

## **MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS**

### **What the Measure requires North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to do**

The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 replaced the Welsh Language Act 1993 and as part of this legislation, the Welsh language has equal legal status with English in Wales and must not be treated any less favourably. The Authority no longer needs to develop and implement Welsh Language Schemes, however, it must instead comply with a set of Welsh Language Standards.

The Welsh Language Commissioner issued fire and rescue authorities with their Compliance Notice on 30th September 2016. This document lists which of the Standards (as listed in full in the Welsh Language Standards Regulations (No.5) 2016) North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority must comply with, along with any exemptions and their implementation dates.

The Authority is required to publish its Welsh Language Standards annual report for 2019/20 by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and to publicise this appropriately.

The Authority is committed to ensuring that, in conducting public business in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on the basis of equality in order to recognise and value the rich diversity of communities, against a backdrop of significant natural and cultural heritage.

The Authority also acknowledges its duty towards its staff, most of whom are residents of North Wales, and who themselves reflect the linguistic and cultural make-up of their own communities. By acknowledging its moral and legal duties to protect the cultural heritage of the area and meet the expectations of the local community, the Authority continues to work towards ensuring that it conducts its public business in both languages.

### **The Authority's Implementation Plan is available to view using the link below;**

<http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/337605/welsh-language-standards-implementation-plan-nwfrs.pdf>

During 2019/20 the Authority continued to comply with the set of Welsh Language Standards issued in its Compliance Notice on 30 September 2016. It also continues to work collaboratively with the other two Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales with regular meetings held of a Grŵp Iaith.

The Authority also conducted work in partnership with colleagues at North Wales Police and has attended its Welsh Language Forum Meetings in order to share information on best practice.

### **Standard 147: The number of employees who have Welsh skills:**

As at 31st March 2020, 717 employees (of 866) were able to demonstrate that they had Welsh language skills (level 1 and above) 340 of whom were classed as fluent speakers (Level 4 and 5).

### **Standard 148: The number of staff members who attended specific training that must be provided in Welsh if it is available in English (namely training on recruitment and interviewing, performance management, complaints, induction, dealing with the public and health and safety):**

None of the training listed in Operational Standards Number 125 was provided this year. Had any of the training itemised in this Standard been delivered, it would have been facilitated in both Welsh and English.

A Coaching and Mentoring Course was delivered during the year and 14 participants chose to complete the course in Welsh.

**Standard 151: The number of new and vacant posts categorised as ones where Welsh language skills are essential, desirable, not necessary or need to be learnt:**

All posts require some level of Welsh with the minimum requirement being Level 2 speaking and listening. During this period, 24 new and vacant posts were advertised, 10 of which were classed as Welsh essential (Level 4) and 14 as Welsh desirable (3 at Level 3 and 11 at Level 2).

During this period 47 RDS firefighters (on call) were recruited - all newly employed firefighters are required to attain a minimum requirement of Level 2 Welsh, either on entry or within their probation period. Two Firefighter Apprenticeship Schemes were also advertised, where the minimum requirement by the end of the training period was raised from Level 2 to Level 3.

**Standard 143: The number of complaints received by the organisation about each class of standards:**

Complaints are monitored and dealt with by the Professional and Service Standards Department. Complaints and letters of appreciation are reported annually to the Fire and Rescue Authority. No complaints were received in 2019/20 in relation to the Welsh language. North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has published a complaints procedure on its website and also has an internal policy for staff on how to raise a concern or complaint.

**Promoting the Welsh Language:**

Promotion of the Welsh language is maintained internally in a variety of different ways including: through the Welsh Champions Scheme; a regular Welsh Column in the internal magazine 'Y Fflam'; within weekly staff bulletins; a Welsh Wednesday campaign; and through Workplace Facebook which has sub-groups for Learners and Welsh Champions. There is also a 'Welsh Learner of the Year' / 'Commitment to the Welsh Language' award.

A Welsh language champion scheme exists whereby Welsh speaking members of staff volunteer to support colleagues to improve their Welsh language skills. During 2018/19 a new resource pack was created for the Champions to utilise with Welsh learners in the workplace. During 2019/20 a further 50 packs were produced to meet the continuing demand for resources. The packs contained A3 place mats, flash cards, games and worksheets designed to assist those learning Welsh. These resources were circulated to all fire stations and area offices. A desk calendar was again produced for staff which includes tips on Welsh grammar and vocabulary. An annual Saint David's Day Quiz was held to raise awareness of the commitment towards the language – this was well received with the winner receiving an Amazon voucher worth £30.

The Human Resources (HR) Department ascertains the language choice of prospective employees at first point of contact and records this information for future use. It keeps a record of all members of staff who have requested to receive correspondence through the medium of Welsh and this can be reviewed at any stage. All HR policies and forms relating to an individual's employment have been translated and published internally. Complaints and disciplinary

procedures are also facilitated through the medium of Welsh on request, with the language choice of the individual being respected at all times.

Guidance is provided to employees on the importance of offering language choice to all, whether face-to-face or over the phone, regardless of location, accent, ethnicity etc. This message is reiterated during the mandatory Welsh Awareness Module that has been produced for employees, during the face-to-face sessions for new starters and during the initial firefighter training course. Guidance is also available with regards to issuing correspondence to the public and all email signatures and letter-headed paper includes a statement welcoming correspondence in Welsh or English. 'Siarad Cymraeg' and 'Dysgu Cymraeg' logos have also been incorporated into standard e-mail signatures.

The Training department maintains a record of all the Welsh courses attended and assessments undertaken by employees, and records the results on its internal recording system. The training department also facilitates internal Welsh courses provided by Coleg Cambria and members of staff are encouraged to request courses during their annual appraisal. This year staff have also been encouraged to attend the intermediate, higher and proficiency courses at Nant Gwrtheyrn as part of the Welsh at Work Scheme provided by the National Centre for Learning Welsh.

New and revised policies are published internally in both English and Welsh and each policy is required to have an associated integrated impact assessment to ascertain its impact on the Welsh language and to identify and promote ways of creating a positive impact, and avoiding negative impact.

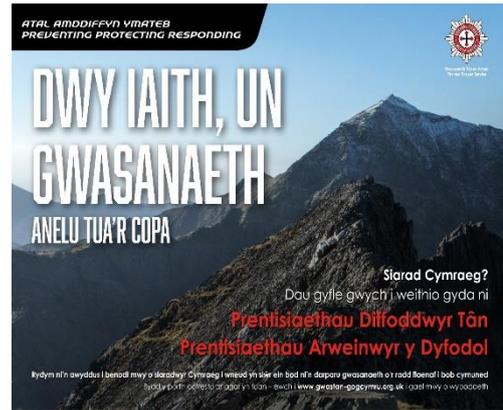
As with the previous Welsh Language Scheme work continues to proactively offer language choice to all service users as this has always been seen as beneficial and a gateway to improved engagement with all members of the community. This year we have proactively sought to promote the Service as a bilingual organisation by promoting positive messages on Twitter using the hash tag #yagym as part of the 'Awr Gymraeg' initiative. These messages have been in relation to the Standards, highlighting the rights of Welsh speakers to contact us in Welsh. All promotional materials, posters and leaflets are bilingual with the Welsh language appearing first at all times.

The North Wales Fire and Rescue Service website is fully bilingual and this includes Readspeak facilities through the medium of Welsh. Enquiries through the website are dealt with in the language choice of the enquirer.

The Authority recognises the value and benefit of offering language choice and as such has continued to operate a fully bilingual Control Room / Joint Communications Centre, despite there being no statutory requirement to answer 999 calls bilingually. The Authority recognises that it has a moral and ethical duty to deal effectively with people when they are involved in an emergency situation and therefore goes above and beyond the requirements of the Standards in order to deal with incidents effectively in the caller's language of choice.

During 2019/20 the Authority took part in the Welsh Language Commissioner's initiative, 'Mae gen i hawl' by creating a series of short clips that were used on social media sites to promote the rights of service users to make contact in Welsh. It also took part in the Diwrnod Su'mae

Shwmae initiative by changing the Service's profile picture on Facebook and Twitter for the day and by posting a video to promote the use of Welsh and sharing resources internally.



This year the Authority was also keen to reach out to Welsh speakers during its recruitment campaigns to ensure that it had an adequate number of Welsh speakers to operate bilingually, now and in the future, and so a positive action plan was instigated to encourage more Welsh speakers to apply for employment opportunities. During a campaign to recruit Firefighter Apprentices, Welsh speakers were targeted on social media and through the local 'papurau bro', highlighting the Welsh language as a valued and vital skill.

For the first time ever during a campaign to recruit operational staff equal merit was given to a GCSE in English and Welsh in order to ensure equality, and therefore the mandatory requirement to candidates prior to registration was a GCSE grade C or above in either Welsh or English.

The results from the initial sift were encouraging. Out of a total of 492 registrations, 138 disclosed that they were fluent Welsh speakers, with a further 74 disclosing that they were intermediate Welsh speakers, and a further 154 disclosing that they were learners, compared with 122 stating that they were non Welsh speakers and 3 choosing not to disclose this information. In all, 15 people chose to complete their application form in Welsh and 49 requested a Welsh interview. Unfortunately, due to the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic the process has now be put on hold and so further investigative work into the linguistic makeup of the candidates has not been possible. The Authority will continue to concentrate its efforts on encouraging more applications from Welsh speakers as well as encouraging people to be confident when noting their linguistic skills.

The Authority also had the exciting opportunity to work alongside Coleg Cambria in the production of a series of videos ('Ar Frys') aimed at encouraging young people to pursue a career in the emergency services. The videos highlighted the importance of Welsh language skills in an emergency.

The Authority will continue to look at new ways of engaging with its communities to highlight the Welsh language services on offer and emphasise that Welsh is a valued skill in its workplace.



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