



# CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

## Example of Good Practice

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### ‘Papurau Bro’ – Community Newspapers as cultural infrastructure

Mid Wales

Key words: rural communities, culture, language, literature

#### 1. Introduction

Papurau Bro are Welsh language community newspapers providing a hyper-local media outlet and calendar for community events and organisations. As cultural infrastructure, the papers **support the Welsh language** and **cultivate a sense of belonging**, while stories of people and places **connect communities to their heritage**.

‘Bro’ is a Welsh term relating to an area, and can be attributed to a parish, a town locality, or even a valley. Papurau Bro normally cover small towns and their surrounding locality. The majority are based in rural areas, signifying the importance of agriculture and rural communities as strongholds of the Welsh language.

Recently, there have been **innovative efforts to develop a digital platform**. Bro 360 is a new partnership between the Papurau Bro and Golwg, the most widely published Welsh language magazine in circulation.



The front page of Papurau Bro Clonc, serving the Lampeter area, Mid Wales



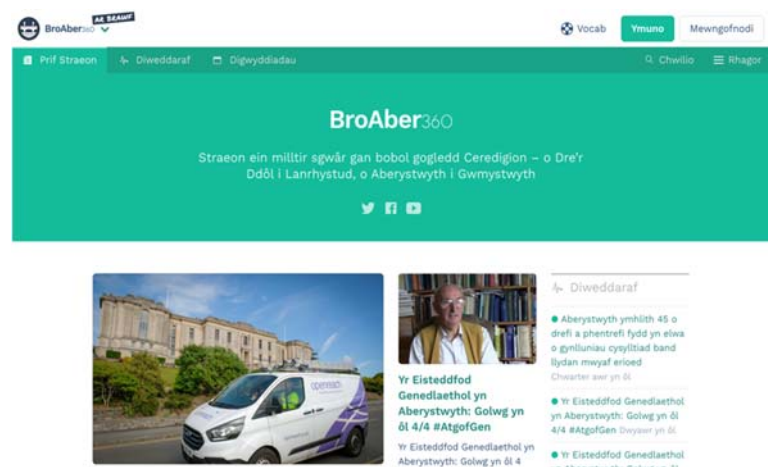
## 2. Project Intention / Background information

Papurau Bro were first established in the 1960s and 1970s in an effort to strengthen Welsh culture and communities. It was felt that the local English language newspapers of the time did not reflect local Welsh culture. There are over 50 Papurau Bro published all over Wales. Each paper is unique and independent, with its own format. Most offer features such as: updates from local villages, stories of notable local characters, local history and folklore, recipes, and regular columns. Importantly, a social calendar for the area provides details of various upcoming community events, such as concerts, fundraisers and local agricultural shows.

Papurau Bro are run by dedicated teams of volunteer contributors and editors, with a management committee to oversee organisation and finances. The primary costs include design, printing and folding. Some papers pay for distribution to local shops, whilst others rely on volunteers to do this.

The papers are funded through a variety of business models. Papers sold in local shops generate a circulation revenue, while advertising revenue comes from local businesses. Each paper also receives a small grant from the Welsh Government, administered through Mentrau Iaith Cymru (a national body providing administrative support for local Welsh language organisations). Some papers also supplement their income with fundraising activities.

Recently, there have been efforts to innovate the role of the Papurau Bro through developing a digital platform. The aim of the Bro 360 project is to develop an online hyper-local news platform that compliments the Papurau bro. The project uses digital infrastructure developed by the Golwg Cyf. To date, the project has developed seven pilot websites for four areas with large rural populations – Lampeter, Tregaron, Aberystwyth and North Ceredigion, and Arfon in North Wales.



*The homepage for BroAber360, serving the rural-urban Aberystwyth area, Mid Wales*

## 3. Main Description

### 3.1. Benefits

Papurau Bro provide an outlet for Welsh language local news and stories to be shared on a level that would otherwise not be commercially feasible. There are Papurau Bro in both rural

and urban areas, but most of the 50 Papurau Bro are based in rural areas. In an era when many rural schools, shops and pubs have closed, the Papurau Bro provide an opportunity for communities to communicate with each other, and the chance to play a much wider role in local democracy and public participation. They further provide an interface with important cultural organisations including Young Farmers' Clubs and Merched y Wawr (a rural womens' organisation).

Papurau Bro play an important role in maintaining and developing cohesive rural communities – one of the well-being goals in the Well-Being of Future Generations Act, a landmark piece of legislation outlining Wales' commitment to Sustainable Development. The papers' readership is typically much wider than the circulation list – people share copies of the paper with friends and relatives, and papers are also read in community venues, such as pubs and cafes. In contrast to national daily newspapers, people read Papurau Bro '*o glawr i glawr*' (from cover to cover), and readers are genuinely interested in hearing about their local neighbourhoods and keeping up to date with local events. The papers also help integrate new residents to the area, offering a way to find local events to attend, clubs to join and new people to meet.

### 3.2. Challenges

The main challenges facing Papurau Bro relate to resources - a readily available bank of volunteers and financing the production costs. Succession plays an important role also, as many volunteers are older.

One of the main aims of the new Bro360 project is to overcome these challenges by engaging with a younger audience as online content developers. Experiences from the pilot show that young people are very advanced in the technical aspects of digital content creation, but need support to develop ideas and interesting storylines. Having started from the Bro 360 platform, some young people involved in the pilot have now also started contributing to the printed Papurau Bro.

### 3.3. Papurau Bro and Covid-19

Covid-19 has created additional challenges for Papurau Bro, as many of the older volunteers involved in the production of the papers have needed to shield. Due to the enormous volunteer effort that goes into producing papers that publish monthly editions, there were initially concerns that if the papers stopped, they may not gather the momentum to start back again. But with a '*Cefn Gwlad*' can-do attitude, electronic versions of 32 of the Papurau Bro (in PDF form) have published online via the Bro360 platform, which has proved successful and led to numbers of downloads exceeding regular circulation numbers.

Some Papurau Bro have also taken the opportunity to publish back editions of their papers online. Online distribution further provides an opportunity for the Welsh-speaking diaspora to re-connect with their *cynefin* (locality), with downloads from different parts of the world.



Discussions have been held around the future of Papurau Bro based on the success of the digital platform. Different income generation options are also being, such as a payment option for downloading a PDF version of the paper, or a subscription-based model. There are also opportunities to develop local apps to help local companies compete with larger companies on the digital stage, considering three key elements to a sustainable local community – local businesses supporting local organisations who support and use hyperlocal news outlets. Papurau Bro have been in circulation for the past 50 years, and despite the challenges of Covid-19, digital technology provides a myriad of opportunities for the tradition to continue.

#### 4. References

You can reach the digital versions of Papurau Bro here - <https://bro.360.cymru/papurau-bro/>

