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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

Eich cyf/Your ref: British Sign Language
(Wales) Bill
Ein cyf/Our ref: JH/PO/652/25

Jenny Rathbone MS
Equality and Social Justice Committee

15 December 2025

Dear Jenny,

British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

Thank you for the Equality and Social Justice Committee Report published on 5 December 2025 regarding the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill as part of stage 1 scrutiny.

I am grateful to the Committee for its considered stage 1 scrutiny.

Alongside the Member in charge of the Bill, I have carefully considered the Committee's report.

Please see my response in Annex 1 to the set of recommendations in advance of the Stage 1 General Principles Debate.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Hutt AS/MS

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Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

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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.

Annex 1: Response to Equality and Social Justice Committee’s report on the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill – December 2025

<p>Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends that the Senedd agrees the general principles of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill at Stage 1.</p>
<p>Accept Welsh Government supports the general principles of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill and welcomes the Committee’s scrutiny at Stage 1.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge reviews the description of BSL used in the Explanatory Memorandum to address the concerns raised by stakeholders and considers the merits of including a clear definition of BSL on the face of the Bill and whether amendments are needed to achieve this. The Member in Charge should aim to set out his response to this recommendation by 7 January 2026 so that if the Bill progresses, Members can consider the response ahead of Stage 2 proceedings.</p>
<p>Accept Welsh Government notes stakeholder concerns regarding the description of BSL used in the Explanatory Memorandum. Welsh Government will work with the Member in Charge as needed to consider and update this description and consider the merits of including a clear definition of BSL on the face of the Bill.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge of the Bill brings forward amendments at Stage 2 which would require Welsh Ministers to publish the BSL guidance within the same or similar timescales as those specified in relation to the national BSL strategy. The committee thinks that unless a compelling argument is made for a different timescale, 18 months after the Bill is enacted should be sufficient and appropriate.</p>
<p>Accept Welsh Government agrees that BSL guidance should be published within a similar timescale to the national BSL strategy and that 18 months after the Act is brought into force is a reasonable timescale for this to take place.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge brings forward amendments at Stage 2 which would require Welsh Ministers to consult on the content of the BSL guidance prior to its publication.</p>
<p>Accept Welsh Government agrees that Welsh Ministers should consult on the BSL guidance prior to its publication.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5. The Committee recommends that The Welsh Government should set out in response to this report:</p>

- how it expects listed public bodies to collaborate across administrative boundaries in the preparation of local plans;
- how it will build the capacity of listed public bodies so that they are equipped with the right support and expertise to prepare and execute local plans effectively; and
- provide confirmation that the Implementation Team for the Bill has dedicated resources to fulfil this recommendation. The Welsh Government should confirm that this will be in place ahead of the Stage 1 debate scheduled for 17 December 2025.

Accept

Listed public bodies are already required to work collaboratively. Welsh Government intends that the BSL guidance will set out ways of working to support cost effective planning, engagement with the BSL community, reporting and delivery for listed public bodies. The BSL guidance will include expectations for collaboration across administrative boundaries in preparing local BSL plans. This guidance will be informed by the BSL Adviser and assisting panel. It is intended that the BSL Adviser and assisting panel will support capacity building for listed public bodies.

The Welsh Government established a BSL policy team within the Equality and Human Rights Division in 2024/25. This team will oversee the implementation of the legislation, should it become law, and fulfil this recommendation.

It has also been agreed that provision will be made from Welsh Government budgets for the full costs of the first year of the implementation of the Bill (up to a maximum of £214,300 in 2026-27 only), based on the figures in the Members RIA. Funding beyond 2026-27 will need to be determined by the next Government following the election in May 2026.

Recommendation 6.

The Committee notes that under section 7(2) it is envisaged that Welsh Ministers must produce progress reports in every period of 3 years after publication of the national strategy. The committee recommends that the early progress reports required by the Bill, should it become law, involve consideration of whether other public bodies should be added.

Accept

Welsh Government agrees that the Welsh Government progress reports required every 3 years should include consideration as to whether additional public bodies should be included under the Bill, should it become law. The BSL adviser and assisting panel should provide advice on these considerations.

Recommendation 7.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government and the Member in Charge consider how the appointments process can ensure that the needs of the Deaf community are reflected appropriately in the appointments process for the BSL Adviser. We would welcome more detail on this matter in response to this report, which we expect in time for the Stage 1 debate on 17 December 2025.

Accept

Welsh Government will ensure that the appointments process for the BSL Adviser reflects the needs of the deaf BSL signing community. Welsh Government will

work with the deaf BSL community through the Welsh Governments BSL Stakeholder Group to address any barriers in the process. Consideration will be given to the provision of any required training to the deaf BSL signing community, to enable a diverse range of applicants. This may include training in relation to both the application process and interviews.

Recommendation 8.

The Committee recommends that the role of BSL Adviser is recognised as a public appointment that is eligible for pre-appointment scrutiny and that the appropriate committee in the next Senedd is offered the opportunity to conduct a pre-appointment hearing with the preferred candidate. The committee agrees that this change can be achieved informally through agreement between the Welsh Government and the Senedd and should be made now in order to provide a firm signal of intent for the next Welsh Government and Senedd.

Accept

The Welsh Government agrees that the BSL Adviser should be recognised as eligible for pre-appointment scrutiny. This was confirmed in the evidence session to Committee.

Recommendation 9.

The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge clarifies the options available to complainants requiring recourse in instances where public services are failing to meet their duties under the Bill (if enacted by the Senedd) and considers whether any changes to the Explanatory Memorandum are required that could help in that regard.

Accept

Welsh Government will support the Member in Charge to clarify options for complainants where public services fail to meet their duties under the Bill and provide any information needed to update the Explanatory Memorandum as required.

Recommendation 10.

The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge brings forward amendments at Stage 2 which would place duties on Welsh Ministers to prepare and issue guidance on the appropriate route for BSL signers to make complaints about access to services. This should be accompanied by a duty to consult on that guidance with the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales specified as a mandatory consultee.

Reject

Welsh Government does not consider it necessary to place a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers to prepare and issue guidance on complaints routes, or to specify the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales as a mandatory consultee. Existing mechanisms and guidance provide appropriate routes for BSL signers to raise concerns.

Recommendation 11.

The Committee recommends that the Member in Charge brings forward amendments at Stage 2 to ensure engagement and co-production by placing a

formal requirement on Welsh Ministers to consult Deaf BSL signers on the national BSL strategy and guidance.

Accept

Welsh Government agrees that the Member in Charge should bring forward amendments at Stage 2 to place a formal requirement on Welsh Ministers to consult BSL signers on the national BSL strategy and guidance.

Recommendation 12.

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government ramps up efforts to expand the BSL interpreter workforce and commits to:

- reviewing the timescales for actions that are to be taken forward in the BSL Stakeholder Route Map to ensure they are aligned with the Bill;
- Setting annual targets for the training and recruitment of BSL interpreters and translators;
- Setting clearer and more ambitious target deadlines to prevent slippage.

Accept

Welsh Government is committed to expanding the BSL interpreter workforce. The BSL Task and Finish Stakeholder Group have made recommendations on the BSL workforce and the timing implications related to recommendations. Welsh Government will publish its BSL Route Map in early 2026, this will be informed by the advice of the Task and Finish Group. The Task and Finish Group considered a draft Route Map in their September meeting. Short-term actions will be completed within 18 months.

Long-term actions to support and develop the BSL workforce, including BSL interpreters should be included in the national BSL strategy, with clear targets for the training and recruitment of BSL interpreters and translators. These actions must be informed by the BSL Task and Finish Stakeholder Group recommendations report, the BSL Advisor and assisting panel.