



The Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

SeneddEconomi@senedd.cymru

23 June 2025

Dear Colleague

### **Consultation: City and Growth Deals**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in the above consultation. Supporting the socio-economic infrastructure of Welsh-speaking communities is a core objective of the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy. The [Cymraeg 2050](#) strategy emphasises the importance of developing a prosperous, sustainable economy in order to sustain and strengthen those communities that have a high density of Welsh speakers. The challenge is to ensure that people have good quality jobs, attractive careers, and homes so that they can stay, return, or settle in those communities. The city and growth deals are very relevant in this context.

The results of the 2021 Census suggest that population growth in Wales is slowing down and that there's a decline in the population aged 15–64. The fact that these trends are very evident in those areas where the Welsh language is at its strongest is a matter of concern. The loss of people of working age has a negative impact on the sustainability of these areas, and therefore jeopardises the viability of Welsh as a natural community language. As you know, the results of the 2021 Census also show a decrease in the number and percentage of Welsh speakers in Wales. Although there's a decrease in the majority of counties in Wales, the most significant decrease can be seen in the counties of west Wales, in the strongholds of the Welsh language. It is reasonable to conclude that the economic performance of these areas contributes to the depopulation that is taking place there, and that this has a negative impact on the viability of the Welsh language.

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To stop the decline of the Welsh language in these areas, we must ensure that we support and enable people to continue to live and work in those communities, or return to them. The activity of the city and growth deals to regenerate the economy in these areas is very relevant to that effort.

### **Considering the effects of policy decisions within areas of higher density linguistic significance**

Since summer 2024, the Welsh language standards place a duty on the corporate joint committees, which implement the city and growth deals, to consider the effects of policy decisions on the Welsh language. This requirement should ensure that organisations give conscientious consideration to the Welsh language when deciding on future strategic direction. The needs of communities where there is a high density of Welsh speakers should therefore be central to policy decisions that will affect them.

There are good examples of the current strategies of the city and growth deals giving consideration to the promotion of the Welsh language, and they've funded projects that are relevant to Welsh culture that increase the opportunities to use the language. A good example of this is the development of Yr Egin in Carmarthen, which promotes the status of the Welsh language and its culture within the town, and is home to organisations that operate through the medium of Welsh, such as S4C and the Urdd. We don't know if Yr Egin's Welsh ethos is due to conditions imposed as part of receiving funding from the Swansea Bay City Deal. However, we are keen to see similar projects that create economic opportunities by attracting investment in areas where there's a high density of Welsh speakers, while at the same time creating further opportunities to use Welsh. It would be useful if the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee could question the joint committees and the city and growth deals as to what consideration they have given to the needs of Welsh speaking communities within their boundaries.

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## **Specific strategy for areas of higher density linguistic significance**

In its report, [\*Empowering communities, strengthening the Welsh language\*](#), the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities (the Commission) argues that existing economic development strategies and structures have been developed without much thought for the needs of communities that have a high density of Welsh speakers. According to the Commission, mainstream economic development policies have not closed the Gross Value Added gap with the rest of the UK, and there's a need to rethink what kind of interventions would offer the most value to these communities.

The Commission recommends that the Welsh Government should develop an economic development strategy that specifically addresses the needs of areas of higher density linguistic significance. According to the Commission, that strategy should promote economic development approaches that focus on the basic needs of those communities. We agree with the Commission's assessment and are supportive of the call for a strategy that puts a specific focus on the economic needs of these areas. In its response to this recommendation, the Government has committed to considering this as part of the delay and reflection period for the ARFOR II programme. We think that officers of the city and growth deals operating in areas of higher density linguistic significance should be involved in discussions about the development of specific economic strategies for these areas. It is necessary to ensure that the city and growth deals contribute directly to the success of these economic strategies.

## **The infrastructure of areas of higher density linguistic significance**

We should aim to mainstream as much of the needs of the areas of higher density linguistic significance as possible within the direction and activity of the city and growth deals. It is essential that the needs of communities where there's a high density of Welsh speakers are taken into account when infrastructure projects which are part of city and growth deals are being developed. Developments in areas such as public transport and digital infrastructure are likely to strengthen communities that have a higher density of

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Welsh speakers, as they facilitate the lives of the people who live there and increase their ability to access good jobs. That in turn should help create conditions where fewer working-age people feel they need to leave their communities in order to have better life chances.

Similarly, urban regeneration developments can provide the housing needed for working-age people, and make our towns attractive places to live. However, caution must be taken when developing new housing in areas of higher density linguistic significance, as the development of too many new homes could lead to high levels of immigration which could have a negative impact on the density of Welsh speakers in the area. That should be a consideration when deciding on the locations of large housing estates that will be built for the city and growth deals' economic development workforce. It is local needs that need to be met in the areas of higher density linguistic significance, rather than the requirements of national or regional policies.

### **The green economy, Cymraeg 2050, and strengthening Welsh communities**

There's a link between the need to support the economic prosperity of Welsh communities, and the exciting opportunities that exist as a result of net zero economic development. There's potential for the economy of areas in west Wales to strengthen as a result of the economic opportunities of a green transformation, as the region possesses many relevant natural resources. It's good to see that the city and growth deals have been investing in low-carbon energy projects. An example of good practice that we would be pleased to see replicated elsewhere was a £9m investment by North Wales Ambition to expand the Morlais tidal energy project, which is led by Menter Môn, which also operates through the medium of Welsh and exists for the benefit of the Welsh language and the communities of Anglesey.

There's a clear overlap between some of the core objectives of the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy and the projects that the city and growth deals have for net zero development. Considering these links and clarifying the key role of the skills sector in

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Wales in this context should be a priority for the city and growth deals. The Government and the city and growth deals should invest in the development of the green economy in rural and post-industrial areas where there's a high density of Welsh speakers. The evidence base needs to be improved for better planning and to help local people access the jobs that can result from the green economy transformation. Focusing on integrating related policy agendas (for example, the Welsh language, the green economy, and agriculture) is one way of maximising investment and benefits.

### **Local Welsh language education and training pathways**

In order to harness the potential that exists to support the economic prosperity of Welsh-speaking communities, it is essential that suitable education and training pathways are available locally, and through the medium of Welsh. For example, if an area has the potential for wind energy development, then there needs to be training pathways for local people to access this, through the medium of Welsh. The city and growth deals therefore need to work in partnership with a number of organisations such as the Government, education providers, the Commission for Tertiary Education, and the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, to ensure that this is in place. In addition, training courses for specific industries should be provided as close as possible to that area, to help people to stay and live in their communities.

### **Empowering Welsh-speaking communities to keep the benefits local**

The Government's recent consultation on the skills of the net zero sector referred to maximising local ownership, while retaining economic and social benefits in Wales. We agree that models of local ownership over energy production are an effective way of creating good jobs in Welsh-speaking areas. They also have the potential to contribute to the local area's economy. We are aware of several community initiatives in the electricity and heat generation sector that operate through the medium of Welsh, and contribute to the local economy. In our conversations with Community Energy Wales, for example, Ynni

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Ogwen and Ynni Sir Gâr emerge as models of good practice of how to maximise local ownership and proactively support the Welsh language. We are aware that Growing Mid Wales has provided support to projects such as Ynni Teg, which is developing small-scale locally owned solar and wind farms.

Many of the coastal areas of west Wales include communities with the highest density of Welsh speakers, and that population could benefit from developments in the marine energy sector, such as the development of new wind farms in the Celtic Sea off the coast of Pembrokeshire and south-west England. The city and growth deals should actively learn from initiatives such as Ynni Ogwen, Ynni Sir Gâr and Menter Môn to understand what skills were essential to their success, and what skills they anticipate they will need in the future. Community Energy Wales has launched a working group on shared ownership, bringing together commercial developers and community energy groups to share information, address barriers, and develop best practice. Engaging with that working group could be an effective way to learn about skill needs at a local level, and to think about how the city and growth deals could support other Welsh-speaking communities to recount the successes of existing community energy groups and innovations.

### **The importance of Welsh-language workplaces and the Welsh Offer**

In areas where there's a lower density of Welsh speakers, there are fewer opportunities to use Welsh on a day-to-day basis, so it is vital that Welsh school leavers continue to use the language as they progress in their education or training, and into the world of work. The challenge is to maintain our young people's Welsh skills and turn speakers into long-term users. A key part of ensuring this linguistic progression is to enable people to work through the medium of Welsh on a day-to-day basis. Focusing on increasing the use of Welsh in the workplace has the potential to influence people's perception of the importance of the language, on opportunities to gain linguistic confidence, and on wider use of the Welsh language in the community. There's a real opportunity from the city and growth deals to contribute to this effort by promoting organisations that offer Welsh

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language services to the public and enable people to work through the medium of Welsh, thereby supporting the Government's *Cymraeg 2050* strategy.

Private businesses and third sector organisations can work with our Hybu team in order to receive the [Welsh Offer](#), which is an official recognition from the Commissioner given to organisations that have worked with us in order to draw up a Welsh Language Development Plan. This gives organisations the opportunity to develop their Welsh language services over time, and to show the public that they are proud of the Welsh language. Over 160 organisations have now accepted the Welsh Offer, and this figure is growing monthly. Encouraging organisations that receive funding from the city and growth deals to gain the Welsh Offer recognition would be an effective way to contribute towards the effort to increase opportunities for people to use their Welsh.

We hope you'll find the above comments useful in your consultation, and I'm happy for my officers to meet with you for a further discussion.

Yours faithfully,

Efa Gruffudd Jones

**Welsh Language Commissioner**

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