

From The DALO:

Ms Emer Boyle
Communities Committee Clerk
Room 430
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Emer,

SIGN LANGUAGE BILL DELIBERATIONS

I refer to your correspondence of 10 November 2025 (your ref: CC/25/369) regarding the Committee's Sign Language Bill Deliberations - Week 1 – Clauses 1 and 2. You wrote to me again on 14 November 2025 (your ref: CC/25/386) regarding Sign Language Bill Deliberations: Week 2 – Clauses 3 and 4. Both letters outlined the Committee's request for some clarifications and additional information.

In your correspondence of 14 November, you advised that the Committee also agreed to ask officials to attend in person at the Committee meetings scheduled for 27 November and 11 December 2025, to provide an update in relation to all of the feedback from the Committee's deliberations. Officials will be happy to respond to the Committee's queries at those meetings and will provide briefing on the aforementioned clauses in advance of these appearances.

I trust this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,



Laura Coffey
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer
Private Office



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES

Room 430
Parliament Buildings
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

10 November 2025
Our ref: CC/25/369

Laura Coffey
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer
Department for Communities
Level 9
Causeway Exchange
Belfast

Dear Laura

Sign Language Bill Deliberations - Week 1 – Clauses 1 and 2

At its meeting on 6 November 2025, the Committee commenced its deliberations on clauses 1 and 2 of the Sign Language Bill.

During the closed session, and as confirmed in open session, members agreed I write to you in relation to the following:

Clause 1

- Confirmation that all of the Bill includes the Deafblind community. Members queried whether Deafblind should be specifically referenced in clause one or if its inclusion in clause 11, and consequently of *'common tactile or non-visual forms of the language as used and understood by some deafblind people'* in clause 12, assures full inclusion in the Bill.
- Could the Department clarify and update the EFM accordingly if it considers that the latter assures this?

Clause 2

2(1)

- Would the Department be minded to amend 2(1) by removing "to such extent (and in such manner) as the Department considers appropriate"

- Could the Department include a definition of 'Promote' (also used in 2(2)) under key terms in Chapter 4 to indicate, along with other information, that 'promotion', in terms of deaf culture, is more than ensuring the availability of classes.
- Where 'the deaf community' is mentioned, that it reads across to Clause 11 and recognises the deaf community extends beyond sign language users.

2(2)

- Clarification that the use of 'or' rather than 'and' wouldn't have unintended consequences in terms of promoting one language over another
- Clarification in relation to who the Department considers to be 'other suitable persons'
- Addition of:
 - (c) - Deaf adults and their families
 - (d) - Children Of Deaf Adults (CODAs)
- How the Department intends to address the issue of 'language deprivation' – evidence received by the Committee suggests that when children are diagnosed with a hearing impairment/as being deaf, a medical model is offered to 'fix' this, however access to sign language learning is not offered. Witnesses advised this should be offered alongside any medical models to ensure 'the greater use and understanding of BSL and ISL' and to address 'language deprivation'.

2(3)

An update from the Department on its discussion with NDCS in relation to raising the age of 19 to 21 or 25. The Committee's collective view is that 25 would be preferred.

- Committee notes if the 3rd point in 2(2) above is progressed this may not be required

Clause 11

During the course of the deliberations in the context of discussions in relation to who is part of 'the deaf community', Members wished to explore if the Department was minded to change:

'For the purposes of this Part...' to 'For the purposes of this Bill/Act..' in order to provide complete clarity.

To support the efficient progress of the deliberations stage, I would be grateful for a prompt response.

Yours sincerely

Emer Boyle

Clerk to the Committee for Communities