

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol](#) ar gyfer yr ymchwiliad i Gydlyniant Cymdeithasol

This response was submitted to the [Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) on the [inquiry into Social Cohesion](#)

SC 21

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaethau Tai, Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn

Response from: Housing Services, Cyngor Sir Ynys Môn

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- **The key issues which impact social cohesion in Wales and consider whether interventions need to target specific groups of people, geographical areas or particular key issues.**

Firstly, we believe it is important to note that key issues which impact social cohesion are different across all regions of Wales. Issues that might impact some regions aren't an issue in other regions or have yet to become issues on other regions. It is important to note that although on the whole Wales is mostly dealing with the same issues all regions are not the same.

When mentioning that not all regions are the same, one of the biggest issues affecting Northwest Wales that might not be as prominent in other regions is the Welsh language. According to the 2021 Census 66.6% of people in Gwynedd can speak, read and write in Welsh, whilst only 26.2% of the population have no skills in Welsh. On Anglesey 58.1% of the population can speak, read or write in Welsh, whilst only 30.7% have no skills in Welsh.

The highest percentage of racial hate crime in this region comes from Welsh v English. This is mostly driven from the amount of second homeowners within Gwynedd and Anglesey. Stats from 2021-22 show that Gwynedd had the highest percentage throughout Wales of second homes at 37% whilst Anglesey were second with 32%. The YesCymru movement is building momentum in Northwest Wales. YesCymru is a movement dedicated to the goal of an independent Wales, they believe that only a Wales, with its own government and institutions, elected and created by the people of Wales can truly be trusted to govern in the best interests of its people. During a protest in 2019, 10,000 people gathered on Y Maes in Caernarfon to march. Whilst in September 2023 over 10,000 people attended a march in Bangor.

Alongside the Welsh language another issue for Northwest Wales is rurality. Rural areas of Wales account for 82% of the land area of Wales and is home to 32% of the national population. 3 of the 9 predominantly rural counties include Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy which make up the whole of Northwest Wales. Rural communities are often more vulnerable to a range of health and wellbeing impacts. Older people often live in more rural areas as a pose to urban areas and are impacted by social isolation, low levels of mobility, existing long-term health conditions, barriers to access services, poverty and lack of transport.

The lack of transport in Northwest Wales creates issues as it isolates some of our most vulnerable communities from accessing support. There is a lack of support groups or 3<sup>rd</sup> sector

organisations in rural areas meaning that people must travel to towns and cities to access support. Without access to public transport these people are unsupported and often segregated from their communities.

Lack of funding support for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector organisations is a great worry across North Wales. 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations are unsure how they can continue to provide support for our most vulnerable communities due to lack of all round support for the organisations. The inclusive emphasis of the activities delivered by these funds has a meaningful impact on alleviating tension and encouraging cohesion within our communities; outcomes that are key to achieving the government's vision of an anti-racist Wales and other ambitions.

Communities in North Wales are becoming more diverse due to the continued delivery of various resettlement schemes in the area and the roll out of full asylum dispersal across all UK local authorities. Our local authorities in Northwest Wales have made pledges to resettle more refugees as part of the safe and legal routes cap consultation which was published last year.

The dispersal accommodation estate is growing rapidly across the region, including into new dispersal areas in Conwy, Gwynedd and Anglesey. Local authority staff in new dispersal areas lack knowledge and skill when working with clients who have NRPF. They lack knowledge on the dispersal/ Asylum process and migrants' rights and entitlements. This makes it difficult to develop new and effective pathways within services. Organisations such as Migrant Help, Welsh Refugee Council and Red Cross are unable to offer outreach work in these new dispersal areas due to lack of funding. Case work and support then falls on the LA staff, particularly the local Resettlement teams. It is vital that for these communities to thrive within Northwest Wales, funding is needed for 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations to be able to offer face to face services and support, locally and particularly in newer and rural dispersal areas.

The growing number of resettled families to the area creates further pressures on accommodation needs locally, particularly when families are placed in temporary or dispersed accommodation with a need to move on to more settled accommodation within a short period of time. Examples of this are ARAP families on three year leases in SFA and newly granted refugees in dispersed accommodation needing to move on with 56 days.

We have seen an increase in presentations from families/individuals with NRPF, this has resulted in a social services duty without any extra funding to support this. Many of these presentations come as a result of individuals attempting to cross the border into Ireland by boarding the ferry at Holyhead Port. We anticipate further duties and financial strain on social services, following negative decisions on asylum claims as asylum dispersal continues to roll out in our areas.

- **Examples of best practice and other interventions/needed to support social cohesion and overcome tensions. This includes understanding the role the third sector plays in supporting social cohesion and what barriers it faces, including funding.**

Northwest Wales is committed to supporting the roll out of asylum dispersal across the areas of Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy. We believe that it is vital for the individuals and families moving to the area to be included within the communities. In response to the lack of available services locally, Hub's have been set up across all three counties through each local authority with the support of the Community Cohesion team. The community hub's and drop-in services welcome

members of all communities across the region and the aim is to provide a space for communities to come together and get to know one another in a supportive and respectful environment, as well as provide, support, guidance and signposting to access essential services such as health care, housing, education and employment and welfare and immigration advice. All three Hub's are well attended every week and has become a core support for many of the attendees.

As well as the Hub's mentioned above all three resettlement teams from across all three local authorities as well as the Community Cohesion team, representatives from Migrant Help, Welsh Refugee Council and Red Cross, local community groups, social workers and other local organisations meet monthly to discuss best practice, gain advice from each other and support each other with any difficult arising issues.

In order to promote Diversity across North Wales the Northwest and Northeast Community Cohesion teams have collaborated on an event due to take place in April named Diverse Together North Wales 2025. It will be a conference, workshop and networking event for diverse community representatives in North Wales. This includes ethnic minority / LGBTQ+ / disabled / socially isolated members of our communities, and everyone with a Protected characteristic. It will be an opportunity to share experiences of the Public Sector in North Wales: from engaging with their local council, to receiving healthcare at your local hospital, to interacting with local police. We hope that this will enable future events and conversations that can support social cohesion and overcome tensions.

Further to the event mentioned above to prevent any possible tensions it is vital that the cohesion team meets often with various stakeholders and public sector services including North Wales Police, Welsh Government and the local health board as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations. By holding monthly meetings all parties involved can discuss possible arising tensions, incidents that have already taken place that are causing unrest and support each other. These meetings will enable professionals and practitioners from different backgrounds to communicate better, discuss each other's roles, responsibility and what resources are available and hopefully encourage different teams to collaborate with each other.

We believe that for communities to thrive and for tensions to be monitored and kept at a low level it is vital that there are more community-based groups/organisations. Community-based groups/organisations are able to find innovative solutions aligned to the unique needs of their community, they can serve as trusted voices in their areas and build cross-sector partnerships for public well-being. Community groups/organisations may often lead to greater understanding of community contexts. We have been able to see the benefits of community-based groups through the community Hub's set up across all three counties in the Northwest. Having these Hub's be accessible to asylum seekers and refugees have allowed them to receive weekly support, meet new people and be aware of what's happening within their communities, whilst it also gives the community cohesion team the opportunity to be aware of any tensions that the members might be experiencing.

We have a good working relationship with colleagues in Welsh Government, from various teams relating to community cohesion and resettlement. Regional meetings are held regularly where updates can be communicated, best practice and issue reporting, as well as sharing data, trends and reports which are relevant to understanding the impact of resettlement on local communities and acting on or responding to this as needed. From the most recent 'Sanctuary in

the Senedd' event it is apparent that the sharing of lived experiences and positive outcomes and achievements can have a very positive impact on service delivery. We recently met with the Migrant Integration Framework Manager to discuss ways in which the gaps in data could be met and look forward to further conversations and supporting this work.

We welcome a recent invitation, from Joy Kent on behalf of Housing Justice Cymru, to take part in 'The Croeso Collective' a new network for organisations from across sectors and across Wales that provide or procure housing or homelessness services and are interested in helping people seeking sanctuary avoid homelessness and be welcomed into our communities. We look forward to taking part and are interested in finding out more about the network and NACCOMM. We appreciate the support to help us create and continue conversations on this locally.

- **What support the Welsh Government provides to community groups and organisations and identify whether there are any opportunities to provide additional support. This includes examining the limitations and barriers which exist given some aspects of support for social cohesion are reserved to the UK Government (for example policing, media and internet regulation), and what action could be taken to overcome these challenges.**

We believe that recording and sharing of data is a fundamental aspect of supporting community groups and organisations. Data sharing can promote transparency, reproducibility and collaboration across academic disciplines. Recording information and sharing with other organisations could keep individuals or groups safe and free from harm. Information sharing is vital to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of communities.

When there are times of unrest either within the UK, Wales or specific regions of Wales it would be extremely beneficial if local authorities and Welsh Government are able to send the same message out. During the July/August 2024 UK riots local authorities were unsure of the message they should be sharing with the public and we're seeking support and advice from the Community Cohesion teams and Welsh Government. Having the same message being released by local authorities and Welsh Government can create strong communication, build trust and transparency between Welsh Government, the local authority and its customers. It would create less opportunity for misinformation or incorrect information to be shared between communities which could cause less tension.

It is also important to note that having the resources to release messages in all languages is key in ensuring all ethnic minority groups also receive correct information. Organisations must be aware that there are some communities within their areas that don't understand Welsh or English therefore having translation services available is crucial to ensuring messages are shared far and wide in a safe and correct manner that will also ensure false information or incorrect information isn't shared.

Whilst on the subject of messages being released to the public, the Community Cohesion team also believes it's time that more organisations took more responsibility in sharing information regarding minority groups, highlight all religious events or celebrations and celebrate diversity throughout the calendar year. The Northwest Community Cohesion team have created an Equality Calendar for 2025, the purpose of the calendar is to try and highlight the importance of minority groups, to educate others on the importance of minority groups and to learn of the history of minority groups. Having events planned throughout the year from the equality calendar ensures interaction between local authority staff and customers, having the opportunity

to get to know staff and customers and ensuring that minority groups feel seen and valued within their communities. It can be used as a powerful resource for understanding the historical, cultural and religious events that shape diverse groups and their impact on workplace. Some of these events may raise questions around how accommodating the workplace is around the religious needs of some staff. It is important that organisations don't shy away from highlighting these dates due to fear of backlash or negative feedback, the Community Cohesion team can assist organisations in navigating sharing information and conversations.

Over the past years the Community Cohesion team have been able to deliver the small grants scheme. The small grants scheme can have a massive impact on local communities and small organisations and can motivate organisations to collaborate on future initiatives. It can empower individuals to become more invested in their communities and offer more opportunities for minority groups within their own communities. It is vital that the small grant scheme continues to ensure opportunities for small grassroots organisation who couldn't compete with big national organisations a chance to flourish and to reach individuals, families and communities that are hard to reach.