



Cymdeithas yr Iaith Response to Cyngor Gwynedd's Consultation on the Language Strategy 2023-33

Cymdeithas yr Iaith is an association of people who take non-violent action for the Welsh language and Welsh communities as part of the international revolution for rights and freedoms.

Whilst acknowledging that the council's influence is largely limited to its own provision we believe that the Council has room to set a goal that Welsh will be the main language in the county and that working with and putting pressure on other organisations with which it is already involved, such as Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board, Bangor University, Fire and Rescue Service, North Wales Police and bodies to which it allocates grants, to set the same goal by adopting the principle of making Welsh the predominant language in their institutions.

Cyngor Gwynedd is well-placed to share good practice with other bodies, and require services provided on behalf of or in collaboration with the Council to be provided in Welsh.

Despite reference to recruitment difficulties, as a body whose administrative language is Welsh, it goes without saying that staff need to be able to work through the medium of Welsh.

Rather than saying that "the Welsh language will be fairly addressed in the development of any recruitment/workforce development plans" therefore, it is necessary to ensure that staff appointed can use Welsh as part of their work or are expected to reach that level within a certain period of time

Area of action 4, which relates to communities is arguably the most important area of the strategy as a number of other elements mean that people are unable to stay in their community to live and work.

The strategy refers to "*developing an understanding of what "community" means in modern Gwynedd.*"

It would be difficult to define a community in Gwynedd as each community and its needs will be different and measure community use of Welsh so it is important to create favourable conditions for communities and enable people to live in them.

Housing problems are mentioned, but there's nothing in the strategy that would address that. The county council has new powers to charge 300% tax on second homes, but the council has not fully exercised that power.

We have not yet been told whether it will impose an article 4 condition in any wards within the county, to require a planning application to change a home into a second house.

Of course, the problem is wider than second homes and holiday accommodation, the strategy itself points to the housing market as one of the significant challenges to the viability of a community:

"pressure on the housing market, which means people have to move to other communities in order to live and work."

The loss of people from our communities because house prices are out of reach for people on local pay is a significant problem.

The council could call on the Government to use the opportunity through the promised Property Act to regulate the housing market and make it easier for community-led enterprises to be able to offer a range of suitable local solutions to their community.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith's proposals for an Act [can be found here](#).

The strategy also notes that a lack of diverse employment opportunities is another factor affecting people's ability to stay in their community.

Again, we believe that there is room for the council itself to address this. The language strategy refers to the Arfor scheme and the resulting grants. The grants for businesses should be prioritised for community enterprises that will create work locally.

Furthermore, there is room for the council to impose conditions on grants it allocates that Welsh becomes the dominant language and that they create employment locally.

In addition to these two things, the lack of investment in communities is a significant challenge and makes it difficult for people to live in rural communities.

It would be difficult for someone dependent on public transport to travel to work in some areas. Places also need to be appealing to live in, if there are no social opportunities or means to travel in the evenings people will be less likely to want to live in rural communities.

The county's young population is a cause for concern in education. The cabinet member with responsibility for education recently indicated that a strategy for modernising the school system will take place over the Summer, and that it will take the fall in pupil numbers in Gwynedd into account.

Schools are seen as educational resources for children only but can be the focus of activities and community life. There is therefore an opportunity through the new strategy to strengthen the experience of Gwynedd's communities as well as the educational experience of young people. There are various models that are possible to sustain rural schools while also making them a community resource.

Another concern in education is that the language strategy refers to *"Providing opportunities for children and young people who are not yet Welsh-speakers, to learn and become confident Welsh-speakers."*

"Giving everyone the opportunity" to have a Welsh language education is not enough. Although the vast majority of schools in the county are Welsh school it is time to move Ysgol Friars in Bangor and Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn to become Welsh schools. There's no obvious reason why both are still English schools.

It's also unclear how the impact of the strategy will be measured. The strategy has one target:

"We want to set an overall target to see an increase in the regular use of Welsh. We also want to see 100% of Gwynedd's children have the opportunity to speak Welsh and use the language regularly."

It's a vague target that's too general. If the intention is to create a plan in order to implement the strategy, we need concrete targets to aim for.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith

May 2023