

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a'r Prif Chwip
Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Chair Committee

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

2 June 2023

Dear Russell and Jenny,

Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee report: Into sharp relief: Inequality and the pandemic

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to your letter in relation to RNIB highlighting recommendation 37 of a report to the previous Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee regarding inequality and the pandemic. This recommendation calls for an accessibility lead within the Welsh Government to oversee the production of all key public health and other information in accessible formats. I have copied this letter to the Minister for Health and Social Services as this recommendation clearly impacts on both of our portfolio areas.

The Welsh Government is fully committed to ensuring accessibility of all information for all Welsh citizens. You will be aware during the Covid-19 pandemic we ensured all public information was fully accessible including the presence of a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter at each of our Covid-19 news conferences and ensuring that large print and braille were available on request alongside other accessible formats on key products, such as the shielding letters from the Chief Medical Officer.

During the pandemic we established an Accessible Communication Group, to discuss and overcome the barriers stopping people from accessing information. This Group includes a wide range of organisations, who have testified to the difficulties that some of those with impairments experienced when trying to access clear and concise information during the coronavirus pandemic. The Group also includes organisations who represent refugees, children and the Gypsy, Roma Traveller communities. The group co-created a guidance document which sets out the standards that the Welsh Government will meet to make sure that communications are accessible and meet the needs of people across Wales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir 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 corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We continue to maintain and improve our advice and guidance on accessibility on a cross-government basis. This sets clear and commonly understood standards which apply to the whole government and provides a framework for all departments to provide key information in a way which is accessible to all. It is the responsibility of all parts of the government to ensure that the material they produce aligns with these standards. As part of the development of those standards, it is clear that given the breadth and complexity of its policy responsibilities, the Welsh Government generates and publishes a very significant amount of material every year, over which it would likely be impossible for one individual to maintain effective oversight. We will continue to keep the recommendation for a single lead under consideration, but the current approach of system-wide responsibility for accessibility, carried out on a cross-government basis, and with a foundation of common standards, enables effective delivery to meet the needs of the people of Wales.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and supporting codes of practice set out requirements, in line with the Equality Act 2010, to ensure equality of access to services. This includes local authorities providing information advice and assistance relating to care and support, which is accessible and meets the needs of the population. Also, in delivering care and support, local authorities must use the language of need and preferred means of communication, for example British Sign Language, braille, large print versions.

This means people must be able to fully participate in the assessment of their potential needs. Everyone must be able to express their views, wishes and feelings as an equal partner about what matters to them and what they want to achieve. Our 2014 Act requires that local authorities must support people to be able to do this.

The 2014 Act also requires Regional Partnership Boards to assess and plan for the care and support needs of their populations. Guidance sets out core themes for these population assessments and area plans, including for those with sensory impairments.

The Welsh Government is fully committed in supporting all disabled people in Wales. We have set up the Disability Rights Taskforce which will run until 2024. It brings together people with lived experience, Welsh Government Policy Leads and representative organisations to identify the issues and barriers that affect the lives of many disabled people. The Taskforce works within the scope of the Welsh Government's legal remit and not in areas that solely fall under the UK Government's responsibilities.

The Taskforce established a number of workstreams which were identified as priority areas:

- Embedding and Understanding of the Social Model of Disability (across Wales)
- Access to Services (including Communications and Technology)
- Independent Living: Health, Wellbeing and Social Care
- Travel
- Employment and Income
- Affordable and Accessible Housing
- Children and Young People
- Criminal justice System

The Working Groups have a range of stakeholders which includes organisations that support disabled people, disabled people with lived experience and Welsh Government policy leads. These include blind and partially sighted members who provide lived experience to working groups, including travel and access to services. The working groups' co-produced recommendations will form an action plan, to improve the lives of disabled people in Wales.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first few letters.

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