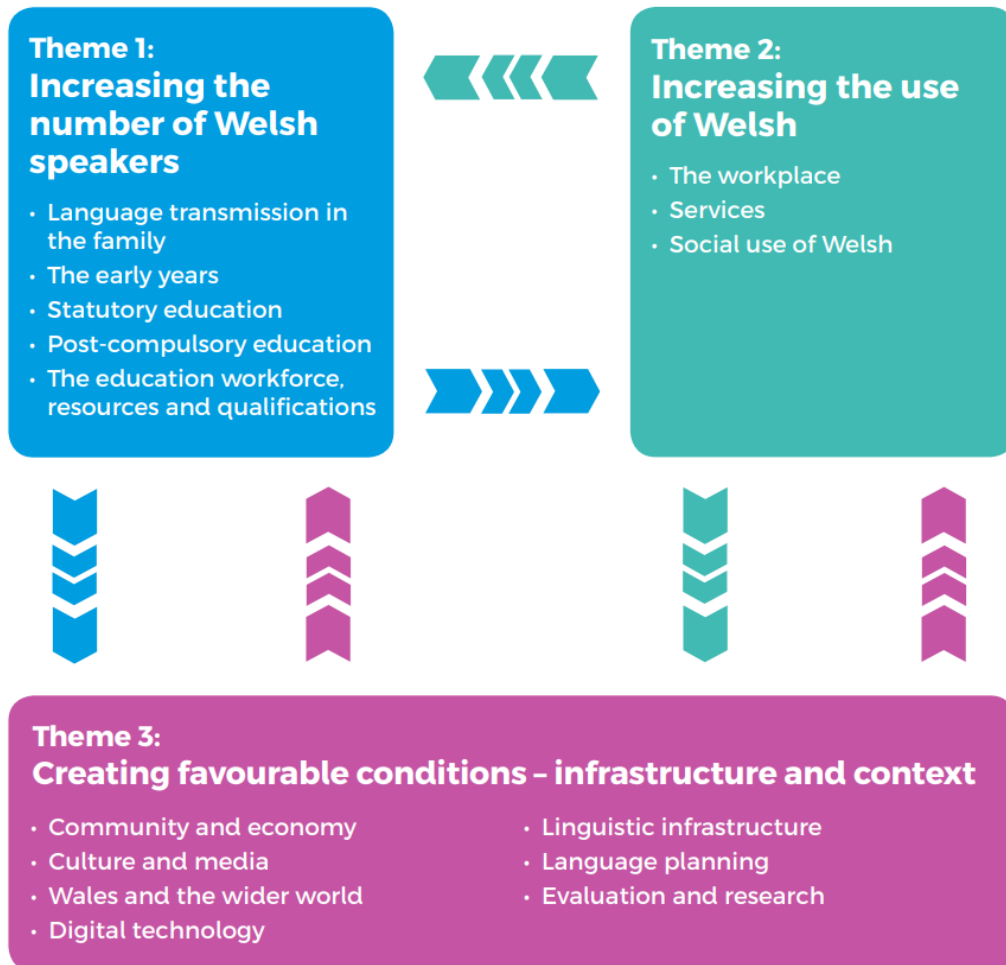


WELSH LANGUAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT – Elections and Elected Bodies (Wales) Bill

[Cymraeg 2050](#) is our national strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers to a million by 2050. The Welsh Government is fully committed to the new strategy, with the target of a million speakers included in the Taking Wales Forward Programme for Government and Prosperity for All: the national strategy.

The Cymraeg 2050 strategy has three themes:



The headings under each theme outline the scope of activities that can affect the language.

Background to the Bill

The Programme for Government was published on 17 June 2021 setting out ambitious commitments to be delivered between 2021 and 2026 to improve the lives of people across Wales. It is important that the Senedd and local government closely represents the communities it serves, and the Programme for Government includes a commitment to reform local government elections to reduce the democratic deficit. Our vision is for Wales to be a place where it is easy for every citizen to get involved in our democracy, have a say in elections and vote.

In June 2021 the Welsh Government announced an ambitious programme of electoral reform to build on work delivered in the fifth Senedd including extending the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds through the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020. On 29 July 2021 the Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution published a written statement setting out a framework for electoral reform and priorities to enable more newly enfranchised voters and existing voters to register and vote in the local government elections in 2022.

In October 2022 we consulted on a wide set of proposals to reform Welsh elections. Youth Friendly, Easy Read and British Sign Language versions of the consultation were published alongside the main document.

The Bill will deliver a major package of reforms outlined in the White Paper, including:

- piloting the registration of electors without application for Welsh elections prior to full roll-out,
- establishing an Electoral Management Board (EMB) to improve the administration of elections,
- reforming the processes for conducting community and electoral reviews,
- abolishing the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales and transferring its functions to the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales,
- improving accessibility of Welsh elections for disabled people and,
- improving candidate safety by legislating to extend the scope of the offence of undue influence.

Does the Bill demonstrate a clear link with the Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language (Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers)?

Respondents to the White Paper identified no significant impact on the Welsh language from the policy proposals. Existing Electoral Commission guidance for Returning Officers requires that Returning Officers must have regard to the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Furthermore,

the practical utilisation of the infrastructure and staff of local authorities to deliver elections therefore integrates the use of Welsh in the delivery of elections.

Electoral services are therefore delivered in Welsh, as far as reasonable and proportionate, so as to treat the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language. This links to one of the strategic objectives of the Cymraeg 2050, Services (under theme 2), which aim is to increase the range of services offered to Welsh speakers, and an increase in use of Welsh-language services.

The majority of respondents to a specific question in the White Paper did not support introducing new Welsh language requirements on Returning Officers. The Welsh Language Commissioner and some respondents to the White Paper provided examples of areas that could be improved by referring to services to be delivered through the medium of Welsh when elections take place. Suggestions include that electoral templates, written and verbal communication and the declaration of results should be bilingual and translator/interpreter resource provided when needed and that bilingual professional training should be available for staff, candidates and elected members. We will take account of these points as we work with electoral stakeholders to design services.

Describe and explain the impact of the proposals on the Welsh language and explain how you will address these impacts in order to improve outcomes for the Welsh language?

The Welsh Government believes that providing more electoral services in Welsh will positively impact on the Welsh language. We will work closely with the Welsh Language Commissioner, the Electoral Commission and the EMB to address the issues raised during the consultation process and to ensure the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than English.

While there is only one provision in the Bill that will explicitly promote the Welsh language, set out below, the following examples show how we will consider the Welsh language during implementation of the Bill's wider provisions:

Changes to electoral and community reviews undertaken by the Local Democracy & Boundary Commission for Wales and local authorities across Wales.

The Bill includes a number of changes to the arrangements for these reviews, including the addition of the Welsh Language Commissioner to the list of mandatory consultees when developing its policy and practice statement and the individual electoral reviews. It also requires the Commission to include the English and Welsh electoral ward names in both the Welsh and English versions of its reports. This is a change to the current practice which is that the English names of wards are included in the English reports with the Welsh ward names included in the Welsh reports. This is intended to support the Welsh language by increasing the transparency of the process for determining ward names in Welsh and English and enabling greater engagement by voters.

Welsh language requirements for Returning Officers

The White Paper sought views on whether specific Welsh language requirements should apply to Returning Officers and on the types of services people would like Returning Officers to deliver in Welsh. While the majority were not in favour of introducing new requirements, views were mixed on this point. Some felt that sharing information and best practice between local authorities and Returning Officers was more important than setting out new requirements in legislation. We will continue to work with stakeholders to develop policy in this area, through existing secondary legislation powers where appropriate.

Electoral Management Board (EMB)

Coordination of electoral administration in Wales is currently undertaken by the Wales Electoral Co-ordination Board (WECB). WECB is a voluntary body with no statutory powers. One of WECB's key objectives is to ensure that electoral services in Wales are provided bilingually. To help facilitate this, the WECB has set up the Welsh Language Advisory Group, which is chaired by a member of WECB and helps coordinate and support elections teams deliver services in Welsh – for example, agreeing a common glossary of electoral phrases in Welsh. We will continue to work closely with this group in the interim period before an EMB is established.

The Bill establishes an EMB as a statutory board of the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru (“the Commission”), with statutory functions to continue and build on the voluntary work currently undertaken by WECB. The Commission, acting through the EMB, will be responsible for collaboration between returning officers, Electoral Registration Officers and other persons responsible for the administration of Welsh elections. The EMB will have the power to issue directions and advice to Returning Officers and EROs. The EMB will develop the role of the Welsh Language Advisory Group as part of its work, in order to support the bilingual delivery of elections in Wales.

Accessible voter information platform

The Bill places a duty on Welsh Ministers to establish and operate a Welsh elections information platform providing electors with information about Welsh elections. The Welsh elections information platform will provide information in English and Welsh.

Local Government Candidate Survey

The Bill will enable local authorities to include questions designed to measure progress in connection with local initiatives in respect of individuals standing for elected office with local government. This approach would support any initiatives taken locally to encourage more Welsh speakers to stand for election.