

Lord Bellamy KC  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Ministry of Justice

3 July 2023

Dear Lord Bellamy

**Equality and Social Justice Committee report: 60% - giving them a voice: speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system**

Thank you for your response to our letter regarding our inquiry into women's experiences in the criminal justice system, which we noted at our meeting on 19 June 2023.

We recently published a further report which considers the experiences of those with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in the youth justice system. A copy is enclosed for your information. At least 60 per cent, and more accurately 80 per cent, of the young people involved with the youth justice system, are found to have SLCN difficulties, compared with around 10 per cent for children and young people as a whole. Sadly far too many young people with these challenges are ending up in the criminal justice system where the support they receive is patchy and inadequate.

Your letter of 12 June notes that while reserved authorities and devolved authorities work effectively together to deliver the services for which they are responsible, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) funds all the services for which it is responsible. We would therefore be grateful for your views on the Invest to Save principle set out in the report and specifically with regards to Recommendations 3 and 5.

Recommendation 3 calls for dedicated speech and language therapists to be embedded in custody suites at police stations across Wales. What consideration might the Ministry of Justice give to embedding more speech and language therapists in police custody suites? Given that the benefits of keeping young people out of prisons would primarily accrue to the Ministry of Justice it would be useful if you could set out your position including the scope for greater coordination and collaboration between governments on this issue.

In response to the report, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) confirmed that it is in regular contact with the MoJ and provides guidance and support to officials for the AssetPlus screening tool. We consider this collaboration to be crucial. The RCSLT also indicated that training for such a tool is essential for it to be used effectively. Could you therefore set out what training is offered for this purpose. What contribution might the Ministry of Justice be prepared to make to ensuring there is at least some dedicated speech and language therapist involvement in

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) to extend the good practice we applauded from Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Bay YOT.

We are grateful to you for considering our request and look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

**Jenny Rathbone MS**

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Welsh Parliament

