Gwynedd Council Language Complaints Procedure

The Council has a specific responsibility to act and report on complaints relating to the Council's Language Policy or regarding our duty to comply with the Welsh Language Standards.

1. What is considered to be a language complaint?

The Language Policy and Standards impose specific requirements regarding how the Council uses the Welsh language when providing services to the county's residents.

The Standards have been divided into 5 types:

Service Delivery, Operational, Policy Making, Record Keeping, Promotion

The Council's Language Policy provides details on how the Council intends to comply with the Standards' requirements on a day-to-day basis and how it intends to give priority to the Welsh language in its internal administration.

Therefore, language complaints are defined as any complaint that relates to the lack of Welsh provision or cases where the Welsh language has been treated less favourably (inferior) than English. It could also be a complaint about a situation where someone feels that the Council has treated the English language less favourably than Welsh.

2. Receiving complaints

The public can submit language complaints to the Council in many ways:

- By contacting the Service/Department in question directly . Use the Council's central telephone number - 01766 771000 - if you do not have the details of a specific individual.
- By contacting the Language and Scrutiny Unit directly via e-mail iaith@gwynedd.llyw.cymru.
- By using the Corporate Complaints process, either by filling in the form on the website - Formal complaint / Praise (llyw.cymru) - or via e-mail cwynion@gwynedd.llyw.cymru - or on the phone by asking for the Service Improvement Officer on 01286 679103.

You can submit a complaint in writing or orally, and complaints that are received in Welsh or English will not be treated any differently.

Complaints against the Welsh Language Standards:

We encourage the public to contact the Council in the first place if they have any doubt that the Council is not acting in a way that is not in accordance with the principles of the Standards and Welsh Language Measure 2011, but it is also possible to send complaints about the Language Standards directly to the Welsh Language Commissioner. Details about the complaints arrangements can be seen on their website: The Welsh Language Commissioner.

3. Responsibility for monitoring and dealing with language complaints

The Language and Scrutiny Unit has a specific responsibility to monitor language complaints, and it will report on the number of complaints received each year to the Language Committee, as well as in its annual report on the implementation of the Welsh Language Standards, which is published on the Council's website and monitored by the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The Council will deal with language complaints in the same way as it deals with any complaint about a service, and it will follow the corporate procedure.

The Corporate Complaints Policy is available here Gwynedd Council Concerns and Complaints Policy and the corporate procedure for dealing with complaints can be seen on the corporate website Formal complaint / Praise (llyw.cymru). Any variations made to these arrangements in relation to language complaints will be noted below.

We will deal with any complaints under the different types of Standards in the same way, and complaints received in Welsh or English will not be treated differently in terms of the response.

4. Who will respond to your complaint?

The Language and Scrutiny Unit will deal with and respond formally to any complaints relating to the Standards, and to any complaints received from the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office. They will work with relevant officers and departments to coordinate the responses, and give guidance on solutions and preventative actions.

Departments can deal with complaints against the Language Policy directly, and report back to the Language and Scrutiny Unit so that they keep a record of the complaint.

5. The procedure - how will we deal with the complaints after they are received?

If you are submitting a formal complaint/concern, this is what will happen:

We will formally acknowledge the receipt of your concern within 5 working days and we will inform you of how we intend to deal with it.

We will deal with your concern openly and honestly.

If your concern is straightforward, we can ask someone from the relevant service to look into it and respond to you. If it a more complex matter, or includes more than one service, the Language Advisers will coordinate the response and keep in contact with you. We may also include the Service Improvement Officer in the process in order to ensure that we are dealing with the complaints appropriately and transparently.

We will seek to resolve concerns as quickly as possible and we would expect to deal with the vast majority within **20 working days**. If your complaint is more complex, we will inform you within this period why we believe that it could take more time to investigate

We will outline our understanding of the situation and your concerns, and will ask you to confirm that we are correct, or ask you to provide us with more information if we are unclear from the original complaint what is the cause.

We will provide you with regular updates on any developments.

We will ensure that any steps we have taken, or intend to take, are to your satisfaction and seek to prevent the same situation from reoccurring.

Informal Resolution

If possible, we believe that it is better to deal with things immediately. If you have a concern, discuss the concern with the person you are dealing with. They will attempt to provide a resolution for you there and then. If there are any lessons to be learnt from dealing with your concern, the staff member will be able to draw our attention to these lessons. If the staff member cannot help, they will explain why and you can then request a formal investigation.

6. **What if you are dissatisfied with our response?**

If you are unhappy with the way we have dealt with your concern, or if you feel that we have not taken appropriate steps to resolve the situation, you are entitled to contact the Welsh Language Commissioner.

7. **Training - How will we ensure that our staff have the appropriate information to deal with complaints?**

Good practice guidelines on how to deal with complaints are shared with the officers internally. The Service Improvement Officer will arrange regular training for relevant officers in each department, in order to ensure that everyone is aware of how to deal with complaints effectively. This includes Customer Care training and sessions with representatives from the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman. Officers will be given the opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other about the best way of dealing with complaints and treating the complainants with respect and courtesy.

8. **The Role of Elected Members and the Language Committee**

Any elected member also has the right to submit a complaint about the lack of Welsh provision, or failure to treat the Welsh and English languages equally in services. They should submit any complaints in the same way as the public, or by making direct contact with the Language Advisers.

The Language Committee has a role to monitor and supervise the implementation of the Standards, and as a part of that duty, the Language Advisers will submit annual complaints reports to them. We will not discuss and report on complaints whilst the investigations are ongoing. Complaints will only be recorded and reported to the Language Committee once they have been resolved. Members of the Committee may ask for further steps if they see a pattern emerging in the type of complaints received or if there is a reason to question whether the problem that led to the complaint has been fully resolved, and in a way that ensures that the same complaint does not arise again.