

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>LANGUAGE COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>29 June 2026</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Results of a pilot study on measuring the use of Welsh in public places providing services on behalf of Cyngor Gwynedd</b>
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<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>To present the results of the survey</b>

## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1. The aim of the Welsh Government's *Cymraeg 2050* strategy (2017a), is to reach a target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and increase the use of Welsh. Cyngor Gwynedd, as all other local authorities, has a language strategy which supports the realisation of the target. In order to monitor and measure their success, it is important to measure the use of Welsh in the community regularly by collecting evidence.
- 1.2. Currently, limited public quantitative data regarding the Welsh language is available, except for the census figures of the Office for National Statistics collected every 10 years. Information is also collected about a cohort of the population through the annual Survey of the population, but the sample is small on a county level and there is no necessity for people to complete it. It must be borne in mind that self-reported data is received from these sources and so they are not independent. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a void in terms of collecting regular independent data on the use of Welsh, therefore it was decided to pilot a survey in Cyngor Gwynedd.
- 1.3 The aim of this study was to be innovative with the methodology of measuring and observing the use of Welsh in indoor public spaces in order to address an element of the data gap in Gwynedd. There was a focus on observing the use of Welsh by residents when using Cyngor Gwynedd services and services commissioned to Cyngor Gwynedd's arm's-length company, Byw'n Iach, to provide them on behalf of the Council. We hoped to obtain a true picture of the linguistic situation and establish a baseline to continue to measure language use consistently in the future by using independent data instead of data collected through a self-reporting questionnaire only.

1.4 The aim was to adapt the street survey used in the Basque Country and use it to collect various indoor public places data. A decision was made to collect data in three different locations namely Siop Gwynedd receptions, libraries and leisure centres and in three different geographical locations, i.e., Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau. In addition, it was agreed to observe the use of language at Galw Gwynedd contact centre, which provides a front-line service to deal with phone calls from residents across Gwynedd. The survey was carried out with support from Bangor University.

## 2. Data about the situation of the Welsh language in Gwynedd

2.1 Gwynedd is the Welsh language's stronghold, with 64.4% of the population able to speak Welsh according to the figures in the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2021). This is the highest percentage of all counties in Wales. Nevertheless, the Welsh speaker figures vary in terms of age and locations and there are challenges around linguistic planning. The greatest challenge is probably the variation in terms of the number of speakers across the county, with some areas like Caernarfon with 81.5% of Welsh speakers, and others such as Bro Dysynni with 40.1%.

2.2 Since 1981, the percentage of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd has fallen from 76.2% to 64.4%, therefore it is obvious that a linguistic shift is happening and that interventions are needed to reverse it (table 1).

**Table 1 - Percentage of Welsh speakers per area, 1981 - 2021 census**

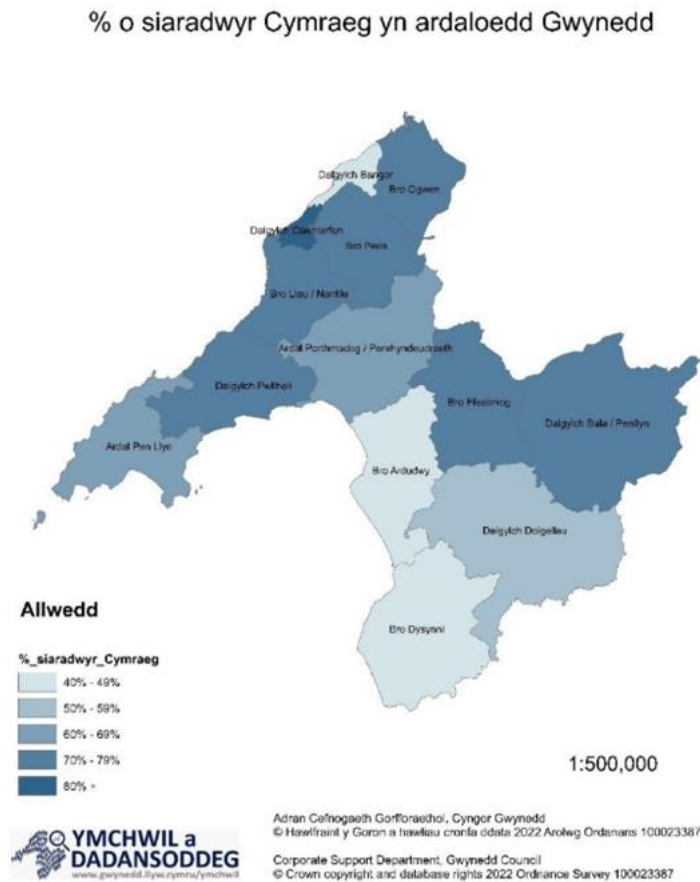
(Office for National Statistics, 2021)

Area	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021
Caernarfon Catchment Area	86.0%	87.9%	86.4%	85.3%	81.5%
Bro Lleu / Nantlle	84.0%	80.0%	78.8%	78.7%	76.3%
Bro Peris	82.9%	79.3%	78.9%	77.4%	74.6%
Bro Ffestiniog	86.6%	82.4%	80.0%	77.2%	74.4%
Pwllheli Catchment Area	85.1%	79.9%	78.5%	77.2%	74.3%

Bala / Penllyn Catchment Area	85.3%	80.6%	77.7%	75.8%	73.1%
Bro Ogwen	76.5%	74.1%	72.4%	72.6%	70.4%
Pen Llŷn Area	79.2%	72.0%	69.6%	67.6%	69.0%
Porthmadog / Penrhyndeudraeth Area	80.0%	74.5%	72.3%	69.0%	66.8%
Dolgellau Catchment Area	74.4%	64.7%	67.1%	62.1%	57.7%
Bro Ardudwy	58.9%	52.5%	50.1%	47.8%	47.3%
Bangor Catchment Area	58.0%	58.9%	51.6%	42.0%	44.1%
Bro Dysynni	52.3%	47.1%	43.4%	38.6%	40.1%
<b>Gwynedd</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>72.1%</b>	<b>69.0%</b>	<b>65.4%</b>	<b>64.4%</b>

- 2.3 The average of Gwynedd Welsh speakers is slightly below the threshold of 67%, which is considered by some as the required percentage to ensure that a minority language is sustainable in a community. Unless there is an adequate critical mass of speakers, language use cannot be increased (Huws 2018). It could therefore be argued that many areas in Gwynedd are at risk of seeing a further decline in Welsh speakers and that research and resources are needed to create and monitor interventions that focus on maintaining and increasing the use of Welsh.
- 2.4 According to the 2021 census (ONS 2021), the highest number of Welsh speakers, 81.5%, is seen in the Caernarfon area, north of the county, and the lowest percentage of Welsh speakers, 40.1%, in Bro Dysynni in the south of the county. In 7 areas of the county, there are over 70% of Welsh speakers. (See figure 1)

**Figure 1 - Map showing the percentage of Welsh speakers in Gwynedd areas**



2.5 The 2021 census (ONS 2021) shows that more children speak Welsh and that being able to speak Welsh reduces with age (table 2). This suggests that Welsh ability is relatively robust in the county, particularly amongst children, but it does not tell us anything about the use of Welsh. It should be borne in mind that the ability to speak does not mean that people use the language regularly. Here, we can see that there is a linguistic dualism which is common in bilingual places worldwide. Language use is affected by many factors, including linguistic competency, social use and the context of use and cultural identity.

### 3. Methodology

3.1 The aim of the methodology was to measure the use of Welsh and English, investigating four main factors: gender, age, location and geography.

3.2 Data was collected in three geographical locations in Gwynedd (Caernarfon, Pwllheli and Dolgellau) across three types of services: Siop Gwynedd receptions, libraries and leisure centres, as well as Gwynedd contact centre.

Primary data was recorded systematically, including the language of the interaction, age, gender and use of language with children.

- 3.3 Four standard age categories (2-15, 16-24, 25-64, 65+) were used, and input was received from relevant officers to ensure that the observation times and data collection methods were appropriate and consistent. The observations were held over a period of months to ensure a variety of service users.
- 3.4 The observation method varied according to the location:
- Structured visits were held to leisure centres over full days at specific times.
  - Flexible visits were arranged to libraries to reflect the range of services and users.
  - Data was recorded in Siop Gwynedd and the contact centre by frontline staff over a specified period.
- 3.5 Direct observation methods and systematic recording were used, with the intention of securing reliable and comparative data across different service contexts.

#### 4. Results

##### General picture

- 4.1 A total of 3,205 interactions were observed. Of these, the Welsh language was used in 2,302 (71.8%) instances, and English in 903 (28.2%). This shows that the Welsh language continues to be the main language of service in many public contexts.
- 4.2 In terms of gender, only small differences were seen: 76.2% females and 75.2% males chose to use Welsh. This does not suggest a meaningful relationship between gender and language choice.

##### Age

- 4.3 There is a clear pattern whereby less use of Welsh is made in the older age groups. The Welsh language was used by:
- 90.3% of the 2–15-year-old group
  - 69.8% of the 16–24-year-old group
  - 68.9% of the 25-64 age group
  - 58.3% of those aged 65 and over

Table 1			Language used by age		Total
			Welsh	English	
Age	2-15 years	Number	977	105	1082
		%	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%
		Number	157	68	225

	<b>16-24 years old</b>	<b>%</b>	69.8%	30.2%	100.0%
	<b>25 - 64 years</b>	<b>Number</b>	712	321	1033
		<b>%</b>	68.9%	31.1%	100.0%
	<b>65+ years</b>	<b>Number</b>	245	175	420
		<b>%</b>	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%
	<b>No way to observe</b>	<b>Number</b>	211	234	445
		<b>%</b>	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>Number</b>	2302	903	3205
<b>%</b>		71.8%	28.2%	100.0%	

4.4 This pattern is consistent with the census data and suggests that a gradual linguistic change is happening. In terms of linguistic planning, this causes concern and highlights the need for interventions to sustain the use of Welsh amongst adults.

4.5 The impact of inward and outward migration should also be considered. In recent times, inward migration to Gwynedd has been substantial, particularly amongst young people, whilst outward migration includes many young people who were educated through the medium of Welsh. This demographic change could have a substantial influence on language use.

#### Area

4.6 The use of Welsh varies substantially between areas:

- Caernarfon: 82.9%
- Pwllheli: 81.6%
- Dolgellau: 35.9%

4.7 This pattern reflects the census data and confirms that Caernarfon and Pwllheli are strong centres for the Welsh language, whilst its use is less prominent in Dolgellau.

#### Settings

4.8 The most use of Welsh was seen in social and informal settings:

- Leisure centres: 81.0%
- Libraries: 65.6%

In more formal locations, the difference was less obvious:

- Siop Gwynedd: 57.1%

- Contact Centre: 47.4%

<b>Table 2</b>					<b>Total</b>
<b>Language used by type of setting</b>			<b>Welsh</b>	<b>English</b>	
<b>Setting</b>	<b>Leisure Centre</b>	<b>Number</b>	1550	363	1913
		<b>Setting %</b>	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%
	<b>Library</b>	<b>Number</b>	441	231	672
		<b>Setting %</b>	65.6%	34.4%	100.0%
	<b>Siop Gwynedd</b>	<b>Number</b>	100	75	175
		<b>Setting %</b>	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	<b>Galw Gwynedd</b>	<b>Number</b>	211	234	445
		<b>Setting %</b>	47.4%	52.6%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Number</b>	2302	903	3205	
	<b>Setting %</b>	71.8%	28.2%	100.0%	

4.9 This suggests that Welsh is more likely to be used in social contexts, whilst English was more common in official situations.

#### Children and language transfer

When children were present, Welsh was used in 78.4% of the interactions. Whilst encouraging, it is lower than the transfer rates noted in the census (75.2% on average across households in Gwynedd).

## **5. Conclusion**

5.1 The results show:

- That Welsh continues to be a strong community language in several areas
- That use reduces in the older age groups
- That context (formal/informal) has a substantial influence on language choice

5.2 The lower use of Welsh in formal situations suggests the presence of diglossia - where different languages are used for different contexts.

## **6. Recommendation**

6.1 The members are asked to accept and note the content of the report.