

## WRITTEN EVIDENCE PAPER TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

Minister for Education and Welsh Language: March 2022

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### Introduction

This paper provides evidence to the Committee prior to my attendance at the meeting on 23 March 2022. The invitation requested a discussion on Second Homes.

### Affordability, Second Homes and the Welsh Language

The difficulties people – particularly young people – can have in accessing affordable, quality housing, whether to buy or rent has had significant coverage, across Wales, the UK and beyond. Often, in West Wales, those difficulties are related to second homes. This raises questions about the sustainability of our communities and of empty homes that add nothing at all to community life.

We have already proposed a three-pronged approach that seeks to address the core issues of affordability, second homes and the Welsh language. The Minister for Climate Change will present information on these plans in more detail in her evidence paper to this committee. However, I would like to note the announcement that the Dwyfor area has been selected as a pilot area is a significant one. Dwyfor is of course a stronghold of the Welsh language – where the Welsh language is an integral part of daily life. There is a cluster of communities with a high density of second homes in this area. As we pilot a number of interventions, it is vitally important that we create a stronger evidence base of the potential impacts on the local economy, our communities and on the Welsh language.

The areas of affordability, second homes and the Welsh language are areas that have called for us to work closely together across Government. As such, we have established a Ministerial group to discuss and work together to create solutions and take this policy work forward. In addition, a cross-departmental group of officials meet regularly, I also chair a cross-party group in conjunction with the Minister for Climate Change, the Minister for Finance and Local Government and the Minister for the Economy. We are also working closely with the Designated Members on this as part of the Collaboration Agreement.

In my speech ['Cymraeg belongs to us all'](#), I highlighted the various challenges facing the Welsh language. I recognise the threat to our Welsh speaking communities, particularly those with higher numbers of second homes. As such, I am keen to develop a wide range of interventions to address these challenges and this is the basis of the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan.

### Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan

I am leading on the work of establishing the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan, one of the Welsh Government's key priorities as set out in our *Programme for Government 2021-2026*. The plan aims to introduce a package of interventions as well as consider how the national interventions (a three-pronged approach) could act as a balanced package to protect Welsh-speaking communities. In this way, we want to ensure that they are

sustainable and viable communities for future generations, where the Welsh language can thrive.

In his report, commissioned by Academi Hywel Teifi, [Second homes: Developing new policies in Wales](#), Dr Simon Brooks provided a balanced analysis of the possible effects large concentrations of second homes can have on our communities. He also outlined the challenges facing Welsh-speaking communities and the need to sustain those communities.

Our [Cymraeg 2050](#) targets of reaching a million Welsh speakers by 2050 and of doubling the daily use of Welsh have a clear narrative about the direction of travel for Welsh language policy. They give context to the national wellbeing goal in the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), *A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language*. For the strategy to succeed, we need to work together across government – both national and local – to take a holistic approach to tackling policy issues that are of strategic importance to the language, namely:

- The importance of maintaining Welsh as the primary language spoken in communities in the west and north-west.
- More opportunities for children and adults to learn and, for those who are learning or are already speakers, to become habitual users of the language wherever they live in Wales.

Without maintaining linguistically vibrant geographical communities in the west and north-west, there will be fewer opportunities for people to use the language in everyday social situations. That in turn risks weakening the foundations for the task of creating new speakers across Wales. We therefore need to focus on maintaining the social fabric of these Welsh-speaking communities and avoid creating an imbalance leading to an acceleration of community language shift from Welsh to English.

The Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan will work closely with the pilot in Dwyfor, it is possible that some of the interventions proposed in the plan would also be piloted in Dwyfor.

### **The proposed interventions that will shape the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan**

The draft document proposed a wide range of schemes to empower communities to secure a supply of affordable housing locally, strengthen the economic base and create opportunities for the Welsh language to thrive.

#### **Community-led co-operatives and social enterprises**

Co-operatives and social enterprises are already an important part of the social and economic landscape in Wales. There is a strong tradition of communities coming together to safeguard local amenities and local services, as well as benefiting from the natural resources in providing economic benefits to local communities. There are examples of community-based social enterprises: Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog, Partneriaeth Ogwen and Galeri in Caernarfon, for instance, exemplify how social enterprises can support and provide a valuable service to a local area. The Welsh language is fully integrated within their organisations and provides good quality job opportunities and supporting the local economy. We will encourage other communities to follow their example by providing support and guidance to help establish community-based social enterprises and co-operatives. The

Welsh language will be an intrinsic part of the social business, and will aim to reach beyond the original geographical areas.

We aim to build on the good work already being delivered in Wales by providing additional resources to help drive this work forward within Welsh-speaking communities. This support will provide opportunities for communities, where basic services are likely to disappear, to develop social enterprises, to create new initiatives to strengthen the foundation of the local economy and to develop community-led housing co-operatives.

### **Social businesses: tourism sector**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous ideas have been developed for local communities to benefit from the demand for short-term holiday accommodation. We have examples of community-based tourism bunkhouses and short-term holiday accommodation business e.g. Pengwern, Caban Gerlan and Menter y Plu. We will explore ways to support community-based social enterprises to establish and grow short-term holiday accommodation businesses, so that business profits can be re-invested to purchase further stock to be made available on a social rented basis for local people. If the operating model is successful, it could be extended to include wider community ownership within the tourism industry.

### **Estate Agents' Steering Group**

Estate agents play a key role in the property market. Many estate agents in rural, coastal and Welsh-speaking areas are long established businesses which have substantial expertise and knowledge and provide a valuable service to the local communities they serve. How properties are described, and detail about the local community, can be influential in providing prospective buyers with useful context – both on the property and the area, before they make a final decision on purchasing a property.

The aim is to build on work that is already ongoing to raise awareness of the Welsh language and the local communities where properties are located. For example, estate agents, local authorities and the Mentrau Iaith have been co-operating with the Welsh Government, by distributing local information packs. These provide important and useful information for people wishing to purchase a property in the area.

Our intention is to establish an Estate Agents' Steering Group for Welsh-speaking communities – to facilitate potential new projects and research that can be developed in partnership with local estate agents and other key stakeholders.

### **A 'fair chance' for local buyers and renters**

In the current market, we understand concerns that some properties are sold or let before being listed on the market. This has been highlighted in areas where demand for properties is high. Local people can be unaware that potential properties are due to come on the market. Property sellers have a key role and we will therefore explore opportunities to work with them as well as key stakeholders such as estate agents so that properties can be advertised for a limited period to local people first. This would allow people from a clearly defined area to have an opportunity to view and arrange the necessary finance to purchase/rent the property. In the same way, if a local co-operative wished to purchase a property, this would allow them sufficient time to prepare a financial package. As noted, this

would be a voluntary scheme in partnership with property sellers and other key stakeholders, and would need to be carefully planned and piloted.

## **Cultural Ambassadors**

Wales is a welcoming society and we encourage people who visit or decide to move to Wales to actively engage with our unique language and culture. To further facilitate this, we wish to establish a network of Cultural Ambassadors who will actively promote our culture, heritage and Welsh language. The [ecomuseums LIVE](#) is an interesting programme which aims to support coastal communities in the Llŷn Peninsula and Iveragh Peninsula, Ireland to promote their natural and cultural assets, creating opportunities for sustainable tourism. We will consider what the ecomuseums will learn from their interventions and draw on their experiences.

## **A commission on Welsh-speaking communities**

We will establish a commission to safeguard the future of the Welsh language as a community language. The commission will lead on a socio-linguistic analysis of the health of the language in our communities. It will develop a model to provide evidence for local authorities on the vitality of the language in the communities they serve. The commission will consider the challenges facing Welsh-speaking communities and gain a better understanding of the linguistic, socio-economic and social restructuring challenges faced post COVID-19 and leaving the European Union. The commission will make policy recommendations.

Underpinning this, the commission will analyse the 2021 Census results to better understand the language shift over the last decade. In this light, it will consider which interventions are needed today, and ensure that future policy interventions are based on sound evidence. This work links to the development of models that help define areas of linguistic interest and sensitivity. The aim is to make it clear which interventions and support are needed in these areas to protect the language and how the collective approaches are used from a language perspective to ensure policy goals are met.

I have already announced that Dr Simon Brooks will chair the commission and I will be making an announcement shortly on the other members of the commission.

## **Housing, Work and Language (Tai, Gwaith ac Iaith)**

Sustaining a strong economy as well as sufficient supply of affordable homes is necessary in providing a sufficient baseline for the Welsh language to thrive. One of the main challenges facing rural, coastal and Welsh-speaking communities is the constant outmigration of young people. This is a complex, multifactorial issue and is not because of the lack of job opportunities or affordable homes alone – it includes the social and educational aspiration of people needing to explore and gain new experiences. We welcome opportunities for our young people to further attain their educational aims, gain valuable skills and work experiences, both within and outside of Wales. We should also support those young people who want to continue living in the communities in which they were brought up, as well as create and support opportunities for people to return.

The Arfor Programme was funded by the Welsh Government to pilot innovative approaches to promoting entrepreneurship, business growth and community resilience while supporting the Welsh language. The programme has targeted support in Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire and was delivered over a two year period, 2019-20 and 2020-21, by the 4 local authorities working on local and collaborative projects. As part of the

programme, funding has been set aside for an independent evaluation of the two-year programme, which was published in October 2021.

Work is being carried out on proposals for the Arfor 2 programme in collaboration with the Designated Member, Cefin Campbell MS as part of the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. We will take account of the experience and evaluation of the previous programme, which is complementary to other existing or planned activity which is of relevance. As part of this work, consideration will be given to developing an appropriate suite of performance measures for the programme.

In 2019, the then Minister for International Relations and Welsh Language established an Economy and Welsh Language Roundtable. This included representatives from local authorities, economic development policy leads and practitioners and Welsh language planners. The roundtable is now chaired by myself. It has recommended numerous actions which can support the rural economy as well as providing the right conditions for the language to thrive. Many of these proposals are already being developed or implemented. We will expand the role of the roundtable to include housing. The new Economy, Housing and Welsh Language Roundtable will also be responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan.

## **Place Names**

Place names are integral features of the cultural and historic landscape of Wales, both on a local and a national level. They are particularly important to the visual and aural character of Welsh-speaking areas and communities, and we recognise the special need to value and retain the rich legacy of our Welsh place names.

To address the challenges associated with place names, we will explore how local authorities are fulfilling their roles in this area. We will consider the recent use of covenants to protect house names and explore how these might be used more widely in the future. Central to this work, will be exploring new ways of raising awareness of and promoting the List of Historic Place Names of Wales.

## **In conclusion**

The consultation on the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan closed on 22 February. We are currently analysing the consultation responses. Once this work has been completed, I will make a further statement and publish the package of interventions we will develop as part of the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan.

**Jeremy Miles MS**  
**Minister for Education and Welsh Language**