

Front cover

WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME

VALUATION TRIBUNAL FOR WALES



Prepared under the Welsh Language Act 1993 as amended 'The Act'

Inside cover

Welsh Language Scheme

VALUATION TRIBUNAL FOR WALES

This Scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board under Section 14 of the Act. It came into effect on 24 May 2012. This Scheme replaces our previous Scheme, dated 10th October 2007.

1. Introduction

Principle of Equality

- The Governing Council of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales ('the Council'), has adopted the principle that in the conduct of their public business and administration of justice in Wales, it will treat the English and Welsh languages on the basis of equality. This Scheme sets out how the Council will give effect to that principle when providing services to the public in Wales.
- The Council will endeavour to work on the good foundations set by its predecessor body, which has, for more than a decade expanded and improved the way it offers and presents its bilingual service.
- The Council believes that equality is at the heart of 'the Act' and has set out its mission to produce, within this Scheme, realistic and flexible aims conducive to offering a first class bilingual service to the 'user' (customer) working on a day to day basis and always being mindful of the spirit of 'the Act'.

Background to the Valuation Tribunal for Wales and a summary of its work

- The Council is the management policy body for the Valuation Tribunal, which is sponsored by the Welsh Government, in a similar way to the parallel service in England, sponsored as a Non Departmental Public Body by the Department of Communities and Local Government.
- The Tribunal's work mainly involves the processing and determination of appeals in relation to the Council Tax and Non Domestic Rating: and to a lesser extent Drainage Rate Appeals.
- The total appeal clearance for 2005/06 (immediately following the dual revaluations) was over 16,000; with less than 10% of those appeals reaching hearing. Fewer than 50 of those determined appeals were conducted through the medium of Welsh. With similar figures being experienced with the 2010 non-domestic rating revaluation.
- The bulk of the Tribunal's work has tended to be non-domestic rating, with a majority of these appeals dealt with by professional agents. Occasionally non-domestic rating appeals are lodged through the medium of Welsh, whereas with Council Tax the percentage is higher. Consequently, a higher proportion of Council Tax appeals conducted in Welsh reach a hearing in comparison with Rating appeals.

The Tribunal's Regional Offices

- The Valuation Tribunal for Wales has offices situated in Newport for both the East and South Wales Regions; and Llandudno Junction and Carmarthen for the North and West Wales Regions respectively: each supported by a total of five or less staff, made up of Tribunal Taking Officers and Clerical Officers. Each Region has within its complement a Clerk of the Region, who as well as being of Tribunal Taking status, heads the administration of their unit. A Chief Executive heads the line management and the overall Valuation Tribunal administration in Wales.
- The Clerks of the Regions, aided by the support staff, perform all the administrative duties concerned with the processing of appeals and the overall operation of the Regional office, including receiving, registering and acknowledging appeals, the listing and clearing of appeals, related correspondence, telephone queries, financial support work, personnel work and accommodation/venue arrangements.
- The Clerk of the Region, or his/her Tribunal Taking Officers, give procedural and legal advice to lay members as required at hearings.

Tribunal membership

- The membership of the Valuation Tribunal is made up of complements of lay persons appointed, following application and consideration, by joint appointing panels: there is a separate Panel for each of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales, made up of delegate(s) from the relevant local Council and the President of the Tribunal or his Regional Representative. The President, Regional/ Deputy Regional Representatives and Chairs are duly elected by the Tribunal membership. Bilingualism is an important factor in the appointment process to ensure each Region has at least a proportion of its membership with a bilingual capability to meet the perceived needs of its area.
- There will be a commitment to maintain and develop the bilingual element of the lay membership: which currently exceeds 25% overall (ie 45).

2. Service Planning and Delivery

Tribunal Hearings

Section 22(1) of “the Act”

“In any legal proceedings in Wales the Welsh Language may be spoken by any party, witnesses or other person who desires to use it, subject in the case of proceedings in a court other than a magistrates’ court to such prior notice as may be required by rules of court; and any necessary provision for interpretation shall be made accordingly”

- The Valuation Tribunal, although not strictly a court, does follow S22, and welcomes persons who wish to use Welsh in the Tribunal’s proceedings to do so. In most instances appellants will have indicated a wish to conduct their business in Welsh by way of the appeal documents and/or correspondence, therefore bilingual provision at the hearing is automatically assured. Even without prior notice the Valuation Tribunal has catered for persons who have used Welsh during the hearing for the first time in their appeal business: however without some prior notice such provision could not be guaranteed immediately on these, albeit rare, occasions.

3. New Policies and Procedures

- In the formulation and development of new policies and procedures the Valuation Tribunal for Wales will assess any linguistic implications with the view of always promoting and facilitating the Welsh Language, and in doing so implementing the principle of equality as appropriate: ensuring that consistency with this scheme is maintained. This scheme once established would not be amended without referral to, and agreement from, the Welsh Language Board in writing.
- The Council welcomes the use of the Welsh Language in the Valuation Tribunal’s appeal process: and in doing so will not assume the current low demand by appellate parties is the norm.
- Staff and advisers involved in policy formulation will be made aware of the scheme and the organisation’s responsibilities under ‘the Act’.

The Standard of Service in Welsh

- The Valuation Tribunal is committed to delivering an equally high quality service in Welsh and English which will be stated publicly in formal documents.
- The Valuation Tribunal is committed to ensuring consistency in the standard of services in Welsh provided by its Regions.

4. Dealing with the Welsh speaking public

- The Valuation Tribunal will make it known that the public may choose which language to use in any form of discussion with the Valuation Tribunal.

Written communication

- The Valuation Tribunal welcomes correspondence in Welsh and English.
- All correspondence received in Welsh will be reciprocated in Welsh whether it be letters or appeal documents. Similarly once an oral indication has been made that a “customer” wishes to deal with the Tribunal in Welsh, records will be so noted and all further business will be conducted in Welsh.
- The Valuation Tribunal will correspond in Welsh following face-to-face or telephone communications in Welsh.
- There will be a commitment to maintain existing service of written communication in the language of the customer. In the absence of bilingual officers at a particular office, on occasions, the service will be made available at the earliest opportunity, which is unlikely to exceed three working days.

Telephone Communication

- The Valuation Tribunal welcomes telephone calls in Welsh and English, and will adopt a means of conveying choice of language to those who are telephoning.
- Members of the public wishing to conduct a telephone conversation in Welsh will be able to do so. All staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls in Welsh, and how to transfer calls to staff who speak Welsh. Where the facility is not immediately available arrangements will be made to contact the caller later to provide a Welsh service. All staff will be trained to provide a basic bilingual greeting.

- There will be a commitment to at least maintain the existing bilingual telephone service. The service will be monitored and reviewed in conjunction with any future recruitment.

Interviews/Callers at the Tribunal Office

- The Valuation Tribunal has for some years experienced a relatively small number of persons calling at their offices considering the thousands of appeals processed per year.
- However there will usually be a member of staff on hand to deal with callers wishing to conduct their business through the medium of Welsh. Should an adequate facility not be readily available arrangements will be made at the earliest opportunity.
- The Council is committed to maintaining its bilingual customer service for 'callers' at the Tribunal's offices. The service will be monitored and reviewed in conjunction with any future recruitment.

Other dealings with the Public

- Our website will include a clearly visible navigation device which will transport the user to an area providing information in Welsh.
- Any generic material published bilingually by the Tribunal, will also be published bilingually on our website.
- Whenever we post publications on our website, the English and Welsh versions will be posted at the same time, if available.
- Tribunal decisions for Non Domestic Rating and Council Tax appeals are currently published on the website in English, and bilingually where they are heard in Welsh.
- When designing new websites, or redeveloping our existing websites, we will take into account our obligations under this Scheme.
- We will review, in conjunction with the Welsh Language Board, how we may increase the Welsh language content of our website over time.

5. Meetings/hearings organised by the Tribunal Office

Translation Facilities

- When required instant translation facilities, from qualified providers, will be engaged at hearings; although the tribunal does have a pool of bilingual members and employment of such translation facilities has not been experienced frequently.

6. The Council's Public Face

Corporate Identity

- The Tribunal's identity in Wales will be in a bilingual format, including signage and logos.

Signs

- All information signs within the curtilage of the organisation's property in Wales, including internal areas to which the public has access will be fully bilingual.
- There will be a commitment that the size, quality, legibility and prominence of text on signs will respect the principle of equality.
- Where separate Welsh and English signs are provided, they will be equal in terms of format, size, quality, legibility and prominence.

Publishing and Printing Material

- We will publish all generic material for the public bilingually.
- Many of the forms, notices and leaflets used in Wales are based on similar documents developed within the larger and parallel Valuation Tribunal for England: consequently translation is implemented for all documents where there is a perceived demand. This means that all mainstream Non Domestic Rating and Council Tax appeal documents are catered for bilingually (exceptions are occasional appeals e.g. drainage or penalty appeals where ad-hoc documents are prepared as necessary).

- All members of the public/appellate parties, as indicated earlier, making their appeal or conveying correspondence in Welsh will be replied to in Welsh. Due to the volume of information and current Information Technology parameters certain notices are dispatched in either English or Welsh (or both) as a true bilingual version is not practicable.
- The Minister for Local Government and Communities has and will continue to receive the Annual Report on the Valuation Tribunal for Wales from the Council bilingually.
- The Annual Report will be made available in a bilingual format for members of the public: it is envisaged to make this document available on the website of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales during 2011.
- Advertising by the Valuation Tribunal for Wales will be bilingual, thus treating both the Welsh and the English on the basis of equality.
- The Valuation Tribunal for Wales registers its commitment to equality in the use of the Welsh language within its service to the public. This will also extend where practicable to internal documents circulated to the whole Tribunal membership.

7. Implementing and monitoring the Scheme

Staffing and recruitment

- The Valuation Tribunal for Wales currently employs nineteen staff, eight of whom are bilingual: others have some basic skills and several of those have participated in at least one Welsh Language Course in recent years.
- The Council will continue its commitment to at least maintaining current level of bilingualism amongst staff, whilst encouraging other members of staff to learn Welsh or improve their ability to speak Welsh: by providing a reasonable amount of time and financial support to pursue appropriate courses.
- The Valuation Tribunal for Wales will ensure that it seeks access to sufficient and appropriately skilled Welsh speakers to enable its workplaces to deliver a full service through the medium of Welsh.
- Progress in implementing the programme will be monitored and action will be taken should the numbers of Welsh speakers in scheme-related posts begin to decrease.

- During recruitment of staff, ability to speak Welsh will always be stated as desirable, in the absence of essential being specified.

Administrative arrangements

- The scheme has been approved at the highest level and will carry the full authority of the organisation.
- The Council is committed to give co-ordinating responsibility for the scheme to a senior officer, but with managers being given responsibility for implementing those aspects of the scheme relevant to their own departments. The officers responsible will be the Chief Executive and the Clerks of the Regions.
- The Council will ensure that everyone in the organisation is familiar with the scheme and what is expected of them.

Monitoring

- The Governing Council is the statutory body controlling the policy and administration of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales, in the continuance, implementation and monitoring of measures described in this Scheme.
- The Council is committed to monitoring the implementation of the scheme.
- The Council in conjunction with the Management Team has established satellite forums, one of which is Compliance: Welsh Language Committee embracing the Welsh Language Scheme.
- The Council has delegated responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the scheme to the Compliance Committee (Welsh Language Committee).
- At local level each Clerk of the Region will be responsible for the day to day overseeing at his/her base Region.
- The Council will adopt a complaints procedure to deal with grievances regarding the scheme. This will be part of the organisation's general complaints procedure.
- The Council will provide the Board with an annual report in a form approved by the Board, which describes progress in implementing the measures in the scheme against the approved timetable.

Any comments or questions concerning this scheme should be addressed to:

The Chief Executive

Governing Council of the Valuation Tribunal for Wales,
c/o 22 Gold Tops,,
NEWPORT,
NP20 4PG.

E-mail VTWaleseast@vtw.gsi.gov.uk

who will bring such matters to the notice of the President of the Tribunal and Governing Council members as appropriate. Matters concerning a particular Region should be addressed to the relevant Clerk of the Region: addresses appended herein – Annex C.

Timetable/Check List

	Current Status	Action
➤ Equality of status of the Welsh and English Language in conduct of business and policy making	Already adopted	Monitor within 12 months of approving the Scheme and thereafter every following 6-12 months.
➤ Administrative business at offices:-		
<u>Staffing</u> of offices – bilingual facility at each office but where not immediately available support arrangements from neighbouring offices can be arranged without delay.	Currently one (or more) bilingual officer(s) at each office.	Continue
<u>Staff Recruitment</u> desirability of bilingual staff shall feature in recruitment.	Currently the practice	Monitor
<u>Staff Training</u> encourage non bilingual staff to engage in training, to learn or improve ability to use Welsh. All staff to engage in basic greetings/first line responding. Foster staff commitment/create awareness and understanding of the scheme.	Currently the practice	Monitor within 6 months of approving the Scheme and thereafter every following 6-12 months.
<u>Telephone Callers</u> wishing to be dealt with in Welsh will be able to be so dealt: should the facility not be immediately available arrangements will be made for a bilingual personnel to contact them	Currently the practice	Monitor within 6 months of approving the Scheme and

without delay.

thereafter
every
following
6-12 months.

Callers at VT Offices

Wishing to conduct business in Welsh should be able to do so; but if a bilingual person is not available arrangements will be made as soon as practicable

As above

Internal/External Signs bilingual/equal prominence.

Currently the practice

Continue

Letterheads/Office Notices/Complement Slips bilingual/equal prominence.

Currently the practice

Continue

➤ **Tribunal Hearings**

i) Persons lodging their appeals through the medium of Welsh and/or subsequently corresponding or indicating a preference for Welsh will be so dealt with at their hearing automatically: usually by bilingual lay members and court taking officers or translator facilities as necessary.

Standard practice

Continue practice - indicate in guidance notes

ii) Hearings requested in Welsh with no prior indication can usually be catered for in all Regions, however the Tribunals on occasions may need to adjourn for a short period in such instances for appropriate arrangements to be made.

Currently the practice

Continue practice – indicate in guidance notes – [monitor number of instances].

Public meetings (other than hearings) are not usually held by the Tribunals but should they be in the future bilingualism would be incorporated.

➤ **Computer and support systems**

provide for bilingual, or separate English and Welsh, key notices as is logistically practicable to meet estimated need during the likely life

Currently the practice

Monitor within 6 months of approving

of the computer system.

the
Scheme
and
thereafter
every
following
6-12
months.

New or major rewriting of systems.

(Currently however we have a joint arrangement with the VTE on computer software: which could change in the foreseeable future.)

Ensure that the measures enshrined in this scheme are an integral part of computer planning to incorporate the estimated needs for the likely life of the computer system.

Identification of Welsh appeal cases on both computer and manual support records (markers).

Currently the practice

Continue

➤ **Guidance leaflets and publicity material**

Relating to the Tribunals' work/appeals system: such leaflets and printed material will be produced bilingually, or in English and Welsh separately depending on the size, layout, logistics of production on the quantities to meet the perceived need - however, will be printed in equal prominence and quality.

New leaflets produced April 2011

Customer Survey: When undertaking public surveys with customers, it will be normal practice that all aspects of communication will be available bilingually. Respondents will be able to respond to the survey in Welsh or English.

How can you contact us?

VALUATION TRIBUNAL REGIONAL OFFICES

**Areas Covered:
COUNCIL (BILLING
AUTHORITIES)**

East Wales Region

22 Gold Tops
NEWPORT
NP20 4PG

Clerk of the Region : Mr S Hill IRRV(Hons)

Tel: 01633 266367 Fax: 01633 253270
E-mail: VTWaleseast@vtw.gsi.gov.uk

Powys CC
Blaenau Gwent CBC
Caerphilly CBC
Monmouthshire CC
Newport City Council
Torfaen CBC

North Wales Region

Government Buildings, Block A(L1)
Sarn Mynach,
LLANDUDNO JUNCTION
LL31 9RZ

Clerk of the Region: Mrs C Dawson Tech IRRV

Tel: 03000 625350 Fax: 03000 625368
E-mail: VTWalesnorth@vtw.gsi.gov.uk

Wrexham CBC
Flintshire CC
Denbighshire CC
Gwynedd CC
Isle of Anglesey CC
Conwy CBC

South Wales Region

22 Gold Tops
NEWPORT
NP20 4PG

Clerk of the Region: Mrs W B Beynon IRRV(Hons)

Tel: 01633 255003 Fax: 01633 255004

Cardiff CC
Rhondda Cynon
Taff CBC
Vale of Glamorgan CC
Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Bridgend CBC

E-mail: VTWalesouth@vtw.gsi.gov.uk

West Wales Region

Llys y Ddraig
Penllergaer Business Park
SWANSEA
SA4 9NX

Clerk of the Region: Mrs A H Smith BSc. PhD.FGS.

Tel: 0300 790 4530 Fax: 0300 790 4522

E-mail: VTWaleswest@vtw.gsi.gov.uk

Neath-Port Talbot CBC
City & County of Swansea
Carmarthenshire CC (Part 3)
Carmarthenshire CC (Part 1&2)
Ceredigion CC
Pembrokeshire CC