

SIARTER SIR GÂR

Charter for Carmarthenshire



Rhanbarth Sir Gâr Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg

October 2004

Preface

1. The Welsh language will not survive in Carmarthenshire unless there is an opportunity for everyone to learn and use the language in all aspects of their lives, and not until sustaining local communities becomes central to a wide range of policies.
2. We believe that there is a responsibility on the County Council – as representatives of the people – to realise these aims in those areas where it has the power, and to set an example and give a lead to others in those areas where it does not have any direct responsibilities.
3. There is a deeper significance to the future of Welsh in Carmarthenshire than the fate of the language itself. It represents the continuation of community values and the right of our communities to shape their own future.
4. This Charter has been published at a time when the County Council are adopting two fateful strategies:
 - The Unitary Development Plan
 - Schools Organisation Plan

These strategies could undermine our Welsh -speaking village communities and deprive them of their main resource for regeneration i.e. the local school. Adopting these two plans proves that the aim of their Corporative Strategy of 'safeguarding the Welsh language and Welsh-speaking communities' is nothing but empty words and that there is a need for a more practical strategy.

5. We believe that the language strategy promoted by the council is useful but wholly inadequate in itself to secure a future for the Welsh language since it does not deal with the main political issues, which will decide the future of our communities. Our *Siarter Sir Gâr* (Charter for Carmarthenshire) represents a serious attempt to face up to these issues.

In this document we present the steps which must be taken if the Welsh language is to have a chance of surviving as a community language. Taken as a whole, these steps form *Siarter Sir Gâr*.

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1. Welsh as an Official Language

The County Council should work gradually in order to ensure that the Welsh language becomes its principal administrative language. Then other bodies, due to the influence of the Language Strategy, will make serious effort to follow the lead given. Education in the county will be put in a new context. With the main employer and service provider in the county making full use of the Welsh language in its work from day to day there will be a far stronger motivation to teach Welsh effectively in our schools.

2. Welsh medium education in every community

2.1 The Welsh Language Education plan should be revised in the county's school through ensuring a language continuum. Every School should move up the continuum by strengthening their use of Welsh. This means strengthening the Category A schools while increasing the use of Welsh as the medium of the life & work of every school. The AB & B school would work towards being re-graded as Category A schools. This strategy should also be expanded to include secondary education.

2.2 Through C.C.E.T., and especially Coleg Sir Gâr, Welsh medium training should be ensured for every sector of work in the county so that people will be free to use Welsh in all aspects of public life.

2.3 The success of village schools in the field of social integration should be built upon by ensuring a network of Community Education Units in the urban areas as well. In practise this would mean an increase in flexible & multi-site establishments – designed to meet the training needs of the communities rather than the managerial needs of the administrators. The use of the educational resources should be integrated & rationalized by ensuring that every village or community unit would offer a range of education basic to the community including the teaching of Welsh to adults and training through the medium of Welsh. The County Council Community Regeneration Department should work through these community/neighbourhood units to improve skills & recognise opportunities to develop the local economy. *Such a strategy would represent positive rationalisation and a genuine modernisation of schools as opposed to the office-based plans and negative cut-backs of the Council's current Schools Organisation plan and so-called "modernisation".*

3. The Regeneration of Welsh-speaking Communities

In accordance with the County Council's Corporate Strategy, a strategy should be devised to sustain and develop our welsh-speaking communities. An effective strategy should on the one hand acknowledge the potential of every community in the county to become a Welsh-speaking community whilst on the other hand recognising the variety of the present reality. This could be achieved by the categorising system of the county's communities (a similar policy to the categorising of schools) in negotiation with the relevant Community Councils. There would be different strategies for different categories with the one principle of an increasing continuum. Dedicated officers within the Chief Executive's Department would be responsible for ensuring that every Council department would consciously contribute to the strategy and consider the effect of all their policies on the sustaining of our Welsh-speaking communities. An urgent Identification of Needs is required, with emphasis on ensuring that young people can choose to live in the Welsh-speaking communities and experience a broad life-experience. Amongst the policy fields that would contribute to the strategy would be the following:

- Housing Policy to sustain welsh-speaking communities – implementing the *Homebuy* scheme and plenty of units to rent (including youth units i.e. for young individuals).

- Planning Policy to support Welsh-speaking communities – ensuring that their effect on the sustenance of the community and its culture would be a main factor in deciding on planning applications
- Community Education units working through the medium of Welsh and open to the whole community for youth clubs and the learning of new skills to promote work opportunities..
- Transport Policy to support Welsh-speaking communities – taking into consideration the needs of young people with no car and families with only one vehicle. A minibus service should be set up to connect people with their places of work during the day and with leisure and social centres during the evenings – including a late night service back from the towns.
- Work opportunities to sustain communities through a combination of training in the Education units, easy transport to workplaces and promoting community ventures in the production sector and services.
- A variable language policy for Community councils and public services in the different community categories. Welsh would be the main official language of public life and services in the Category A communities.
- The county council should undertake formal negotiations with Youth Councils and school students on every Development plan so that they feel part of the process of planning a future for their communities.

4. LEISURE FACILITIES

4.1 The strategy should attempt to make these communities lively places where young people would wish to make their future.

4.2 An important contribution (see above) by a flexible public transport policy so that young people can live in Welsh-speaking villages and also enjoy urban leisure facilities.

4.3 With the increasing confidence of Welsh-speaking communities, their Welshness could be marketed with community-friendly tourist campaigns (on the same pattern as eco-friendly tourism) attracting European tourists who would be interested in experiencing a lively Welsh medium culture. This would ensure that these communities would not become introverted, and in practice, money from the tourism ventures during the summer months could fund a number of bands and cultural groups who would contribute to their communities throughout the winter.

5. THE COUNTY COUNCIL SHOULD PUT PRESSURE ON OTHER RELEVANT AUTHORITIES TO ACT ON MATTERS OUTSIDE THE COUNCIL'S AUTHORITY:

- On Westminster to call for a new Welsh Language Act and a Property Act
- On the Assembly to fund housing for rent and the Homebuy scheme.
- On the European Objective 1 fund to finance projects to develop Welsh-speaking communities because of their importance to European culture.
- On ELWA and Higher Education establishments to fund Community Education Units, and research programmes to assess the need of these communities.
- On private partners – to follow the example and leadership of the Council work.

Until now, the emphasis has been placed on increasing the number of individuals who say that they have knowledge of Welsh. In the future, we must concentrate on promoting the use made of the language – in all aspects of life in the county and through ensuring the survival of Welsh-speaking communities.