

Agenda – Equality and Social Justice Committee

Meeting Venue:

Committee Room 5 (Ty Hywel)

Meeting date: 22 September 2025

Meeting time: 11:00 – 17:00

For further information contact:

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**** In addition to the breaks published on the agenda there will also be periodic comfort breaks, called by the Chair ****

Pre– meeting

(10:30–11:00)

Public session

(11:00 – 16:45)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(11:00)

2 Stage one scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill: evidence session two

(11:00–12:15)

(Pages 1 – 27)

Polly Winn, RNID

Sarah Thomas, Centre of Sign Sight Sound

Lunch break

(12:15– 13:25)



**3 Stage one scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill:
evidence session three**

(13:25–15:00)

(Pages 28 – 32)

Tom Lichy, British Deaf Association

Martin Griffiths, British Deaf Association

Cath Booth, Wales Council for Deaf People

Charles Hampton, Wales Council for Deaf People

Break

(15:00–15:15)

**4 Stage one scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill:
evidence session four**

(15:15–16:30)

Jemina Napier, Herriot–Watt University

Biao Zeng, University of South Wales

5 Papers to note

(16:30)

- 5.1 Correspondence from the Children's Legal Centre Wales to the Chair regarding Deprivation of Liberty Orders for children and “If Not Now, Then When? Radical Reform for Care–Experienced Children and Young People” Inquiry recommendations

(Pages 33 – 35)

- 5.2 Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and the Constitution Committee regarding the Memorandum of Understanding Welsh Ministers and HM Prison and Probation Service

(Page 36)

6 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

(16:30)

Private session

(16:30 – 17:00)

**7 Stage one scrutiny of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill:
consideration of the evidence**

(16:30–16:35)

8 Social Cohesion: consideration of draft report

(16:35 – 17:00)

(To Follow)

Document is Restricted

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee

Bil Iaith Arwyddion Prydain (Cymru) | British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan RNID Cymru
Evidence from RNID Wales

You do not need to answer every question, only those on which you wish to share information or have a view.

What are your views on the general principles of the Bill?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We strongly support the proposed Bill and believe that the legislation is necessary to achieve the desired change and equality for BSL users in Wales.

This Bill would give BSL users in Wales legal recognition of their distinct language and cultural identity, and would bring Wales in line with other UK Nations who have BSL legislation. Including the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, the British Sign Language Act 2022 of Westminster, and the Northern Ireland Sign Language Bill which is currently going through the Assembly with the support of their Government.

This legislation is needed to address the significant and persistent inequality experienced by BSL users in Wales. Deaf BSL users in Wales, of which there are estimated to be between 5,600 and 7,300¹, continue to face significant barriers in everyday life, due to the lack of access to public services – including healthcare,

¹ (Bowen & Holtom, 2020)

local authorities and education – as well as employment and wider cultural and social life. Despite the limited data on the experiences of deaf BSL users in Wales, RNID analysis of census data shows that one in three (38%) of BSL users of working age are economically inactive, highlighting how they are further from the labour market than people with hearing loss more widely, and the general population.²

We believe the draft Bill is strong, wide-reaching and has the potential to go further than existing legislation, but only if effectively implemented in collaboration with the deaf community. We know that significant effort is needed to achieve this, and to ensure that the provisions and duties within the Bill have the required strength and detail; and that public bodies and Ministers are equipped with the right support and guidance to meaningfully implement the Bill.

There is also significant effort needed to improve the wider population's understanding and awareness of BSL. RNID's ***It Does Matter*** report looked at public attitudes towards deaf people, and of the general public who took our survey, 34% said they didn't know how to communicate with a BSL user. This lack of understanding and awareness has a significant impact on deaf BSL user's daily lives.

We also believe that this Bill and the priorities within it are closely aligned with existing Welsh Government priorities, including the Strategic Equality Objectives and the More Equal Wales goal within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

We look forward to supporting this Bill and its implementation.

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to each section to around 500 words).

We welcome the statutory framework to promote and facilitate the use of BSL within Wales and believe this is a vital step towards inclusion and recognition for the deaf community.

We believe that the proposed provisions provide a clear and coherent structure and mechanism which should achieve the intended policy aims of the Bill. We expand on each of these below, and believe that, taken together, these provisions provide a strong framework to implement and enforce the Bill.

² RNID analysis of 2021 census data.

Throughout the legislative process we want to see a strong commitment to the following approaches:

- Principles of co-production or participatory policy making with deaf BSL users in Wales, to ensure their needs are understood by the Ministers and public bodies whose duty it is to meet them;
- Clear, measurable and timely goals tied to the national BSL strategy and BSL plans to ensure implementation is meaningful and reporting processes are grounded in targets. This should also align the BSL strategy and plans with wider Welsh Government objectives and strategies, e.g. the Strategic Equality Plan, etc;
- Identification of key immediate barriers that could undermine the impact of the Bill; for example, the lack of interpreter workforce in Wales. BSL interpreters play a crucial role in ensuring that services and institutions can meet the needs of deaf BSL users, and while it's not a silver bullet, without action to address the dwindling interpreter workforce in Wales, we may not be able to progress at the desired pace.

1 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL

We welcome the duty on Welsh Ministers and believe this is a necessary provision to ensure there is cross-government understanding and awareness of the Bill and the needs of the deaf community.

We want to see this provision result in measures to raise the visibility and availability of BSL both within Government and more widely. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the principle was established to ensure BSL access during Government announcements, so that when the First Minister spoke to the nation, there was always an interpreter present. Since 2023, this has lapsed, without consultation. We would like to see a recommitment to this principle and provision of BSL.

2 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish a national strategy and guidance

We also welcome the duty for a national BSL strategy to be published by Ministers, and for this to be consulted on and laid before the Senedd. However, provisions within this Bill include multiple strategies and plans that will no doubt overlap and intersect. Implemented properly, this has the potential to create a robust and integrated structure to ensure the promotion and facilitation of BSL, however there is a slight risk that this process could become overly complex. To avoid this, the national BSL strategy put forward by Ministers must be robust and include clear goals, timelines and mechanisms for accountability, as well as clearly setting out how the BSL plans of Government and other public bodies interact with and report to the strategy.

While a clear cohesive strategy for implementation is essential, there is also a need for leadership on prioritisation of time and resource, in collaboration with the BSL

using community, to ensure this Bill has the desired impact. We would encourage Members to consider how the national strategy could achieve this, and how it can identify the priority areas that need focus within the first six year period.

This strategy should take into account the work that has already taken place on BSL policy across the last year. Since January, a group of deaf BSL signers working or living in Wales, as well as professionals from representative organisations, have been convened by Welsh Government to form the BSL Stakeholder Group and develop a BSL route map. This work was intended to provide a short-medium term action plan of interventions needed to improve the position of BSL users in Wales. We hope that this work can lay some of the foundations for the development of a national BSL strategy and BSL plans across Government and public bodies.

3 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish BSL guidance

The provision for Ministers to publish BSL guidance is crucial to the success of the Bill and has the potential to address the challenges faced by public bodies and services in ensuring and delivering BSL access.

We know from conversations with some public services, that there is a desire to improve BSL provision, but a lack of knowledge or understanding on how to approach the issue, and a lack of clear guidance and information on how to provide quality BSL communication and information. This is feedback from public bodies who are already engaged and understand the need for BSL information and communication; there are even more services that are further behind on this journey and do not understand the need for BSL, nor how to provide it. This Bill compels them to understand the need to promote and facilitate BSL, and the guidance equips them. Guidance from Welsh Government and the BSL Adviser would provide a framework for BSL provision, improving consistency and quality across public services. We want to see an obligation, alongside this guidance, to ensure public bodies utilise it and apply it to their service provision.

This guidance must be co-produced with BSL users and experts, and must be published before the development of BSL plans by public bodies, to ensure guidance is embedded throughout. We are keen to explore further how co-production can be embedded in the implementation process, with consideration of potential capacity and resource challenges for deaf BSL users and representative organisations. We'd urge the committee to consider this and potential models. In Scotland, for example, a group was appointed by Government who worked with the local authorities for the purpose of co-production, particularly regarding community engagement. This may be something to consider within the role of the Advisory group, or sub-groups addressing specific need.

Within the UK Act, Section 3 includes provision of guidance to be published by the Secretary of State to inform departments on how they can improve their provision of BSL communication. This has not been enacted through secondary

legislation, and each department has published their own plan without the guidance, which has resulted in inconsistent actions across departments. Wales should learn from this process and ensure that the guidance is in place before the plans are developed to ensure that they meet the needs of deaf BSL users.

4 - A duty on specified public bodies to publish BSL plans

This duty is essential to embed BSL provision and inclusivity across public services and to achieve equality for BSL users. Public bodies, including health boards, local authorities and education institutions provide the everyday services that deaf BSL users rely on, and therefore public bodies' BSL plans are crucial for implementation of the Bill and achieving desired policy aims in a way that improves the lives of BSL users.

Plans should be, ideally co-produced, or developed in conjunction with, BSL users. Where public bodies are localised, plans should be consulted on and informed by local priorities and needs. Co-production should be the goal, but we want to acknowledge the capacity challenge this may pose to individuals and smaller organisations, and consider a scalable model to aim for. We believe that the guidance should be co-produced as a priority, as this should form the basis of public bodies' BSL plans.

It is essential that these plans include measurable objectives, clear timeframes for delivery, and interact with the national BSL strategy. These plans should also highlight how engagement with BSL users has or will take place, and how their views have been taken into account within the plan.

Crucially, public bodies must also be supported with resources and training to implement these plans effectively, including training for staff, and guidance on how BSL plans must integrate with other reporting priorities and duties. We welcome the estimated costs provided in the explanatory memorandum, and this must be a continued conversation to understand how resource can be most efficiently and effectively allocated.

Finally, regarding public bodies, we share the concern of other organisations and individuals that there are significant omissions within the current proposed list. Most notably, education providers and regulators, like Estyn and Qualifications Wales, but also bodies like the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales whose responsibility it is to regulate public services and escalate complaints; which is a significant need of BSL users. While we understand there will need to be prioritisation of how this legislation is rolled out and implemented, we would urge the committee to consider how, when and which public bodies should also be subject to this legislation.

5 - The appointment of a BSL adviser

We support the appointment of a National BSL Adviser and agree with the importance that the appointed Adviser be able to communicate effectively and

fluently in BSL. We would add that the following criteria should also be considered for the appointment of that role;

- They should have a firm understanding of the needs of the Deaf community and the day to day experiences of deaf BSL users in Wales
- They should have experience of working within the Deaf community and, either formally or informally, representing the views and interests of BSL users
- They should have a strong understanding of Welsh Government and policy-making, to ensure they are able to achieve the maximum impact in role.

The role of the Adviser will be crucial in informing and advising Welsh Ministers, and be an essential conduit between Government and deaf BSL users across Wales.

While we welcome this role, we want to highlight the weight of responsibility this places on one individual to represent the views of BSL users in Wales, therefore the National Adviser role must be supported by a strong framework, including the proposed BSL Advisory Panel, and clear structures and resource to regularly engage with and feed back to BSL users in Wales.

This also must include appropriate resource for the BSL Adviser to effectively undertake their duties, and we welcome clarity within the Bill and explanatory memorandum on remuneration and facilities for the exercise of the Adviser's functions.

It is unclear at this stage how the Adviser will be expected to liaise with public bodies, but we would like to see the BSL Adviser be able to directly engage with them to support their plan development and implementation, or to intervene when there are concerns.

6 - Reporting duties to be imposed on the public bodies and Welsh Ministers in relation to these duties.

We support the annual reporting requirements laid out in the Bill and would recommend reports be concise, accessible to BSL users and reflect ongoing monitoring. Reports should highlight progress against clear, measurable targets, as well as highlighting challenges or setbacks, and areas for further focus and improvement. We hope with this framework, annual reports will then be used to track and highlight progress over several years.

It's crucial that this reporting process be meaningful to public bodies and to Welsh Government. We don't want them to view it as a tick box exercise, but as a way to engage with the learnings and areas of improvement for promotion and facilitation of BSL.

These reports should embed a learning approach. Analysis by the BSL Adviser, supported by the BSL Advisory panel, should highlight thematic learnings,

challenges, successes and opportunities from across Wales and different public bodies, to ensure successful approaches are embedded consistently, and that BSL plans are reflective of and respond to persistent challenges, informing ongoing approaches.

We would also like to see reports on actions taken within Government departments to promote and facilitate BSL. Since the Welsh Government undertook a BSL audit provided by BDA in 2022, there has been a lack of clarity on progress to improve BSL provision within Welsh Government. Reporting on Government activity too allows us to ensure progress at all levels of public life in Wales, and to have a full picture of progress for scrutiny and improvement. This would also align with elements of other UK legislation. For example, the Scottish BSL Act (2015) where Section 4 of the Bill requires progress reports to be laid before the Scottish Parliament and published publicly every 6 years. The reports document measures taken and outcomes attained in relation to the National BSL Plan and the Authority Plans, as well as including examples of best practice or poor performance. Within the UK British Sign Language Act 2022, Government departments are required to publish BSL plans and report on each department's BSL provision and promotion.

How appropriate are the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate Legislation?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We support the powers within the Bill and believe they are sufficient to deliver the stated policy aims, provided they are exercised transparently and in consultation with the deaf BSL using community.

We particularly welcome the ability for Ministers to add or remove public bodies from the list, as highlighted above, we would like to see this legislation expand to a broader list of public bodies to ensure the rights of BSL users are upheld across all aspects of daily life. All public services should be accessible to deaf BSL users, and therefore the list should reflect that, although we understand there will need to be prioritisation of the most urgent areas for implementation.

Are there any barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

As highlighted throughout our response, we do not underestimate the significant effort needed to implement and ensure the effectiveness of this Bill, and this effort is needed across Government, public bodies, the Adviser and Advisory panel, and supporting stakeholders, including BSL users themselves and representative organisations like ourselves.

We believe the statutory framework set out in the Bill provides the structure needed to potentially go further than other UK legislation if effectively implemented.

As we have raised elsewhere, our only concerns are;

- That there must be clear, measurable and time-bound targets throughout the national strategy and BSL plans to drive progress;
- That each of the Bill's provisions has a clear purpose and is situated within the wider statutory framework; to ensure the numerous strategies, plans and guidance work together rather than create a confusing and complex structure;
- That the BSL Bill must be embedded within wider Welsh Government policy and legislation to ensure public bodies are aware of how their duties under the BSL (Wales) Bill, also contribute to wider goals, for example the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act's 'A more equal Wales' goal.
- That a test and learn approach must be embedded throughout implementation, to ensure that plans are responsive to and reflective of challenges and successes in achieving the aims of the Bill.
- That currently, the list of public bodies within the Bill is not adequate to address the challenges faced by BSL users in every aspect of their life. We would like to see this list expanded to include organisations like the Public Services Ombudsman, and crucially, education institutions like Estyn.
- That the National BSL Adviser is appropriately resourced to carry out their duties, including remuneration, provision of facilities including staff, and appropriate powers to compel or investigate public bodies.
- That effort is needed to tackle immediate challenges that could compromise the success of the Bill; for example, the provision of BSL interpreters and Video Relay Service (VRS) technology. We know these things are not a silver bullet, but they will be needed in the short-term to address immediate challenges of BSL access and provision.
- There is currently a lack of clarity about enforcement powers within the Bill, and what action can be taken by the BSL Adviser, Advisory Panel and Welsh Ministers if they feel that public bodies are falling short of their duties under the Bill. We would welcome further clarity on powers to investigate and intervene in these instances.

What are your views on the assessment of the financial implications of the Bill as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

The assessment of financial implications within the explanatory memorandum is helpful in estimating some of the anticipated costs of implementation. This needs further exploration to understand the resource needed by public bodies to meet

their duties within the Bill, and this should be an ongoing discussion throughout the legislative process and during implementation.

We also welcomed the commitment by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice of £240,000 in funding for the year 2026/7 made in the Senedd in July. This will support initial rollout of the legislation and support for public bodies.

Throughout this inquiry, we would encourage the committee to consider how processes can be streamlined to most efficiently use resource and ensure that funding is allocated in a way that has the biggest direct impact on BSL users; for example, aligning BSL reporting duties with existing duties, such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations reporting process, reporting on Welsh Government equalities plans, or Welsh Language reporting duties.

While we understand the existing cost pressures faced by public bodies, the inequality faced by BSL users in Wales already poses a cost to public services and the Welsh economy, due to their poorer health and economic outcomes.

Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum?

Anything else?

The Bill will not address all the barriers faced by BSL users in Wales, and we particularly want to draw attention to the barriers in healthcare that have a hugely detrimental effect on people's quality of life, as demonstrated by our findings in our [2025 Still Ignored: The Fight for Access Healthcare](#) report.

With NHS trusts and health boards listed public bodies under the Bill, this is one of the key areas we want the BSL (Wales) Bill to address. Some key findings are below – although we were not able to provide a separate specific breakdown by BSL user respondents, 18% of those surveyed were BSL users, and broadly our research showed that they faced even more significant barriers than deaf people or people with hearing loss who did not use BSL:

- 1 in 4 (25%) of deaf people and people with hearing loss in Wales have been denied the information and communication support they need at NHS appointments, despite being legally entitled to it.
- 1 in 5 (18%) said a health condition was made worse due to this lack of accessible communication.
- Almost 1 in 10 told us they have avoided calling an ambulance or going to A&E due to this lack of access.

- More than half (56%) have had to rely on either a partner, children, family or friends to interpret or relay information for them at an appointment. These individuals may also not be equipped with the right language to adequately translate medical information – this is a **patient safety issue**, and also strips **them of their privacy, dignity and independence** when accessing healthcare.
- **Despite the All Wales Standards for Accessible Communication and Information being introduced more than a decade ago in 2013**, only 1 in 5 (18%) agreed that their information and communication needs are met more often now than a decade ago.

The report also revealed challenges to accessing communication support handled through the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) who book interpreters and other support – but confirmation and information regarding the booking is rarely shared with BSL users.

We expect the BSL Bill to be a step in the right direction as health boards and NHS trusts are listed public bodies under the Bill, but further action must be taken in order to address these issues and ensure deaf people have access to healthcare.

The revised and strengthened All Wales Standards are due to be published in the coming months, and this provides a key opportunity for both these areas of work to align on shared priorities, and work closely with health boards to support implementation.

Further details of RNID's recommendations to Welsh Government, NHS Wales, Health Boards, Trusts and other public bodies can be found in our [Still Ignored](#) report, and encourage policy makers to engage with us if they would like more evidence and information.

We want to end by saying that we are in strong support of the draft Bill, and believe that it provides a potentially strong framework to significantly improve the lives of BSL users in Wales. Implementation will now be crucial, and alongside other charities supporting deaf BSL users, and BSL campaigners, we hope to support Welsh Government and other public bodies to meet the duties set out in the Bill, and improve access, as well as the linguistic and cultural rights of deaf BSL users.

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee

Bil Iaith Arwyddion Prydain (Cymru) | British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan COS - The Centre of Sign-Sight-Sight | Evidence from COS - The Centre of Sign-Sight-Sight

What are your views on the general principles of the Bill?

I welcome the principles of the Bill, they are more robust than those of England and Northern Ireland, but does not give equal standing to English and Welsh.

The appointment of a BSL advisor (who I assume will be a Deaf BSL user) is imperative providing they are involved in all aspects of the Bill and not just a figure head.

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

While many of these principles could be encouraged through policy or guidance alone, legislation provides the teeth to make them real.

Legislation ensures that this intention isn't just aspirational but actionable, by using terms like "must" "report" "measurable".

Mandating BSL Action Plans: Public bodies must develop and publish strategies to promote and support BSL.

Monitoring & Reporting: Regular reporting requirements keep progress transparent and measurable.

Embedding in Governance: Instead of being an optional "add-on," BSL becomes part of organisational policy-making and service design.

Driving Cultural Change: Over time, a legal framework shifts attitudes and practices across sectors (health, education, employment, justice).

What are your views on the Bill's key provisions (set out below), in particular are they workable and will they deliver the stated policy intention?

1 – A duty on Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL

This cannot be a token gesture of attending a Deaf Awareness course and ministers and staff thinking that is enough. The scrutiny needs to be robust and the responsibility of someone who fully understands the language and culture of the Deaf Community

2 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish national strategy and guidance

The strategy will give a framework for the Bill's implementation. The 6 year cycle seems in itself far too long. Allowing the strategy to be "reviewed" does not go far enough, in essence it gives Minister's permission to pop it on a shelf, take it down, tick a "I have reviewed this" box and pop it back on the shelf.

3 - A duty on Welsh Ministers to publish BSL guidance

This cannot be a token gesture of attending a Deaf Awareness course and ministers and staff thinking that is enough. The scrutiny needs to be robust and the responsibility of someone who fully understands the language and culture of the Deaf Community

4 - A duty on specified public bodies to publish BSL plans

This is not robust enough. Where are organisations funded by Welsh Government such as LLAIS, Higher Education bodies, Qualification Wales, other Commissioners.

5 - The appointment of a BSL adviser

An advisor is a step down from a Commissioner, again showing that Welsh Government places more emphasis on Welsh than BSL.

The Advisor must be a Deaf BS user, be given authority to review reports, investigate complaints, enforce guidance and be accountable to the Deaf Community of Wales.

6 - Reporting duties to be imposed on the public bodies and Welsh Ministers in relation to these duties.

Who will review these reports, will they be published in an accessible format, what will they report against?

Measurable Outcomes need to be established to ensure bodies are reporting on the same outcome.

These should be used to establish a "Best Practice" guide for bodies, developed by the Advisor and BSL Stakeholder group.

How appropriate are the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate Legislation?

Are there any barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and does the Bill take account of them?

The lack of qualified BSL interpreters and translators

The lack of knowledge within public bodies

The lack of understanding of their rights within the Deaf Community at a grass roots level

What are your views on the assessment of the financial implications of the Bill as set out in Part 2 of the Explanatory Memorandum?

Are there any other issues that you would like to raise about the Bill and the accompanying Explanatory Memorandum?

There is a lack of rights that are given to the Welsh language, BSL is being treated as a "favour".

This Bill is about language, not access, it is not a disability issue.

Anything else?

Agenda Item 3

British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

British Deaf Association stage 1 submission to the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Introduction

1. We warmly welcome the Bill. As evidenced by the submissions to Mark Isherwood MS's 2024-25 consultation on his proposal for a Bill, there is a pressing need for legislation.
2. The Bill as published will bring a new government focus on information in BSL and will enable deaf signers to be seen as the solution rather than as a problem.
3. Sign Language legislation is important to Welsh signers. It is a formal acknowledgement of and a sign of respect for signing communities as a distinct part of Welsh life. It recognises Welsh signers as a linguistic minority group with our own distinct culture and aspirations. The legislation follows similar support from the Scottish Parliament, the UK Parliament and the Northern Ireland Executive which is promoting its own legislation.
4. British Sign Language is a visual-gestural language with a distinctive grammar and syntax using handshapes, facial expressions and movement to convey meaning. It is an indigenous language to the UK and has been part of recorded history since at least the 17th century. It is estimated to be the preferred language of between 5,600 and 7,300 people in Wales.
5. The British Sign Language (Wales) Bill is a strong Bill that provides a clear foundation to drive progress for deaf signers across Wales.

A new focus on information in BSL

6. 98 out of 111 respondents to the official consultation on the Bill (November 2024 – January 2025) said that 'education' provided a 'main barrier' for deaf people in Wales. 97 out of 111 said the same about 'health.' Barriers include a lack of deaf awareness, a failure to grant BSL provision, a shortage of BSL-signing staff, and obstacles to deaf signers entering careers in these sectors.
7. These problems persist despite the Public Sector Equality duties in the Equality Act 2010 and despite the 2013 All Wales Standards for Accessible Communication and Information for People with Sensory Loss. A new approach is needed, above and beyond an 'access' perspective and towards inclusive leadership.
8. The BSL (Wales) Bill will not change this overnight. But it will require local authorities and NHS bodies to examine their approach and to consider, identify and plan how

they can promote and facilitate the use of BSL and to report on their progress. We would expect and recommend that this process will actively involve BSL signers in Wales who can contribute to the prioritisation and to the solutions.

9. This approach, required by law, will incentivise public bodies towards good practice and hopefully create a 'ratchet' effect as each successive plan can be better than the one before.

Deaf signers as the solution, not the problem

10. Historically, deaf signers have been made to feel like a burden to public bodies in our country. Yet, we bring a lifetime of experience and expertise which can only assist public bodies in the production of their improvement plans and the delivery of services through BSL.
11. According to the consultation findings, nearly all respondents disagreed that deaf people 'currently have a voice in the design and delivery of the public services they use'. Most agreed that deaf people 'should have a formalised voice in the design and delivery of the public services that they use'.
12. The Bill will encourage good practice in genuinely giving authority over our lives to deaf signers in Wales. It is our expectation that Welsh Ministers and listed public bodies will wish to develop strategies and plans which are genuinely grounded in the experiences and aspirations of the Welsh signing communities. We do not believe that it is appropriate, possible or efficient for non-signers to lead on determining the path of our future lives. Instead, we wish to see genuinely deaf-led solutions. BSL services should be designed, managed and evaluated by those who will use these services. This extends to the leads within each department or public body tasked with creating that body's BSL Plan. We strongly believe that each such person should themselves be a deaf signing professional. We strongly believe this will maximise value for money and impact of the BSL Plan.
13. An example of the need for this is demonstrated by the different processes employed by the Scottish Government in the development of the first and second BSL National Plans. The first national plan (2017-23) was very substantially co-created through a National Advisory Group, which had one deaf and one deaf-blind co-chair. The second plan (2023-29) did involve consultation with deaf communities, but it was then "edited down" within the civil service. For Scottish deaf signers, this led to understandable disappointment. It is our reflection that the National Advisory Group was the more effective way to give strength to the voice, experience and aspirations of signing communities.
14. Deaf-led solutions are authentic, responsive and efficient. As an example, the Welsh Government set up a BSL Stakeholder Group to inform the development of a

Welsh Government BSL ‘route-map’ to promote and facilitate BSL and improve outcomes for Welsh Deaf signing communities. This Stakeholder Group is co-chaired by a deaf signer from the British Deaf Association and a deaf signing civil servant. This work has progressed well and at good pace, partly because of constructive engagement with Welsh deaf signers. It has also been very helpful that the two co-chairs, while each having distinct professional roles, share the same language, both literally and metaphorically - in terms of their culture and life experience. This has enabled much more rapid progress.

Support for the general principles of the Bill

15. The Bill is not fundamentally about – and should not be seen as being about - access to ‘mainstream society’ for members of a disabled community. It is about saying that the lives and aspirations of deaf signers have equal value in Wales. It is about respect for a specific cultural minority within Wales and the language that we use. It will start to bring about a transformation in the lives of deaf signers.
16. As such, the high-level duties on Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL are about a vision for Wales more than they are about specific actions. Wales has a proud record of support for the Welsh language; we believe that the same arguments apply to British Sign Language.
17. We support the structure of the Bill: the high-level duty, the creation of a National BSL strategy, the appointment of a national BSL adviser and panel and the expectation of listed body BSL plans. Together, this approach creates a strong and progressive framework to drive and enable the next steps in the lives of Welsh deaf signers.

Suggestions and issues that the committee might wish to consider

18. While we strongly support the Bill, we hope that the committee will wish to consider the following issues. Not all of these may require amendments to the Bill – it may be that Ministerial assurances or legal clarification would be helpful. We raise these points in a desire that committee process will lead to confidence in the strength of the Bill.
19. We would appreciate clarity on what the National BSL strategy will cover. It is important that the BSL “strategy” addresses strategic, high-level issues. But we believe strongly that Welsh Ministers must also provide clarity about the practical and measurable steps that they will take as departmental Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL. For example, there is a clear need for specific measurable actions in the field of education, including actions within the responsibility of Welsh Ministers. **We request that the committee ask the Minister to confirm that a**

single document – the national BSL strategy – is intended to cover both strategic and operational issues.

20. There is a balance to be drawn between the speed of developing BSL plans and the capacity to do them well. The fundamental tension is around the capacity of the Welsh deaf signing community to lead the development of the plans and thereby to have authority over our lives and the delivery of our aspirations. Too many plans will overwhelm the capacity of Welsh deaf signers to play a leadership role; too few will cause a failure in the delivery of vital and urgent improvement. We believe that it is critical that the Welsh Government acknowledges and responds to this tension. For the avoidance of doubt, we believe that the priority should be genuinely Deaf-led planning – and we think that the BSL adviser can play a helpful role here. The alternative, of hearing non-signers deciding “what deaf people need” is not a recipe for progress. **We request that the committee press Ministers on how they intend to ensure that the development of BSL plans is led by those who understand the aspirations of deaf signers. For example, Ministers might provide advice through guidance issued under section 3(a) of the Bill.** It would be helpful for the committee to press Ministers on their understanding of the capacity of deaf signing communities in Wales and what steps they could take to develop a deaf leadership cohort.
21. It is important to understand the approach that the BSL Adviser is able to take. Realistically, some parts of Welsh government (whether nationally or locally) will respond well to the Bill, when enacted, and some will be less effective. It is important that the BSL Adviser has the ability and the resource to work pro-actively to address specific or thematic issues and to report accordingly. It is important that the Adviser is empowered to “speak truth to power.” **We request that the committee review how Welsh Ministers expect the BSL Adviser to engage with deaf signers in Wales and to address and report on any deaf community concerns about the implementation of the Bill.**
22. The Bill rightly says that its BSL Adviser must be able to communicate effectively in and use BSL. We would go further than this. We would hope that the Adviser will bring direct personal experience of the Welsh deaf signing community and its culture. We also believe that members of the panel appointed to assist the adviser should be required to have a sufficient understanding of BSL to be able to use it fluently in panel meetings. It is an important symbol and a matter of practical efficiency that BSL should be the language of the panel. **We request that the committee consider how the Bill can embed expertise in the lives of Welsh signers into the person of the Adviser and the membership of the panel.**

23. We are not clear why the list of public bodies has a particular focus on local authorities and health bodies – as opposed to education bodies for example. Responses to Mark Isherwood MS’s consultation showed that education was the most frequently cited source of barriers for deaf people. In this regard, we note the absence of education bodies such as Estyn (whose role includes evaluating deaf education) and Qualifications Wales (with its responsibility to monitor exam boards) from the Bill. Likewise, the bodies responsible for higher and adult education. Other national bodies have important responsibilities covering aspects of the support and education of deaf babies, children and young people. We also note that other important bodies are not on the list in section 8 of the Bill. We observe that the Welsh Government publishes a Register of devolved Welsh public bodies and statutory offices and that the Future Generations Commissioner lists 56 public bodies in Wales subject to the duties of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. We also note the range of bodies listed in the BSL Scotland Act, which includes courts, regulators and commissioners. We would give some priority to bodies like the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, Transport for Wales, the Senedd Commission (noting that the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body is covered by the BSL Scotland Act).
24. We do appreciate that there is a need to prioritise areas for the development of BSL plans, if only so that their development can be led by deaf signers. Our preference would be to have a smaller number of plans, developed through a Deaf-leadership approach, rather than more plans subject at worst to a less effective “consultation.” As such, we do not expect all the bodies whom we would aspire to have BSL plans should be required to produce plans immediately. But it would be helpful to understand the rationale for prioritisation and to be assured that “second priority” bodies would be added to the list in due course. We also note and applaud that some Scottish bodies have volunteered to produce BSL plans, for example Food Standards Scotland - there may be a helpful path forward here. **We request that the committee consider how and when education functions affecting deaf children, particularly Estyn and Qualifications Wales, can be brought within the remit of the Bill. We request that the committee seek clarity on how and when additional bodies will be expected to produce BSL plans.**

Agenda Item 5.1



Canolfan
Gyfreithiol
y Plant
Cymru

Children's
Legal
Centre
Wales

Date: September 10th 2025

Letter sent by Email to:

Seneddequality@senedd.wales

SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales

Subject: Deprivation of Liberty Orders for children and “If Not Now, Then When? Radical Reform for Care-Experienced Children and Young People” Inquiry recommendations

Dear Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

CC: Jenny Rathbone MS, Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

I hope this message finds you well, and that you were able to take some time for rest over the summer recess.

As we approach the end of the Sixth Senedd, I am writing to ask whether the Committee would consider requesting an update from the Welsh Government on its progress in implementing the recommendations set out in your powerful 2023 inquiry, *“If Not Now, Then When? Radical Reform for Care-Experienced Children and Young People.”*

As part of the Inquiry, Children’s Legal Centre Wales submitted evidence on the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders involving children ([link to evidence](#)).

As you are aware, some children with complex needs require placement in secure accommodation, if there is a risk to their safety (and/or others) (Section 119, Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014). However, where suitable placements are unavailable or unsuitable for meeting complex needs, the High Court may use its inherent jurisdiction to authorise deprivation of liberty, often resulting in children

being placed in unregulated or unregistered accommodation, sometimes far from home.

We were particularly encouraged by Recommendation 20 of your final report, which stated:

Recommendation 20

The Welsh Government should carry out an immediate analysis of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders across Wales for the past 24 months, broken down by local authority responsible for the child, age of the child, and the length of the order. This analysis should be published no later than December 2023. The Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Social Services should jointly publish, no later than December 2023, an action plan setting out how they will reduce the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders in Wales. The action plan must include clear timescales and funding allocations.

In response, the Welsh Government stated:

Response: Accept in part

The Welsh Government will carry out an analysis of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders across Wales for the past 24 months, broken down by local authority, age of the child, and length of the order. The results of this analysis will feed into the Welsh Government's Transformation Programme for Children's Services.

While we welcomed this commitment, we noted at the time that the response lacked urgency and did not set out a clear action plan to address the immediate needs of the highly vulnerable children affected by Deprivation of Liberty Orders in Wales.

This concern was echoed during the Committee's inquiry by The Honourable Mr Justice Francis, Family Division Liaison Judge for Wales, who remarked:

"And I think, for me, doing the job that I've been doing in Wales in recent years, this is the single biggest crisis point. It is absolutely desperate. You don't put somebody under a deprivation of liberty order unless you are absolutely at the extreme end of trouble, and I think it's a terrible problem."

As of 2025, we have not seen any evidence that the Welsh Government has completed or published the analysis it committed to undertaking.

We would therefore be grateful if the Committee could clarify whether it has received this analysis. If not, we respectfully ask whether the Committee would consider formally requesting:

1. The results of the analysis, as per the Welsh Government's commitment; and
2. An update on how this work is progressing within the Transformation Programme for Children's Services, particularly with regard to the rights and wellbeing of this vulnerable cohort.

As you know, children subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders are often among the most vulnerable in our society, with complex and overlapping needs arising from early trauma, neglect, poverty, and other adverse experiences.

We have copied in the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee, recognising that the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders may disproportionately affect certain groups of children and intersect with issues of equality and social justice.

Finally, as we near the end of the Senedd term, we believe it would be timely for the Committee to seek a broader update from the Welsh Government on its progress in implementing the Inquiry's other recommendations — both those fully and partially accepted.

We would be grateful for any update you can provide and thank you for your continued commitment to the rights and welfare of care-experienced children and young people in Wales.

Kind regards

Dr Rhian Croke

Children's Legal Centre Wales

Contact Details: rhian.croke@swansea.ac.uk

Agenda Item 5.2

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mike Hedges MS, Chair
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru

16 September 2025

Memorandum of Understanding Welsh Ministers and HM Prison and Probation Service

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to notify you that a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\) between Welsh Ministers and HM Prison and Probation Service](#) was published on 11 September 2025. This MOU overtakes the previous one which lapsed on 31 March 2025.

The MOU describes the working relationship between the Welsh Government and HM Prison and Probation Service. It sets out the general principles which underpin the Parties' shared commitment to reducing re-offending in Wales and the continued acknowledgement that learning and skills provision which leads to sustained employment is one of the most effective means of reducing re-offending. The MOU covers offender learning and skills within custody and sets out how offender learning is to be taken forward in Wales.

I have also copied this letter to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, the Equality and Social Justice Committee, and the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne Neagle". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

17 September 2025

Dear Jenny,

British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

I was grateful for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Equality and Social Justice Committee on the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill. I very much welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee as the Bill progresses through Stage 1.

On that basis, I wanted to follow up on an important area of questioning raised at the evidence session, and provide some further clarity if I could. This relates to Section 5(7) of the Bill, which states that:

5(7) If the BSL adviser requests that a listed public body provides the adviser with information for the purpose of the exercise of any of the adviser's functions, the body must comply with the request unless it considers that doing so would conflict with its duties or have an adverse effect on the exercise of its functions.

You asked why the Bill had been drafted to include a 'get out' for public bodies relating to any conflict with its duties or adverse effect on the exercise of its functions.

I would like to first confirm that it is not my intention that this provision could or should be used as a general get out for public bodies. It should only be used when there is a genuine reason that would prevent that public body from providing the information requested. That could include, for example, information that, if released, could breach a duty of confidentiality held by that body.

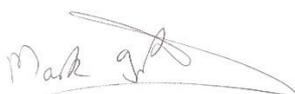


As I outlined during the meeting, I did have concerns about the inclusion of this wording in the Bill. First and foremost I believe that public bodies should do all they can to comply with their duty under the Bill to provide the information requested. I also believe that the instances where the provision of information would conflict with a public bodies' duties or have an adverse effect on the exercise of its functions, would be relatively low, and would happen only in specific circumstances.

Discussion held during the drafting of the Bill also highlighted that it is not uncommon for such provisions to be included in legislation. Similar provisions are included in other Senedd Acts, including in particular, the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, which also sets out the model for the Adviser on which we based the equivalent provisions of the BSL Bill.

However, notwithstanding the above, I fully understand the Committee's concern about the potential misuse of this provision, and would want to do all I can to avoid that. If the Committee's view is that this provision should be amended to help prevent such misuse, I would be very happy to explore that as the Bill progresses, including holding further discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice.

Yours sincerely



Mark Isherwood MS
Member of the Welsh Parliament for North Wales

Agenda Item 8

By virtue of paragraph(s) vii of Standing Order 17.42

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