW, we wholeheartedly support the Welsh language and are committed to supporting Welsh speakers and promoting the use of the Welsh language.

This year, we asked Welsh speaking complainants about how we could improve our Welsh service even further. I was pleased to see that most of what was asked for was a Welsh service we already provide. We are now doing more to promote these services to Welsh speakers through our revised website, our outreach work and social media.

We also revised the way we assess the impact of our policies and procedures on the Welsh language, to make sure that we complied with the Welsh Language Commissioner's latest good practice guidance on policy making standards. The impact assessment on Welsh language is more rigorous and is now considered separately from the assessment on equality characteristics.

We responded quickly when two Welsh speaking members of staff left. We took a pro-active approach,

establishing an innovative Welsh-speaking graduate programme and now have even more people working for us that can deliver our services in Welsh. Welsh speakers using our service.

Michelle Morris

**Public Services
Ombudsman for Wales**
September 2024



Part 1

Background



About us

We have three main roles.



We investigate complaints about public services.

We can look at the services provided by devolved public bodies in Wales such as local councils, Health Boards, social landlords and others. We can also look at complaints about private social care and end-of-life care, as well as some private healthcare.

We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.

We look at complaints about councillors at local councils, fire authorities, national park authorities. We also look at complaints about police and crime panels. We are also a “prescribed person” under the Public Interest Disclosure Act for raising whistleblowing concerns about breaches of the Code of Conduct by members of local authorities.



We drive systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

We can investigate on our own initiative, even if we have not received a complaint. We can also set complaints standards for public bodies in Wales, monitor how they handle complaints and provide training to them.



Our Welsh language duties

Under our legislation, we must comply with Welsh Language Standards (the Standards). We welcome the use of the Welsh language and we are committed to the aims of the Standards and to meeting the needs of Welsh speakers.

[You can read the Welsh Language Standards and our compliance notice with our Welsh Language Policy on our website here.](#)

Responsibilities

Our Management Team has the overall responsibility for the strategic direction and governance of the office. Our Chief Operating Officer and Director of Improvement ensures that operational management complies with all legal, statutory and good practice guidance requirements of the Standards.

Day to day responsibility for the Welsh Language sits within our Improvement Team. Our Head of

Policy, Communications and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is responsible for overall policy development and reporting and can be contacted to discuss this report.

All staff receive information about our duties and commitments under the Standards and our Welsh Language Policy and are expected to comply and contribute as relevant and appropriate.

How we prepared this report

In developing this report, we drew on guidance and advice from the Welsh Language Commissioner. The report was approved by our Management Team on 14 August 2024.

Compliance with the Standards

We assess our compliance with the Welsh Language Standards every two years, in line with monitoring arrangement for organisations named in the No. 2 Welsh Language Standards Regulations.

Our last compliance assessment was in August 2022, and we reported on the outcomes in our Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 2022/23. We took action to address feedback promptly. In the past year, we believe we continue to comply with all the Welsh Language Standards. The next compliance assessment will be in August 2024.

We reviewed the way we measure our impact on the Welsh Language and have revised our impact assessments procedures to strengthen the focus on the Welsh Language.

We remain concerned about the relatively low numbers of people who choose to communicate with us

in Welsh. We asked Welsh speaking complainants what they thought of our service. Most told us they had submitted their complaint in English, despite being very confident in their ability to speak, read and write in Welsh.

The main reasons why they had done this related to concerns they had that the complaint would not be considered as quickly and that their correspondence with public bodies, relating to their complaint, was in English. Some respondents also expressed concerns about using Welsh in a formal context.

We are reviewing the feedback, and doing more this year to promote our Welsh language service, including having a stand at the annual Eisteddfod.

You can find out more about how complaints can be made about our compliance on our [website](#).



Part 2

Our performance in 2023/24



Service delivery standards

Use of our services

Service users expressed the preference to be contacted in Welsh in less than 1% of our complaints in 2023/24.

Correspondence (Standards 1-7)

We state in all emails and letter footers that we welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh, that we will respond to correspondence in Welsh and that corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. We ensure that this happens consistently by including the statement in our standard email and correspondence templates on our casework management system and any emails sent from our 'Outlook' email system.

If anyone writes to us in Welsh, we will automatically reply in Welsh.

Our staff are supported on how to make their email signature and out of office replies bilingual and a banner to include in their signature if they are able to communicate in writing in Welsh.

Telephone (Standards 8-22)

All telephone calls are answered

bilingually, with the Welsh greeting first. Our automated call answering service is also available in Welsh and callers have the option to choose to speak in Welsh. The Welsh option is always first.

During 2023/24, 148 callers to our office chose the option to speak in Welsh.

We have 3 members of staff who are available to answer the initial calls in Welsh and work on a rota to ensure cover.

Staff have been instructed to change personal answer phone messages, so they are bilingual. Staff have been provided with instructions and training on how to do this.

In our Intake, Public Services Complaints, Code of Conduct and Improvement Teams we have:

- 3 permanent Welsh speaking Casework Officers.
- 5 Welsh speaking Investigation Officers
- 4 Welsh speaking staff in communications, policy and compliance
- 1 Welsh speaking Team Manager.

People who contact our office and



who wish to have their complaint dealt with in Welsh, are allocated a Welsh speaking case officer for them to contact directly. On occasions where people call a direct number regarding a complaint where the person being called does not speak Welsh, we are able to transfer the call to a Welsh speaker to deal with the enquiry.

People who contact direct line numbers for other enquiries, such as for information about a job application or tender, can be transferred to someone who can speak to them in Welsh, in as far as someone with the requisite knowledge and skills is able to provide them with the service they require.

Meetings (Standards 24 - 32)

Where we have not had contact and established how a person would want to conduct a meeting, we ascertain which language they would like to use in the meeting.

All larger meetings that we organise will have bilingual and 'Welsh first' publicity, announcements and meeting papers and we check with the participants whether they would like to use Welsh, in case translation services are needed. Every year we run a series of four sounding board meetings that we organised in April 2023, and again in March/April 2024 for our stakeholders

- local councils, local Health Boards, housing associations and advice and advocacy organisations. We invited them to use Welsh during the meeting if they so wished.

We generally do not hold meetings that are open to the general public in delivery of our services, and as such no meetings or public events were organised in the reporting period.

Publicity (Standards 33- 72)

We launched our new website with additional features to enhance accessibility and improve user experience. Our website is bilingual and we endeavour to ensure that all interfaces and menus are available in Welsh and that there are always direct links from English to corresponding Welsh pages.

We resolved one complaint, received via the Welsh Language Commissioner regarding website clarity, promptly.

We ensure that the Welsh language content always appears first in our social media accounts. During the year, we posted 97 times on Twitter in Welsh, with many of the posts replicated on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Currently, our office receives few visitors, but we have these facilities:

- Our door greeting is bilingual with the Welsh first
- We display a sign in our reception which welcomes the use of the Welsh language.

All staff are able to greet people in Welsh.

There are badges available to staff who speak fluent Welsh which indicates that they are able to speak to visitors in Welsh.

Procurement (Standards 72– 76)

Our Procurement Policy states that tender applications in Welsh are welcome and that they will not be treated any less favourably than those submitted in English. During 2023/24, we advertised only one tender. None of the suppliers submitted a tender application in Welsh.

Promotion of services (Standards 77 - 80)

Our complaints services are fully bilingual. We promoted our Welsh language services using the #DefnyddiaDyGymraeg hashtag.

Our Complaints Standards training is offered in Welsh, English or bilingual

delivery. No public body has taken us up on the offer of Welsh language training in 2023/24.

After launching our new Welsh-led logo in April 2023, we have updated all policy documents with our new branding. All reports and documents published have the new logo and a statement that the document is available in Welsh on the English versions.



Policy making standards

New or revised policies and procedures (Standards 84– 86)

We make a conscientious effort to consider the potential effects of a policy decision on the Welsh Language. To ensure compliance with the policy making standards, we have in place the following arrangements:

- [Welsh Language Policy](#) – which sets out our duties and commitments with regard to compliance with the policy making standards. The policy was revised during previous year in consultation with the Welsh Language Commissioner.
- [Equality Impact Assessment \(EIA\) Policy and Procedure](#) – which includes a separate assessment of the impact on the Welsh language and aims to:

anticipate or identify the consequences of a policy on individuals or groups of service users/employees and their use of the Welsh Language;

ensure that any negative effects are eliminated or minimised;

maximise opportunities for promoting positive effects.

- Policy Control Procedure - which ensures that all our policies are up to date, consistent in presentation, published appropriately and compliant with our equality and Welsh language duties. The Procedure states explicitly that all our policies must be available in Welsh and in English and that they must be published at the same time in Welsh and in English on our Intranet and the website.
- A dedicated Policy Control Officer – responsible for ensuring that the EIA procedure and the Policy Control Procedure are implemented correctly.
- Our internal Equality Group - to provide advice and assistance to policy owners who are developing new or reviewing existing policy on equality matters, including the Welsh language.

8 EIAs of policies were undertaken in 2023/24. Most identified neutral impact on the Welsh language, reflecting our compliance with Welsh Language Standards. 3 identified positive impact.

As a result of the Welsh Language Tribunal that found in favour of the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC), elements of our equality impact assessment procedures have been revised to ensure compliance with good practice guidance on policy making standards.

The equality impact element and the element of the impact on Welsh language are now separated. This is reflected in the new procedure title (Equality and Welsh Language Impact Assessment) but also in new sections specifically about the Welsh language.

Consultations (Standards 87 - 89)

During the year, we conducted 1 external consultation on our new Strategic Equality Plan 2023-2026. The consultation document included the following questions:

- What effects could our proposed Equality Plan have on the Welsh language and, specifically, on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English?
- How could positive effects on the Welsh language be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Commissioning research (Standards 91–93)

We have not commissioned or undertaken any research in pursuit of making a policy decision during 2023/24.



Operational standards

Policy for using Welsh internally (Standard 94)

We have in place a [Welsh Language Policy](#), aligned with our duties under the Standards. The policy includes a section clarifying our approach to using Welsh internally. It is available on the Hub/Yr Hwb (our intranet) and our public facing website. We reported last year that the policy was revised and agreed in May 2023. We consulted with the Welsh Language Commissioner during the revision.

Employment documents (Standard 95 - 100)

We ask all new colleagues joining us to state whether they would like **any** correspondence and documents relating to employment, training, performance objectives or career planning in Welsh or English. During 2023/24, 11 new colleagues joined our team, 4 of which were temporary. Of the 11 staff members, 10 did not have any Welsh language requirements and one only required pay slips to be provided in Welsh.

In the application form, we ask applicants if they would like documentation relating to potential employment in Welsh or English.

Employment policies (Standard 101 - 107)

All [our human resources policies](#) relating to behaviour, health and safety, work place benefits, performance management, absence, working conditions and work patterns are available in Welsh on both our website and intranet site.

Staff grievance and disciplinary procedures (Standard 108 - 115)

Our arrangements for [grievance](#) and [disciplinary](#) procedures can be undertaken in Welsh. We have not received any grievances in Welsh nor taken disciplinary action in Welsh during 2023/24.

Technology to facilitate use of Welsh by staff (Standard 116 - 122)

All staff have access to Welsh grammar and spellchecking apps.

All staff have been provided with instructions on how to switch language settings for the following:

- Microsoft EDGE
- Microsoft Outlook Language proofing

- Microsoft Windows
- Microsoft Office
- HUB (Home page / News page / Policy page)

We have a site on our Intranet which includes information about our translation process, access to Welsh language training, our duties under the standards and other relevant information.

Staff Welsh language skills (Standard 123)

We undertake an annual survey of our staff and we collect information on the level of Welsh language skills as part of that survey.

We saw a reduction in the proportion of staff who could communicate in Welsh fairly well or fluently in 2023/24. 8% of our staff said that Welsh was their main language – a decrease from 14% last year. We also saw a reduction in fluency across all Welsh language skills.

- speaking: 21% (compared to 26% last year)
- reading: 24% (compared to 31% last year)
- writing: 21% (compared to 26% last year)
- understanding: 21% (compared to 32% last year).

This was primarily due to 2 Welsh speaking members or staff resigning or retiring. As a small office, such changes have a big impact. We have made plans to appoint a temporary call-handling on 3 month appointments in 2024 to boost the number of people in our public complaints team who speak Welsh.

We also launched our new Graduate Trainee Programme and have advertised for a Welsh speaking Graduate Investigation Officer. The response has been promising and this three-year development programme will provide an excellent opportunity to a new graduate whilst helping us meet our needs, especially in relation to Welsh language skills.

Whilst we hold and have analysed the data, owing to the small numbers of staff at certain levels or in certain teams, it is not feasible for us to share data relating to Welsh speakers at different grades or in different teams without risking the identification of individuals and the disclosure of personal data.

Training and communication support (Standards 124 - 131)

Attention to the Welsh Language Standards is included in our induction



programme (Module 2 – Introduction to the Organisation). Much of our induction material is available in Welsh, though as yet there has been no call to have it delivered in the Welsh language.

We encourage staff to learn Welsh, including in work time, and we support those who wish to continue to improve their Welsh to do so. We supported 5 colleagues to undertake Welsh language training during the year.

We support the use of the Welsh language in meetings and interviews and have secured on-line training in Welsh from our training provider, IHASCO. This includes Health & Safety. We have not provided training on the other elements included under standard 124 (in English or Welsh) during 2023/24.

Recruitment (Standard 132 - 136)

Our Recruitment and Selection Policy confirms that we will not commence the recruitment procedure until the need for Welsh language skills has been assessed and recorded. We establish the need for Welsh language skills as part of the development of individual job descriptions and person specifications, based on skills shortages and needs within the organisation. We detail the need for Welsh language skills in both the job

description and advertisement prior to the vacancy going “live”.

We advertise all our vacancies bilingually and the advertisements state that applications may be submitted in Welsh and that an application submitted in Welsh will not be treated less favourably than an application submitted in English. All documents published as part of the recruitment pack are published bilingually. Our recruitment forms give applicants an opportunity to indicate whether they would want the recruitment process to be conducted in Welsh.

We always seek to communicate with the job applicant in the language of their choice. This includes the 'offer letter'. Following feedback from the Welsh Language Commissioner, we also now ensure that calls to notify successful applicants are now made according to the applicant's language preference.

Signs (Standard 138–139)

As we rent our offices, we do not have control of the permanent external signs to our office. However, all our new temporary and permanent signs, put up since the introduction of the Standards, are fully compliant.



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