

British Sign Language (Wales) Bill

Bill Summary

August 2025



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August 2025

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This briefing summarises the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill as it was introduced.

The **British Sign Language (Wales) Bill** ("the Bill") is a **Member Bill** brought forward by Mark Isherwood MS, the Member in Charge of the Bill.

A British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation of the Bill **is also available**.

The Bill was introduced into the Senedd on 14 July 2025, accompanied by an **Explanatory Memorandum and Regulatory Impact Assessment**. On 16 July, Mark Isherwood MS **made a statement in Plenary on the Bill**.



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1. Background

Mark Isherwood MS was successful in the April 2024 **Member Bill** ballot. **His proposal for a British Sign Language (BSL) (Wales) Bill** received the Senedd's leave to proceed on 19 June 2024.

A **consultation on the proposed Bill** ran between November 2024 and January 2025, and received 119 responses. A **summary of the consultation responses** was published in March 2025.

The Senedd's Citizen Engagement Team also facilitated an engagement programme to gather the lived experiences of BSL signers and their families across Wales. A total of 77 participants took part in four interviews and five focus groups as part of this programme. A report on the **findings from the engagement programme** is available online in BSL or as a written report.

Overview of the Bill

The Bill would require Welsh Ministers to:

- promote and facilitate the use of BSL;
- prepare and publish a national BSL strategy, and to review this at least every 6 years;
- issue guidance to listed public bodies on how to promote and facilitate the use of BSL;
- appoint a BSL adviser and a panel to assist them; and
- prepare and publish a report at least once every 3 years after the BSL strategy is published, assessing the progress made in promoting and facilitating the use of BSL.

The Bill also requires listed public bodies to prepare and publish a plan setting out how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL when carrying out their functions, and to report on the implementation of this plan.

The Bill proposes these duties would be placed on the following public bodies:

- local authorities;
- local health boards;
- certain NHS Trusts (Public Health Wales, Velindre and the Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust); and

- certain special health authorities (Digital Health and Care Wales, and Health Education and Improvement Wales).

Purpose and aims of the Bill

The **Explanatory Memorandum** outlines three main reasons the Bill is needed. These are:

- to recognise the language needs of the BSL community and their cultural identity and heritage;
- to ensure that policy makers and service providers consider the language needs of Deaf BSL signers, and the barriers they face, when designing and delivering services; and
- to ensure legislative parity with the UK and Scottish Parliaments, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Both the UK and Scottish Parliaments have introduced legislation to support the promotion and facilitation of BSL (through the **British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015** and the **British Sign Language Act 2022**). The Northern Ireland Assembly is currently considering the **Sign Language Bill**.

The Bill aims to establish a framework for the promotion and facilitation of BSL in Wales. It sets out the steps that Welsh Government and listed public bodies must take to plan how they will promote and facilitate the use of BSL, and to report on progress. However, the Welsh Government and listed public bodies will be responsible for deciding on specific actions to be taken when developing the national BSL strategy and local BSL plans.

During **a statement** on 16 July 2025, Mark Isherwood MS described the Bill as “a framework piece of legislation”, stating:

Together, we must do all we can to remove the barriers encountered by deaf people, and although the Bill does not address individually all those barriers, it does provide a framework where the Welsh Government and those listed public bodies... have to consider the needs of deaf BSL signers alongside their duty to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

The Welsh Government previously expressed the view that the aims of the Bill could be achieved without the need for legislation. Lesley Griffiths MS, then Cabinet Secretary for Culture and Social Justice, made this point during a debate on **a motion seeking the Senedd’s agreement to introduce the Bill** on 19 June 2024.

During **the statement on 16 July**, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd

and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt MS, said the Welsh Government welcomed the Bill. She noted that there had been “widespread support” for the Bill, and noted the importance of the legislation had been reinforced through discussions with the **Cross-Party Group on Deaf issues** and the BSL stakeholder task and finish group convened by the Welsh Government. She went on to say:

I’m confident this Bill will positively influence national policy and local delivery of our public services and will provide the framework needed to promote and facilitate the use of BSL across the nation.

How to use this Bill Summary

This document is not an exhaustive summary of every aspect of the Bill. It is designed to be used electronically and signpost to further detail.

There is more commentary on the Bill’s provisions in the Explanatory Notes section of the **Explanatory Memorandum**. The Explanatory Memorandum also provides more information about the development of the Bill.

2. Summary of provisions

The Bill (as introduced) has 11 sections and one schedule.

Promoting BSL

Section 1 places a duty on Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.

National strategy and guidance

Section 2 requires Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a national strategy setting out how they will promote and facilitate the use of BSL in the exercise of their functions, and how they will encourage listed public bodies to do the same. The strategy must be laid before the Senedd and must be available in BSL.

The first strategy must be published within 18 months of the Bill coming into force. Welsh Ministers are required to review the strategy at least once every 6 years after this. If they decide to revise the strategy, the revised version must also be published.

This section also requires Welsh Ministers to consult with the BSL adviser and “any other persons they consider appropriate” before publishing the BSL strategy or any revised version of it.

Section 3 requires that Welsh Ministers issue guidance to listed public bodies (see Section 8 of the Bill) about how they may promote and facilitate the use of BSL, and to ensure this guidance is available in BSL.

Listed public body BSL plans

Section 4 requires each listed public body to prepare and publish a plan setting out how it intends to promote and facilitate the use of BSL in the exercise of its functions. The plan must describe how the public body intends to follow Welsh Government guidance, or why it does not intend to do so.

A public body must consult with anyone it considers appropriate before publishing a BSL plan or a revised version, and the plan must be available in BSL. Public bodies must publish their BSL plans within 12 months of the national BSL strategy being published, or the publication of a revised version.

This section also gives Welsh Ministers the power to make regulations to require public bodies to include particular information in their BSL plans, and to direct

public bodies to review their plans.

The public bodies which would be required to publish a plan are listed in Section 8.

Adviser to the Welsh Ministers

Section 5 requires that Welsh Ministers appoint a BSL adviser, and that the person appointed uses and is able to communicate effectively in BSL. It also requires Welsh Ministers to appoint a panel to assist the BSL adviser, and to consult the adviser before making any appointments to the panel.

The BSL adviser may provide information or advice to Welsh Ministers in relation to their functions under the Bill. They may also provide information or advice to anyone about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL in Wales, with the agreement of Welsh Ministers.

The BSL adviser may request that a listed public body provide them with information that would help the adviser to exercise their functions. The public body is required to comply with the request, unless doing so would conflict with its duties or have an adverse effect on the exercise of its functions. Where a public body decides not to comply with a request for information, it must explain why to the BSL adviser in writing.

Reporting

Section 6 requires a listed public body to prepare and publish a report setting out what it has done to implement its BSL plan, and if it has not implemented something, explaining why not. The report must be published within 12 months of the publication of a public body's BSL plan, and must be available in BSL.

Section 7 requires Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a report assessing the progress made in promoting and facilitating the use of BSL at least once every 3 years after the national BSL strategy is first published. The report must be laid before the Senedd, and must be available in BSL.

Welsh Ministers are required to consult with the BSL adviser and any other persons they consider appropriate when preparing a progress report. The section also gives Welsh Ministers the power to require a listed public body to provide them with information for the purpose of preparing a progress report.

General

Section 8 specifies the public bodies that will be required to publish a BSL plan, and to report on its implementation. The listed public bodies are:

- Local authorities
- Local health boards
- Certain NHS Trusts (Public Health Wales, Velindre and the Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust)
- Certain special health authorities (Digital Health and Care Wales, and Health Education and Improvement Wales).

It also gives Welsh Ministers the power to make regulations to add organisations to the list (provided they are **a devolved Welsh authority**), remove organisations from the list, or amend the description of a listed public body. It requires Welsh Ministers to consult the BSL adviser and other persons they consider appropriate before exercising these powers.

Section 9 makes provisions in relation to the powers to make regulations under this Bill and the applicable procedure of Senedd Cymru to be followed in making those regulations.

Section 10 provides that the Bill comes into force on the day after Royal Assent is received.

Section 11 sets out the short title of the Bill.

Schedule 1 – BSL adviser

Schedule 1 makes provision in relation to the appointment of the BSL adviser, and the appointment of members of a panel to assist them.

It allows Welsh Ministers to provide the BSL adviser with staff, accommodation, equipment and other facilities which are necessary for them to carry out their functions under the Bill.

It also provides that Welsh Ministers may pay remuneration, expenses and allowances to the BSL adviser and members of the panel, and to pay pensions to current and former BSL advisers.

3. Cost of implementation

The **Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA)** estimates the overall costs of the Bill as being between £3.76 million and £4.14 million over a 10-year period. The total estimated cost comprises around £1.61 million in costs to the Welsh Government, and between £2.15 million and £2.53 million to the listed public bodies.

This estimate only covers the administrative costs of delivering the requirements of the Bill. It does not include any costs associated with implementing a national BSL strategy or local plans, and it does not estimate the financial impacts of any benefits to the Deaf community which might result from the Bill. This is because the content of the national BSL strategy and local plans will be determined at a later stage by the Welsh Government and listed public bodies.

4. The Senedd's scrutiny

There are **four stages to the Senedd's scrutiny of Bills**.

Stage 1

The Bill has been referred to the Equality and Social Justice Committee for Stage 1 scrutiny, with a deadline of 5 December 2025 for it to report on the general principles of the Bill.

The Committee will be launching an open call for evidence on the Bill, and will hold evidence sessions in the Autumn term to hear stakeholder views on the Bill before reporting to the Senedd.

Further information on scrutiny at Stage 1 is available on the **Bill webpage**.

Stage 2 and beyond

Should the Senedd agree to the general principles of the Bill, it will be subject to amendment at Stage 2. These amendments will be considered by the Equality and Social Justice Committee. The Business Committee's timetable for the Bill sets a deadline of 6 February 2026 for Stage 2 to be completed.

The Bill would then be subject to further amendment by all Members of the Senedd in Plenary (Stage 3) before a final vote on whether to pass the legislation (Stage 4).