

Report on Implementation of the Welsh Language Scheme 2001-2002

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BEST VALUE RESPONSE

Following your letter dated 29 November 2001 regarding providing a Best Value verdict for the authority to include in its Best Value Plan, it is with pleasure that we provide the following verdict. Our verdict is based on the Authority's Annual Monitoring Report and this letter projects our response to that report as well as providing specific suggestions on implementing the Scheme in future.

The Authority provided a comprehensive and thorough monitoring report and we wish to thank you as a body, and thank Mrs Judith Morris especially, for its preparation. The report is proof of the way the Authority has implemented the Scheme gradually and inclusively and we believe that the Authority has been successful on the whole in the way it has welcomed and integrated the Welsh Language Scheme within its administration over the first year of its implementation. In the Best Value context, our verdict, which appears below, will express our opinion on two aspects, namely performance with regards to operating the service and managing the Scheme. We summarise our opinion on these aspects below.

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SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE

The Authority has enthusiastically integrated the requirements of the Welsh Language Scheme into its daily administration. It has looked at the services that the Authority provides and has prioritised those departments that are in daily contact with the public. The Authority has already prepared staff guidelines as well as a "Rough Guide" to the Welsh Language Scheme and these have been means of raising staff's awareness of the Welsh Language Scheme's requirements.

Offering Choice of Language: Good

The Board was pleased to see that the Authority emphasizes the importance of offering its users their preferred language. We believe that there is a need to ensure that the preferred language is offered, established, and recorded in each case and we are happy to say that the Authority is preparing a database of preferred languages. It should be ensured that the system is a corporate one and that all members of the Authority's staff use it at all times instead of an ad hoc system dependant on the whim of the member of staff. To this effect, we suggest that the Authority prepares Staff Guidelines regarding establishing and recording the preferred language and the appropriate means of doing so.

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Written Communication: Good

Despite some problems with regard to establishing effective monitoring systems when beginning to implement the Scheme, we believe that the Authority has succeeded in providing an effective bilingual service when communicating with the Welsh-speaking public in writing. It has looked at the cross-section of standard letters and newsletters/circulars produced by the Authority with the view of preparing a scheme of work to translate them. The Authority has also shown initiative, which is beyond the measures of the Welsh Language Scheme in its intention to communicate bilingually in initial letters where the preferred language is not known. This is a development to be welcomed.

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Telephone Communication: Fairly good and improving

Following some initial problems, the monitoring structure has been formalised. We believe that there is a need for the Authority to invest further in qualitative monitoring systems e.g. to measure whether or not a bilingual greeting is used, or was the individual transferred to a Welsh speaker. This can be achieved through random checks. With regards to the staff working in the Brigade's Operating Room, it should be ensured that Welsh speakers are available to deal with 999 emergency calls. We welcome the Welsh place names pronunciation training but we believe that there is a need to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of Welsh speakers available to speak with the individual in crisis. Obviously, that individual could be a young monoglot Welsh speaker and so it is essential that there are Welsh speakers available here.

Public Meetings and One to One Contact with the Welsh speaking Public

Public Meetings: Very good

One to One Contact with the Public: Fairly good and improving

The preferred language is offered and established systematically before the Authority's public meetings and this is good practice to be praised. The Authority also operates pro-actively as well through ensuring that there are Welsh speakers at each meeting and through ensuring that either the Chairman is bilingual or that there are Welsh presentations. Once again, this is good practice that we wish to praise. Collectively, this leads to a situation where the public can identify the Brigade as a

bilingual body, and can feel comfortable using the Welsh language at public meetings.

An attempt should be made at developing the same principle for day-to-day contact with the public. Once again, the individual's preferred language should be established and acted upon. As is noted above, we suggest that the Authority prepares guidelines that will inform staff of the steps to be taken in ensuring that the preferred language is offered, established and recorded and the means to act upon that preferred language. We recognise that the department's ability to act on the individual's preferred language is dependant on the service teams' linguistic resources and we outline this further in the context of the Linguistic Skills Strategy below.

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Contact with the Community and with Schools: Fairly good and improving

The Authority works closely with the community and the local schools in the area and we believe that ensuring a bilingual service in this respect is essential. The Authority provides bilingual displays when advising the community on fire safety and this is good practice. It does concern us that the DTLR is slow in producing bilingual material for British campaigns but the Authority should continue to design their displays completely bilingually and should ensure that all displays are bilingual. As well as this, the Authority should look at the way they promote the Welsh language and encourage its use when working with the community and Welsh medium schools. They could be encouraged to use bilingual safety signs, for example. This relationship with the public is already being fostered through Carmarthenshire's Language Strategy and we hope that the forum can develop into a productive working group with regards to promoting the Welsh language within the County.

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Public Face: Very good

The Council's corporate identity is bilingual and steps have been taken to ensure that every sign that is renewed will be bilingual. With regards to publications, it has translated documents and identified weaknesses in the provision such as English only leaflets by other bodies such as the DTLR and other English-only external leaflets, posters and publications exhibited within the Authority's public buildings. The DTLR should provide bilingual materials in accordance with the Welsh Language Scheme but we believe that there is room for the Authority to develop further management points with regards to public information within its buildings. Doing this would be one way of encouraging other parties to operate bilingually. The Authority's website is bilingual and we agree that there is a need to ensure that any electronic service provision is prepared bilingually with respect to e-government policies.

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SCHEME MANAGEMENT

Committees: Good

The Authority has ensured that the Welsh Language Scheme penetrates every part of its administration mainly by raising awareness at the Management Team meetings and the Senior Officers meetings and departmental meetings. As well as this, the

Welsh Language Scheme is a permanent item in the Chief Officers' monthly meetings. Raising awareness on the higher levels of the Authority in this way is one way of ensuring that the responsibility for the Scheme is devolved to departments. A means of formalising this is to prepare departmental action strategies. It was good to see that the Brigade has already considered this as the next step forward and we look forward to receiving the strategies in the near future.

At present, the Authority does not have a specific Welsh Language Working Group for discussing the Welsh Language Scheme as this happens in the above-mentioned meetings. Although this arrangement has appeared very successful during the first year of implementing the Scheme, we feel that there will be a need for establishing a Corporate Language Working Group in order to coordinate and keep an overview of the implementation of the Scheme during the next two years. Such a group could coordinate the development of the departmental action strategies and discuss corporate themes such as awareness, language training and staffing themes. The Corporate Welsh Language Working Group could prepare thematic reports to be considered by the Management Team and the Senior Officers, which is an other way of increasing awareness and ownership of the Scheme. As well as those, it should be ensured that the Scheme has a leading officer with an appropriate agenda to ensure that the Scheme is implemented effectively and to validate the information provided by the departments with regards to the monitoring process.

Awareness: Good

With regards to keeping an eye on the level of the workforce's awareness of the Welsh Language Scheme's requirements, the Authority should consider means of assessing staff awareness. We therefore suggest that the Authority hold a sample of interviews to assess the frontline officers' and Administration Officers' awareness of the Welsh Language Scheme's measures. In light of such awareness reviews the location and nature of weaknesses could be identified. Following that, the Authority could consider whether or not language awareness sessions need to be held for the staff. This is in accordance with the Authority's list of priorities for 2001-02.

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Linguistic Training: Fairly good and improving

Linguistic training was provided for the Authority's staff as well as vocational training, such as the Fire Safety Education course, through the medium of Welsh. We should also praise the training for the Brigade's Management Staff in order to assist them with pronouncing Welsh place names (but please see the above note regarding the need for fluent Welsh speakers). The Annual Monitoring Report recognises that the Welsh Language courses are agreed on an ad hoc basis at present and this is a weakness. The provision of linguistic training should be a part of the Personnel Department's staff training processes and heads of departments should assess the need for linguistic training in terms of the individual's training needs, job requirements and through considering the team dimension. This should all be considered when agreeing on each member of staff's Personal Development Plan. As well as this, the most appropriate linguistic training for the individual's need and for the body should be considered. The Annual Monitoring Report refers to Language Refining courses and we agree that this sort of training is a priority with regards to increasing the Authority's stock of fluent Welsh-speakers within a short period of

time. Although linguistic training is provided, we believe that there is scope for coordinating the training process more effectively. To this effect, I enclose a copy of the Board's 'Welsh in the Workplace' Guide for your information.

Staffing: Fairly good and improving

With regards to staffing processes, we feel that the Authority has taken definite steps to ensure that they are in line with the Welsh Language Scheme. The survey is a significant step forward and it should be ensured that the results are kept centrally on the Personnel Department's records. In the same respect, the same linguistic information should be collected on new members of staff who start working with the Authority in order to ensure that the Authority has a current view of the workforce's linguistic capabilities at any point. As noted in the Annual Monitoring Report, the survey's results will show those services where there is a lack of Welsh speakers and this will all feed into the Authority's Linguistic Skills Strategy. The Linguistic Skills Strategy should enable the Authority to keep an overview of its linguistic resources and thus to fulfil the requirements of the Scheme by having sufficient staff that can speak Welsh. As well as identifying those locations where there are no Welsh speakers, the strategy will lead on the recruiting projects and relevant training used to fill those gaps. We look forward to receiving a copy of the Authority's Linguistic Skills Strategy after it is finished at the end of March.

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Monitoring Systems: Good

The Authority's Monitoring Report shows evidence of careful monitoring on a number of aspects of the Welsh Language. Despite some initial problems, it shows that relevant monitoring systems have been established to measure the Authority's performance with regards to implementing the Welsh Language Scheme in accordance with the various measures. The Report does not confirm whether or not the inspection processes for the Welsh Language Scheme feed into the information for Best Value. Combining the information for the Monitoring Report and the Best Value Plan would be a way of avoiding duplication of inspection work. A number of Unitary Authorities as well as the North Wales Fire Authority already follow this course of action.

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Conclusions

Having considered the Authority's Annual Monitoring Report, we conclude that the Authority has seriously endeavoured to implement the Welsh Language Scheme effectively and constantly over the past year. We are confident that implementing the Scheme will strengthen as it penetrates further into the Authority's administration and services. We were satisfied that you have sufficient pastoral services in place to supervise the Scheme. To reflect this, this is the procedure for reporting on compliance with the Scheme in future.

1. Officers should continue to prepare internal progress reports in order to keep an eye on the Scheme's implementation, presenting constant information to the Management Team.

2. As well as this, the Authority should produce an annual Monitoring Report which will enable it to fulfil the following objectives:

- To measure whether or not the Authority is in compliance with the Scheme
- To measure the quality of its service in Welsh
- To analyse its performance per department, as well as corporately, in order to ensure consistency;
- To identify any basic weaknesses, and to adopt an action plan containing a timetable to correct them.

When carrying this out, the Authority is welcome to use the means of monitoring within the Board's reporting framework if it so wishes, as part of the work, but the purpose of this is to allow you to use means that will be a part of your usual monitoring and reporting process.

3. A copy of this report should be sent to the Board electronically, if possible.

We believe that such a monitoring system is a better way of assessing the performance of a body which has a firm control over the Welsh Language Scheme and it is a sign of the Board's trust in the Authority's implementing the Scheme. If you require confirmation or further guidance in the above respect, please feel free to contact us.

As part of moving towards this arrangement, we now require confirmation that you will address the following issues appropriately during the year and that the progress will be included in the Authority's next annual report.

- Finishing the Linguistic Skills Strategy;
 - Preparing Staff Guidelines on establishing and recording the service user's preferred language, to be used as part of your work arrangements and practices;
 - Holding a survey of the staff's awareness of the Welsh Language Scheme;
 - Establishing a cross-departmental Working Group under the leadership of the Coordinating / Welsh Language Officer to drive the Scheme forward;
 - Finishing and adopting Departmental Action Strategies
- Would you please send us a draft copy of the Linguistic Skills Strategy when it is ready.

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Best Value Verdict

Having considered all the information that we have, we come to the conclusion that the Authority's present performance can be fairly illustrated as follows:

Cyflwyno Gwasanaeth Da
Service Delivery: Good

Rheoli'r Cynllun Da
Scheme Management: Good

I sincerely hope that the above will be of assistance to you in the implementation of your Scheme during the coming year. Should you wish to discuss our response or the verdict further, please feel free to contact me on 029 2087 8044.

Yours Sincerely,

MELERI WYN WILLIAMS
Coordinating Officer
Public and Voluntary Sectors