



Welsh Government Evidence Paper – ARFOR Programme

18/02/2026

This paper provides a summary of the ARFOR programme and has been prepared by the Welsh Government for the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee, ahead of the meeting to be held on Wednesday 4th March 2026 when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language and Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning look forward to giving evidence/discussing further.

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1. Background

1. Welsh Government has provided grant funding to the local authorities in the ARFOR region of Ynys Mon, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire to deliver strategic programmes designed to support economic development and the Welsh language across the four local authority areas. The programmes, based on proposals received from the four authorities collectively, have been managed by Cyngor Gwynedd and delivered by a range of contracted partners and by the local authorities themselves. ARFOR has sought to test a range of approaches, recognising that a strong local economy is vital to sustaining the Welsh language in the rural heartlands.
2. The initial ARFOR programme (agreed as part of the budget agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru), operated between 2019 and 2021, with a budget of £2 million of revenue funding.
3. As part of the Co-operation Agreement there was a commitment to co-produce a phase 2 of the ARFOR programme with local authorities. Building on the experience of the earlier programme, a further £11 million of funding was made available to ARFOR 2 between 2022 and 2025 to support a more strategic programme of interventions.
4. During the current financial year, a budget of £500k has been made available to the local authorities to undertake a “pause and reflect” exercise, whilst maintaining funding for the programme co-ordinator and aspects of the programme (aimed primarily at young people). This work will be key to help inform a way forward alongside mainstreaming of functions.
5. A governance structure was in place for the ARFOR Programme through the establishment of a Programme Board, comprising the Leaders of each of the 4 local authorities, to provide strategic direction and decision making. This was supported by an Officials group with representatives from each of the local authorities. Both Groups, and the Programme Co-ordinator employed by Cyngor Gwynedd with funding via the programme, have worked closely with officials from both Economy and Welsh Language teams in Welsh Government.

2. ARFOR 1 (2019-2021)

6. Funding of £2 million was provided to ARFOR 1 to pilot innovative approaches to promoting entrepreneurship, business growth, community resilience and the Welsh language. It targeted support in Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire and was delivered over a two-year period 2019/20 and 2020/21.
7. The funding – made available from Welsh Government via Cyngor Gwynedd to the 4 local authorities - was based on a proposal received from the local authorities which looked to facilitate new and innovative methods to supporting economic development in the region, by:
 - Promoting enterprise and supporting business growth in areas with a high proportion of Welsh speakers
 - Generating more and better paid jobs to retain local people in these areas and encourage those who have left to return
 - Promoting the wide-ranging value of the use of Welsh and bilingualism in business creating a vibrant sense of place
 - Encouraging the businesses and people who move to rural areas to value and use the Welsh language
8. In addition to piloting interventions in each of the different local authority areas, the fund was intended to support projects developed in a collaborative approach on an inter authority basis given the areas share many similar social and cultural situations.
9. The ARFOR 1 programme delivered a number of interventions across the 4 counties including:
 - **Direct business grants:** Direct business grants were offered by all four local authorities, though with some variation. Grants were offered to support capital and revenue investment.
 - **Llwyddo'n Lleol:** Gwynedd and Ynys Mon also offered placements for young people on the Llwyddo'n Lleol scheme run by Menter Mon. The scheme involved an 11 week mentoring programme, supporting young people as they developed their business ideas and plans. Alongside the mentoring, the young people were expected to document their experiences through social media, in turn aiming to highlight the business opportunities and possibilities for young people in the area.
 - **Ffiws/Gofod Creu:** The Ffiws scheme funded the creation of temporary spaces around Gwynedd and Ynys Mon offering free access to specialist equipment, with technicians on hand to help with training and use. The spaces offered access to equipment such as 3D printers or laser cutters. The intention was to support local businesses to develop prototypes and product ideas.

- **Cymunedau Mentrus:** The Cymunedau Mentrus scheme sought to support social businesses and community enterprises develop spaces and workplaces that would in turn allow them to extend or expand their provision, support and services to the communities.
 - **Bwrlwm ARFOR:** the programme’s marketing initiative to promote impact and lessons and to develop case study examples.
10. ARFOR 1 was a pilot programme testing innovative, place-based interventions to promote economic resilience and through this the Welsh language. It mainly focussed on business support, mentoring of young people, support for social enterprises and projects to embed the Welsh language in a business setting.
11. Despite some difficult operating circumstances (due to Covid) the outcomes for the ARFOR 1 programme included 154 businesses supported, 238 full-time and 89 part-time jobs created, and 226 jobs safeguarded.

3. ARFOR 2 (2022 – 2025)

12. Building on the earlier ARFOR 1 programme and evaluation, £11 million was made available for ARFOR 2 between 2022 and 2025 as part of the Co-operation Agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. Delivered as a grant via Cyngor Gwynedd on behalf of the four local authorities, this aimed to support a strategic programme supporting economic development and the Welsh language across the ARFOR area.
13. Managed by Cyngor Gwynedd and delivered collaboratively by the authorities and contracted partners, ARFOR 2 built on the foundations laid by ARFOR 1 while testing new approaches based on a central principle: a strong local economy is essential to sustaining the Welsh language in its traditional and rural heartlands.
14. ARFOR 2 has focused on encouraging young people to stay or return to the ARFOR area, supporting local enterprises, promoting economic and social opportunities, and strengthening the use of Welsh in the workplace and wider community. The programme has supported several key elements, including:
 - a. **Llwyddo'n Lleol** [Succeeding Locally] – Focused on changing perceptions of the region as a place to live and work, using marketing and direct support to help young people settle, find jobs, or start businesses.
 - b. **Cymunedau Mentrus** [Enterprising Communities] - Provided grants to businesses to create jobs and promote the use of the Welsh language.
 - c. **Cronfa Her** [Challenge Fund] – Funded innovative projects for a wider range of stakeholders to explore new ideas and generate learning about the relationship between the economy and language, in line with the programme's objectives.
 - d. **Bwrlwm ARFOR** [The vibrancy of ARFOR] – A communications and marketing strand to promote regional identity and the use of the Welsh language and raise awareness of the programme objectives.
15. ARFOR 2 was a placed based approach and delivered collaboratively with the support of over 200 partners and stakeholders. The '*ARFOR 2 Programme Update Document*' (included at the following link: [Second phase of ARFOR](#)), prepared by the local authorities provides full details of the outputs delivered as part of the programme, together with case studies and examples of the breadth of support provided to individuals, businesses and communities under this programme. It also provides an overview of the work streams and gives examples of some of the many organisations and individuals from across the ARFOR region who have benefited from the Programme.
16. Wavehill Consulting Ltd was commissioned to work alongside the delivery of the various elements of the ARFOR 2 programme to provide an independent evaluation. The evaluation concludes that the programme has delivered a significant amount of activity in a very short period. Several key performance measures were agreed as part of the contractual process, and overall, the

outcomes and outputs suggest effective performance. Of the 23 indicators which included a quantitative target, the programme met or exceeded 18 of them. However, for some aspects of the programme e.g. changing perceptions etc, it has been difficult to apply any meaningful quantitative measures.

17. The evaluation reports that ARFOR 2 has delivered short-term economic benefits, including:

- creation of 327 and safeguarding of 295 jobs
- supporting 263 new and 678 existing enterprises
- 210 businesses increased their use of Welsh
- over 200 young people received in depth support.

18. The evaluation report makes a number of broad recommendations, including:

1. The need for a long-term intervention to make a real difference, given that the two-year delivery programme is not sufficient to address the challenges posed. It suggests a focus on:
 - a. sharing good practice and providing guidance and strategic coordination.
 - b. research, testing and piloting, with focus on young people
 - c. marketing and communication – aimed at changing perceptions
2. Use a transition period to plan thoroughly for longer term intervention, with continued support for 'Llwyddo'n Lleol' on a smaller scale to support marketing aspects, and to work towards mainstreaming the successful and innovative elements of the programme
3. Applying the research's main lessons to inform next steps

4. Current Position and Next Steps

19. Building on the recommendations of the evaluation of ARFOR 2, Welsh Government has provided further funding of £500k in the form a grant to Cyngor Gwynedd on behalf of the four local authorities in this current financial year to:
- Support the ongoing role of the programme co-ordinator at Cyngor Gwynedd.
 - Continue ‘Llwyddo’n Lleol’ activity with focus on young people, but on a reduced scale.
 - Working closely with Wavehill Consulting Ltd, to undertake a pause and reflect exercise to allow the local authorities to identify:
 - what has worked well
 - where impact has been strongest
 - what has been less effective
 - where opportunities exist to take lessons learnt into mainstream activity
20. This work is ongoing, and due to be completed soon after the end of the financial year. Actions to mainstream some activities such as business support are underway and the final report will be important to help inform a way forward across the functions delivered.