

A Framework for Welsh Constitutional Development: Strategic Priorities for the 2026-2030 Senedd Term

A working paper on how a Plaid Cymru-led Welsh government, working with the Welsh Greens and broader civil society, can advance serious Welsh constitutional development across the full range of options identified by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (2024).

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Executive summary

Welsh devolution since 1999 has been characterised by what Adam Evans (2024) terms “constitutional instability amidst institutionalised conservatism”: three successive devolution dispensations, each proving inadequate because constitutional change repeatedly outran the institutional capacity needed to make it work. The 2026-2030 Senedd term is the first realistic opportunity for sustained strategic work to address that pattern through institutional development rather than further legislative patches.

The framework’s core thesis is that constitutional durability follows institutional capability rather than preceding it. Whatever constitutional future Wales eventually chooses among the three options identified by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (2024) — enhanced devolution, federal structures within the United Kingdom, or fundamental constitutional change — Wales benefits now from institutions strong enough to sustain it. The Commission itself declined to recommend between the three options, stating that the choice is for citizens and their representatives. This framework adopts the same position.

The work proposed here is concrete. A Welsh Treasury Management Office providing sophisticated public sector financial management. A Welsh Green Bank channelling investment into renewable energy and decarbonisation. An expanded Welsh Revenue Authority developing fiscal capability. Welsh cooperation offices in Brussels, Dublin, and beyond, building external relationships. A Welsh Public Service Academy developing administrative competence. Implementation of the Independent Commission’s recommendations on democratic innovation and constitutional principles. Working toward at least one substantive referendum on a devolved power transfer question where political conditions support it. Sector-specific economic development in renewable energy, fintech, Welsh-language creative industries, and life sciences. Cross-party constitutional dialogue with Welsh Greens, conditional Welsh Labour voices, and civil society. Expanded Welsh external engagement. Honest measurement of progress published transparently.

This is patient institutional work executable largely within current devolved powers and within tight fiscal conditions. Phased implementation is assumed rather than full-scale parallel delivery, with prioritisation reflecting fiscal capacity in any given year. Sections most executable within executive authority — institutional capability development, external engagement, and Welsh national life — carry the early-term momentum while legislative cooperation develops.

The framework is offered as a contribution to strategic thinking within Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Greens, YesCymru, and broader Welsh civil society.

Strategic priorities at a glance

Governance competence (Section 2) - NHS waiting list reduction through transparent metrics - Sustained improvement in Welsh educational performance - Welsh economic performance benchmarks against comparable UK regions - Major infrastructure delivery on time and budget - Crisis management capability demonstrated through transparent decision-making

Institutional capability (Section 3) - Welsh Treasury Management Office for sophisticated public sector financial management - Welsh Green Bank for renewable energy and decarbonisation finance - Welsh Revenue Authority expanded capability within devolved tax powers - Welsh cooperation offices in Brussels, Dublin, and beyond - Welsh Public Service Academy for administrative competence development - Welsh local democratic capacity strengthened alongside Welsh Government institutional development

Constitutional preparation (Section 4) - Implementation of Independent Commission Recommendation 1 (democratic innovation) - Implementation of Independent Commission Recommendation 2 (constitutional principles) - Work toward at least one substantive referendum on a devolved power transfer question where political conditions support it - Senedd electoral system review under Commission Recommendation 3

Economic capacity (Section 5) - Sector-specific economic strategy in renewable energy, fintech, Welsh-language creative industries, life sciences - Welsh fiscal capacity development within devolved space - Honest published analysis of Welsh structural economic challenges

Cross-party constitutional dialogue (Section 6) - Welsh Greens as constitutional partner with distinct identity preserved - Engagement with conditional Welsh Labour voices on specific questions - YesCymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg civil society partnership - Welsh local government and civic society engagement on devolution questions

External engagement (Section 7) - Republic of Ireland as priority bilateral relationship - Scotland and Northern Ireland cooperation on devolved policy questions - EU member states engagement within established UK constitutional conventions - Devolved and sub-state administrations internationally for institutional learning

Welsh national life (Section 8) - Welsh public administration developed through senior civil service recruitment pipelines and Welsh policy expertise - Welsh language confidence in public administration - Welsh cultural production supported through public funding - Welsh public engagement with constitutional questions through deliberative mechanisms

Measurement and accountability (Section 10) - Specific milestones for institutional capability development published annually - Cross-party dialogue progress tracked transparently - External engagement outcomes measured - Honest reporting across all eight dimensions

Foreword

This paper is a contribution to Welsh constitutional thinking in the wake of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales (2024) and the 2026 Senedd election.

The 2026 election produced a Plaid Cymru-led minority government supported by the Welsh Greens, a substantial Reform UK opposition, and a reshaped Welsh Labour group entering opposition for the first time since devolution began. Turnout crossed fifty per cent for the first time in Senedd history. Welsh politics is more plural, more competitive, and more democratically grounded than at any previous point in the devolution period.

This paper does not argue for any single constitutional option. It proposes work that serves Wales well whichever of the Commission's three options Welsh citizens ultimately choose. It is offered as a working document for discussion, and welcomes critical engagement from political, academic, and civil society perspectives.

1. The strategic frame

Welsh constitutional development is a generational project. The 2026-2030 Senedd term is one electoral cycle in a longer process. What it can deliver is the foundation on which subsequent terms build.

The strategic test of the term is whether Welsh institutional capacity, democratic infrastructure, external relationships, and public life have grown materially. Each of these is valuable in itself and necessary under any of the Commission's three constitutional options.

The framework's underlying argument is that constitutional durability follows institutional capability rather than preceding it. The historical pattern of Welsh devolution since 1999, documented across the Evans (2023, 2024, 2026) papers, is that successive constitutional settlements have proved unstable because institutional development lagged behind constitutional change. Addressing that pattern requires reversing the historic sequencing: building institutional capability before pursuing major constitutional expansion. Institutional capability does not determine constitutional preference, which remains a democratic question for Welsh citizens; but durable constitutional settlements are more likely where institutional capability already exists.

Constitutional change and national institutional development

This framework distinguishes between constitutional change and national institutional development. Constitutional arrangements may evolve over time, but Wales benefits immediately from stronger institutions, broader democratic participation, greater external engagement, and deeper confidence in Welsh public life regardless of eventual constitutional destination.

The institutional, democratic, and external work outlined here develops Welsh capability to operate effectively under any of the Commission's three options, including continuation of current arrangements. Capability that exists serves Wales whatever the constitutional outcome; capability that does not exist would constrain

Wales's options regardless of public preference. Building this capacity now is therefore consistent with respecting Welsh democratic agency.

Some proposals would naturally become more significant under certain constitutional futures than others. That reflects the realities of building institutional capability from the current devolved baseline. The discipline applied throughout is whether each proposal materially improves Welsh governance under current arrangements as well as under any plausible future settlement. Proposals that fail this test are not part of the framework.

Two timelines for constitutional development

Two distinct timelines are at work in constitutional development.

Devolution of powers is incremental constitutional development on a Senedd-term timescale. Specific power transfers (justice and policing, broadcasting, expanded tax powers) can be advanced through Welsh democratic process, including referendum where appropriate, on a timeframe governed by political opportunity and intergovernmental relations. One or more such steps is realistically achievable within the 2026-2030 term.

Changes to Wales's fundamental constitutional status proceed on a longer horizon governed by demonstrated Welsh institutional and governance capacity and durable public opinion. That horizon is properly measured in five to fifteen years rather than within a single Senedd term. A constitutional-status referendum is appropriate when Welsh institutional and governance capacity has been demonstrated over an extended period, when Welsh public opinion supports putting the question, and when the institutional infrastructure exists to act on whatever answer Welsh voters give.

Both timelines are present in the Commission's three options. Both serve Wales. They proceed on different timetables. The 2026-2030 term should advance work on both: incremental devolution where political conditions allow, and the longer-horizon institutional, democratic, and external preparation that makes any future constitutional-status change operationally credible.

Indicative phasing of the 2026-2030 term

The work clusters in three phases across the term.

Phase 1 (2026-2027): foundation. Governance stabilisation, institutional capability development within executive authority, expansion of Welsh external engagement. The work least dependent on coalition stability and most achievable in the early period of a minority government. Welsh Treasury Management Office establishment, Welsh cooperation office expansion, Welsh language confidence in public administration, and the public service capability work all sit here.

Phase 2 (2027-2028): democratic and constitutional infrastructure. Implementation of Commission Recommendations 1 and 2 begins to deliver visible outputs. Welsh Constitutional Principles Project consultation. Welsh Green Bank establishment. Senedd electoral system review reports. Cross-party constitutional dialogue produces shared positions on specific questions.

Phase 3 (2028-2030): consolidation and substantive delivery. Statement of Welsh Constitutional and Governance Principles produced. Senedd electoral re-

form legislation if the review supports change. At least one substantive referendum on a devolved power transfer question delivered where political conditions support it. Honest measurement and accountability published across all framework dimensions.

Indicative phasing is not commitment to a fixed schedule. Political conditions, coalition stability, intergovernmental relations, and external events will shape actual sequencing. The phasing signals operational seriousness rather than fixed delivery dates.

Success criteria

The success criteria for the term are:

Visible Welsh institutional capability that strengthens public services and Welsh self-governance under current arrangements.

Cross-party constitutional dialogue with Welsh Greens, civil society organisations, and conditional voices from other parties engaged.

Welsh external engagement that builds trade, cultural, educational, and institutional relationships valuable in their own right.

Implementation of the Independent Commission's democratic innovation and constitutional principles recommendations.

Working toward at least one substantive referendum on a devolved power transfer question within the term where political conditions support it, exercising Welsh democratic agency on a specific power transfer question.

Honest, transparent measurement of progress, allowing public accountability.

Welsh institutional capability sufficient to operate effectively under whichever of the Commission's three constitutional options Welsh democracy chooses over the longer horizon.

These are achievable in one term with disciplined strategic focus. They do not require the term to be exclusively about constitutional matters. They can run parallel to and reinforce the broader Welsh Government policy programme.

What this framework does not propose

The framework's discipline is as much about what it excludes as what it includes. The framework does not propose:

Immediate constitutional-status referendum. The five to fifteen year horizon for any such referendum is set out in the timeline distinction above.

Unilateral Welsh constitutional action outside UK legal frameworks. All proposals operate within current devolved powers or through established democratic and intergovernmental processes.

Creation of duplicate sovereign-state structures where current Welsh needs do not justify them. Each institutional proposal addresses an identifiable Welsh governance gap.

Constitutional development detached from governance performance. Section 2 (governance competence) is the foundation that all subsequent work depends on.

Replacement of UK-wide cooperation where such cooperation materially benefits Wales. The framework develops Welsh capability alongside, not in opposition to, existing cooperative arrangements that serve Welsh interests.

These exclusions clarify what the framework is and what it is not, so that it can be engaged with on its own terms.

The framework draws on substantial existing scholarship. Evans (2024) documents three successive Welsh devolution dispensations — the Government of Wales Act 1998, the Government of Wales Act 2006, and the Wales Act 2017 — each proving inadequate to the demands of devolved governance, and each preserving what Evans terms a “conferred powers mindset” even after the 2017 shift to a reserved powers model. The pattern is one of constitutional designs imposed from Westminster without sufficient Welsh institutional capacity to sustain them.

These three historical dispensations are distinct from the three contemporary constitutional options the Independent Commission (2024) identifies — enhanced devolution, federal arrangements within the United Kingdom, and Welsh independence. The Commission declined to recommend between the options, stating that “the choice is for citizens and their representatives.” This framework adopts the same position, and proposes the response the diagnosis implies: durable Welsh constitutional development requires Welsh institutional capacity sufficient to sustain whatever settlement Welsh democracy ultimately chooses.

2. Demonstrated governance competence as foundation

Constitutional development is strengthened by effective governance and visible improvements in everyday Welsh public life. The strongest foundation for long-term constitutional confidence is sustained success in public service delivery, economic management, and institutional reliability. Visible Welsh governance performance during the 2026-2030 term is the most direct way that Welsh institutions express their maturity, and the most powerful contribution the term can make to Welsh devolved governance maturity.

The specific governance areas that matter most:

NHS waiting list reduction, demonstrated through transparent metrics. Welsh waiting times have been the most visible governance challenge of recent years. Material progress here is essential and supports public confidence in Welsh institutions across every other dimension.

Education outcomes including international assessment performance, university pipeline strength, and skills development. Sustained improvement in Welsh educational performance is one of the most durable demonstrations of Welsh governance capability available to the term.

Economic performance benchmarks against comparable UK regions. Wales’s productivity, GVA per capita, and employment quality are areas where visible improvement matters substantively and reinforces the framework’s broader institutional development work.

Infrastructure delivery on time and budget. Major projects completed competently demonstrate Welsh capacity to manage complexity and underpin confidence in further institutional development.

Crisis management capability tested by inevitable unexpected events. The 2020 COVID period demonstrated that Welsh decision-making could diverge from Westminster usefully when warranted; future crises will provide further opportunities to demonstrate Welsh governance capability.

Governance and constitutional development are the same project rather than competing claims on attention. Effective Welsh public service delivery is itself constitutional work: it is what Welsh self-government looks like in practice, and what gives Welsh institutional development its substance. Public constitutional confidence is earned through institutional reliability and democratic trust rather than asserted through rhetoric.

3. Institutional capability development

Welsh institutions need the capability to serve Welsh needs effectively under whatever constitutional arrangement Wales operates. The 2026-2030 term should systematically develop Welsh institutional capability within current devolved powers, addressing identified weaknesses and building administrative competence for more sophisticated public administration. Comparable institutional development has occurred across devolved, federal, and regional administrations internationally as administrative complexity increased alongside political responsibility; the proposals below sit within that established pattern rather than departing from it.

The proposals in this section are practical governance improvements within current devolved responsibilities. A Welsh Treasury Management Office strengthens public sector financial management. A Welsh Green Bank addresses identified gaps in renewable energy finance. Expanded Welsh Revenue Authority capability supports better tax administration. Welsh cooperation offices abroad support trade, education, and policy partnership. A Welsh Public Service Academy develops Welsh administrative capability. Each addresses a specific Welsh governance gap. Their constitutional significance lies precisely in their usefulness to everyday Welsh administration: they make Welsh self-government work better today, and the institutional learning they generate would serve Wales well under any future constitutional arrangement.

3.1 Welsh Treasury Management Office

Welsh public sector financial management currently operates with limited specialised capacity. The proposed Office would function as a specialised public sector financial management and investment capability rather than a macroeconomic treasury institution. A Welsh Treasury Management Office would address this through:

Strengthened management of Welsh public sector reserves, pension fund investments, and cash management with greater sophistication than current arrangements provide.

Development of Welsh expertise in public finance, investment management, and fiscal sustainability analysis through targeted recruitment and partnerships.

Relationships with comparable public sector treasury and investment management bodies in devolved, regional, and small-state contexts, including in Scotland, Ire-

land, Estonia, Slovenia, Malta, and other administrations where institutional learning is available.

Quarterly published analyses of Welsh public sector financial position, supporting transparent accountability.

Engagement with the Cardiff fintech sector and Welsh universities to build technical infrastructure expertise relevant to public sector financial systems.

The proposed Office would operate within existing Welsh fiscal powers and would not duplicate HM Treasury macroeconomic functions. Comparable treasury management and public investment functions exist within devolved and regional administrations internationally without implying sovereign monetary authority. This is a public sector financial management modernisation initiative, addressing real gaps in current Welsh capability.

3.2 Welsh Green Bank

Wales has natural advantages in renewable energy: onshore wind, offshore wind potential, tidal power, hydroelectric capacity, and emerging tidal lagoon technology. A Welsh Green Bank, modelled on the Scottish National Investment Bank, would:

Finance renewable energy projects at scale that purely commercial markets under-deliver.

Generate returns that contribute to Welsh public revenue.

Build Welsh institutional capacity in green finance, addressing the gap left by the UK Green Investment Bank's privatisation in 2017.

Demonstrate Welsh institutional innovation in addressing market failures.

Provide cross-party policy appeal, supporting collaboration between Plaid Cymru, Welsh Greens, and conditional Welsh Labour MSs.

Indicative long-term capitalisation in the £500 million to £1 billion range over multiple Senedd terms, drawing on existing Welsh Government resources, Welsh public pension fund investment, and where possible green finance partnerships with EU institutions and ethical bond markets. The precise scale and phasing of capitalisation would depend on fiscal conditions, borrowing constraints, and partnership arrangements available at the time of establishment. The Bank's capitalisation strategy would likely require multi-term development through blended public and private structures rather than reliance on Welsh public borrowing alone, consistent with how comparable institutions have scaled internationally. Initial-term ambition is establishing the Bank with a working capital base and proven operational model rather than reaching full scale within four years. Operational credibility and investment discipline would matter more than rapid scale in the Bank's early years.

3.3 Welsh Revenue Authority development

The Welsh Revenue Authority, established under devolved tax powers, should be developed in scope and capability to handle the full range of currently devolved tax functions and prepare for any future expansion of devolved fiscal responsibilities. Specific actions:

Build operational capacity for handling broader tax functions within devolved space, including potential local tax reform, devolved tax administration improvements, and digital tax systems development.

Strengthen working relationships with HMRC for effective intergovernmental tax administration.

Engage with comparable revenue authorities internationally for institutional learning on tax administration best practice.

Publish detailed analyses of Welsh fiscal position, breaking down the current fiscal framework into its component parts and identifying where current arrangements might be strengthened.

3.4 Welsh external engagement capacity

Welsh external engagement currently operates with limited resources. Expanded capacity supports Welsh trade promotion, cultural cooperation, educational partnership, and policy engagement. Specific developments:

Expand Welsh Government cooperation offices beyond current limited presence. Priorities: Dublin, Brussels, Edinburgh, Washington, Berlin, Paris.

Develop formal cooperation frameworks with small EU member states where Welsh interests align: Ireland obviously, also Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus.

Build cultural cooperation through Welsh language, music, literature, sport, and creative industries. Welsh cultural distinctness creates international recognition that supports trade and educational relationships.

Engage with Quebec, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, and Catalonia as devolved or sub-state administrations facing comparable governance questions. Solidarity relationships and intellectual exchange.

Welsh university partnerships internationally, building academic relationships that translate into broader institutional connections.

3.5 Welsh public service capability

Welsh public servants would benefit from professional development that builds Welsh-specific institutional knowledge alongside broader public administration training. Specific moves:

Recruit Welsh public servants explicitly, with Welsh language preference for relevant roles and Welsh-specific induction programmes.

Develop a Welsh Public Service Academy providing professional development in Welsh public administration, drawing on Welsh university partnerships.

Build Welsh-specific institutional knowledge in policy areas where Welsh approaches diverge from English approaches.

Strengthen the Welsh public service ethos that supports excellent administration of Welsh policy.

3.6 Welsh local democratic capacity

Welsh institutional capability does not reside solely in Welsh Government and Senedd Cymru. Effective Welsh self-government depends on capable local democratic institutions — county and city councils, community councils, and the regional structures through which Welsh local government cooperates. The framework’s institutional capability work should be matched by investment in Welsh local democratic capacity: sustainable local government finance, professional capability development across the twenty-two principal authorities, regional cooperation structures that handle cross-boundary challenges in transport, housing, and economic development, and active engagement with community councils as the closest democratic layer to Welsh citizens. Welsh institutional maturity is incomplete if it concentrates capability at the Cardiff level while local government capacity weakens. The 2026-2030 term should treat Welsh local democratic capacity as part of the same institutional development programme as the proposals above, rather than as a separate concern.

4. Constitutional preparation

The Independent Commission (2024) made specific recommendations on democratic innovation and constitutional principles that the 2026-2030 term should implement. These constitute substantial constitutional preparation work in their own right.

This section addresses both timelines identified in Section 1: incremental devolution work executable within the term, and longer-horizon preparation for constitutional-status questions that will be settled on a five to fifteen year horizon when Welsh institutional capability and public opinion support a substantive question being put.

4.1 Implementing Commission Recommendation 1: democratic innovation

The Commission’s first recommendation states that “The Welsh Government should strengthen the capacity for democratic innovation and inclusive community engagement in Wales. This should draw on an expert advisory panel, and should be designed in partnership with the Senedd, local government and other partners. New strategies for civic education should be a priority for this work, which should be subject to regular review by the Senedd.”

The Commission grounded this recommendation in extensive citizens’ engagement work conducted through panels, surveys, the Community Engagement Fund, and Beaufort Research. Among the strongest messages the Commission received was that many citizens feel they have no influence on the actions of government, that the power to vote is an inadequate mechanism for meaningful influence between elections, and that there is a significant civic education gap concerning which level of government does what. The Commission also found 81% of those surveyed across Wales were very or fairly interested in how Wales is run. The combination of high interest with low felt agency and acknowledged civic education gaps is the precise problem Recommendation 1 addresses.

Implementation in the 2026-2030 term should include:

Establishment of an expert advisory panel on Welsh democratic innovation, drawing on Welsh and international expertise in deliberative democracy.

Citizens' assemblies on specific Welsh policy and constitutional questions, modelled on the successful Irish Citizens' Assembly process.

Civic education strategy for Welsh schools and adult education, addressing Welsh constitutional literacy and democratic engagement.

Regular Senedd review of democratic innovation progress, ensuring accountability.

4.2 Implementing Commission Recommendation 2: constitutional principles

The Commission's second recommendation states that "Drawing on this expertise, the Welsh Government should lead a project to engage citizens in drafting a statement of constitutional and governance principles for Wales."

Implementation in the 2026-2030 term should include:

Establishment of a Welsh Constitutional Principles Project, with citizen participation through deliberative engagement.

Public consultation on Welsh constitutional values, drawing on the Commission's findings on Welsh constitutional traditions and perspectives.

Production of a Statement of Welsh Constitutional and Governance Principles by 2029, allowing time for thorough engagement.

Cross-party Senedd consideration of the resulting Statement.

4.3 Substantive devolution referendum

The Commission's analysis identifies multiple areas where the current devolution settlement is unstable or inadequate. The 2026-2030 term should aim to deliver at least one substantive referendum on a specific devolution question where political conditions support it.

Plausible devolution referendum questions consistent with the Commission's analysis include:

Devolution of justice and policing to Wales, addressing the Commission on Justice in Wales (Thomas, 2019) recommendations.

Devolution of broadcasting and Welsh-language media policy.

Specific tax powers expansion within UK fiscal framework.

Referendum is one tool among several for advancing devolution of powers, not the default route. Some devolution changes can proceed through Senedd legislation and intergovernmental negotiation without requiring direct popular mandate, as previous Welsh devolution settlements have done. Referendum is appropriate where the constitutional significance of the change warrants direct democratic mandate, where political conditions require it for legitimacy, or where the absence of a referendum would itself become contested. The choice between legislative route and referendum route should be made on the merits of the specific question rather than by default. The framework does not propose frequent constitutional

referendums as a routine mechanism of governance; the use of referendum should remain proportionate to the constitutional significance of the question involved.

A successful referendum on a substantive devolution question demonstrates that Welsh constitutional development can proceed through Welsh democratic process. This precedent has long-term constitutional importance regardless of the specific question chosen, and it builds Welsh institutional experience of conducting constitutional referendums on the kind of timescale appropriate to the question being asked.

4.4 Senedd electoral system review

The Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 introduced the closed-list D'Hondt system used in the 2026 election. The Commission's third recommendation calls for "the planned review of the Senedd reforms" to be "resourced to ensure a robust and evidence-based analysis of the impact of the changes."

The 2026-2030 term should:

Implement Commission Recommendation 3 by resourcing a thorough review of the 2024 reforms following the 2026 election.

Examine alternative electoral systems including Single Transferable Vote, which would increase voter agency.

Consult on Senedd electoral reform with Welsh civil society and academic expertise.

Bring forward proposals for Senedd electoral reform if the review supports change.

5. Welsh economic development

Welsh economic performance has structural challenges that constrain Welsh public finances and limit policy options. The 2026-2030 term should make demonstrable progress on Welsh economic distinctiveness and capacity within devolved space.

5.1 Sector-specific Welsh economic strategy

Wales should pursue economic development in sectors where Welsh natural and acquired advantages create distinctive capability:

Renewable energy (offshore wind, tidal, hydroelectric, with potential leadership in tidal lagoon technology).

Cardiff fintech cluster (building on Monzo and Starling presence into a broader financial technology hub).

Welsh-language creative industries (S4C expansion, music, literature, gaming, digital media).

Life sciences research clusters (building on Cardiff University and Swansea University strengths).

Sustainable agriculture and food (Welsh produce with strong provenance brands).

Education and university sector exporting Welsh expertise internationally.

The strategic discipline is choosing sectors and committing to them, rather than the dispersed approach that has characterised some recent Welsh economic policy.

5.2 Welsh fiscal capacity development

The Welsh Revenue Authority development (Section 3.3) supports broader Welsh fiscal capacity. Additional moves:

Welsh Government should publish detailed and transparent analysis of the Welsh fiscal position, breaking down Welsh public spending and revenue into component parts with honest assessment of strengths, weaknesses, and dependencies.

Welsh tax-raising capacity should be exercised to its current devolved limits, building operational experience and demonstrating fiscal capability.

Welsh public sector pension management capability should be developed, building institutional sophistication in long-term financial management.

The framework's institutional development proposals are designed for delivery within tight fiscal conditions. Welsh Government operates under the Welsh fiscal framework with limited borrowing powers, dependent on UK fiscal settlement decisions, and managing significant baseline pressures across health, education, and local government budgets. The institutional capability development proposed in Section 3 is therefore a prioritisation choice within the available envelope rather than additive spending alongside existing commitments. The Welsh Treasury Management Office, Welsh Green Bank, expanded cooperation offices, and Welsh Public Service Academy each require trade-offs against other Welsh Government activity, phased introduction reflecting fiscal capacity in any given year, and active partnership with Welsh public pension funds, EU green finance institutions, and other external sources where the proposals can attract co-investment. Phased implementation under fiscal constraint is assumed rather than full-scale parallel delivery. Honest fiscal accounting for the framework's components is itself part of the governance capability the term should build.

5.3 Honest engagement with structural challenges

Serious economic policy acknowledges challenges rather than minimising them. The 2026-2030 term should commission and publish honest analyses of:

Welsh demographic challenges and their fiscal implications.

The economic relationship with England, including the costs and benefits of current arrangements.

Welsh language status and its economic implications.

Welsh productivity and employment quality compared to comparable regions, with clear analysis of contributing factors and possible interventions.

Public confidence in Welsh institutions is built through honest engagement with challenges. Performative optimism damages credibility; transparent analysis builds it.

6. Cross-party constitutional dialogue

Welsh constitutional development requires engagement across political traditions. No single party will deliver constitutional change unilaterally. The 2026-2030 term should build the cross-party constitutional dialogue that underpins durable change.

6.1 The Welsh Greens as constitutional partner

The Welsh Greens won their first ever Senedd seats in the 2026 election, with Anthony Slaughter as party leader securing a Caerdydd Penarth seat. The relationship should be developed as constitutional partnership:

Joint working on Independent Commission Recommendations 1 and 2 implementation.

Shared advocacy of Welsh Green Bank and renewable energy policy.

Cross-party amendment work on legislation affecting constitutional development.

Coordinated external engagement on shared interests including Celtic and small-nation cooperation.

Distinct identity preservation. The Welsh Greens should remain visibly distinct from Plaid Cymru rather than being absorbed into a Plaid-dominated bloc.

6.2 Engaging conditional Welsh Labour voices

Welsh Labour faces significant rebuilding following the 2026 result. Welsh Labour leadership contest outcomes will influence the party's posture toward constitutional development. Engagement with individual Welsh Labour MPs and Labour-supporting civil society figures who are sympathetic to specific constitutional steps builds cross-party legitimacy.

The discipline is engaging individual voices on specific questions rather than expecting Welsh Labour as a party to support a Plaid-led constitutional agenda. The 2024 Independent Commission, which included Welsh Labour participation, demonstrates that constitutional engagement across party lines is possible on specific questions.

6.3 YesCymru and civil society

YesCymru is a cross-party civil society movement focused on Welsh constitutional questions. Its value lies in its political independence. The Welsh Government should treat YesCymru as a partner with distinct identity:

Engage with YesCymru on consultation processes for the Constitutional Principles Project (Section 4.2).

Support broader Welsh civil society engagement with constitutional questions through accessible Welsh Government consultation processes.

Avoid co-opting YesCymru into Welsh Government messaging discipline. Civil society independence is constitutionally valuable.

Encourage Welsh civil society organisations (trade unions, churches, cultural institutions, academic bodies) to engage with constitutional questions on their own terms.

6.4 Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg and Welsh language activism

Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg’s tradition of Welsh-language advocacy intersects with broader constitutional questions. Engagement should respect their distinct mission while recognising the connections between Welsh language status and Welsh constitutional development.

7. External engagement

Welsh external engagement supports Welsh trade, cultural exchange, educational partnership, and policy cooperation. The 2026-2030 term should build Welsh external relations capacity within established UK constitutional conventions, expanding the policy engagement and cooperation work that Welsh Government already undertakes.

The external engagement framework set out in this section is consistent with the international cooperation activity routinely undertaken by devolved and regional governments across Europe and within the United Kingdom. Scottish Government, Northern Ireland Executive, the German Länder, Spanish autonomous communities, Belgian regions, and Quebec all maintain external engagement capacity within their respective constitutional frameworks. Welsh external engagement of the kind proposed here is normal devolved-government practice. Its purpose is practical cooperation in areas of devolved competence, supporting Welsh trade, research, and policy interests, rather than the conduct of independent foreign policy.

7.1 The Republic of Ireland

Ireland is Wales’s most strategically important external relationship. The Welsh-Irish relationship has substantial economic, geographic, and policy foundations. These relationships are already reflected in existing trade, transport, educational, and cultural links across the Irish Sea, which this framework proposes to deepen through normal devolved-government cooperation:

Trade integration across the Celtic Sea, including Welsh ports and the Wales-Ireland freight corridor.

Maritime infrastructure cooperation, including ports, shipping, and Celtic Sea logistics.

Energy cooperation, particularly Celtic Sea offshore wind and tidal projects where shared maritime resources support joint development.

Higher education links between Welsh and Irish universities.

West coast connectivity, where Welsh and Irish infrastructure choices interact with broader Atlantic and European networks.

Welsh-Irish relations also reflect shared cultural and linguistic heritage through the Celtic family of languages, a real element of the relationship that supports the practical cooperation rather than substituting for it.

Specific actions:

Welsh Government cooperation office in Dublin with substantial mandate for trade, cultural, educational, and policy engagement.

Formal Welsh-Irish intergovernmental cooperation framework covering economic, cultural, educational, and policy matters, building on existing bilateral arrangements between Welsh and Irish governments.

Annual Welsh-Irish parliamentary exchange programme between Senedd Cymru and the Oireachtas.

Joint Welsh-Irish work on Celtic Sea renewable energy projects, drawing on shared maritime resources.

Cultural and language cooperation between Welsh and Irish.

7.2 Scotland

Welsh-Scottish cooperation should be developed beyond current ad hoc arrangements:

Joint working on devolved policy matters where Welsh and Scottish interests align.

Shared advocacy on UK-wide reforms relevant to devolved administrations.

Cooperative work on Celtic and Gaelic language matters.

Coordinated engagement with international bodies recognising devolved or sub-state administrations.

7.3 EU institutions and member states

Welsh engagement with EU institutions and member states supports Welsh trade, research collaboration, cultural exchange, and policy learning:

Welsh Government cooperation office in Brussels with mandate for engagement with EU institutions accessible to sub-state actors.

Formal engagement with the EU Committee of the Regions and other relevant institutions.

Cooperative relationships with sympathetic EU member states.

Welsh participation in EU programmes where possible (research, cultural, educational programmes).

7.4 The wider international community

Welsh external positioning extends beyond Europe:

The Commonwealth, where Welsh historic connections support contemporary cooperation.

Quebec specifically as intellectual partner on devolved or sub-state governance questions.

Small-state and regional administrations facing comparable governance and resilience challenges.

Welsh diaspora engagement worldwide, building on existing Welsh communities and cultural institutions.

8. Welsh national life

If Section 7 concerns Wales's external relationships, this section concerns the internal civic and cultural life that gives those relationships substance.

Wales is a nation. This status is established in UK constitutional law, recognised in Welsh language legislation, and embedded in the existence of Senedd Cymru as the Welsh Parliament. Wales's status as a nation is grounded in established law and institutional practice and is true under any of the constitutional arrangements the Independent Commission identified.

This section addresses how the 2026-2030 term should support Welsh national life across four distinct but related dimensions: Welsh public administration, Welsh language confidence, Welsh cultural production, and Welsh public engagement with constitutional questions. Each dimension serves Wales as a nation regardless of which constitutional future Wales chooses.

8.1 Welsh public administration

Welsh Government and Senedd Cymru are the institutions through which Wales as a nation conducts its public business within the current constitutional arrangement. The 2026-2030 term should develop Welsh public administration along operational dimensions that measurably improve its functioning:

Senior civil service recruitment pipelines that build Welsh policy expertise over time, including secondment programmes with comparable devolved and regional administrations, structured graduate intake into Welsh Government, and active development of Welsh policy specialists across portfolio areas.

Welsh policy capacity in core economic, fiscal, health, education, and constitutional analysis sufficient to brief Ministers on Welsh-specific evidence and Welsh-specific implementation choices rather than relying primarily on UK-wide analysis adapted to Welsh circumstances.

Welsh Government communications and external engagement (Section 7) conducted with operational confidence in Welsh Government's policy direction, within established UK constitutional conventions.

Welsh public administration should develop strong institutional confidence in its role serving Welsh democratic priorities within the devolved settlement. The measure of that confidence is operational competence rather than rhetorical framing.

8.2 Welsh language confidence in public life

Welsh is one of the two official languages of Wales under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Welsh language confidence in public administration serves Welsh-speaking citizens and reflects Wales's national bilingual character:

Senedd proceedings increasingly bilingual with simultaneous Welsh-language working.

Welsh Government communications consistently bilingual with appropriate Welsh-first framing where appropriate.

Public sector recruitment with Welsh language treated as a standard requirement for relevant public-facing and policy roles where operationally appropriate.

Welsh-medium education expansion responding to demand.

This work implements existing Welsh language legislation and policy. The 2026-2030 term should accelerate implementation rather than introduce new principles.

8.3 Welsh cultural production

Welsh cultural production, in Welsh, in English, and bilingually, is intrinsically valuable and contributes to Welsh national life:

S4C and Welsh-language media supported with appropriate funding.

Welsh sport supported as national activity. The Welsh national rugby, football, and cricket teams have international standing recognised within their respective sports.

Welsh literature, music, theatre, and visual arts supported through Welsh Government funding programmes that recognise their contribution to Welsh national life.

Welsh historical narrative developed in education and public commemoration, addressing acknowledged gaps in Welsh national history education.

Welsh cultural production exists. Welsh sport already operates as Welsh national activity in international competition. This subsection addresses public funding and support for what is already happening rather than constructing new national framing.

8.4 Welsh public engagement with constitutional questions

Welsh voters benefit from understanding the full range of constitutional options Wales could choose. The Commission's citizens' engagement work documents both the need and the appetite for this. Citizens told the Commission that the power to vote felt inadequate as a mechanism for meaningful influence between elections, that there was significant confusion about which level of government does what, and that there was a strong appetite for participatory and deliberative mechanisms beyond electoral participation. The 81% of Welsh respondents who reported being very or fairly interested in how Wales is run represents a public ready for substantive engagement on constitutional questions if the engagement opportunities are well-designed.

The 2026-2030 term should support informed public deliberation:

Implementation of the Commission Recommendation 1 civic education strategy (Section 4.1).

Welsh Government communications that present Wales's constitutional position accurately and completely.

Support for media, academic, and civil society discussion of Welsh constitutional questions.

Public engagement processes (Sections 4.1 and 4.2) that build constitutional literacy through participation.

The discipline is supporting public deliberation rather than directing it. Welsh voters will reach their own conclusions on Welsh constitutional questions; the Welsh Government's responsibility is to ensure they have the information and engagement opportunities to do so well.

9. Risk management

The work proposed in this framework operates within an environment that requires careful risk management. Welsh political conditions, intergovernmental relations, fiscal pressures, and external developments all shape what is achievable in any given year. Honest acknowledgement of these conditions is part of the institutional discipline the framework recommends.

9.1 Coalition arithmetic

A Plaid Cymru-led minority government depends on cross-party cooperation for significant legislation. Welsh Labour's posture on cooperation will be shaped partly by the Welsh Labour leadership contest resolving in autumn 2026. The framework's legislative dependencies (Sections 4 and 5) face higher uncertainty during the leadership contest period and should be paced accordingly. Sections most executable within executive authority (Section 3, Section 6, Section 7) carry the framework's near-term momentum while legislative cooperation develops.

9.2 Sustaining governance performance

Long-term confidence in Welsh institutions is built through sustained performance in public service delivery and responsive management of unexpected pressures. Section 2 (governance competence) is the foundation that all subsequent constitutional work builds on. Welsh Government attention should remain weighted toward visible delivery throughout the term, with constitutional preparation work proceeding alongside rather than competing for capacity.

9.3 UK Government engagement

UK Government engagement with Welsh constitutional development will vary. Some Welsh Government activity falls within unambiguously devolved space; some activity may attract UK Government scrutiny. The framework's institutional capability development (Section 3) operates within current devolved powers and is therefore robust to variation in UK Government posture. External engagement (Section 7) should be conducted within established UK constitutional conventions, which provides both legitimacy and operational stability.

9.4 Public confidence and institutional resilience

Long-term public confidence in Welsh institutions depends on transparency, responsiveness, and resilience under pressure. Risk management requires institutional design that surfaces problems early, responds to them effectively, and maintains continuity of service through periods of political or operational difficulty. Resilience is built through consistent performance over time rather than through avoidance of every possible setback.

9.5 External environment

This work is designed to remain operational across a range of external conditions. Major disruptions (geopolitical shifts, EU developments, energy market changes) would shape priorities and pacing without requiring fundamental reorientation. Building robust Welsh institutional foundations is itself a hedge against external volatility, since institutional capability supports adaptive response under any conditions.

10. Measurement and accountability

Strategic projects require honest measurement. Specific indicators should be tracked publicly:

Welsh institutional capability development (specific milestones for Welsh Treasury Management Office, Welsh Green Bank, Welsh Public Service Academy, cooperation office expansion).

Cross-party constitutional dialogue (number of Welsh Greens-Plaid joint initiatives, Welsh Labour individual engagement, civil society partnerships).

External engagement (number of formal cooperation agreements, cooperation office expansion, parliamentary exchanges).

Economic capacity (Welsh GVA per capita relative to UK average, Welsh-distinctive sector growth, fiscal transparency).

Constitutional preparation (Commission Recommendations 1 and 2 implementation progress, Constitutional Principles Project milestones, devolution referendum delivery).

Welsh national life (Welsh language usage in public life, civic participation rates, Welsh constitutional literacy).

These should be published annually as part of broader Welsh Government reporting, allowing public accountability for progress across all eight dimensions of the framework.

Conclusion

Welsh constitutional development is a generational project. It is advanced by the institutional, democratic, external, and national life work that gives constitutional change its substance. The 2026-2030 term has the opportunity to do that foundational work seriously.

The framework above is not a comprehensive governing programme but a strategic supplement to whatever governing programme emerges in the 2026-2030 term. It identifies the institutional, constitutional, economic, external, and national life work that supports Welsh institutional development consistent with the Independent Commission's three options analysis.

The discipline required is treating this work as patient institutional development alongside effective governance. Constitutional durability follows institutional

capability rather than preceding it. Strong Welsh institutions, demonstrated competence, deepened democracy, expanded external relationships, and confident Welsh national life create the conditions for whichever constitutional future Wales chooses.

The question facing Wales in the 2026-2030 term is not whether every constitutional question can be resolved immediately. It is whether Welsh institutions, Welsh democracy, and Welsh public life emerge stronger, more capable, and more confident by the end of the term than they were at its beginning. If they do, Wales will be better equipped to choose its constitutional future democratically, and to sustain whatever settlement its citizens ultimately support. That is the foundational work this framework proposes, and the test by which it should be judged.

The paper is offered as a contribution to that work.

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