

MEETING:	LANGUAGE COMMITTEE
DATE:	28 January 2021
TITLE:	ARFOR programme
AUTHOR:	Anwen Davies <i>Developing Rural Gwynedd Programme Manager</i>
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT	Give the Members an update on the ARFOR programme

1. Background:

Following a budgetary agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, in February 2019, the Minister for the Economy, Ken Skates AM, confirmed that a budget of £2 million was available to Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire Councils to trial innovative methods of supporting the economy in the Welsh language's heartlands. The funding is available up to the end of 2020/21.

The Arfor Programme Board was established, which includes the Leaders of the four counties and commentators from Welsh Government. Gwynedd Council was asked to act as the lead body for the four counties, by co-ordinating the relationship with Welsh Government.

It was agreed that it was a priority for all counties to refer the majority of the budget to implementing plans locally, by sharing the lessons learnt in order to inform further plans in future.

It was agreed to safeguard some of the budget to draw up a plan to develop the economy and create jobs in the Arfor area for the future, and to hold some joint pilot activities.

£466,250 was available to be invested in Gwynedd over a two-year period on activities that would lead to the creation of new jobs that, in turn, would support the language in our communities.

The Gwynedd Arfor Steering Group has been established to identify a package of innovative projects to trial over the period that is in-keeping with the programme's criteria.

The package of projects in Gwynedd included:

- Support for Enterprise
- Maker and Co-locations Spaces
- Enterprising Communities Challenge
- Llwyddo'n Lleol

2 January 2021 Update

The Committee was presented with the update shown below on the projects in its last meeting in November 2020. In this meeting, the programme Manager will give more information on the changes implemented, as well as share an update on the Strategic Plan and the contingency plans for after the formal end of the programme in March 2021.

November 2020 update:

Although there were concerns at the beginning of the period that the county's Arfor plans would have to be postponed, the past months have in reality been extremely busy.

2.1 *Enterprising Communities Challenge*

Grants had already been distributed to three projects: Partneriaeth Ogwen, Canolfan Henblas and Menter y Plu, with each of them having either continued with their plans or adapted them to face the challenges of the pandemic. The Canolfan Henblas project has been completed, and we will produce a story about it over the coming weeks.

2.2 *Support for Enterprise*

Again, there was concern that a change of direction would be required with this grant, with the pressure to maintain businesses increasing, if not exceeding the need to provide a boost to new businesses during this period. However, it was confirmed that businesses such as Becws Islyn, that had already received offer letters, would continue with their plans. Applications are still being accepted, and work continues to discuss projects for establishing and extending businesses. We will release information about business success stories in Pen Llŷn that are linked to the ARFOR Programme and the LEADER Rural Programme over coming months.

The panel has met on four occasions since April to discuss applications, and it was decided to be more flexible with the type of applications that were accepted, to ensure that there were opportunities for people to establish businesses and gain full-time

employment, in addition to expanding businesses to offer new employment opportunities. The number and quality of applications that have been received were very positive, and all the available grant funding has been allocated. We are eager to help more businesses to apply for additional funding from the Council to support the project and a bid has also been submitted to the Government for capital funding that will enable us to extend the fund.

Until the beginning of the lockdown period, the fund had received over a hundred initial enquiries, approximately 70 businesses had progressed to submitting a Declaration of Interest Form, 22 had applied and 19 had accepted an offer. This number has naturally increased by now, and we will provide a further update to the Committee at the beginning of the year.

2.3 *Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050*

This plan has seen the greatest change over this period, but its success has been notable. The original intention was to provide opportunities for young people to become influencers and work in partnership with local companies. Due to the restrictions, the direction of this scheme had to be changed completely, and the scheme has been re-launched by Menter Môn, with an emphasis on offering a grant to motivate young people to create and implement business ideas. The young people have been sharing their stories on social media. There are plans in the pipeline to develop Llwyddo'n Lleol 2050 across the four ARFOR counties.

2.4 *Ffiws*

Although the space in Porthmadog had to close during the lockdown period, videos and workshops were shared over social media. When the space was re-opened, people were invited to attend one-to-one sessions. We are considering the idea of developing Ffiws space in other areas of Gwynedd over the next few months.

2.5 *Cross-cutting Work*

The ARFOR Strategic Plan Interim Report has been completed by Wavehill company, and the evaluation work will begin imminently. The work of responding to the interim report has already started. More details will be available in the new year. During the next few weeks we will launch the ARFOR Bwrlwm work, and will identify businesses that are role models in their use of the Welsh language, and how they can influence others.

3 What is sought by the Committee?

The Members are asked to accept the update that will be given by the officer and to offer any observations and questions following the presentation.