



Highland Council

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2018 - 2024



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Introduction

The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) users to live, work and visit. They want BSL users to be involved in daily and public life and to be able to make informed choices about every part of their lives.

A six year BSL National Plan (2017 – 2023) sets out ten long term goals. These will show how the Scottish Government will support and promote BSL.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires local public bodies to also publish a six year BSL Plan by October 2018. This is the Highland Council's first BSL Plan. We have worked with other local public bodies to gather views from BSL users in Highland.

'BSL users' covers people who use BSL as their first or preferred language, including Deafblind people who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss.

We have also welcomed views from others including hearing BSL users, BSL/English Interpreters and parents or carers of Deaf people.

The Highland Council's first BSL Plan 2018 – 2024 reflects the long-term goals of the National BSL Plan. Our proposed actions are outlined in this document and they aim to:

- better promote the use and understanding of BSL in Highland
- improve access to information and services for BSL users in Highland

Engagement and Consultation

We worked together with our partners in Highland to find out what is important to BSL users. This includes Deaf and hearing BSL users, BSL/English Interpreters and parents or carers of Deaf people. Some partners (NHS Highland and University of the Highlands and Islands) also have to prepare BSL Plans. Other partners do not need to prepare plans but are interested in the views of BSL users.

Partners = Public bodies working together.

Public bodies = Highland Council, NHS Highland, University of the Highlands & Islands, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, High Life Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

We asked:

- What is important to you or your family as BSL users?
- What barriers do BSL users face?
- What do you think public bodies can do better to promote BSL?

We promoted engagement in press releases, Facebook and Twitter, through a BSL video clip, through the British Deaf Association (BDA) and local Deaf Club.

We gathered views in different ways:

- A drop-in event in Inverness and a focus group in Wick for BSL users
- An online survey
- Comments by email
- A focus group was held for young BSL users in school

What we were told by BSL users

BSL users shared a wide range of views and comments with us. Many people told us of their experiences when trying to access services and information. This included the barriers many faced to access information in a format they could understand. BSL is a language with its own structure and grammar. Some BSL users find it difficult to understand written information in English.

BSL users rely on a small number of local BSL/English interpreters to communicate with public bodies. Supporting BSL users to participate in community and leisure activities is even more challenging.

Not all BSL users are comfortable using technology to communicate with public bodies (for example via ContactSCOTLAND-BSL).

An important message is the need for staff in public bodies to have a better understanding of Deaf/BSL awareness, Deaf culture and the experiences of BSL users. It's also important for them to be aware of when to use BSL/English interpreters and how to do this.

This information has helped to develop the Highland Council's first BSL Plan.

Key messages – BSL users told us:

What is important?

To be provided with
enough
Communication
Support

Individual BSL users
have different needs

Deaf/BSL awareness

Access to accessible
information

Barriers for BSL users?

Lack of understanding
about BSL, culture and
experiences

Not enough
interpreters

Few BSL role
models

Lack of information
in BSL

What can public bodies do better?

Train staff in BSL
and D/deaf
awareness

Raise awareness of
communication
support to staff and
BSL users

Capture individual
experiences of BSL
users

Provide
information in
different formats



Action Plan section 1

Public Services: Across all our services

The BSL National Plan says; *“Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.”*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 1.1 Continue to review and use information we have in our organisation about BSL users to support access to services.
- 1.2 Consider how to capture communication needs at first contact and share (with permission) across Council services as needed.
- 1.3 Work with BSL users and partners to improve access to information about services, e.g. information in BSL
- 1.4 Work with Council Services and partners to promote the use of ContactScotland-BSL
 - Work together to train staff how and when to use ContactSCOTLAND-BSL
 - Work with partners and ContactSCOTLAND-BSL to improve awareness of the service with BSL users.
- 1.5 Work with partners to train staff who work with BSL users.
 - Set up online Deaf and BSL Awareness training for all staff.
 - Promote BSL classes to staff
- 1.6 Continue to provide Communication Support Services for Deaf people to provide access to Highland Council services and information.
- 1.7 Continue to promote and review the Communication Support Service.
- 1.8 Work with partners to engage with BSL users to give updates on BSL Plans (at least once a year).
- 1.9 Positively promote BSL as a language and aim to remove any stigma associated with BSL.



Action Plan section 2

Family Support, Early learning and Childcare

The BSL National Plan says: “*The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a D/deaf or Deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL*”

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 2.1 Provide Deaf/BSL Awareness to “early years” staff who work with BSL users.
- 2.2 Provide information about resources available in BSL so that staff can meet the needs of families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child, including Grandparents and other siblings.
- 2.3 Make sure families of D/deaf or Deafblind children have access to locally and nationally developed BSL resources and advice.
- 2.4 Provide specialist services to families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child to support the move into nursery and also into school.
- 2.5 Deaf parents/carers may avoid parents’ information evenings and so advice on appropriate supports to include them more will be created.
- 2.6 Make sure that BSL users who are parents/carers have access to communication support services for access to information and advice. Key information should also be available online so that parents can revisit this as required.
- 2.7 Make sure that families of D/deaf or Deafblind children have access to communication support services for access to information and advice at the earliest possible stage.
- 2.8 If needed, a Child Plan will be developed and actions will be recorded which will include where reasonable adjustments are required to meet the needs of the child. A summary could be made available in BSL if the parent/child also had a literacy difficulty.



Action Plan section 3

School Education

The BSL National Plan says: “Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child’s education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school”

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 3.1 Continue to lobby for Deaf people to be allowed to access teacher training and become positive role models.
- 3.2 Continue to contribute to CRIDE (Consortium for Research into Deaf Education) and highlight the recognised examples of good practice in Highland. CRIDE collect information on the level of BSL held by teachers and support staff working with D/deaf and Deafblind pupils in schools.
- 3.3 Continue to promote and raise awareness of the importance of BSL through the work of Highland Council’s Deaf Education Service.
- 3.4 Where appropriate, raise awareness in schools to ensure a BSL friendly school for parents and pupils through a whole school approach.
- 3.5 The Highland Council will contribute to any future BSL initiatives from SQA. This comes from having previous involvement of delivering SQA units.
- 3.6 To support parents and young people who use BSL:
 - Highland Council will continue to publicise the use of their Communication Support Service.
 - Highland Council will provide training and awareness to schools on how they can make sure parents who use BSL know how they can be involved in their child’s education
- 3.7 Build on good practice in Highland and continue to include and promote BSL as part of the 1+2 languages initiative.
- 3.8 Roll out a programme of training for schools to use Highland’s 1+2 BSL Introductory pack. This started in September 2018 and will continue until summer 2020.
- 3.9 From August 2018 we will pilot new National Qualifications in BSL as they become available from SQA.
- 3.10 Ensure robust transitions planning and signing support for deaf/Deaf young people and BSL users in line with Additional Support for Learning legislation.



Action Plan section 4

Training and Work

The BSL National Plan says: *“BSL users will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, so that they can fulfil their potential, and improve Scotland’s economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career”.*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 4.1 Make sure pupils and carers know where they can find information in BSL for:
 - Advice and guidance about their career and learning choices
 - Information on transition process.
- 4.2 Work with partners who deliver skills and employment services
 - Work with employer groups already supporting employability
 - Let people know where they can get advice on the needs of BSL users
- 4.3 Work with partners to prepare, deliver and monitor transition plans for BSL users.
- 4.4 Raise awareness of the UK Government’s ‘Access to Work’ (AtW) scheme with;
 - Managers, and
 - staff who use BSL (including those on Modern Apprenticeships) so that they can benefit from the support it provides.
- 4.5 Ensure Highland Council’s information on reasonable adjustments in the workplace and recruitment includes reference to AtW and BSL.



Action Plan section 5

Health (including social care), Mental Health and Wellbeing

The BSL National Plan says: “BSL users will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives and to make informed choices at every stage of their lives”.

We agree with this long-term goal.

The Lead Agency model means that NHS Highland is commissioned to deliver adult social care in Highland. By 2024 we will:

- 5.1 Make sure that ‘Looked After and Accommodated’ children and young people have access to BSL support and are supported to take part in the planning process.
- 5.2 Work with partners to set up BSL and Deaf awareness training for staff who work with young BSL users. Ensure a good level of deaf awareness and where possible and appropriate, basic BSL for staff who work with people who are deaf/Deaf.
- 5.3 Utilise and promote the use of BSL services within NHS Highland and consult with NHS Highland Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to make sure that:
 - children and young people who use BSL and who need Psychological Therapies have their communication needs met including access to specialist mental health using BSL.
- 5.4 Work with partners to make sure that any local work to deal with social isolation explicitly considers the needs of BSL users. Ensure key messages available online are available in BSL.
- 5.5 With partners, review public protection information. Provide key messages from this in BSL.



Action Plan section 6

Transport

Transport: The BSL National Plan says: 'BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland'

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

6.1 Engage with the BSL community in Highland to inform and develop prioritised transport and travel information. This will be provided in accessible formats e.g. easy to read materials.

6.2 Promote and encourage the use of ContactSCOTLAND-BSL to enable access to transport information.

6.3 Think about the needs of BSL users when developing the transport pages of our website.

6.4 Promote the use of booking systems for our community transport operators and other demand-responsive transport contracts which are appropriate for BSL users

6.5 Encourage and support transport operators in driver awareness training to assist BSL users.

6.6 Encourage BSL users to use the HITRANS Thistle Assistance Card. This card lets drivers know that support is needed by users of public transport. The aim is to improve communication between bus drivers and passengers.

6.7 Make sure that school transport providers are given awareness training if any pupils on their routes are BSL users, and that school transport/ bus escorts also receive training.



Action Plan section 7

Culture, Leisure, sports and the Arts

The BSL National Plan says: *“BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Scotland”*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

7.1 Improve access to BSL information where possible on:

- Culture, arts, leisure, local sports facilities and sporting opportunities.

7.2 Think how the use of technology could improve the experiences of BSL users. For example, in new developments such the Castle Hill Development in Inverness.

7.3 Work with partners to set up BSL and Deaf awareness training for High Life Highland staff who work in culture, leisure, arts and sport.



Action Plan section 8

Justice

The BSL National Plan says: 'BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland'

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 8.1 Continue to ensure BSL provision is available for Criminal Justice service users.
- 8.2 Raise awareness amongst partners supporting the work of the Highland Community Justice Partnership and the Children's Hearing system in Highland of BSL support services.



Action Plan section 9

Democracy

Democracy: We share the long-term goal for democracy set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

“BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies”

By 2024 we will:

- 9.1 Promote the Access to Elected Office Fund locally. This can meet the additional costs of BSL users who want to stand for selection or election in local or Scottish Parliament elections.
- 9.2 Review the format of information about elections and the election process.
- 9.3 Work with partners to develop and promote accessible guidelines for activities and events.
- 9.4 Capacity building –
 - work with partners and Deaf BSL users to develop and encourage independence
 - make sure partners on the nine local [Community Planning Partnerships](#) work with each other and Deaf BSL users so they can actively contribute to the local plans. Raise awareness of how to book BSL/English interpreters and the need to book early.
- 9.5 Raise awareness about ContactSCOTLAND-BSL with elected members

Next steps

- The final version of the Highland Council's BSL Plan is published in BSL and English on the Council website.
- A detailed timetable for actions will be developed with identified lead officers. The plan will be monitored annually and progress reports made every two years.
- We will consider comments we receive about the Highland Council BSL Plan at any time.
- We will continue to engage with BSL users as we carry out actions in the Plan.
- We will keep people up to date with our progress.

Contact for comments and further information

We welcome comments on Council's BSL Plan at any time. The Plan is published in BSL (video clips) and English. Both versions are on the Highland Council website at www.highland.gov.uk/BSLplan.

To comment or find out further information about the Highland Council BSL Plan, contact: Rosemary Mackinnon, Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX, tel 01463 702094, email rosemary.mackinnon@highland.gov.uk

BSL users can use ContactSCOTLAND-BSL <https://contactscotland-bsl.org>