**The rush for housing in the context of the challenges of Covid-19 to the Welsh neighbourhood**

**Heini Gruffudd, Dyfodol i’r Iaith**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to offer some comments. The pandemic has isolated us in our homes for long periods of time, many have lost work or are facing an uncertain future, and the pandemic has brought distress to many. Let us not forget that as we discuss some of the challenges that the pandemic has set for the Welsh language.

It is remarkable that the energy and ingenuity that we have in favour of the Welsh language has meant that families and organisations have taken advantage of the new opportunities that the electronic media have brought. The number who have actively learnt Welsh is one bright example, but the Government's report (2020, The Impact of *Covid 19 on Welsh*Community*Groups* – *survey findings*) has identified significant challenges for our neighbourhoods.

My intention now is to start considering how the pandemic has affected three areas that are underlying language recovery and language planning. The pandemic has shown that many of our efforts to strengthen the Welsh language in terms of its rights, and to create civic standards, laudable though these are, lose importance if there are fundamental weaknesses in the three areas: the home, the growth of numbers and the neighbourhood.

The Government's analysis of Welsh-speaking community groups is impressive, and I thank the Government for conducting the research. I don't know whether this is the first time that we have had an idea of the number of associations and organisations across the country that sustain our Welsh life. It is not complete, of course: I know, for example about some twenty Welsh-speaking societies in Swansea that are not in the survey. But the number of Welsh-speaking community groups in the survey shows how important these are to Welsh life, and also suggests that there is a correlation between the number of Welsh-speaking community groups with the percentage of Welsh speakers in counties. Welsh-speaking community life is strongest in counties where more than 40% of the population speak Welsh,

**Figure 1 Number of Welsh-speaking community groups by percentage of Welsh speakers in counties**

There is one Welsh language group for every 140 Welsh speakers in Welsh-speaking areas, and one for every 330 Welsh speakers in more anglicised areas. (Further research is needed to know exactly how many Welsh speakers participate in these societies.)

**Figure 2: Number of Welsh speakers per community group**

Given the population as a whole, based on the 2011 Census figures, there are around 250 people in Welsh-speaking areas per society, 750 in medium-speaking areas, and over 3000 inmore anglicised (possibly more urban) areas.

**Figure 3: Population number per Welsh-speaking community group by linguistic nature of areas**

The Government Statement following the survey recognises the need for thorough work in the community, including strengthening resources, such as Centres, sports clubs and arts groups, and developing Welsh life at a micro level in neighbourhoods. (Morgan, 2020) It is clear that there are significant challenges in Welsh communities and neighbourhoods in the post-Covid period. Language Initiatives will need more than more funding to have the impact. Having said that it is good to understand that the Language Standard which relates to how local authorities want to promote the Welsh language, is going to receive close attention from the Government. This is Standard 145, which is in Schedule 4 to the legislation

**Figure 4: Standard 145, Schedule 4**

**SCHEDULE 4 Regulation 2(4)**

**Promotion Standards**

**PART 1**

**THE STANDARDS**

**1 Standards relating to a body promoting the Welsh language**

**Standard 145:You must produce, and publish on your website, a 5 year strategy explaining how you intend to actively promote the Welsh language and to facilitate the wider use of the Welsh language in your area**

(<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2015/996/schedule/4/made/welsh>)

# This is, as far as I can see, the most important Standard among all Welsh Language Standards but it is only now, 6 years since the publication of the Welsh Language Standards (No. 1) Regulations 2015, that local Councils are seriously supported to set creative targets. It will not be small task to offer robust guidance to the 22 authorities, and to persuade them that there is a need to go further than demonstrating how they comply with the other Standards, as is happening in some cases now. This is an opportunity for local authorities to start Welsh Language Centres, matching what is happening in the Basque Country.

The best measure of language health is the strength of language transmission in the home, and I hope that the Standard 145 will provide an opportunity to give attention at a local level to promoting the language in homes. Local Welsh Language Centres could be linked to ambitious projects by the National Centre for Learning Welsh to teach the language to parents and to foster Welsh-speaking homes. Thorough research commissioned by the Welsh Government on patterns of language use in the home, recognises that

'experts emphasise the need for a clear plan for transfer

 (language in the home) to facilitate the transfer and to ensure that the child

receive as much input as possible in the minority language'

(Evas and Morris, 2017, 24).

The patterns of over-e-bias'vary across Wales, with the strongest inWelsh-speaking areas, although there is a constant linguistic loss between the ability of parents and their children, particularly the place of one parent s'n speak thelanguage. Around 6 per cent of children in Wales receive Welsh in the home, and this figure has, overall, weakened over the last fifteen years:

**Figure 5: Percentage of 5-year-olds receiving Welsh at home**



(Welsh Government, 2021, p. 12)

Closeto three-quarters of pupils receiving Welsh-medium education, therefore, live in English-speaking homes. As we have heard, as schools are closed during the Covid period, these have been deprived of a personal-living link with the Welsh language. It has not just been the loss of Welsh-medium education, but the loss of the varied and rich Welsh-language activities provided by schools, and as a result of compulsion to isolate, the loss of personal contact with friends.

It is entirely timely, therefore, that the Government has published its national policy on transferring the Welsh language in familiesd. The Policy consists of four topics:

1. Inspiring children and young people to speak Welsh with their children in the future
2. Raising the confidence and language skills of school leavers
3. Support and encourage the use of Welsh in mixed-language families
4. Supporting Welsh speaking families with their children.

Welsh Government (2021), *National policy on the transfer of the Welsh language and its use in families.*

These are commendable objectives, and a programme of work has been linked to these points. But we must ask whether the objectives have been supported by a strong regime and the successful implementation of the programme? A large number of sociological, educational and economicfactors , some owned by the Government, militate against the objectives. These include:

* The Government's 'Seren' policy that encourages the brightest pupils

in Wales to study at English universities

* Lack of use of Welsh in the further education system
* Shortage of Welsh workplaces for school leavers
* The weakness of the economy of Welsh-speaking areas
* Shortage of affordable housing in semi- and more Welsh-speaking areas.

These factors together contribute to unfavourable conditions to raise Welsh-speaking families.

The 'Seren' Policy, for example, undermines the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's efforts to expand the Welsh language in higher education in Wales. It is likely that students studying in England are more likely to work and live there, also contributing to the weakening of the Welsh economy. In turn this is likely to weaken the effort to have Welsh-speaking staff in schools and other public organisations in Wales.

Pupils in the further education system are those who need to work locally. Are six per cent of further education students receiving some of their training in Welsh or bilingually? Without the Welsh language being an integral part of the further education of Welsh-speaking students, The Welsh language is likely to suffer as a language of work and then as a family language.

Given that, as the Government does, the choice of the language of the home can be taking place without a deliberate decision, all the Government's education, economy and housing policies need to be coherent.

Assuming that local authorities can be drawn into the effort to strengthen the Welsh language in homes, the Government needs to consider how it can ring-fence the financial and human resources to increase the number of children receiving Welsh at home. This should be the cornerstone of Welsh Government policy in its million-speaker campaign. For example, mae need to encouragethe National Centre for Learning Welsh to strengthen the work that it is already doingwith non-Welsh speaking parents in this area. Due to the Brexit and Covid crises, this Centre has lost significant funding. HABE, in the Basque Country, is in the region of £40 million a year. Mentrau Iaith funding, which may be influential locally, has not risen for years and there is an urgent needto deepenMudiad Meithrinin many parts of Wales so that it can promote the Welsh language in the home.

There is a need to ask how it is possible to bring in S4C, BBC Cymru and BBC Wales and ITV Wales, andthe electronic media that have been a pull in the Covid period, and the print media , to be part of thecampaign. Do not underestimate the scale of the task or the necessary resources.

As the number of children receiving Welsh at home has fallen, we have become increasingly reliant on the education system to sustain the Welsh language. She is now an old preacher that, ultimately, schools are unable to make up for the weaknesses of language in the home and the community. Although immersion education is an integral part of the effort to revitalise language, the personal gains in language skills will not lead to an increase in the transfer of The Welsh language from one generation to the next until the Welsh language regains its place in homes and communities.

But given that the education system needs to make up for the weakness of the Welsh language in homes, it needs to be recognised that the growth of Welsh-medium education since the Second World War is one of the main signs of hope for the Welsh language. Growth has been styming, but has increased somewhat in the last ten years, givinga1% increase since 2004.

**Figure 6: Number of first language pupils by three years, years 1-11**

([Pupils who studied Welsh as a first language in primary, middle and secondary schools in years 1-11, by local authority, region and year (gov.wales)](https://statscymru.llyw.cymru/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Welsh-Language/pupilstaughtwelshprimarymiddlesecondaryschools-by-localauthorityregion-year))

But if one looks more precisely, the percentage of growth per year is unstable, with no growth above 1.5%:

**Figure 7: Percentage growth of first language pupils, table 1-11, by year**

Cthe same trend is made if we look at the number of fluent pupils in Welsh, in years 1 – 11 during the same period. Although the numbers of fluent pupils have risen from 57,410 to 64,030 over fifteen years, the growth by year is unstable, with a recent tendency for growth growth to decrease:

**Figure 8: Percentage growth of fluent pupils in Welsh 2004/5 – 2019/20**

https://statscymru.llyw.cymru/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-Annual-School-Census/Welsh-Language/abilityspeakwelshpupils5andover-by-localauthorityregion-category

During lockdown, planning of Welsh-medium education continues, and there is hope that Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, given targets over 10 years, with the Government setting specific goals for each local authority, will be more successful than previous Plans. The reality of recent years is that an increase in the number of pupils in Welsh-medium schools is the main factor for the growth that has been, and the increase of these will be the main factor in the future.

The important issue now is how to increase the momentum. Specific funding was linked to local authority schemes in the last capital funding period and hopefully again this year. Heb adequate capital funding, it is difficult to see that the growth of Welsh-medium education will accelerate on a scale that will transform the situation. Some counties, such as Neath Port Talbot, have managed to fail to open one new Welsh-medium primary school in twenty years. Add to this the need for an ambitious programme of training education staff so that the growth of Welsh-medium education is not hindered.

We have often heard that pupils of Welsh-medium schools do not use Welsh outside school. There's nothing new in this. Research carried out at Swansea University by Cynog Dafis and myself and others showed that, some thirty years ago, two main factors influenced young people's use of the language, namely the home and the neighbourhood (Gruffudd 1996).

Since then some have argued that there is a need to revisit how we view a community and that it needs to be recognised that interpersonal networks and working patterns are more mobile in today's world. The argument is that focusing on the geographical community is not sufficient to identify influences on the use of language (Jones and Lewis, 2019).

What remains stable, however, for most children and young people until school-leaving age, is that they spend their childhood and adolescence in a geographical setting, and that, with the exception of the family, is the greatest linguistic influence on them linguistically.

Consideration therefore needs to be given to the robustness or vulnerability of our Welsh-speaking neighbourhoods. Immigration - not necessarily second homes or holiday homes - is seen as an influential factor. Socio-economic factors, which are in place throughout Europe, are partly responsible for the immigration:

* Semi-rural conomi too weak to keep young people in the minority language areas
* Civic centre access
* Housing at the mercy of the free market
* Life in more pleasant circumstances attracts civic riches
* In the wake of Covid, more working from home and wanting to come to the country

# Interestingly, in Gwynedd in 2011, 90% of the population who claimed Welsh or Welsh and British nationality were able to speak Welsh. Only 13.7% of those who claimed English or British nationality were able to speak the language. In Ceredigion, 76.8% of the Welsh population spoke Welsh, but only 10.6% of english ones. In Anglesey 81.5% of the Welsh population spoke the language, and 13% of the English population.

# Unlike large parts of south Wales, the Welshness of our more Welsh-speaking counties is defined by language. (Office for National Statistics).

# The pattern in the three counties is similar.

# Figure 9: The number of Welsh and English nationalities speaking Welsh in the more Welsh-speaking counties of Wales

# Immigration has increased, if a man is to believe interviews on Radio Cymru and the press in general. It appears that prices are rising, and that a third of the houses sold in Gwynedd in this period, have been sold to immigrants.

#

# A report by Propcast says that house prices in Wales rose by 10.7% in the year to December, higher than any of the other UK countries (*The Sunday Times*,2 February 2021).

# Figure 10: Press coverage of the growth in demand for second and in-immigration housing

# C:\Users\Admin\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Word\IMG_9128.jpgCovid-19: Working from home leads to house price rise in Wales

# Pent-up demand after Covid lockdown fuels UK house sales surge

# Brits set sights on second homes in the UK as travel restrictions increase

#  Rich Europeans Flee Virus for 2nd Homes, Spreading Fear and Fury

Detached house prices in Gwynedd have risen by 14.6% during the Covid period,according to the Sunday *Times based* on Hamptons research. Among the 5 counties with the highest increase in UK for second homes in the Covid period were Gwynedd and Anglesey. In Anglesey 31% of the houses sold were second homes, and 27% in Gwynedd. (Compare with Cornwall , 13%)

On 11 February Principality Building Company reported that average house prices reached £209,723 and that '18 of the 22 counties in Wales saw record prices in the last three months of 2020'. Prices rose by 8.2% in 2020, with a 16% increase in Anglesey, 14% in Conwy. Dafydd Hardy said that 'only about one in three of the buyers were people moving from beyond Wales'.

Perhaps Dafydd Hardy needs to consider the phrase 'only'. The pressures of Covid have led people to want a house with a garden, and working from home has become a reality for many. This puts additional pressure on housing, above the demand for summer houses, or holiday homes.

The Welsh Government and local councils are looking for ways to resolve this housing rush; raising the purchase tax on second houses had little influence. The Government has announced that they have supported the build of 20,000 affordable homes. Gwynedd wants to start buying houses for rent. Ceredigion is experimenting with land sales schemes for local people and Carmarthen wants to address the housing situation.

There is the same desire to secure housing for local people in many parts of Europe. Switzerland in 2012 narrowly passed a law restricting second homes to no more than 20% of the housing of any area (without restriction on lodgings). The Lake District has plans for expanding social housing. A combination of legislation and intervention in the housing market is taking place, and the principles of good management are being discussed throughout Europe, including protecting people in need, securing affordable housing, resisting over-exploitation, planning land use and buildings , and ensuring a socially responsible construction sector. (*Urban Agenda for the EU, Housing Partnership: Action Plan*  ec.euopa.eu  *)*

In Wales it is clear that legislation is needed on second home levels and summer housing, but at the same time strengthening an economy, and getting housing for local people is an essential part of the solution. With an increasingly working mode from home, there is a possibility that talented young people can stay in their community instead of accessing the cities. And when immigrants come, there is a need to understand how to wrap them in our language and Welshness, for example by offering welcome packages and offering free Welsh lessons, as has happened to immigrants to England.

It is becoming clear that we cannot solve the challenges that have intensified during theCovid-100period in these three keyareas, the language in the home, the education system and in the neighbourhood, without having a powerful regime, and adequate resources, to plan and address it all.

Bill Gates says solving the pandemic is playing toddlers compared to solving climate change. What is needed for us in Wales is to change the climate of the Welsh language. That won't happen now without some things changing.

* **The Government's 2050 Project (the project that aims to have a million Welsh speakers by 2050) is hidden in the government's heart. It needs to be promoted into a truly public and national project**
* **The Welsh language needs a full-time minister, rather than the post being shared with sport, Prime Minister's duties, Brexit or Mental Health.**
* **The Welsh language division in Government needs to be promoted to a full department**
* **If we believe that there is value in restoring Welsh as a national language, adequate resources need to be given, e.g. trebling the funding to the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, and the National Centre for Learning Welsh so that they can transform the language skills of public and grassroots sector workers**
* **The challenges of recruiting Welsh speakers into the education workforce need to be addressed**
* **Similarly personnel with language planning expertise need to be developed to offer imaginative and wide-ranging schemes that will permeate all neighbourhoods**
* **A broad national programme needs to be developed to get parents to consider that it is their duty and privilege to speak Welsh with their children.**

In the view of Future for the Language, the concerns of the Covid period provide further evidence that consideration needs to be given to establishing a powerful, adequately resourced National Language Planning Body that will be able to address such a large project. The Body needs to be independent of the arbitrary politics of parties, and be a prominent part of the cultural and economic life of Wales.

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