# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Update on 'More than just words 2022-27** |
| **DATE**  | **21 December 2023** |
| **BY** | **Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

Today I have published the [first annual report for the More than just words plan 2022-27](https://www.gov.wales/more-just-words-annual-report-2022-2023). The plan builds on the previous More than just words frameworks with the aim of further developing and strengthening Welsh language provision in our health and care services.

When individuals access and receive health and social care, it is usually when they are at their most vulnerable. Being able to communicate in their own language at this time is essential.

Our More than just words plan demonstrates our commitment to strengthening the use of the Welsh language in health and social care services. The Welsh language belongs to us all and our aim is for this to be embedded across Wales so that individuals receive care that meets their language needs without having to ask for it, leading to safer and better outcomes. That is our Active Offer principle, a key feature of the plan.

Our aims are ambitious, and strengthening Welsh language services will take time which is why our plan has a five-year timeline. However, as I present the annual report today, I am proud of the progress that has been made and of the solid foundations that have been laid for the future.

As the report shows, there are many excellent examples of initiatives underway to strengthen Welsh language services in the health and care sectors.

To help achieve our ambitions I established a More than just words Advisory Board in August which helps monitor and scrutinise progress against the plan. The knowledge, skills and experiences of the members will help to drive forward delivery of the plan, and I thank them for their work so far.

Culture and leadership are key drivers for the successful implementation of More than just words. Progress in this area has included the setting of personal objectives for NHS leaders in Wales; senior managers participating in the Leading in a Bilingual Country leadership programme; and ensuring that More than just words has been a regular agenda item at the NHS Wales Leadership Board meetings.

Developing the Welsh language skills of the workforce is a crucial element of More than just words. We have introduced a mandatory Welsh language awareness course for all NHS Wales staff. Within the first few months of implementing the training 65% of NHS Wales staff had undertaken this training.Social Care Wales is developing a Welsh language awareness module for the social care sector.

Many staff working in the health and social care sectors are able to speak some Welsh but have not practiced regularly and so lack confidence to use the language. The National Centre for Learning Welsh has developed a Health and Care Learning Welsh Programme to support these colleagues to refresh their Welsh language skills.

I am also proud of those in the health and social care sectors who understand the importance of speaking Welsh with patients and have learnt the language from scratch. The report specifically mentions Alison Cairns, the winner of the National Welsh Learner of the Year Award this year, who uses Welsh in her work in social care, and one of the runners up Manuela Niemetschek, who works for the NHS, and who was inspired to learn Welsh as she recognised the importance of using Welsh in mental health services.

The Centre for Learning Welsh is also developing a Welsh language “courtesy” course to increase awareness of the positive impact that learning and using Welsh can have on those receiving care. This new course will help ensure that by 2027 all 200,000 staff working in health and social care should have courtesy level Welsh.

To celebrate and share these initiatives with others work started in 2022-23 on developing a portal to collate and communicate examples of innovative good practice.

Technology has an important role to play in increasing interaction between patients, service users and professionals. This is why we have ensured that the recently introduced NHS app, which includes a wide range of useful features to help the public interact with the NHS, is available fully bilingually.

We know that we need to improve the data we collect and hold around the use of the Welsh language and that more work is required to ensure that our systems are able to share, record and track information including language preference. Work is underway that will help us to progress this.

Strengthening Welsh language services in health and social care is a journey and a lot has been achieved in the first year despite the unprecedented challenges facing our services. I know that our health and social care professionals and other stakeholders across Wales will continue to rise to the challenge to implement the actions in the More than just words plan. This will enable us to provide Welsh speaking individuals with the patient centred care they deserve.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.