

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
Newyddiaduraeth Newyddion yng Nghymru: Dyraniad cyllideb arfaethedig Llywodraeth Cymru o £100,000 y flwyddyn / News Journalism in Wales: Welsh Government's proposed budget allocation of £100,000 a year.
CWLC(5) NJ01
Ymateb gan Alan Evans, Golygydd Llanelli Online / Evidence from Alan Evans, Editor of Llanelli Online

My name is Alan Evans and I am the editor of Llanelli Online a 24/7 hyperlocal news site for Llanelli and surrounding areas. I have been building up the brand and content but it is not yet a fully-fledged business. Within 8 months the site has built up an audience of 40,000 per week. This is almost the population of the town of Llanelli.

We focus on several key elements. News– local, national and International where it impacts on the community. Sport, mainly local and underrepresented such as ladies rugby, disabled athletes. Business, local including job vacancies, successes, etc. Farming, Politics – local national and international. Health. Community and Arts.

Our demographic is 18 to 65 60/40 male to female.

We have covered some major news stories and in fact have broken news stories, which have been picked up by the BBC and Wales Online. We do not rely on Facebook but rather go out on a daily basis usually at the invite of individuals or groups. We research our stories and we offer opportunity for responses from all sides involved in any story.

We have covered political party conferences, large sporting and community events. We have sponsored local sports teams. We have taken on and helped students who have in turn moved on to other jobs. We have established a very good local reputation amongst the population.

Our main issue has been cash flow. We have zero funds available but we have raised around £6,000 in 8 months, which went back into purchasing equipment and paying for fuel for our vehicle.

We lack a sales person to capitalise on our success and sell advertising. We have thought about monetising the site and this would bring in a small amount of money. The only viable way of sustaining the hyperlocal really is with sponsors, donations and advertising unless it is established as a not for profit and can access grant funding.

We do have a lot of community support and we are looking at launching the town's first independent radio station, which will have a heavy emphasis on the Welsh language. We already supply Radio BGM at Prince Phillip Hospital and the Llanelli Talking Newspaper for the Blind. Our plan would be to place raspberry pi in shops and other locations, which would be programmed to receive our web based broadcasts.

We would be looking to partner local schools and colleges to offer hands on training for those looking to establish a career in the media. The opportunities for such training are now almost non-existent in Wales.

The BBC have had an additional £8mil in funding yet their online site for Wales is not even near as full of appropriate content as this new hyperlocal. Often they are weeks behind our stories. Since receiving the funding they have not made any real difference to their news or current affairs programmes indeed they have actually cut back on them and staff and their news coverage is now more Cardiff and North Wales focussed than before in a bid to pick the low hanging fruit stories that are within driving distance of the studio. It is in essence lazy journalism for big bucks.

We believe that we have strong strong evidence in Llanelli Online to assert that it is a very good example of how local journalism can function in 2017 without the need for lots of flashy cars and highly paid managers in suits who contribute nothing to the end product like the BBC and other top heavy organisations who cream off public funds to support their lavish lifestyles.

That may sound harsh but I would ask you to compare a hyperlocal site like Llanelli Online with the BBC's site for South West Wales. One receives absolutely zero help or funding, the other well.

In conclusion I would submit that the money WAG have made available for hyperlocals will not go very far given that the bare minimum to get a hyperlocal off the ground and able to survive in the first year would be around £10,000. That is a conservative estimate. Given that scenario you would only be looking at 10 new hyperlocals across Wales if you could find a journalist mad enough to spend the long hours required in providing a high quality community service.

My submission would be that it would be far more viable to fund any existing hyperlocals should they need it but with the proviso that they open their doors to trainees. Those same trainees-interns could also benefit from a small bursary fund to get them through the doors of a university. I have one such young man with me now who left a media course because he just wasn't getting the kind of help and experience I was able to offer him. His work is clearly now of a level of a well-trained journalist as can be seen on the website.

There is an opportunity to help and learn from a fledgling Hyperlocal in the backwater of Llanelli, which if funded correctly could be an exemplar model for others to follow. I would be happy to meet to discuss ways in which we could help in ensuring that hyperlocals begin to flourish across Wales as I believe that these are the future of journalism in Wales as the mainstream abandon communities.