

Welsh Language Scheme prepared in accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 (the Act) and the Regulatory Code for Housing Associations in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, March 2006.

This Scheme received the approval of the Welsh Language Board under section 14(1) of the Act on [23 June 2009]



1.0 Introduction

Linc-Cymru Housing Association has adopted the principle, that in the conduct of public business in Wales, it will treat the Welsh and English languages on the basis of equality. This scheme notes how we will operate that principle in providing services to the public in Wales.

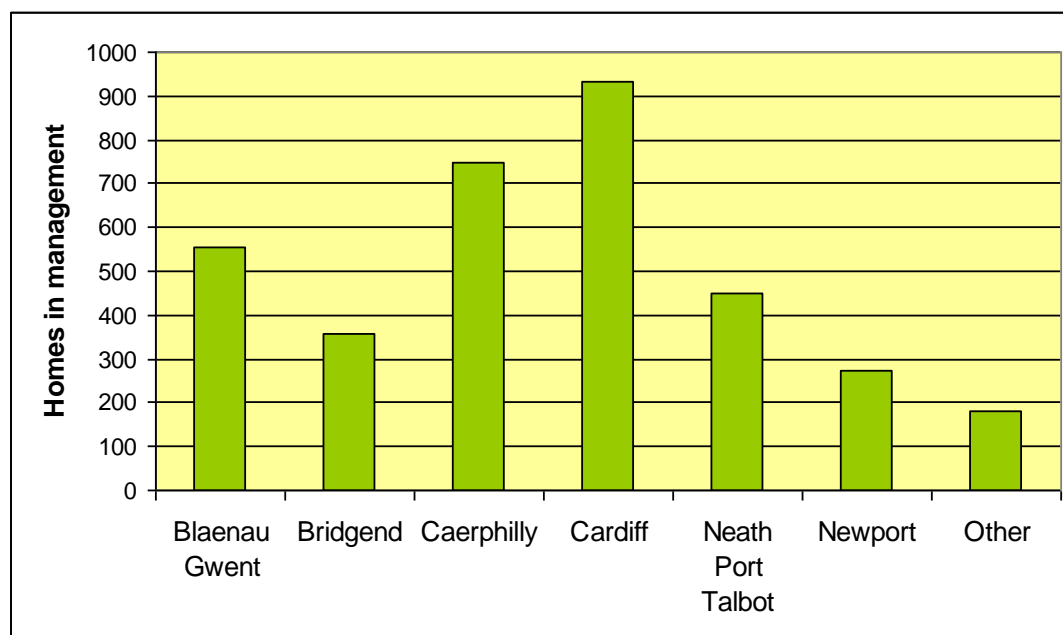
2.0 About Linc-Cymru Housing Association (Linc-Cymru)

Linc-Cymru:

1. Is a People and Property business where our People are our staff, customers and stakeholders and our Properties are represented by the homes we own and manage.
2. Focuses on:
 - Providing affordable homes for people who want to rent or buy.
 - Maintaining our existing housing stock across South Wales to a high standard.
 - Developing mixed use schemes that contribute to Local Authority Community Regeneration strategies.
 - Developing innovative schemes that enable older people to maintain their independence with dignity in a safe secure environment.
3. Maintains the values of being focused, positive and innovative.
4. Has 4 distinct Aims of:
 - Putting our customer first.
 - Being recognised for our innovative approach.
 - Developing and supporting our staff.
 - Designing and maintaining safe, comfortable and secure homes.

We have provided services to tenants, home owners and communities across South Wales for 30 years. We have 3,500 tenancies across 10 Local Authority areas, most being located in Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Neath Port Talbot and Newport. We are based in the Capital City of Wales, Cardiff. The table overleaf shows our ownership by local authority area.

Table 1 – Linc-Cymru homes in Management as at April 2007



3.0 The Welsh Language in the context of Linc-Cymru's area of operation, customer and staff profile

The context for this Scheme is the demand for Welsh among our customers, the ability of staff to communicate in Welsh and the linguistic profile of the areas in which we work. We have established this by consulting with our customers and staff and using other public information available to us.

Customer Information

Every 3 years we undertake a comprehensive survey of the views and opinions of our customers. Specific satisfaction surveys are undertaken more frequently. For our 2006 survey we specifically asked questions about the Welsh Language. We did this to secure a contextual background for our Welsh Language Scheme. The information below is extracted from the 2006 Tenants Survey.

- Ethnicity – 38% considered themselves British and 57% Welsh.
- 98% said that the main language spoken in the home was English.
- 42% said that the preferred language to receive written information in was English. There was no preference expressed by 58%.
- 89% said that they never speak Welsh. 9% said they spoke Welsh some of the time. For 0.2%, Welsh is the first language in their household.
- 8% said they understood spoken Welsh, 6% spoke Welsh, 5% read in Welsh and 3% can write in Welsh.

Public Information

The proportion of people speaking, reading and writing Welsh increased across our main operation areas during the period 1991 to 2001. (Source – the 2001 Census)

Information indicates that the demand for Welsh language services is currently modest in the areas where we work. We recognise however that the

number of Welsh speakers is increasing and Linc-Cymru will endeavour to act in accordance with the principles of the Assembly Government's action plan for a bilingual Wales, *laith Pawb*.

Our Staff Dimension

We have invited all staff to contribute towards this language scheme. Our findings are:

- 1 member of staff is fluent in Welsh and a small percentage has a basic understanding.
- It is rare for Welsh to be heard in our communities and for customers to communicate with our staff in Welsh.
- 16 members of staff would like to learn Welsh ranging in levels from fluent (3), intermediate (3), basic (10).

The Association's contact point for the Language Scheme is the Head of HR, and may be contacted on hr@linc-cymru.co.uk

4.0 Planning and Delivering Services

Policies and Initiatives

In formulating new policies and initiatives, or in amending policies, Linc-Cymru will assess their linguistic impact and make sure they are consistent with this Language Scheme and will ensure that the measures in the Scheme are implemented when new policies and initiatives are implemented.

Linc-Cymru will not amend this Scheme without the prior agreement of the Welsh Language Board. Linc-Cymru will ensure that staff involved in the formulation of policies are aware of the Scheme and of the Association's responsibilities under the Regulatory Code and the Welsh Language Act 1993.

5.0 Service Provision

We will ensure that as many of our services as possible are available in Welsh and we will inform the public when they are available. Linc-Cymru will carry out the commitments noted in the Scheme by implementing the following arrangements

- Adopt systems or procedures which facilitate the provision of service in the chosen language of the person receiving the service;
- Raise awareness among the Association's staff of the Language Scheme;
- Increase the availability of Welsh language skills by means of training.

Regulatory functions and third party services

Any contracts or arrangements made with a third party will be consistent with relevant sections of this Scheme.

Partnerships

The Association works in partnership with public bodies, organisations from the voluntary sector and other agencies. We operate on many levels when working with others:

- when the Association is the strategic and financial leader within a partnership, it will ensure that the public service provision is compliant with the Language Scheme
- when the Association joins a partnership led by another body, the Association's input to the partnership will comply with the Language Scheme and the Association will encourage other parties to comply
- when the Association is a partner in a consortium, it will encourage the consortium to adopt a language policy. When acting publicly in the name of the consortium, the Association will act in accordance with the Language Scheme.

The Association will ensure that officers are aware of the requirements of the Language Scheme when operating in partnership.

Services provided in Welsh and in English will be equal in quality and they will be provided within the same timetable.

6.0 Dealing with the Welsh Speaking Public

Written Communication

Members of the public are welcome to correspond with us in Welsh if they prefer to do so. Writing to us in Welsh will not of itself lead to a delay in replying. The reply will be in the same language as the original correspondence, and correspondence initiated following face-to-face or telephone communication in Welsh will also be in Welsh, unless agreed otherwise.

Where we are aware that an individual, group or organisation prefers to receive correspondence in Welsh, it will be sent in Welsh.

Guidance will be issued to staff on how to meet our commitment on correspondence in Welsh including details on use of translation services available. Where signed correspondence is duplicated in English and Welsh, both copies will be signed.

Telephone Communication

Members of the public are welcome to telephone us in Welsh if they prefer to do so. All persons calling central telephone numbers will be greeted bilingually. In time we will seek to have the ability to converse with Welsh speakers in Welsh at reception. In the meantime, any caller using Welsh will be treated as courteously as those using English.

If a caller replies in Welsh to the initial greeting the caller will be given the choice of being connected to an external qualified interpreter to translate the two parties' conversation or continue the call in English. Staff will be provided

with guidance on handling telephone calls from Welsh speaking members of the public.

Public Meetings

Linc-Cymru acknowledges the right of the Welsh speaking public to use the Welsh Language at public meetings (defined as meetings open to the general public, which are publicised in advance). Notices of meetings will ask participants to let us know in advance if they wish to use the Welsh language. Translation arrangements will be made in the light of this. Guidance will be provided for staff arranging such meetings, indicating the importance of establishing language preference at the earliest opportunity.

7.0 The Public Face of the Association

Corporate Identity

Linc-Cymru will adopt a bilingual corporate identity. This will extend to cover the standard information used on promotional materials and goods, such as letter heads, faxes, business cards, ID cards, displays, publications, signs, vehicles and buildings. This will be achieved as an integral part of the ongoing development of our public face.

Signs

When we renew or re-erect any signs we will ensure that the new versions are bilingual. Signs erected for the first time will be bilingual.

The size, standard of clarity and prominence of the words on the signs will respect the principle of language equality. It will be our standard practice to provide bilingual signs, but on occasions when Welsh and English signs are provided separately, they will be equal in terms of form, size, quality, clarity and prominence. Translations will be sourced or checked by a professional translator until internal Welsh speaking capacity is developed.

Publishing and Printing Materials

We will produce our key strategic documents in a bilingual form. We will explore opportunities to co-operate with Syniad, our consortium partners in producing material that is common to all consortium members.

www.linc-cymru.co.uk

Our web site is constantly updated, complex and maintained by internal IT staff.. As a minimum there will be a Welsh Language statement or area on the site, which will explain how to deal with Linc-Cymru in Welsh. Documents published on the Internet for which there is a Welsh version will be published in both languages.

Forms and explanatory material

When we produce bilingual forms, our standard practice will be to produce them with both languages appearing together in the same document.

In some cases (perhaps due to the complexity of a form) production of a bilingual version will not be practical, and separate Welsh and English versions may be more appropriate. In such cases, the Welsh and English versions will:

- be published at the same time
- be equally as easy to obtain in offices and other distribution centres
- be distributed together, and
- include a message which confirms that the form is also available in the other language.

The Association will try to establish the chosen language of members of the public by including a “language choice” question on the first form in a series. Once the chosen language of an individual is known, we will distribute material in Welsh, English, or bilingually from then on, as appropriate.

We will ensure that consistency of terms is a regular practice in the preparation of forms.

Press Releases

Press releases are a prominent part of the Association’s public face and we will therefore publish them bilingually when appropriate under the circumstances.

Marketing and Publicity Campaigns

Our marketing campaigns will comply with the relevant sections of this Scheme.

Official and Public Notifications; Staff Recruitment Advertisements

Our official and public notices will be bilingual when it is appropriate under the circumstances. They will be equal as regards form, size, quality, clarity and prominence. Our staff recruitment advertisements will be bilingual for posts where Welsh language skills are required. Information packs, such as job descriptions and person specifications will be prepared in Welsh and in English for every post where Welsh language skills are essential or desirable.

8.0 Implementation and Review of the Scheme

Staffing

Linc-Cymru will adopt an approach which will ensure that functions having regular, direct contact with the public will, in time, seek to include staff with appropriate Welsh language skills in order to achieve the aims of the Welsh Language Scheme. Recruitment will take account of this strategy.

Relevant staff will be encouraged to develop Welsh language skills and to adopt the required changes in working practices in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Welsh Language Scheme. However, staff will not be pressurised to move post or to take part in language training.

Linguistic ability will be considered as one of the many potentially relevant skills when appointing staff. We will determine the areas of priority for recruiting Welsh speakers in order to meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Scheme. Where linguistic ability is considered to be essential or desirable, this will be stated in job advertisements.

Where a non Welsh speaking candidate is appointed for a post where Welsh is necessary, the appointment will be dependent on a commitment to take part in Welsh language training courses to a specified level. All appointments will of course be made on merit and strictly in accordance with our Equal Opportunity Policy and employment legislation.

Welsh Language Training

We will support this Language Scheme by encouraging and supporting members of staff to learn Welsh or to improve their skills in Welsh. We will provide awareness training for staff and include such training in the induction of new staff.

Administrative Arrangements

The Linc-Cymru Board of Management and Executive Team has endorsed the Scheme and are fully committed to its successful implementation.

Responsibility for co-ordinating the Scheme has been assigned to the Personnel Manager to whom all enquiries should be directed. All Directors and Managers will be responsible for implementing those aspects of the Scheme that are relevant to their own work areas and for ensuring their staff are familiar with the Scheme.

For those members of staff who are assigned specific responsibility for greeting the public bilingually, or who have other responsibilities set out in this document, instruction and guidance will be provided.

Reviewing the Implementation of the Scheme

The Chief Executive will report to the Board annually and will send a copy of the report to the Welsh Language Board. The report will follow a format agreed with the Board and will include information about the nature of any complaints and improvement suggestions received from the public in respect of the Scheme.

Publication of Information

We will include a statement in our annual report noting where members of the public can obtain a copy of our annual monitoring report to the Welsh Language Board.

Publicity

We will ensure that members of the public who deal with the Association know about this Scheme and its contents, and how they can conduct their dealings with the Association in Welsh.

We will use the Association's standard complaints procedure to record and deal with complaints about this Scheme and will ensure that it will be possible to monitor specific complaints about the Scheme.

Our methods of publicising the Scheme and its contents will follow our usual corporate publicity arrangements, and will include ensuring that the Scheme is published in a prominent location on our website.

Further information about this Scheme can be obtained by contacting the Head of HR at our Cardiff office.
