

# WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## **Talk with Me Phase 2 – Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery plan**

DRAFT

## WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

Acting early to support babies and children in developing their Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) is crucial. SLC skills are critical to our wellbeing, they shape our relationships and are fundamental to our learning. 1 in 5 children and young people are struggling with their SLC development<sup>1</sup> and more than 10% have long-term speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which create barriers to communication or learning in everyday life<sup>2</sup>.

Babies, children and young people with SLCN are at greater risk of a range of adverse outcomes, including poor emotional and mental health and higher risk of unemployment. SLC skills follow a social gradient, with children living in poverty being at higher risk of having SLCN. These children were also amongst those most likely to have been adversely affected by Covid-19 and associated restrictions.

The potential impact of SLCN on children's outcomes is alarming, but effectively identifying and supporting children early reduces the risk of negative outcomes and narrows the disadvantage gap.

In 2020 the 'Talk with Me' delivery plan was launched to provide SLC support to children aged 0 to 5 across Wales. Since its launch, Talk with Me has shown progress across objectives. Welsh Government wishes to build on the successes of Talk with Me to extend the workplan and include a focus on children aged 5 to 11. The Talk with Me early years workplan will continue to be delivered alongside Talk with Me Phase 2.

A consultation is being carried out in early 2026 to gain the views of stakeholders across the Early Years, Health and Education sectors to ensure the proposed objectives are aligned with children aged 5 to 11. The views of babies, children and young people will also be captured within this consultation.

Colleagues within and outside Welsh Government are clear that while a focus on prevention in the earliest years continues to be important, children beyond this age range also need access to effective universal and targeted SLC support.

**Long term** - If SLCN is not identified and supported early this can result in negative outcomes across the life course. We are aiming to break this inter-generational cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech and Language UK, 2023 [Listening-to-unheard-children-report-FINAL.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> Afasic [What Are Speech, Language and Communication Needs \(SLCN\)? - Afasic](#)

**Prevention** - By identifying SLCN early and implementing timely interventions, we can prevent problems escalating and ensure children get the right support, from the right people, at the right time.

**Integration** – Talk with Me Phase 2 will contribute to the 7 wellbeing goals from the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, in particular:

*A prosperous Wales* - Children who have acquired SLC skills have a greater chance of achieving positive outcomes later in life e.g. strong educational attainment, better mental health, greater employability potential and social equality.

*A healthier Wales* – Evidence suggests that SLC must be prioritised as a child well-being indicator and treated as a public health issue.

*A more equal Wales* – Language acquisition is a key component in creating a society that enables people to fulfil their potential irrespective of their background (including their socio-economic background and circumstances). Providing support for SLC for children aged 5 to 11, as well as the early years, will help to further promote this.

*A Wales of cohesive communities* –A significant proportion of young people in the youth justice system and long-term unemployed young men have SLCN. Promoting and supporting SLC development will contribute to creating attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – Promoting language development in the Welsh language will contribute to the strategy: *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers*. Providing bilingual language development support will help to enable children to participate in activities that promote the language and culture of Wales.

**Collaboration** - By working with experts in the field of Early Years, Health Social Care and Education, we can shape our national direction of travel for SLC, building upon the good practice we know exists in our local authorities, as demonstrated through programmes such as Flying Start and Families First.

**Involvement** – We have collaborated with Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and internal Welsh Government colleagues to develop this proposal. The consultation exercise will help ensure those who are affected by the proposal will have a voice in the development of the plan.

**Impact**- We know from published and anecdotal evidence that there has been a trend of increasing demand and complexity of SLCN in children of school age (e.g. Welsh

Government, 2025)<sup>3</sup>. Evidence from Welsh Government's current SLC delivery plan suggests that a focus on prevention can have a positive impact on outcomes. A strategic approach to supporting SLC in the early years needs to be replicated for older children if we are to reach all of those in need of support.

If we do not invest in prevention, we are potentially at risk of

- Children moving from early years settings with a workforce skilled in supporting SLC, to education settings where this training is not currently consistently available or implemented.
- Children whose SLCN have not been identified and supported in the early years, are at risk of 'slipping through the net' and potentially experiencing negative outcomes.
- Increased demand on specialist services which are already under significant pressure.

The potential risks of publishing a delivery plan expanded to include children aged 5 to 11, include:

- Increased demands on the education workforce through training and implementation of evidence-based interventions
- The education workforce will not prioritise SLC above other competing demands and expectations.
- Increased demand on specialist services through effective identification of children with SLCN

**Costs and Savings-** We are consulting to establish SLC priorities for Wales. Once these have been established, we will be able to estimate costs. The Early Years Branch budget for Talk with Me will be used for early years actions on the delivery plan. It is anticipated that other actions in Talk with Me Phase 2 will be funded by the teams responsible for their delivery.

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<sup>3</sup> [Post-pandemic speech, language and communication needs for pandemic-era babies and toddlers now aged 5 to 8 in full-time schooling in Wales](#)

## CONCLUSION

### **How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?**

We are in the process of going out to public consultation to ensure that the people most likely to be affected by the proposal are given the opportunity to contribute at an early stage. This includes a specific consultation with children and young people via Children in Wales. A children's version of the consultation document is available to ensure the information contained in the document is accessible to all.

Community Mentors will also have the opportunity to contribute to the consultation with a focus on Anti-Racism.

Welsh and English language are at the heart of the proposed delivery plan and the plan is focussed on supporting children's language development in every language they are exposed to.

### **What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?**

Talk with Me Phase 2 delivery plan will contribute to the 7 wellbeing goals from the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, in particular:

*A prosperous Wales* - Children who have acquired SLC skills have a greater chance of achieving positive outcomes later in life e.g. strong educational attainment, better mental health, greater employability potential and social equality.

*A healthier Wales* – Evidence suggests that SLC must be prioritised as a child well-being indicator and treated as a public health issue.

*A more equal Wales* – Language acquisition is a key component in creating a society that enables people to fulfil their potential irrespective of their background (including their socio-economic background and circumstances). Providing support for SLC in the 5 to 11 age range, as well as the early years, will help to further promote this.

*A Wales of cohesive communities* – A significant proportion of young people in the youth justice system and long-term unemployed young men have SLCN. Promoting and supporting SLC development will contribute to creating attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – Promoting language development in the Welsh language will contribute to the strategy: *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers*. Providing bilingual language development support will help to enable children to participate in activities that promote the language and culture of Wales.

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- Increased demand on specialist services which are already under significant pressure.

The potential risks of publishing a delivery plan expanded to include children aged 5 to 11, include:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Lack of Stakeholder Buy-In</b>	High	High	Involve stakeholders early through co-design workshops; communicate clear benefits tied to curriculum goals; create evidence-based briefing materials.
<b>Insufficient Training for Staff</b>	High	Medium	Develop bite-sized training modules; include real classroom examples; offer ongoing support via community of practice.
<b>Increased demands on the education workforce through training and implementation of evidence- based interventions</b>	High	High	Involve stakeholders early through co-design workshops; communicate clear benefits tied to curriculum goals and ALN requirements; work to incorporate SLC into initial teacher education
<b>Poor Measurement and Evaluation</b>	High	Medium	Define measurable outcomes now; use simple tools for baseline and follow-up; share early wins widely.
<b>Limited Parental Engagement</b>	Medium	Medium	Create easy-to-use resources for parents; use newsletters and social media; partner with community hubs.
<b>Funding or Resource Constraints</b>	High	Medium	Identify low-cost strategies; seek partnerships with local health boards and charities; build sustainability plan early.
<b>Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Overlooked</b>	Medium	Medium	Ensure resources are bilingual; include examples relevant to diverse communities; consult language specialists.

<b>Digital Access Issues</b>	Medium	Medium	Provide offline alternatives; test digital tools for compatibility; offer guidance for low-tech implementation.
<b>Increased demand on specialist services through effective identification of children with SLCN</b>	High	Medium	seek partnerships with local health boards, co-design solutions, assist with implementation of preventative support

**In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:**

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

The Talk with Me Phase 2 delivery plan is being proposed in order to mitigate the risks detailed above to ensure children's SLC skills are supported appropriately at a universal and targeted level in the early years, as well as in the 5 to 11 age range.

The consultation is being carried out in order to engage the public and relevant stakeholders at this early stage to reduce the risks of SLC not being prioritised as the actions in the plan will focus on stakeholders priorities.

The focus on preventative, universal and targeted support within the Talk with Me Phase 2 delivery plan would aim to reduce the demand on specialist services as the right children would be supported by the right people at the right time.

Mitigation measures specific to each identified risk are set out in the table above.

**How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?**

An implementation plan will be developed as an internal working document that will have clear specific goals and measures of impact alongside each action agreed on the delivery plan. These will ensure that the outcomes will be measured and evaluated. Outcome measures suggested in consultation responses will be incorporated as appropriate.

An impact presentation will be written at the conclusion of the plan and shared with relevant stakeholders.