

Meeting	OLC Board Meeting	Agenda Item No.	9
		Paper No.	140.7
Date of meeting	24 July 2025	Time required	10 Minutes

Title	Welsh Language Scheme
Sponsor	Mike Harris, Interim Head of Communications, Engagement and Impact
Status	OFFICIAL
To be communicated to:	Members and those in attendance

Executive summary
<p>The Welsh Language Act 1993 established a duty for public organisations providing services in Wales to produce a Welsh Language Scheme (the Scheme). The Scheme produced by the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) was prepared under the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and in consultation with the Welsh Language Board (now the Welsh Language Commissioner) prior to publication.</p> <p>It describes how, when providing services to the public in Wales we will give effect to the principle that we treat the English and Welsh languages equally, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable.</p> <p>The Scheme was prepared in accordance with Sections 12 to 14 of the Act and in accordance with guidelines issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner under Section 9 of the Act. The Scheme came into effect on 11 May 2011.</p> <p>LeO has made significant changes to its operations since 2011. Recognising this, LeO's EDI Manager has updated our Scheme in consultation with the Welsh Language Commissioner. The final draft was completed and approved by the Chief Ombudsman in June 2025, and will be presented to the Commissioner for approval on 17 July.</p> <p>The attached paper outlines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Key changes to LeO's Welsh Language Scheme; and 2) A summary of LeO's annual report to the Welsh Language Commissioner, setting out how we met our Scheme obligations when delivering services in Wales between April 2024 and March 2025.

Recommendation / action required	
Board is asked to:	
1) Comment on the new Scheme (Annex 1) 2) Approve LeO's annual report to the Welsh Language Commissioner (Annex 2)	
Equality Diversity and Inclusion	
EDI implications	Yes
The Scheme and our updates against it give effect to LeO's obligation to treat the English and Welsh languages equally.	
Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol)	
Paragraph reference	Fol exemption and summary
Attachments: Draft documents attached	Fol Exempt S.22 – information intended for future publication

Welsh Language Scheme

1. Introduction

The Welsh Language Act 1993 established a duty for public organisations providing services in Wales to produce a Welsh Language Scheme (the Scheme). The Scheme produced by the Legal Ombudsman (LeO) was prepared under the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and in consultation with the Welsh Language Board (now the Welsh Language Commissioner) before publication.

It describes how, when providing services to the public in Wales, we will give effect to the principle that we treat the English and Welsh languages equally, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable.

The Scheme was prepared in accordance with Sections 12 to 14 of the Act and in accordance with guidelines issued by the Welsh Language Commissioner under Section 9 of the Act. The Scheme came into effect on 11 May 2011, so this is the fourteenth year of its operation.

2. Updating LeO's Welsh Language Scheme

Changes to the Scheme

Since 2011, when the Scheme was initially launched, LeO has made significant changes to its operations which meant that some aspects of its Scheme were no longer relevant or practicable.

Recognising this, LeO's EDI Manager engaged with the Welsh Language Commissioner in 2024 for advice on updating the Scheme, and made a number of changes.

These include:

- **Strengthened translation services:** previously, the Scheme referred to the use of Welsh-speaking members of staff to provide LeO's service in Welsh. Now, LeO uses interpretation and translation services from an external supplier, BigWord, which offers a high quality and reliable service for reasonable cost. The wording of the Scheme has been updated to reflect this operational development.
- **A refreshed action plan:** the action plan relating to how we manage the Scheme has been updated. Most of the updated actions relate to how we promote the Scheme internally to raise awareness, in addition to how we would manage communications at events in Wales.

Finalising LeO's new Scheme

The final draft of the LeO's revised Scheme was reviewed and approved by the Chief Ombudsman in June 2025.

The Commissioner's office has informally expressed its satisfaction with the new Scheme and the positive improvement in the standard of language accessibility that it facilitates.

The Scheme has now been formally submitted to the Commissioner's office, with the expectation that it will be presented to the Commissioner for review on 17 July. We expect to receive the outcome of the review within approximately two weeks of that review date.

3. Annual report on LeO's activity in 2024/25

Background

Each year, LeO provides a report to the Welsh Language Commissioner on how it has fulfilled its obligations under the Scheme. Our latest report is presented in Annex 2, and covers activity in the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Last year's report anticipated that for the 2024/25 report we would be able to report against the requirements of the new Scheme. However, as we are still awaiting approval, this year's report has been prepared with reference to our old Scheme.

Subject to the OLC Board's approval, the annual report is due to be submitted to the Commissioner by 31st July 2025.

Key points from our annual report

In our report for 2024/25, we note:

- An increase in the number of LeO staff working in Wales (our Cardiff Hub), from 13 to 16, demonstrating LeO's growing presence in Wales.
- Awareness of LeO among the public in Wales is fairly stable, based on research we commission annually into public awareness of our service. The percentage of people aware of LeO when prompted decreased marginally (by one percentage point, from 69% to 68%), and unprompted awareness increased marginally (again, by one percentage point from 2% to 3%). There aren't significant differences in the levels of public awareness in Wales compared to England.
- Small numbers of the public are using LeO's services in Welsh. This includes 57 unique visits to the online complaint checker in Welsh, and 14 unique visits to the complaint form in Welsh. We translated correspondence into Welsh for one complainant last year.

- The low level of demand for services in Welsh seems consistent across the last three years of our Scheme's operation. We would like to understand better whether this represents a relatively 'normal' level of demand for an ombudsman scheme, or whether we can further improve our accessibility. We will be participating in engagement campaign being run by the Welsh Language Commissioner's office in September 2025 to boost awareness of public services that are accessible in Welsh. The campaign may generate some interesting insight for us to reflect on.
- As usual, we translated the OLC's 2023/24 Annual Report and Accounts into Welsh and this was made publicly available on the LeO website.
- We did not host any public events in Wales this year.

Other Welsh language activities

We have updated the content of the auto-response email sent to all complainants who contact us – delivering a commitment in our updated action plan. This email now includes a Welsh translation of the message, which was previously only scripted in English.

We have also updated our Equality Impact Assessment forms to include a requirement to consider any potential impacts on Welsh speakers in our projects.