

Welsh Language Scheme – Summary

The Welsh Language Scheme - Objectives

The objective of the Welsh Language Scheme is to enable everyone who uses the Association's services, or is in discussion with the Association, to do so through the medium of Welsh or English, according to their personal choice, and to ensure high quality services are delivered through the medium of Welsh or English.

We will make sure that:-

- our policies and procedures are consistent with the Welsh Language Scheme,
- the public can use Welsh when dealing with First Choice, if they wish to do so,
- services provided in Welsh and in English will be equal in quality and they will be provided within the same timetable.
- we meet the needs of Welsh speakers in whichever way we deal with the public,
- that if we join a partnership led by another organisation that we will comply with the Welsh Language Scheme and encourage the other organisation to do so,
- our commitment to the Welsh Language Scheme is outlined in key documents,
- if we hold public meetings, including conferences, we will adopt a method of establishing participants language of choice,
- if we regularly fail to meet a consistent demand for services in Welsh we will take action, such as training or appointing bilingual staff or utilising the services of a translator or accessing Welsh speaking staff in other organisations,
- our IT systems and any interactive media are Welsh / English compatible,
- our public image is bilingual, including our website,
- we publish bilingually those documents available to the public which provide information about the Association's services and also documents which are annual or periodical,
- First Choice staff are encouraged and supported to learn Welsh or to improve their skills in Welsh,
- monitoring of this Scheme will be a continuous and structured activity.

First Choice Housing Association Ltd

17/06/08 Welsh Language Scheme

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 8th June 2007.

The scheme was reviewed on the 17th June 2008 by the Association's Board of Management.

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1.1 Aim of the Scheme:

First Choice Housing Association Ltd has adopted the principle, that in the conduct of public business in Wales, that 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.

1.2 Objectives:

- to enable everyone who uses a service or is in discussion with the Association to do so through the medium of Welsh or English according to the personal choice of the individual.
- to ensure high quality services through the medium of Welsh

The Association acknowledges that members of the public can express their opinions and needs better in their chosen language. It also acknowledges that enabling the public to use the Welsh language is a matter of good practice rather than a concession, and that denying them the right to use their chosen language could place them in a disadvantaged position. The Association will therefore offer the public the right to choose which language to use when dealing with it, in accordance with the principle above.

2.1 Background and Corporate Values

First Choice Housing Association was established in 1988. It is a Housing Association registered under Section 3 of the Housing Act 1996 (No JO94) and is a Registered Social Landlord under Section 1 of the Housing Act 1996. First Choice is also registered with the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965, under registration number 26118R, having charitable status.

First Choice's aims to develop and manage quality housing for people with learning and sensory disabilities, who may have additional physical disabilities or behaviours which challenge services. The Association also provides properties for those requiring respite or emergency intervention services. The Association is zoned to develop throughout Wales and also owns and manages properties in Shropshire.

2.2 Structure and Area of Operation

First Choice is a non profit making organisation, governed by a voluntary Board of Management that employs staff to carry out its aims and objectives. It is run by a Chief Executive and team of Senior Managers. The office is based in Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan.

The Association operates in 16 Welsh Local Authorities and in Shropshire, England.

2.3 Service Users

The Association's service users are people with learning and sensory disabilities, who may have additional physical disabilities or behaviours which challenge services.

The Association's properties are commissioned by Local Authorities' Social Services Departments who have 100% nomination rights to the properties. The Local Authorities contract with external organisations to provide the Association's tenants and users of respite and emergency intervention services with the support they require.

2.4 The Welsh Language

Due to the complex and diverse needs of the Association's service users, the small number of properties in the Association's ownership and the geographical spread of the Association's properties, use of statistics from, for example, the 2001 Census, would not accurately reflect the particular circumstances of the Association's service users.

Local Authorities' Social Services departments have statutory responsibility for the Association's service users. They are responsible for ensuring that the needs of the Association's service users are met, including ensuring that tenants and service users are able to use their language of choice. In effect if a service user was a Welsh speaker the Local Authority would ensure that the external agency contracted to provide that service user with support would provide that service in Welsh.

First Choice will endeavour to act in accordance with the principles of the Assembly Governments action plan for a bilingual Wales.

For further information about our policy for the Welsh Language, the contact is the Chief Executive, who can be contacted on 029 2070 3758.

3.1 Policies and Initiatives

- 3.1.1 Mainstreaming is the term used to describe the work carried out under this measure. The Association supports the principle of mainstreaming the Welsh language, which is defined by the Assembly Government as follows:
“To consider the Welsh language in all aspects of your work and in all that you do, with the aim of ensuring that every opportunity is taken to promote and support the Welsh language; to contribute towards the Government’s vision of a truly bilingual Wales; and to plan, provide and evaluate services in Welsh and in English”.
- 3.1.2 In formulating new policies and initiatives, or in amending policies, the Association 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.
- 3.1.3 The Association will consult the Welsh Language Board beforehand regarding any proposal which would directly affect this Language Scheme. This Scheme will not be amended without the prior agreement of the Welsh Language Board.
- 3.1.4 We will ensure that whoever is involved in the formulation of policies is aware of the Scheme and of the Association’s responsibilities under the Regulatory Code and the Welsh Language Act 1993.

3.2 Service Provision

The Association will carry out the commitments noted in the Scheme by implementing the following arrangements:-

- share services for Welsh speakers with nearby establishments which provide the same services, or to purchase the services from them;
- adopt a systems or procedures which facilitate the provision of service in the chosen language of the person receiving the service;
- employ professional translators;
- raise awareness among the Association’s staff of the Language Scheme;
- consider the need to increase the availability of Welsh language skills by means of training and recruitment.

3.3 Services provided for the public by other organisations

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

3.0

PLANNING AND DELIVERING SERVICES

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

3.4 Quality Standards

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

3.4.2 The Association will highlight this central principle in key documents such as corporate plans and annual reports. It should be outlined also in other situations where statements are made regarding equal opportunity and standard of service.

4.1 Correspondence

- 4.1.1 The Association welcomes correspondence in Welsh.
- 4.1.2 All correspondence will be dealt with promptly and correspondence through the medium of Welsh should not in itself lead to delay. Our targets for replying to correspondence in Welsh will be the same as our targets for replying to correspondence in English.
- 4.1.3 When someone writes to us in Welsh, we will provide a reply in Welsh (if a reply is needed).
- 4.1.4 If a separate Welsh and English language version of any correspondence must be published, our standard practice will be to ensure that both versions are available at the same time and for the same price (if relevant).
- 4.1.5 Materials enclosed with bilingual correspondence will be bilingual.
- 4.1.6 We will keep a record of those persons who wish to deal with the Association in Welsh.
- 4.1.7 We will agree arrangements for correspondence and for arranging translation.

4.2 Communication over the telephone

- 4.2.1 The Association welcomes telephone calls in Welsh and our standard practice is to ensure that the public can speak in Welsh or in English when dealing with us over the telephone.
- 4.2.2 Every member of staff will answer the telephone with a bilingual greeting.
- 4.2.3 There will be a bilingual message on answering machines in the reception areas and on the switchboard.
- 4.2.4 In order to achieve the aim of treating the Welsh and English languages on an equal basis, we will provide staff with guidelines on how to deal with telephone calls from Welsh speakers and ensure that they are familiar with the arrangements

4.3 Public Meetings

- 4.3.1 When public meetings are held by the Association, including conferences and other similar events, we will adopt a method of establishing the language of choice in making the arrangements. We will follow the following procedure:
- We will invite attendees to inform the organisers whether they wish to use Welsh or English
 - The organiser will assess whether translation facilities are needed. As well as considering whether the Association has been informed of the chosen language of the attendees, he/she will consider the location of the event, who is likely to be present, and the subject in question.
- 4.3.2 In order to ensure that every employee in the Association is aware of the requirements in organising and holding public meetings in Welsh or bilingually, we will provide guidelines for the administration of such meetings.

4.4 Other Meetings

- 4.4.1 The Association welcomes meetings with the public in Welsh or in English, but due to the shortage of Welsh speakers in some fields, we cannot guarantee a face to face meeting in Welsh on all occasions. If we regularly fail to meet the demand we will consider taking action such as training or appointing bilingual staff or utilising the services of a translator.
- 4.4.2 When we arrange or attend a face to face meeting with the public, we will find out their chosen language at the first opportunity and, wherever possible, we will ensure that a qualified individual who speaks Welsh deals with those who note that their chosen language is Welsh.
- 4.4.3 If no suitable Welsh speaker is available, we will offer them the option of continuing with the meeting in English or dealing with the matter by correspondence in Welsh.
- 4.4.4 If it is obvious that there is a consistent demand for face to face meetings through the medium of Welsh, and that we are failing to meet that demand, we will consider taking action such as training or appointing bilingual staff or utilising the services of a translator.

4.5 Communicating with the public in other ways

- 4.5.1 We will consider the best ways of meeting the needs of Welsh speakers in whichever way we deal with the public.
- 4.5.2 We will consider the requirements of this Scheme when providing or planning new information technology systems, or when providing interactive media.

5.1 Corporate Identity

5.1.1 Our public image, including our address, logo, corporate slogan, visual identity and any other standard information used on the Association's materials and goods (such as headed paper, fax paper, business cards, publications etc) and in other circumstances such as signs, vehicles and buildings, is bilingual.

5.2 Signs

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

5.2.2 The size, standard of clarity and prominence of the words on the signs will respect the principle of language equality.

5.3 Publishing and Printing Materials

5.3.1 The documents that are to be published bilingually will include those which are published or available to the public in general and:

- provide information about the Association's services
- are annual or periodical publications

5.3.2 Our standard practice will be to provide bilingual publications but on some occasions for practical reasons, we will publish separate Welsh and English versions. In such cases, we will distribute the versions at the same time as each other. They will also be equally as readily available and both versions will include a message noting that a version is available in the other language.

5.3.3 When a document is published which has a price, the price of a Welsh version of the document will be no higher than the price of the English version.

5.3.4 We will ensure that staff and those with responsibility for printing are aware of the policy and procedures for publication.

Website

5.3.5 We will ensure that our website is totally bilingual and that material will be available in both languages at the same time by the end of the lifetime of this Scheme.

5.3.6 We will ensure that Welsh text in our publications is of a high standard and that the tone is appropriate for the target audience.

5.4 Forms and explanatory material

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

5.5 Press Releases

5.5.1 If the Association issues press releases consideration will be given to the appropriateness of publishing them bilingually.

5.6 Marketing and Publicity Campaigns

5.6.1 All advertising and publicity campaigns need to be considered on an individual basis, being mindful of the size and nature of the target audience the circumstances surrounding the advertising / campaign, timing, prestige, demand and value for money.

5.6.2 Usually, advertising will be conducted in English. There may be particular advertisements for which the publication or provision of a Welsh language version is appropriate.

5.7 Official Notifications, Public Notifications and Staff Recruitment Advertisements

5.7.1 Advertisements for posts for which Welsh language skills are essential will appear in Welsh in all publications, with an explanatory note in English for English or bilingual publications.

6.0

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

6.1 Staffing and recruitment

6.1.1 If it is obvious that there is a consistent demand for services in the medium of Welsh, and that we are failing to meet that demand, we will consider taking action such as training or appointing bilingual staff or obtaining the services of a translator.

6.2 Welsh Language Training

6.2.1 The Association will provide awareness training for staff with regard to the requirements of this Scheme. Our standard practice will be to include such training in the induction of new staff.

6.2.2 We will support this Language Scheme by encouraging and supporting members of staff to learn Welsh or to improve their skills in Welsh.

6.3 Administrative Arrangements

6.3.1 This Scheme has the full authority, support and approval of the Association. The Chief Executive has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Language Scheme and all the Association's members of staff have a responsibility to know how to implement the Scheme effectively.

6.3.2 The Senior Management Team will have responsibility for implementing those aspects of the Scheme which are relevant to their work, and monitoring the work of the Scheme from day to day.

6.3.3 We will assist the implementation of the Scheme by providing written guidance and directions for staff. Examples of possible guidance have been outlined under individual measures in the Scheme.

6.4 Reviewing the Implementation of the Scheme

6.4.1 The Chief Executive has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing this Scheme

6.4.2 Monitoring this Scheme will be a continuous and structured activity. This will include monitoring the following fields:

- compliance with the Scheme
- quality of service – to look at complaints and at the front line service
- management and administration
- adequacy of linguistic skills
- mainstreaming

6.0

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF THE SCHEME

6.4.3 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.

6.4.4 The Association welcomes and records recommendations on how to improve the service.

6.4.5 The Chief Executive will report to the Association's Board of Management 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.

6.5 Publication of Information

6.5.1 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.

6.6 Publicity

6.6.1 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.

6.6.2 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.

6.6.3 We will ensure that the Association's staff and agencies are familiar with the measures included in the Scheme in order to ensure that attention is paid to the measures whenever appropriate.