

William Powell AM
Chair, Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

Your ref: P-04-526
Our ref: PO679/RB/HP

21 February 2014

Dear William

Thank you for letter concerning the Assembly Petition:

P-04-526: We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to provide subtitling and signed language access to televised debates and proceedings, to enable the 300,000 with hearing loss and deafness in Wales to follow the democratic processes hearing people already enjoy.

I am responding to the issues raised in turn by the petitioner, below.

Senedd TV

At the moment, the current Senedd TV service cannot carry subtitles of Assembly proceedings. We have recently begun subtitling videos of First Minister's Questions which are added to our YouTube channel the next day. Although they are not live, they are available as a record as soon as possible.

We have consulted with disabled users and accessibility specialists in the past, and as part of that work, there are improvements being made to Senedd TV at the moment that should be realised by the summer term. These features will improve the accessibility of our proceedings and include:

- Transcripts of plenary meetings being viewed alongside an archived video within 24 hours so viewers can see who is speaking and what they are saying; and

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg/We welcome correspondence in both English and Welsh



- Onscreen captioning which will show who is speaking and the agenda item being discussed.

We recently worked with S4C to pilot the provision of live interpretation of First Minister's Questions in British Sign Language (BSL). The live interpretation was available in the viewing gallery, reception areas in the Senedd and Tŷ Hywel, and the recorded interpretation was shown on S4C's *Dydd yn y Cynulliad* programme later the same night. The aim was also to show the videos on our YouTube channel.

The pilot provided some valuable insights into the issues around providing a BSL and live subtitling service. Feedback from the interpreters and service users has indicated that interpreting live Plenary proceedings is exceptionally challenging due to the pace and the technical language, terms and number of statistics used in proceedings. Although the service was welcomed, there was a concern amongst the interpreters and users about the accuracy of the service provided, and as such the extension of the pilot has been put on hold. We are working with the interpreters and S4C on how the issues raised in the pilot can be resolved satisfactorily.

We understand that the Scottish Parliament has recently conducted some research into the provision of BSL and subtitling services which has produced some useful insights and we will contact colleagues to discuss their findings. This, coupled with the results of the pilot, will give us an indication of cost, resource and practical requirements that would involve further increasing the accessibility of Assembly proceedings via Senedd TV to Deaf people and people with hearing loss. We will also discuss the petition and accessibility services with our broadcasting partners, although the editorial responsibility for what is shown rests with the individual broadcasters. I'd like to assure the Committee, that the Assembly Commission remains committed to its equality agenda and to exploring ways in which we can increase access to the Assembly and its work for Deaf people.

It is worth remembering that the bilingual written transcript of Assembly Business is available within 24 hours enabling everyone to engage with Assembly Business as soon as is reasonably practicable. Also, reasonable adjustments such as BSL interpreters and subtitling for any visitors to our viewing galleries can be made upon request with reasonable, advance notice.

Engagement in the democratic process

With regards to increasing awareness of the Assembly and its work with the Deaf community and other people with hearing loss, our Communications Team is in a position to review what publications could be usefully translated into a BSL/captioned format. We can consult directly with the Deaf community as to what we could usefully design and we welcome feedback from petitioners on this matter.

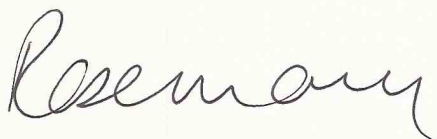
Our Outreach Team is also keen to build upon its contacts from the Deaf community in order to raise awareness amongst Deaf groups and seek opportunities for engagement in committee inquiries and other Assembly activity.

Website

I understand that the petitioner has been in correspondence with the Assembly's Equality Team with regard to comments about the Assembly's website. Through further investigation, it transpired that the comments related to the Welsh Government's website, which we have passed on to its website team for consideration. We have had our website tested by different disabled user groups, and also tested by accessibility specialists Bunnyfoot and The Shaw Trust. We have also invited any comments or suggestions from the petitioner (in separate correspondence) about the Assembly's website and how we could make any improvements for Deaf people and people with hearing loss.

If you feel it would be beneficial, Assembly staff from the Equality Team and Broadcasting Team are on hand to discuss any issues on which you might wish to have further clarification. My office can arrange a meeting at your convenience.

Also, we invite Mr James to meet with our staff or correspond in any way which is preferable to Mr James, to talk through the issues raised in this letter.



Dame Rosemary Butler AM
Presiding Officer