



**Welsh Language Scheme
for Water Customers**

Consultation Draft

Prepared under the Welsh Language Act 1993

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1. Introduction

Under the Welsh Language Act 1993 (the Act), every public body providing services to the public in Wales has to prepare a scheme setting out how it will provide those services in Welsh.

Following an Order by the National Assembly for Wales, which specified that companies providing water and sewerage services for customers in Wales are public bodies for the purposes of the Act, SSE Water Ltd has prepared a Welsh Language Scheme. This document sets out our Scheme.

It describes how we will give effect, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable, to the principle established by the Welsh Language Act that, in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the Welsh and English languages should be treated on a basis of equality.

The Scheme covers the services that we provide to the public in Wales.

In this scheme, the term public means individuals, legal persons and corporate bodies. It includes the public as a whole, or a section of the public, as well as individual members of the public. The term includes voluntary organisations and charities. Directors and others representing limited companies are also within the meaning of the term 'public'. It does not, however, include persons who are acting in a capacity which is representative of the Crown, Government or the State. Consequently, persons who fulfil official functions of a public nature, even though they are legal persons, do not come within the meaning of the word public when they are fulfilling those official functions.

Further information about the scope and purpose of Welsh language schemes can be found in the Welsh Language Board's guidelines, available at www.byig-wlb.org.uk

This scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board under Section 14 of the Act. It came into effect on [date].

2. Background to Water Supply by SWALEC

SWALEC is a trading name of SSE Water Ltd (SSE Water) which is part of the group company Scottish and Southern Energy plc (SSE), one of the UK's largest energy companies. SSE owns regulated infrastructure assets and also provides services using that network infrastructure. For example, it provides a supply of electricity, gas and other utility services to over 9 million customers across the UK, with over 1.2 million of these customers located in Wales.

SSE Water has been appointed by Ofwat as a water and sewerage undertaker to provide water and waste water services to customers within specific appointed areas in England and Wales. These areas are known as inset areas and SSE Water expects that the number of inset areas that it is appointed to serve will grow over time.

This Scheme applies to SSE Water's inset areas located in Wales.

The registered office address of SSE Water Ltd is 55 Vastern Road, Reading RG1 8BU. Its operational base is in Thatcham and it has customer service staff located in Portsmouth. For its services provided in Wales, SSE Water uses the SSE brand name SWALEC and its website pages are available at the following website address: www.swalec.co.uk. Other contact details appear in section 8.

This Welsh Language Scheme relates exclusively to SSE Water. However, SSE Water will draw on the infrastructure and skills of the wider SSE group where possible in order to deliver its commitments under this Scheme. Although SSE Water does not have offices in Wales, SSE does employ staff in Wales and operates a call centre there.

SSE Water is firmly committed to providing services in Wales. We aim to deliver a high standard of service to all our customers and welcome contact from them in their preferred language. In particular, this Scheme sets out how we will support use of the Welsh language in SSE Water's dealings with the public in Wales.

3. Service Planning and Delivery

Policies, legislation and initiatives

Our policies, initiatives and services will be consistent with this Scheme. They will support the use of Welsh and will wherever possible help the public in Wales to use Welsh as part of their day to day lives.

Delivering services

We will ensure that as many as possible of our services are available in Welsh and will arrange for customers to have access to a service in Welsh when required.

We will make customers in Wales aware of our services that are available in Welsh.

Whilst it may not be practicable to provide for all services to be fully available in Welsh, especially some specialist and technical services, the intention is to provide as comprehensive a service as possible and every effort will be made to overcome any difficulties that arise. Our staff who do not speak Welsh will be provided with information on the services that are available in Welsh and how they can be accessed.

Services undertaken on our behalf by third parties

Any agreements or arrangements which we make with third parties will be consistent with the relevant parts of this Scheme, when those agreements or arrangements relate to the provision of services to the public in Wales. This will ensure that third parties provide those services in accordance with this Scheme.

Standards of service

We welcome communication with customers in the language of their choice and aim to provide an effective service to all of our customers. The principle of ensuring we provide a high level of service, irrespective of the language used by the customer, forms part of

our overriding principle that it makes good business sense to deliver excellent customer service and to seek to satisfy the needs of all our customers.

Our aim is to provide a high standard of service and customer care in every aspect of the company's work in accordance with the commitments contained in this Scheme. Our Guaranteed Standards Scheme applies to the provision of services irrespective of the language used. As such, services provided in Welsh and English will be of equal quality and will be provided within the same overall timescales.

4. Dealing with the Welsh Speaking Public

Written correspondence

Our normal practice will be as follows:

Standard or circular correspondence will be published bilingually.

Customers are welcome to write to us or e-mail in either Welsh or English and we will respond (if a response is required) in the same language. Our target time for replying will be the same irrespective of the language used.

When we initiate correspondence with an individual, group or organisation, we will do so in Welsh when we know that they would prefer to correspond in Welsh. Similarly, any correspondence sent to a customer following a conversation held in Welsh, whether face to face or over a telephone, will be written in the Welsh language.

We can also arrange to provide bills in Welsh or English depending on the customers' preference.

Telephone communication

Customers are welcome to communicate with us by telephone in Welsh. For our most widely used customer contact functions, dedicated numbers will be provided for customers wishing to speak Welsh and these calls will be answered by Welsh speakers.

If all of our Welsh speakers are unavailable, the calls will be directed to English-speaking colleagues. The caller will be given the choice, as appropriate, of having a Welsh speaker return their call as soon as possible, continuing the call in English or submitting the query in a written form in Welsh.

The Welsh language numbers will be publicised alongside the English language numbers on our bills and in our publications.

Public meetings

If we arrange public meetings in Wales, we will determine the necessity for translation services based on the location and likely audience and whether we have been informed of, or have prior knowledge of, the specific language needs of customers attending the meeting.

Notices for such public meetings, where appropriate, will be published in a bilingual format and will either note that translation facilities will be available or invite the public to let us know in advance in which language they wish to speak.

Other meetings and dealings with the public in Wales

When we arrange or attend face-to-face meetings with the public, we will establish their language preference at the earliest opportunity and ensure that a suitably qualified Welsh speaking member of staff deals with those whose preferred language is Welsh.

If no suitably qualified Welsh speaker is available and there is no emergency or technical matter which needs immediate attention during the visit, we will offer the choice of continuing the meeting in English, or dealing with the subject by corresponding in Welsh.

The above will also apply to meetings held using videoconferencing and similar equipment.

Because of their location it would not be practicable for staff in our offices outside Wales to conduct face-to-face meetings with the public through the medium of Welsh.

We will ensure that announcements made over public address systems in Wales are made in Welsh and English.

5. Our Public Face

Corporate identity and branding

SSE Water's corporate name will not be provided in a bilingual format.

However, the brand it uses in Wales is SWALEC, which is a long-standing and familiar brand in Wales.

Our contact details and other standard information will appear in Welsh and English on all material which displays our corporate identity. This includes our stationery and material such as acknowledgement cards, compliment slips and invitations.

Publicity campaigns, exhibitions and advertising

All of the publicity, public information, exhibition and advertising material we use in Wales (in order to target the general public) will be produced bilingually, or as separate Welsh and English versions. If the Welsh and English versions have to be published separately, both versions will be equal with regard to size, prominence and quality - and both versions will be available simultaneously and will be equally accessible.

Exceptions to the above will be material aimed at a limited and specialised audience. We will consider the need to produce this bilingually in each case, whilst bearing in mind the nature of the audience and the subject being dealt with.

Any advertisements placed in English language newspapers (or similar material) distributed mainly or wholly in Wales will be bilingual, or will appear as separate Welsh

and English versions (with both versions appearing simultaneously, and being equal with regard to size, prominence and quality).

In Welsh language publications, advertisements will be in Welsh only.

Website

SSE Water's website pages are embedded within the website facilities of the SSE group and at present are available in English only. We will prepare a programme, to be agreed with the Welsh Language Board, setting out how we will increase the Welsh language content of our website, over time.

Whenever we post English language publications on our website, the Welsh versions, where available under the terms of the programme mentioned above, will be posted at the same time.

When designing new SSE Water websites, we will take into account the Welsh Language Board's Bilingual Software Guidelines and Standards and any other guidance issued by the Board with regard to developing websites.

Publications

We will prepare a programme, to be agreed with the Welsh Language Board, setting out how we will, over time, increase the availability of our publications (including forms and associated explanatory material) in bilingual format or as separate Welsh and English versions. New forms or revised forms will be produced bilingually.

If the Welsh and English versions have to be published separately (for instance, where a single document would be too lengthy or bulky), both versions will be of equal size and quality – and we will ensure that both versions are available at the same time and are equally accessible. Each version will note clearly that the material is available in the other language.

If not available free of charge, the price of a bilingual or Welsh version of a document that we produce will not be greater than that of the English version.

The above will also apply to material made available electronically on our website, on CD Rom or otherwise.

Signs in Wales

We will ensure that all of our permanent and temporary signs, which give information to the public, will be bilingual with the Welsh and English text being treated equally with regard to size, legibility and prominence.

We will adhere to this practice whenever signs are being installed for the first time, or whenever we are replacing signs.

If separate Welsh and English signs are provided, they will be equal in terms of format, size, quality and prominence.

Official notices, public notices and staff recruitment notices

Official notices, public notices and staff recruitment notices placed in English language newspapers (or similar media) distributed mainly or wholly in Wales, will be bilingual, or appear as separate Welsh and English versions. Notices will be in Welsh in Welsh language publications.

The Welsh and English versions will be equal in terms of format, size, quality and prominence – whether produced as a single bilingual publication version, or as separate Welsh and English notices.

Notices placed in English language journals (and other publications) with a UK-wide distribution may be in English.

Press releases and contact with the media

When we post press releases on our website, which affect our water customers in Wales, our normal practice will be to issue them in Welsh and English.

6. Implementing the Scheme

Staffing

SSE Water has no offices in Wales. The provision of services in Wales and the implementation of this Scheme will draw on the Welsh language skills of other employees within the SSE group.

Where applicable, we will seek information about the Welsh language skills of job applicants and existing staff. We will keep the need for Welsh language skills within SSE Water under review.

Recruitment

For any posts having extensive and regular contact with the public in Wales we will consider whether fluency in Welsh should be a desirable or essential skill – and this will be stated in job competencies and advertisements.

Language training

We will encourage staff members who wish to learn Welsh, if a business need for the language has been identified.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

SSE Water's ICT facilities are embedded within the ICT resources of the SSE group.

The need to provide information and services in Welsh, and operate in accordance with this Scheme, will be catered for as we develop, design and purchase ICT products and services.

As we develop or procure ICT systems for SSE Water we will take into account the Board's Bilingual software Guidelines and Standards

Partnership working

When we are the strategic and financial leader within a formal partnership, we will ensure that any public service aspects comply with this scheme.

When we join a formal partnership which another organisation is leading, our input to the partnership will comply with this scheme and we will encourage the other partners to comply.

When we are a partner in a consortium, we will encourage the consortium to comply with this scheme. When acting in the name of the consortium, we will operate in accordance with this scheme.

The above refers only to formal partnerships dealing with services available to the public in Wales.

Internal arrangements

The measures in this Scheme carry the full authority, support and approval of our organisation. Managers will have the responsibility of implementing those aspects of the Scheme relevant to their work. SSE Water's Commercial Director is responsible for coordinating the work required to deliver, monitor and review this Scheme.

We will prepare a timetable, to be agreed with the Board, setting out how we will ensure that we will operate in accordance with this Scheme. The timetable will come into effect on the date on which the Scheme comes into effect, or as soon as possible thereafter. The timetable will include targets, deadlines and a report on progress against each target.

The Scheme will be publicised to our staff, and to our customers in Wales. It will be available on SSE Water's SWALEC website pages.

We will produce guidance for our staff to ensure that they know how to implement the measures contained in this Scheme. Existing guidance used by our staff, will be amended to reflect the measures contained in this Scheme.

We will arrange briefing and training, sessions for our staff to increase awareness of this Scheme - and to explain how it will affect their day to day work.

Where we need to use qualified translators or interpreters to help with the delivery of this Scheme, we will ensure that we use only qualified translators or interpreters. We will expect those translators to be members of the Association of Welsh Translators or a similar organisation.

Any form of contact with the public in Wales, which is not specifically dealt with by this Scheme, will be undertaken in a manner which is consistent with the general principles enshrined in this Scheme.

Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations

When we release information under the Freedom of Information Act or the Environmental Information Regulations, we will translate them into the applicant's preferred language provided that the number of words to be translated is less than 500.

Monitoring

We will monitor our progress in delivering this Scheme against the targets set out in its accompanying timetable. We will report to our senior management on that progress.

Our existing monitoring and reporting procedures will include reference to progress in delivering this Scheme, as appropriate.

We will report to the Welsh Language Board on our progress in delivering this Scheme, when requested by them.

Our target is to ensure that we act in accordance with this Scheme within four years of its coming into effect. We will use a self-assessment procedure, to be agreed with Board, in order to monitor progress against this target.

7. Reviewing and amending the Scheme

We will review this Scheme within four years of it coming into effect.

Also, from time to time, we may need to propose amendments to this Scheme because of changes to our functions, or to the circumstances in which we undertake those functions, or for any other reason.

No changes will be made to this Scheme without the Welsh Language Board's approval.

8. Complaints and suggestions for improvement

Complaints related to this Scheme, or suggestions for improvement, should be directed to the following address:

Commercial Director
SSE Water Ltd
55 Vastern Road
Reading RG1 8BU

Or by e-mail to: [**water@scottish-southern.co.uk**](mailto:water@scottish-southern.co.uk)

We will cooperate with the Board in order to resolve complaints - and during any investigations held under Section 17 of the Welsh Language Act.

Other contacts should be directed to:

Customer Service,
Swalec
P.O. BOX 360
Portsmouth,
PO6 2YJ

Tel: General Enquiries 0800 980 1391

Appendix – Main targets for Scheme delivery

Target	Date of completion
Policies and initiatives	
Ensure staff engaged in framing and implementing new plans, initiatives and policies are aware of our commitments under our Welsh Language Scheme	3 months after scheme approval
Delivering services	
Ensure copy of our Welsh Language Scheme is published on our website	Once scheme is approved
Provide information for staff and customers on services available in Welsh	3 months after scheme approval
Correspondence	
Set up arrangements to record language preference for bills and correspondence	3 months after scheme approval
Telephone Communication	
Set up arrangements for telephone communications	4 months after scheme approval
Review voice messaging elements of telephone communication arrangements	2 years after scheme approval
Public Meetings	
Ensure staff engaged in arranging public meetings are aware of our commitments under our Welsh language scheme	3 months after scheme approval
Website	
Prepare a programme, to be agreed with the Welsh Language Board, setting out how we will increase the Welsh language content of our website, over time	4 months after scheme approval
Publications	
Prepare a programme, to be agreed with the Welsh Language Board, setting out how we will, over time, increase the availability of our publications (including forms and associated explanatory material) in bilingual format or as separate Welsh and English versions	4 months after scheme approval
Official notices, public notices and staff recruitment notices	
Ensure staff responsible for preparing notices are aware of our commitments under our Welsh language scheme	3 months after scheme approval
Language Training	
Arrange language training for any staff members who have been identified as wishing to learn Welsh	1 month after scheme approval
Internal arrangements	
Carry out briefing and training for relevant staff to increase awareness of the Scheme	1 month after scheme approval
Monitoring	
Agree self-assessment procedure with the Board	3 months after scheme approval
Review progress on implementing the Scheme	6 months after scheme approval
Reviewing and amending the Scheme	

Review the scheme within four years of it coming into effect	2014
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