

Agenda – Equality and Social Justice Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Committee Room 4 (Ty Hywel)	Rhys Morgan
Meeting date: 26 January 2026	Committee Clerk
Meeting time: 13:30	0300 200 6565
	<u>SeneddEquality@senedd.wales</u>

Pre-meeting

(13:15–13:30)

Public meeting

(13:30– 15:30)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(13:30)

2 British Sign Language (Wales) Bill: stage two proceedings

(13:30–15:30)

Mark Isherwood, MS, Member in Charge of the Bill

Gareth Rogers, Bill Manager, Senedd Commission

Gareth Howells, Legal Services, Senedd Commission

The Committee will dispose of the amendments in the following order: Sections 1 to 5; Schedule 1; Sections 6 to 11.

Documents relevant to Stage 2 proceedings will be available on the [Bill page](#).

3 Papers to note

(15:30)



3.1 Correspondence from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip to the Chair regarding food poverty
(Pages 1 – 5)

3.2 Correspondence from the Welsh Government to the Chair in response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report: "Settled but not safe? EU citizens who stayed after Brexit"
(Pages 6 – 13)

3.3 Correspondence from the Welsh Women's Budget Group and Women's Equality Network Wales to the Chair regarding the Welsh Government's 2026–2027 Budget
(Pages 14 – 16)

4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) to resolve to exclude the public for the remainder of today's meeting and for the entirety of the Committee's meeting on 2 February 2026
(15:30)

Private meeting

(15:30–15:45)

5 Access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food: consideration of preparations for focus group sessions
(15:30–15:45)



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet
dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol,
Y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref JH/PO/25/2026

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of Equality and Social Justice Committee

20 January 2026

Dear Jenny

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond as part of the Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry into access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food.

We recognise that there are significant barriers to overcoming food poverty in a sustainable, preventative way that provides healthy and nutritious food for all. Rising food costs make healthy choices less affordable for many families. Access to fresh produce can be limited in rural and deprived urban areas. Food systems can often be fragmented, and not enough is done to connect local producers directly with communities. In addition, gaps in food literacy mean that too many people lack the skills and confidence to prepare nutritious meals. Despite these challenges, we are determined to build a food system that works for everyone. That is why we are:

- Funding Local Food Partnerships, giving communities a voice in shaping food systems that meet their needs and ensuring healthier food is accessible and affordable.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and responding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- Setting a target to increase public sector procurement of Welsh food by 50% by 2030, strengthening local supply chains and ensuring schools, hospitals, and public services serve nutritious, locally sourced meals.
- Embedding food literacy in education, so that every child leaves school with the skills to prepare healthy meals and understand nutrition.
- Supporting the expansion of edible horticulture and community growing projects, reducing reliance on imports and strengthening local resilience.

The ability for all people to be able to access healthy, nutritious and affordable food, no matter their circumstance, is a basic right and one which the Welsh Government takes very seriously. This is why since 2019 the Welsh Government has invested over £29 million to support community food organisations to tackle food insecurity and provide a wider range of services to help individuals and households maximise their income and build financial resilience.

Funding has supported foodbanks and community food organisations to overcome barriers to accessing, storing and distributing additional supplies of good quality food, including good food surplus. It has also provided funding for Local Food Partnership Coordinators, who seek to bring members of the community together to work towards a more resilient food system, with shorter food miles, less food waste and improved access to nutritional, affordable food for everyone. The Food Partnerships are supporting a range of food related projects which aim to increase access to locally grown produce for all, building community knowledge and skills in growing, facilitating nutrition and cooking skills sessions and helping to reduce the carbon footprint.

Our Emergency Food Aid funding, issued to local authorities to distribute in their areas, is making a real difference to those struggling with affording the cost of food. It is supporting food pantries and co-ops, providing cookery and nutrition classes to families and supporting community growing projects

Tackling food poverty is linked to broader strategies on poverty reduction, health, and education. Our funding reflects this by closely aligning with initiatives that improve household income, reduce inequality, and strengthen local food networks. This integrated approach ensures that while urgent needs are met, we also address structural issues that drive food poverty, helping families move from crisis to stability.

The Healthy Weight Healthy Wales Delivery Plan 2025-27 places a strong emphasis on access to healthy, nutritious and affordable food for all people. It sets out a series of themes, goals and actions to help focus where we can collectively effect the greatest change. Action 9 of the plan aims to support healthy weight initiatives that

reduce health and economic inequalities. This includes initiatives such as Universal Free School Meals ('UPFSM') and our targeted meal offer in secondary schools meaning that more than two thirds of Welsh learners can access a free school meal every day. The Delivery Plan's goals for schools and settings are:

- School meals meet learners' nutritional requirements
- food provided in school premises is healthy by default
- Children develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to plan, grow, prepare and cook affordable and healthier food
- Children experience a range of different foods and understand where they come from
- physical activity is part of the day-to-day life of the school
- All children have opportunities to be active during the school day
- all children have the opportunity to explore and experience a range of sport and active recreation options and are helped to find the ones that they enjoy
- children are physically literate

On 17 December 2025, the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Maintained Primary Schools) (Wales) Regulations 2025 were laid before the Senedd. These new Regulations strengthen standards for food and drink provided in maintained nursery and primary schools across Wales, supporting access to healthier, balanced choices for learners, ensuring closer alignment with the latest nutritional guidance. These will come into force on 31 October 2026.

Through the Universal Primary Free School Meal commitment just under 174,000 pupils have become newly eligible for a free school meal, and over 57 million additional free school meals have been served since roll out began in September 2022. This transformational intervention is helping to support Welsh families with the cost of living and keeping much needed money in their pockets. Recognising the priority we place on delivering a quality offer in the face of rising costs, on 10 December 2025 the Cabinet Secretary for Education announced an increase to the rate paid per Universal Primary Free School Meal, from £3.20 to £3.40. This will safeguard continued delivery of the offer and help ensure our learners have the best possible start. In addition, to maximise the impact of our universal primary offer we are independently evaluating it so that lessons can be learned and its delivery can be continually improved.

The "food and fun" School Holiday Enrichment Programme is a school-based scheme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to learners in areas of socio-economic disadvantage for a minimum of 12 days during the school summer holidays. Children and their families

can also engage in joint physical activity and learn about the benefits of healthy food adopting Community Focused School approaches.

The Community Food Strategy (CFS), published in April 2025, aims to encourage the production and supply of affordable, sustainable and locally sourced food in Wales. An inaugural meeting of the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) core members was held on 3rd December 2025. This is a dedicated Group with the relevant expertise and specialisms necessary to guide delivery against the objectives of the strategy and measure its progress and success.

The CFS focuses on invigorating and supporting grassroots food-related initiatives and improving the focus on food matters in policy making, planning, and service delivery at a community scale. Towards this goal, the Welsh Government has committed funding of over £2 million in 2025 to 2026 to further develop the network of Local Food Partnerships across Wales and to fund Local Food Partnership Coordinator posts until March 2028. The purpose of this investment is to support the development and long-term viability of local food initiatives by building strong relationships between them and the communities they serve. Grant funding objectives for Local Food Partnerships include a focus on the local availability, affordability, access and consumption of healthy and nutritious food for all community citizens, including for those experiencing poverty and with protected characteristics.

The Strategy underpins the actions within the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales delivery plan, particularly around improving the provision and access to locally sourced, healthy food.

Across Wales there are numerous examples of how healthy, nutritious, and affordable food is being made available to everyone. In Blaenau Gwent the food partnership have introduced a fruit and vegetable voucher scheme across fifty-two households involving a £10 voucher to redeem at an independent greengrocer in Ebbw Vale. Referrals for the scheme have been received from Flying Start, reinforcing the message of giving every child the best start in life. The voucher redemption rate in the first month was 88%.

A pilot project in Brecon and Newtown is providing families with subsidised veg boxes followed by monthly cooking classes. Whilst in Carmarthenshire, the food partnership have been working with children on a menu redesign for schools which involves the pupils visiting farms to understand more about the journey of food.

Food Cardiff's 'Planet Card' scheme offers discounts on organic produce at the city's Farmers Markets and is designed to address the issue of food insecurity and to

improve access to healthy, sustainable food options for people experiencing low-income.

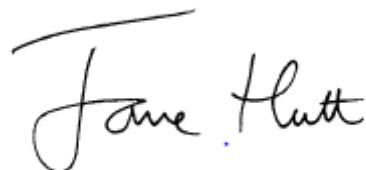
We are supporting the Welsh Veg in Schools scheme which is increasing the number of vegetables our children are eating in their school lunches, improving their diets today and improving their food literacy for the future, while also supporting local farmers and growers. These are just some examples of initiatives which are tackling food poverty by supporting the provision of healthy and nutritious food. The Local Food Partnerships are heavily involved in this and hold regular network meetings where good practice is shared. Later this month I will be meeting Local Authority Cabinet leads with responsibility for Local Food Partnerships and I look forward to sharing with them some of the good practice that is happening across Wales.

Together, these measures represent a shift away from short-term emergency responses toward long-term prevention addressing both immediate needs and underlying causes. By working in partnership with communities, producers, and public services, we can overcome the barriers to food poverty and build a healthier, more sustainable future for Wales.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs



Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyflawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip



Welsh Government Response

Settled but not safe? EU citizens who stayed after Brexit

January 2026

The Equality and Social Justice Committee was established in June 2021 and continues to monitor the operation of the EU Settlement Scheme in Wales. It has published eight monitoring reports and two annual reports to date.

The most recent report published by the Committee in November 2025, raises concerns about the long-term security of EU citizens' rights and highlights risks, data gaps, and policy inadequacies in the UK Government's scheme. The report concludes that while many EU citizens in Wales have secured their status, systemic complexity, lack of awareness, and insufficient data could create risks of future injustice.

This document sets out the Welsh Government's support of the delivery of the EU Settlement Scheme to date and responds to the Committee's recommendations to be put to a future Welsh Government.

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1. The Welsh Government and the delivery of the EU Settlement Scheme in Wales

Since June 2019, the Welsh Government has funded a suite of complimentary support services to EU, EEA and Swiss citizens who wish to remain in Wales. The Welsh Government remains committed to ensuring that all eligible European citizens who have chosen to make Wales their home are supported to secure their status and be recognised as valued members of our communities.

Since the beginning of the UK Government's EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), over 130,932 applications have been made, and concluded, by EU citizens who are Welsh residents, providing those citizens with a lawful immigration status. Many of those individuals have accessed some form of Welsh Government funded support in both completing their applications and accessing their rights.

The Welsh Government continues to engage regularly with the EU Citizens' Rights Forum, providing stakeholders in Wales with a dedicated forum to raise and discuss issues. The Forum is instrumental to strengthening reciprocal dialogue on the delivery of the EUSS in Wales and how EU citizens are integrating into Welsh life.

To date, Welsh Government funded support has enabled EU citizens and their family members to access support with applications, get help with basic eligibility queries, receive advice on social welfare issues and workplace rights, and obtain free specialist immigration advice through funded partners. Welsh Government funded partner, Settled, continues to provide support with late and often complex applications as well as issues in accessing rights.

The Welsh Government will continue to support EU citizens in Wales and will endeavour to ensure there is continued free help and advice for as long as there is an evidenced need.

Undoubtedly, there may still be a number of EU citizens in Wales who have yet to apply to the EUSS and/or need support to upgrade their status, and the Welsh Government is continuing to fund support for those individuals. We welcome the role our stakeholders continue to play in ensuring those facing the greatest barriers in our communities can access support they need.

We are pleased to have recently been able to extend our funding to TGP Cymru to deliver specific and targeted outreach work within the Roma community to ensure that no citizen is left behind. We note the Committee's reference to this group in previous reports.

The Welsh Government also welcomes the UK Government's provisions set out within the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act (2025) which introduces specific legal protections for EU/EEA/Swiss nationals and their family members who have leave under the EUSS.

I would like to draw to the attention of the Committee the statement at para 19 (page 5) regarding "plans to review settled status holders who may no longer meet the requirements". The Welsh Government understands that the UK Government has no plans to review *settled* status holders, and the Home Office has made this clear. The Home Office can only remove settled status due to serious criminality or where settled status was obtained by fraud. The Committee may have meant *pre-settled* status holders here.

I would like to thank members of the Equality and Social Justice Committee for their recent report on the EUSS. Whilst the recommendations are for the next Welsh Government, I have set out the position of this Government.

Jane Hutt

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd & Chief Whip

2. Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends:

The EUSS' long-term nature should be recognised and central to planning at both the UK and Welsh government levels if a second Windrush is to be averted.

Response: Accept

Over recent months the Welsh Government has engaged extensively with the UK Government with regards to the development of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act (2025). The Welsh Government supported the development of the provisions set out in that Bill which create legal protections for EU/EEA/Swiss nationals and their family members who have leave under the EU Settlement Scheme. This means the Bill will continue to protect the rights of EUSS status holders whether or not they were resident in the UK (or the Channel Islands) at the end of 2020.

The Welsh Government continues to engage with the UK Government on future support for the EUSS. Ensuring EU citizens can continue to access the rights and public services conferred to them remains at the centre of those discussions.

3. Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends:

A future Welsh Government must target support towards vulnerable groups and those who are likely to be unaware of the need to apply.

Response: Accept

Since the launch of the EU Settlement Scheme, the Welsh Government has funded and worked with partners to ensure EU citizens who may experience barriers to accessing support services are supported through targeted support and outreach. We work closely with our stakeholders to keep abreast of the challenges faced by people within under-represented and marginalised groups.

In 2025-2026, the Welsh Government has awarded TGP Cymru grant funding to deliver specific and targeted outreach work within the Roma community. This has been awarded in response to feedback from the EU Citizens' Rights Forum and addresses the recommendations set out in the last report published by the Equality and Social Justice Committee.

The Welsh Government's EU Citizens' Rights Forum continues to act as a conduit for collaborative activity focussed on support, awareness raising and signposting, especially within marginalised communities, who often experience significant barriers to support.

4. Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends: The UK and Welsh governments must work together. As a minimum, the Welsh Government should have access to Wales-specific data and be involved at an early stage on changes to the EUSS.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government has long called for better devolved-level data on all aspects of immigration to support better policy making, planning and contingencies where needed.

The EU Settlement Statistics enables the Welsh Government to be able to continue to monitor numbers of applications made and concluded from EU citizens resident in Wales.

The Welsh Government continues to engage with the UK Government regarding the EU Settlement Scheme and related policy changes. To date those discussions have been positive and we have seen a number of beneficial changes as a result, including the introduction of the automation of settled status.

5. Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends: A future Welsh Government must work with EU citizens and partners, including public authorities, Settled, the 3million and the Independent Monitoring Authority, to share expertise and maintain compliance with the Brexit separation agreements.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government's EU Citizens' Rights Forum provides opportunity for partners and representatives of EU citizens in Wales to share expertise, as well as raise and discuss issues.

The Forum has a wide range of representation and facilitates the sharing of information in relation to the implementation of the Withdrawal Act Agreement. Through this Forum partners can share concerns and experiences, which the Welsh Government can then pass on to the UK Government for consideration where necessary and where agreed.

The Welsh Government also continues to maintain a proactive and positive relationship with the Independent Monitoring Authority to ensure all public bodies uphold their statutory obligations to EU citizens in Wales, in line with the Brexit separation agreements.

Agenda Item 3.3

Welsh Government Final Budget 2026-27: A budget that doesn't acknowledge women

WWBG and WEN Wales respond to yesterday's Budget announcement by the Welsh Government.

Yesterday, the Welsh Government published its Final Budget 2026-27, the last Budget of the Sixth Senedd. Following the UK Autumn Budget and a budget agreement with Plaid Cymru, the Final Budget allocated £27.5 billion – £400million of new investment since the Draft Budget in November – to support '[public services, people, communities and businesses in Wales](#).' Alarmingly, the Final Budget and its accompanying documentation made little to no mention of women in Wales. In a country where women make up [51.1% of the population](#), the failure to use a gender lens seriously compromises the Welsh Governments ability to budget responsibly for the people of Wales.

As discussed in our [Budget briefing](#), we were pleased to see additional investment in Wales' public services following the budget agreement between Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru on 9 December 2025. The £180m allocated to NHS can help support women as majority service users and employees. Furthermore, the additional £112.8million invested in Housing and Local Government will provide short-term protection for vital public services. However, as acknowledged in the [Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment \(SIIA\)](#) published alongside the Budget, this uplift is unlikely to meet the cost and demand pressures facing Welsh local authorities. This may result in reductions to social care or increased service costs, both of which impact women in Wales disproportionately. In this context, the lack of targeted funding to improve the poor pay, working terms and conditions in social care will continue to exacerbate the recruitment and retention crisis within the sector. This omission both undermines the announced support for the NHS and fails to support the women who represent [78% of social care employees](#) and majority service users in Wales.

Unfortunately, the failure to adequately support women is a key pattern within this year's Final Budget. Despite inflationary uplifts for each department, the allocations of yesterday's Budget provide little relief for women in Wales who continue to face an unequal economic position and disproportionate share of caring responsibilities. For example, even with inflationary uplifts, the restated funding for childcare is wholly insufficient to address the structural issues with Wales' childcare system which remains [unaffordable, inaccessible and disjointed](#). High costs and gaps in childcare provision continue to represent a key barrier to gender equality by [pushing parents, particularly mothers, out of work](#). The failure to address these issues in the Final Budget is highly regrettable, and will serve to further entrench gender inequality in Wales.

Similarly, while the restated funding for Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) in the Draft Budget was positive, the complete

lack of recognition and additional support for the Welsh third sector in this year's Final Budget is deeply concerning. When public services are under pressure, vulnerable individuals often turn to third sector organisations in Wales for vital support. However, the third sector – especially the Welsh women's sector – has faced successive financial crises alongside increased demand, leading to organisational closures and service cuts. In this context, it is disappointing that the Social Justice portfolio received the smallest uplift of all departments in the Welsh Government's Draft Budget and Final Budgets this year.

We welcome the new collaborative approach taken to the SIIA. As with the Interim Assessment published alongside the Draft Budget, the Final Assessment represented an improvement in budget transparency and clarification of the SIIA process. We were also pleased to see the inclusion of case studies, which provide deeper insight into how evidence has informed decision making, and how those decisions impact certain groups. The identification of negative impacts and efforts to mitigate such impacts were also welcome additions. However, we must express our dismay at the distinct lack of gendered impact assessment within the final SIIA, which failed to acknowledge the impact of any decisions on women, including in key gendered areas such as transport, health and social care and apprenticeships.

The lack of a gender lens in yesterday's Budget and accompanying documentation is highly concerning. Without meaningfully considering the needs and experiences of over half of the population, the claim that the Final Budget adequately delivers for the people of Wales is hard to justify. This failure further underscores the vital need to roll out gender budgeting across the Welsh Government. Only by doing so can we ensure that that decision-makers consider and respond to the needs of all groups of people in Wales and provide the support that women in Wales need and deserve.

Hannah Gri□iths (she/her)

Wales Women's Budget Group Coordinator and Policy Assistant/Cydlynydd Grŵp Cyllideb Menywod Cymru a Chynorthwydd Polisi