

EXPLANATORY NOTES FOR THE BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (WALES) BILL 2026

INTRODUCTION

1. These Explanatory Notes have been prepared to assist the reader of the British Sign Language (Wales) Bill (“the Bill”).
2. The Notes should be read in conjunction with the Bill. They do not form part of the Bill. They are not, and are not meant to be, a comprehensive description of the Bill. Where a section, or part of a section, does not seem to require any explanation or comment, none is given.

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

3. British Sign Language (BSL) is a language that uses gestures, handshapes, facial expressions and body language to convey meaning and which, in its tactile forms, can also use touch. The aim of the Bill is to promote its use in Wales. The Bill does so by imposing various new duties on the Welsh Ministers and on certain public bodies.
4. The Bill requires the Welsh Ministers to promote and facilitate the use of BSL and, in order to fulfil that requirement, produce a national BSL strategy that describes both how they themselves intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL, and how they intend to encourage certain public bodies to do so. The Welsh Ministers must issue those public bodies with guidance about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL. And the Welsh Ministers must appoint someone as their BSL adviser, together with a panel of people to assist the adviser.
5. Certain public bodies listed in the Bill are required to produce plans describing how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL.
6. Both the Welsh Ministers and the listed public bodies are required to report on progress made.
7. The Bill has 11 sections and one Schedule.

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

SECTION 1 – WELSH MINISTERS’ DUTY TO PROMOTE BSL

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

SECTION 2 – NATIONAL BSL STRATEGY

9. Subsection (1) places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to prepare and publish a national BSL strategy that describes, first, how they themselves intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL and, secondly, how they intend to encourage certain public bodies to do the same (subsection (1)(b)). Section 8 lists those public bodies (referred to in these explanatory notes as “listed public bodies”).

10. The Welsh Ministers must publish the national BSL strategy within 18 months beginning with the day after the date the Act comes into force (subsection (2)(a)), and review it at least once every six years (subsection (2)(b)). The strategy (including any revised versions) must be laid before Senedd Cymru (subsection (3)(a)); it must be made available in BSL (subsection (3)(b)) and the Welsh Ministers must consult before publishing it (subsection (4)).

SECTION 3 – BSL GUIDANCE

11. Section 3 requires the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance to the listed public bodies on how they may promote and facilitate the use of BSL in exercising their functions. This guidance must be made available in BSL (paragraph (b)).

SECTION 4 – BSL PLANS

12. Section 4 requires the listed public bodies to prepare and publish plans describing (a) how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL in exercising their functions, (b) how they intend to follow the guidance issued by Welsh Ministers under section 3, and (c) any other information the Welsh Ministers set out in regulations.
13. The listed public bodies' plans must be published within 12 months beginning with the day after publication of the national BSL strategy (subsection (2)). A listed public body must review its plan if directed to do so by Welsh Ministers (subsection (3)(a)) or if the Welsh Ministers revise the national BSL strategy (subsection (3)(b)). The listed public body must consult before publishing the plan (subsection (6)), ensure it is made available in BSL and send it to the Welsh Ministers (subsection (7)).

SECTION 5 – BSL ADVISER

14. Subsection (1) requires that the Welsh Ministers appoint someone as their BSL adviser, and persons to be members of a panel to assist the adviser (subsection (1)). The Welsh Ministers must be satisfied that the person appointed as adviser is able to communicate effectively in and uses BSL (subsection (2)).
15. The Welsh Ministers must consult the BSL adviser before appointing a person as a member of the panel (subsection (3)).
16. The adviser may provide information and advice to the Welsh Ministers about their functions under the Bill (and must do so if requested by Welsh Ministers) (subsections (4) and (6)). And, as long as the Ministers agree to this, the adviser may also provide information or advice to other people in Wales about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL (subsection (4)).
17. The Welsh Ministers are also required to consult the adviser about the following things:
- a. the national BSL strategy (see section 2(4));
 - b. the Welsh Ministers' progress reports under section 7 (see section 7(4));
 - c. making regulations that change which bodies are "listed public bodies" (see section 8(3)).

18. Subsection (9) gives effect to a Schedule which provides that the BSL adviser, and panel members assisting the adviser, will be appointed by the Welsh Ministers (which will be done via public appointments processes) and will hold office in accordance with terms specified by the Ministers. The Schedule also makes provision about how the Welsh Ministers may pay the adviser and panel members and gives them the discretion to provide the adviser with facilities if and to the extent that they consider that to be necessary.

SECTION 6 – REPORTS BY LISTED PUBLIC BODIES

19. Listed public bodies must publish reports detailing what they have done to implement their plans, and if they have not implemented something, explaining why not (subsection (1)).
20. The reports must be published within 12 months beginning with the day after the listed public body publishes its plan under section 4; they must be made available in BSL and sent to the Welsh Ministers (subsection (2)).

SECTION 7 – REPORTS BY THE WELSH MINISTERS

21. The Welsh Ministers must publish a report assessing the progress made in promoting and facilitating the use of BSL in accordance with the Bill (subsection (1)). This will include assessing both what the Welsh Ministers have done pursuant to their duties under the Bill, and also the progress that has been made in Wales more generally. The report must be published at least once in every period of three years beginning with the day after the BSL strategy is published.
22. The report must be laid before Senedd Cymru and be available in BSL (subsection (2)). In preparing the report, Welsh Ministers may require a listed public body to provide them with information (subsection (3)) and must consult (subsection (4)).

SECTION 8 – MEANING OF “LISTED PUBLIC BODY”

23. Subsection (1) sets out the listed public bodies to whom various duties described in these explanatory notes apply. The Welsh Ministers may make regulations that alter which bodies are on this list (subsection (2)).

SECTION 9 – REGULATIONS

24. Section 9 explains how powers to make regulations under the Bill (under sections 4(1)(c) and 8(2)) are to be exercised and sets out the applicable procedure of Senedd Cymru to be followed in making those regulations. For regulations made under section 4(1)(c), this will be the Senedd annulment procedure (meaning that the statutory instrument containing the regulations becomes law when it is made but can be annulled by the Senedd), and for regulations made under section 8(2), this will be the Senedd approval procedure (meaning that the instrument containing them only becomes law if it is approved by a vote in the Senedd).

SECTION 10 – COMING INTO FORCE

25. Section 10 provides that the whole of the Bill comes into force on the day after the day it receives Royal Assent.

SECTION 11 – SHORT TITLE

26. This Bill may be referred to as the British Sign Language (Wales) Act 2026 or Deddf Iaith Arwyddion Prydain (Cymru) 2026.

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