

# **WLGA CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON WELSH LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES HOUSING PLAN**

**February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities and three fire and rescue authorities are associate members.
2. The WLGA is a politically led cross-party organisation, with the leaders from all local authorities determining policy through the Executive Board and the wider WLGA Council. The WLGA also appoints senior members as Spokespersons and Deputy Spokespersons to provide a national lead on policy matters on behalf of local government.
3. The WLGA works closely with and is often advised by professional advisors and professional associations from local government, however, the WLGA is the representative body for local government and provides the collective, political voice of local government in Wales.

## **RESPONSE**

### **Question 1**

**Do you think a co-operative or community-led housing model could help local people to access affordable housing?**

4. Yes. The WLGA's Rural Wales Manifesto, published in January 2021 called for "tailored housing policies to support the needs of rural communities..." including the need to "identify opportunities to explore cooperative housing in empty community properties." Similarly, our publication A Rural Vision for Wales, which set out key policy proposals and asks, identified that "options to explore cooperative housing in empty community properties such as closed schools and pubs, could provide affordable accommodation for young people to live independently."
5. Initiatives that strengthen partnership working between Housing Associations and Councils can increase technical expertise but will require funding and additional resource e.g., dedicated officers with planning expertise to lead community-led projects.

### **Question 2**

**How can Welsh Government encourage further participation in a co-operative or community-led housing model in Wales?**

6. Welsh Government should continue to support the existing network of rural housing enablers, and the Communities Creating Homes project currently hosted by the Wales Co-operative Centre.

**Question 3**

**What are the challenges to sustaining sufficient local interest and investment in social enterprises?**

7. Additional resource is needed to support Councils to engage with communities where there are high numbers of second homes and long-term empty properties which threatens the sustainability and development of the Welsh language within communities.
8. Most Councils have cited 'volunteer fatigue' as a key challenge, as often it is the same small cohort of volunteers who sustain and promote social enterprises and local initiatives. Communities therefore need to develop their pool of volunteers and need additional investment to drive schemes forward.

**Question 4**

**What support or incentives could Welsh Government offer to encourage engagement in such a scheme?**

9. Funding support to develop and evaluate local pilot schemes.

**Question 5**

**To what extent do you think the Estate Agents' Steering Group is a practical and effective way of helping estate agents to play their part in protecting Welsh language communities?**

10. We would support this as an option to be developed locally if stakeholders are supportive.

**Question 6**

**How can estate agents be encouraged or incentivised to engage with the Steering Group?**

11. The role and purpose of the Steering Group could be promoted via communications and training activities provided by Rent Smart Wales.

**Question 7**

**Would a short period for local residents to view and make offers on housing help them to access property markets?**

12. The key barriers for local buyers relate to affordability. We have no evidence that a short period for local residents to view and make offers on housing would have a negative impact.

#### **Question 8**

**What else might help offer local buyers a ‘fair chance’ in the housing market?**

N/A

#### **Question 9**

**How could Cultural Ambassadors engage at a community level to support social cohesion and develop a better understanding of our culture, language and heritage?**

13. The WLGA and Councils are supportive of this proposal providing additional resources are made available to support the work of Cultural Ambassadors. The role would be of value for communities where high numbers of second home ownership threatens the sustainability of the Welsh language.
14. There are several existing initiatives and strategies in place for promoting the Welsh Language within Councils, Cultural Ambassadors would therefore need to work closely with key stakeholders to maximise their impact and to understand where they can add value. Cultural Ambassadors, for example, would need to work with Mentrau Iaith, existing Welsh Fora, Welsh Language Officers within Councils and relevant departments on a project-by-project basis.
15. Each Council is required to develop a 5-year strategy to promote the Welsh language and so Cultural Ambassadors would need a detailed understanding of these plans to maximise their impact in supporting the local community and promoting the Welsh language.
16. By working with the relevant policy officers and education officers, where appropriate, Cultural Ambassadors could also have a valuable role in supporting Council's ambitious plans to grow and develop Welsh-medium education by promoting the benefits of bilingualism, as well as other priorities set out in Welsh in Education Strategic Plans.

#### **Question 10**

**What specific factors should the commission consider in relation to sustaining Welsh as a community language?**

17. Councils would welcome a commission on Welsh language communities which will look at the different factors that affect the ability of the language to be sustained as a community language.
18. Research should be undertaken and reviewed on which strategies and mitigations have a proven track record of increasing language use in the communities (good practice examples could come from Wales or other countries who are actively seeking to promote minority languages). This evidence could help the commission decide on which mitigations would be most appropriate for different types of changes in Welsh language use within communities.

19. The commission should also evaluate data on Welsh language changes over time and use this evidence base to help inform local policies. Findings from the research and evaluation should help improve the quality of Welsh Language Impact Assessments.
20. All Welsh Government consultations currently include questions on the impact of any new policy proposals on the Welsh language – it would be beneficial for any new commission focusing on Welsh language sustainability to gain an overview of the common themes that emerge in these responses, to understand the opportunities, risks and potential mitigations that are identified from these questions on the effects of new proposals on the Welsh language.
21. Councils suggest that the commission should consider the following factors in relation to sustaining Welsh as a community language:
  - Identifications of communities where high levels of second homes, long-term empty properties and holidays-lets are felt to have a negative impact
  - Demographic factors
  - Housing market factors
  - Economic factors (availability / access to of further / higher education, training, employment etc)
  - Position with regard to the Welsh language.

### **Question 11**

**What, in your view, will be the challenges facing the commission?**

22. Ensuring there is sufficient resource and funding to undertake the work.
23. Councils need evidence to be able to draw conclusions and make plans that address the current threats to the sustainability of the Welsh language in areas where second home ownership has increased dramatically. One of the challenges is the rapid change in much of the data under examination for second home ownership.
24. There is also a lack of evidence on effective mitigations that can be put in place, which is why research and evaluation need to be a key starting point.

### **Question 12**

**Are there any examples, practices or instances of interest that could inform the commission's understanding of the factors that affect the language?**

25. Looking at a Council's strategic policies for promoting the Welsh language would be a useful starting point to help inform the commission's understanding of local factors that affect language use and language promotion/improvement strategies.
26. One example outlines how a Council's Local Development Plan identifies areas where over 25% of the population speak Welsh, so that they can put in place mitigations such as the phasing of new housing development sites.

### **Question 13**

**What (more), alongside housing support, can be done to support local and particularly young people to remain, live and work in their communities?**

27. Councils would welcome the expansion of interventions that help local residents remain in their communities to sustain the daily use of the Welsh language. Rural and

coastal councils continue to see the net outward migration of younger people which has long term implications for the sustainability of the Welsh language.

28. There are opportunities to learn from the approaches and interventions piloted as part of the ARFOR Programme to support young people to remain, live and work in their communities, such as the successful Llwyddo'n Lleol initiative. It will be important to capture the learning from such initiatives as part of developing the interventions for the ARFOR 2 Programme.
29. It will also be important to ensure that future Welsh Government programmes and funding streams, such as the new Employability Strategy, future Business and Entrepreneurship support provision and future rural development funding enables young people to remain, live and work in their communities if they so wish and to enable those who have had to move away to return to their local communities.
30. Alongside housing support, it's vital that good quality, well paid jobs are created in a range of industries across these areas to help young people live and work in their communities. Financial incentives would help new or expanding companies to grow or relocate their offices/workshops to the areas that are in the most need of such jobs.
31. Additional support should be given to key employers to facilitate the ability to 'work from home' to ensure workers can remain in their communities.

#### **Question 14**

**Do you have any further comments or suggestions in relation to any of the specific schemes mentioned above?**

32. WLGA and Councils are supportive of the proposal to extend the scope of the Economy and Welsh Language Roundtable to include Housing with a role of overseeing the progress of the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan.

#### **Question 15**

**What kind of local interventions would you want to see to promote the importance of Welsh place names, encourage their retention and to maintain the Welsh language as a visual part of our communities?**

33. Councils are supportive of measures that foster an understanding of the history and culture of their counties, in which the Welsh language plays a defining role.
34. Cultural Ambassadors should play a key role in promoting the importance of Welsh place names in their local communities. Many homeowners change the names of their homes without thinking of the disadvantages from a cultural and linguistic perspective. It is therefore important that homeowners are made aware of the negative impact this can have in terms of eroding an area's cultural identity, heritage and language. Building awareness and understanding of the significance of retaining and maintaining the Welsh language in our communities is key; this needs to happen within the community and before new members join a community to promote social cohesion.
35. Some Councils would like to have the authority to decline applications by residents who wish to change the names of houses from Welsh to English. Currently some

Councils write to applicants asking them to re-consider changing place names from Welsh to English to try and safeguard Welsh place names and ensure that owners are selecting culturally sensitive names for their dwellings.

#### **Question 16**

**What else should be considered as part the Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan?**

36. There is a concern that constraints to developments in some rural areas as a result of 2021 guidance and standards from Natural Resources Wales will exacerbate housing pressures in some traditionally Welsh speaking areas, with potential implications for Welsh as a community language in these locations.

#### **Question 17**

**What changes would you make to the proposals presented in this plan to improve their effectiveness?**

37. WLGA welcome the proposal to create a network of community based Cultural Ambassadors that promote and celebrate our language, heritage and culture. As mentioned above these Ambassadors should develop their understanding of existing Welsh language promotion strategies and local activities to fully understand how they can add value in their role.

**Question 18 We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them**

38. N/A.

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#### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT**

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