Comisiynydd y Gymraeg
Welsh Language Commissioner

Advice note to Welsh Ministers on community language planning

July 2026

1 **Executive summary:** Advice note to Welsh Ministers on community language planning

1.1 **Purpose:** This advice note sets out the steps Welsh Ministers could take to make fuller use of the promotion standards as a statutory framework for co-ordinating community language planning across Wales. Acting on this advice would respond to important recommendations made by the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities and contribute to national policy objectives to increase the use of Welsh.

1.2 **The strategic challenge:** The evidence clearly shows that the social use of the Welsh language is limited. Even though a significant proportion of children and young people can speak Welsh today, a much smaller percentage of these state that they use the language in social situations outside and beyond the education system.

1.3 **Risk:** Without a more robust and coherent approach to community language planning:

- There is a danger that the increase in the number of Welsh speakers will not be translated into an increase in the use of Welsh on the ground.
- Welsh will continue to weaken as a community language, including in areas of higher density linguistic significance.
- Investment in Welsh-medium education and efforts to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh will be less effective if the language is increasingly confined to institutional contexts.

1.4 **The solution proposed:** In line with the recommendation of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities, the promotion standards should be amended to create a stronger and more effective statutory framework for community language planning. This would mean:

- in all parts of Wales that local authority promotion strategies are vehicles for intensive community linguistic planning at a local level, focusing on creating and maintaining diverse opportunities and spaces to use the Welsh language.
- in areas of higher density linguistic significance that the promotion strategies are also a framework that supports the development of public policy for the benefit of the Welsh language, including targeting and evaluating the impact of policy interventions in important areas such as planning, housing, education and economic policy.
- setting stronger and more specific expectations in terms of the content of the promotion strategies, setting out the type of outcomes, targets and indicators that should be set.
- require local authorities to develop and implement promotion strategies in a more strategic and collaborative way, bringing together a range of organisations, associations and partners to deliver them.

- strengthen the monitoring, reporting and evaluation arrangements of the promotion strategies.
- expand the role of the Welsh Language Commissioner to support implementation, assess impact and provide advice on the delivery of the promotion strategies.

1.5 Our vision is that the promotion strategies would resemble Welsh in Education Strategic Plans but would focus on increasing the use of Welsh rather than on educational provision. They would significantly strengthen the link between national policy and local action. The promotion strategies would also connect with and build on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, ensuring that Welsh-speaking children and young people have clear and diverse opportunities to use Welsh beyond school.

1.6 Action that needs to be taken by Welsh Ministers

- Agree to broaden the scope of the review of the promotion standards to realise the potential of strategies to promote the Welsh language as a vehicle and mechanism for intensive community linguistic planning.
- Implement a process of developing detailed policy and legislative options, including:
  - Consider the powers of the Welsh Ministers under Section 26(1), 26(2) and 27(4) of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure to make additional provision about the promotion standards
  - Consider what kind of stronger and more specific requirements could be included in regulations in relation to the promotion strategies
  - What kind of monitoring and accountability procedures and arrangements could be included in order to strengthen the impact of the promotion strategies
  - Consider, in discussion with the Welsh Language Commissioner, as a statutory consultee, what the role of the Commissioner and relevant Welsh Government departments would be in such a reformed regime
- Assess the implications of implementing this approach on the funding methods and resources of local authorities, partners responsible for delivering activities through the medium of Welsh and on the Welsh Language Commissioner.

2 **Full advice:** increasing the reach and contribution of promotion strategies to the delivery of Welsh Government national policy

2.1 Section 4 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 imposes a duty on me to offer advice and assistance to Welsh Ministers on any matter that relates to the Commissioner's functions or to the promotion and facilitation of the use of Welsh. I am issuing this advice note under that provision to explain the steps I consider necessary to strengthen community language planning and increase the use of Welsh.

3 Our Vision

3.1 We wish to see a significant increase in the use of the Welsh language in communities across Wales achieving the Welsh Government's policy objective of doubling daily use of the language by 2050. Our vision is for more Welsh speakers to use Welsh daily in different contexts and spaces. We want to see a significant change in the language habits of children and young people, with more of them using the language naturally outside the school gates, with their friends when socializing, and when taking part in cultural, community and sporting activities.

3.2 To achieve this diverse and obvious opportunities will be required for Welsh speakers to use and enjoy the language on a day-to-day basis. The aim is a Wales where Welsh is a living language in every community and where the use of Welsh is a natural and easy choice in all parts of the country.

3.3 As part of realising this vision, local authorities would lead ambitious community language planning efforts. This work would respond to the local position of the Welsh language, with approaches tailored to factors such as speaker density and the needs of specific areas. Local authorities would co-ordinate the efforts of different organisations and plan strategically to increase opportunities for people to use Welsh socially. Adequate funding and resources would be available to implement these plans and to promote and facilitate the social use of Welsh locally.

4 Current situation and challenges

4.1 **Limited use of Welsh:** The detailed analyses of the Census 2021 results in the Commissioner's 5-year report clearly show that a significant number of children and young people lose Welsh language skills as they get older. One likely reason is that they have too few opportunities to use Welsh socially outside the education system. The Commissioner's research and other evidence suggest that young people increasingly live in a context where English is the language of play and entertainment. There is therefore a real risk that the increase in Welsh speakers created through the education system will remain largely within the school walls.

4.2 **Trends in the demography of Welsh speakers do not create favourable conditions for increasing use:** There are fewer Welsh speakers today than there

were ten years ago, there has been a significant shift from the home to the school as the main source of new Welsh speakers, and the density of speakers in traditional Welsh-speaking strongholds is decreasing. This demographic change has a direct effect on the use of Welsh.

4.3 **Lack of opportunities to use Welsh in lower density areas:** In areas where there is a lower density of speakers there is a lack of natural opportunities to use Welsh as the critical mass of speakers does not necessarily exist to ensure easy opportunities for people to use Welsh. In these areas there is a need to create more spaces where the Welsh language can be used, and more support is needed to carry out leisure and cultural activities through the medium of Welsh.

4.4 While several organisations are already taking action to increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in these areas, this work needs to be further supported by increasing investment and ensuring that different efforts are co-ordinated in a more purposeful and strategic way.

4.5 **A real challenge to the sustainability of higher density areas:** In areas with a higher density of speakers there are many more natural opportunities to use Welsh daily. However, we know from research[1] and experience that the use of Welsh as a natural language in these communities is weakening. Fewer children in these areas speak Welsh at home and socially today, and emigration and wider socio-economic factors are further eroding the use of Welsh within these communities. Ensuring that the Welsh language continues as a community language in these communities is one of the most significant issues for the future of the Welsh language.

4.6 Solving these challenges requires significant intervention from the perspective of community linguistic planning, and also in related policy areas such as town and country planning, housing, and economic development. The solutions currently being offered do not appear to be adequate or coordinated effectively enough to reverse worrying trends in these areas.

5 The relevance of the promotion standards as part of the solution

5.1 The above challenges are complex ones, and the solutions are likely to be equally complex and multi-layered. As the Commission for Welsh speaking Communities has already pointed out, one possible part of the solution would be to further exploit the potential of the promotion standards and requirements for local authorities and national park authorities to draw up 5-year strategies for promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language. Not only do the standards have further potential in terms of intensifying and coordinating efforts to increase language use locally, but also in terms of creating a planning and evaluation framework for the introduction of necessary policy interventions in areas of higher density linguistic significance.

[1] See the Welsh Communities Commission's report: Empowering communities, strengthening the Welsh language, and also the Welsh Language Commissioner's 5 Year Report, 2021-25

5.2 The 5-year strategies are intended to ensure that local authorities plan for increasing the use of the Welsh language locally. While the standards require local authorities to formulate and evaluate these strategies, it is fair to conclude that the success and impact of the strategies have been mixed and generally limited.

5.3 Research commissioned by the Commissioner showed that some local authorities have innovated, but that other strategies remain high-level statements with limited follow-up. As expectations are vague, local authorities do not always co-operate adequately with local partners such as Mentrau Iaith, youth groups, or sports clubs when drafting their strategies. We also know that these strategies are not always co-ordinated effectively with other local authority strategies, for example Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, local well-being plans, local development plans, and economic plans.

5.4 The Commissioner's advice document on compliance with the promotion standards encourages local authorities to consider the wider language planning context. However, there is no direct or clearly defined relationship between the standards and national policy objectives to increase the number of Welsh speakers and the use of Welsh in Wales. The full potential of the promotion strategies as a tool for community language planning has therefore not yet been realised.

5.5 Improving local authority and national park authority arrangements to prepare and evaluate the strategies is one of the priorities of the Commissioner's strategic plan for 2025-30. However, it must be recognised that there are currently limitations to the Commissioner's ability to influence the content and success of the implementation of the strategies. The standards do not set clear expectations for the content of the strategies, nor do they set out a process for monitoring and scrutinising them.

5.6 The first and second phase reports of the Commission for Welsh-speaking Communities make recommendations about the potential of the promotion standards and the promotion strategies of local authorities and national parks as a framework for strengthening and co-ordinating community and local language planning.

5.7 The Commission's first phase report recommends (recommendation 51) that the promotion standards should be amended so that they require organisations to specifically identify how they will cater for areas of higher density linguistic significance. According to the Commission, the revision of the requirements of the promotion standards could significantly contribute to bringing to life the concept of areas of higher density linguistic significance, providing a framework for the development and evaluation of policy interventions in these areas. The promotion strategies could therefore be a vehicle for planning, delivering, and monitoring the impact of interventions that vary national policy in key areas such as education, planning, housing, and economic development.

5.8 The Commission's second phase report also recommends that community language planning needs to be strengthened to extend and broaden the use of Welsh in middle and lower density areas, and that the promotion strategies have a particularly important role in this context (recommendations 4 and 10).

5.9 The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 contains provisions to review the promotion standards to facilitate the achievement of statutory and national targets regarding the use of the Welsh language. We see this review as a golden opportunity to realise the full potential of the promotion standards, and to implement some of the recommendations of the Commission for Welsh speaking Communities.

6 **Our proposal:** increase the reach and contribution of promotion strategies to the delivery of Welsh Government national policy

6.1 We advise the Government to use the review of the promotion standards as a strategic opportunity to realise the potential of Welsh language promotion strategies as a vehicle for intensive community language planning. This would ensure that promotion strategies make the strongest possible contribution to national policy objectives on language use. We want promotion strategies to develop into collaborative framework led by local authorities. Local authorities would be accountable for implementation but would bring together organisations, societies and partners to plan and deliver local language planning strategies. The Commissioner would have a central role in supporting local authorities and national parks, ensuring that organisations implement the strategies effectively in line with the standards, sharing good practice, and providing advice to local authorities, national parks and the Welsh Government.

Step 1: Use the review of the promotion standards as a strategic opportunity to transform the contribution of Welsh language promotion strategies to national policy delivery

6.2 Section 26(1) and 26(2) of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 enables the Welsh Ministers to specify in regulations one or more promotion standards and to make additional provision in relation to those standards. Section 27(4) of the Measure states that the standards specified under section 26(1) or regulations under section 26(2) may deal with the following matters:

- Procedures to be followed by persons
- Collection of information from persons
- Information that must be arranged for to be made available to the Commissioner
- Monitoring arrangements and publicity requirements
- Reporting requirements

Section 150(5) of the Measure also states that any power that the Welsh Ministers have to make an order or regulations under this Measure includes a power to make different provision for different geographical areas.

6.3 As part of the standards review Welsh Ministers could use the above provisions to impose further requirements on local authorities and national park authorities. Our vision is that these requirements would to some extent resemble those of the Welsh

in Education Strategic Plans (Wales) Regulations 2019, but focus specifically on increasing the use of the language.

6.4 In terms of **the content and procedure of the promotion strategies** the revised standards could require local authorities and national park authorities to:

- Set targets, objectives and indicators around increasing the use of the Welsh language in their local area, including the type of data they will need to collect to report on progress.
- Formulate a strategy setting out how they will achieve these targets and objectives, including when they will need to review and revise the strategies.
- Determine the expected content of these strategies. For example, the regulations could be more prescriptive about the outcomes of the strategies, or by requiring organisations to pay due attention to further guidance submitted by the Government or the Commissioner.
- Adopt a collaborative approach to the formulation and implementation of the promotion strategies that will bring together a number of organisations, societies and organisations (for example, the Mentrau Iaith, the Urdd, the National Eisteddfod, youth organisations, young farmers' clubs, sports clubs, education providers, cultural organisations and social groups) and is co-ordinated with relevant wider strategies and policies at local authority and regional level. While input from other organisations in the planning and implementation of the promotion strategies would be key, local authorities would be responsible and accountable for their implementation.
- In areas of higher density linguistic significance, the promotion strategies could provide a framework for planning, monitoring and reporting on interventions that vary public policy in key areas such as planning, housing, education and economic policy.

6.5 In terms of **information sharing, monitoring and reporting** the revised standards could require local authorities and national park authorities to:

- Report annually to the Welsh Language Commissioner on the achievement of the strategy including the main targets and objectives. In areas of higher density linguistic significance there would also be a requirement to report on the impact of interventions that vary public policy.
- Sharing information with the Welsh Language Commissioner on issues such as progress against the strategy's objectives and targets, or data collected as part of the strategy's implementation.
- To report at the end of the period of each strategy to the Welsh Language Commissioner on the achievement of the targets and objectives, and in areas of higher intensity significance to assess the success of interventions that vary public policy.

Step 2: Extend additional duties and resources to the Welsh Language Commissioner

6.6 As a result of the nature of the current standards, it is not customary for the Commissioner to make recommendations to those organisations that are under the promotion standards or to the Welsh Government on the basis of the achievement of the promotion standards. We recommend that the oversight processes of the promotion strategies should be strengthened by requiring the Commissioner to do the following in addition to her existing functions:

- Ensure and support institutions' compliance with these standards in a more intensive and systematic manner, in line with a more robust regulatory framework.
- Provide proactive help and support to organisations through the publication of advice documents, guidance, research, evidence, and the sharing of good practice.
- Provide statutory recommendations and advice to organisations on the delivery of their strategies based on their annual and end-of-period reports.
- Responsibility to assess the success of the strategies, annually and at the end of their period, including assessing the success of interventions that vary public policy in areas of higher density linguistic significance.
- The above assessments would form an evidence basis for making comments and recommendations to Welsh Ministers on how to diversify and develop national policy, where investment and support is now needed based on what works. The Commissioner would therefore have a role in making recommendations to the Welsh Government which would facilitate national policy development based on the Commissioner's responsibility to support and monitor a grassroots action process.

6.7 The Welsh Government would need to provide an additional resource to enable the Commissioner to undertake the above additional duties.

Step 3: Provide additional resources to partners and organisations that contribute to the implementation of elements of Welsh language promotion strategies

6.8 The local strategies would provide useful information to the Welsh Government and to national organisations operating on the ground to increase opportunities for people to use the Welsh language. It would therefore be possible to channel and strategically plan investment based on a detailed understanding of local needs, and based on a much stronger planning regime with robust accountability arrangements.

6.9 Local authorities and national parks would be accountable for the implementation of the promotion strategies. However, due to the strengthening of the community language planning framework we anticipate that an additional resource would need to be provided to key partners who provide Welsh medium services and activities

locally. The Welsh Government, local authorities and others need to provide additional resources and investment to organisations such as the mentrau iaith, Mudiad Meithrin, the Urdd, the National Eisteddfod and sports clubs – to enable them to implement key elements of these strategies. The promotion strategies would also be a means of increasing the need for local community organisations of all kinds to increase their provision and services in Welsh.