

REPORT TO: Cabinet

MEETING DATE: 14 May 2024

BY: Executive Director for Place

SUBJECT: British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval for East Lothian Council's British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the East Lothian Council BSL Plan 2024-2030.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The [BSL \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) received Royal Assent in October 2015 and placed an obligation on the Scottish Ministers to publish a BSL Plan in 2017, followed by Local Authority plans. National Plans and local plans are to be produced every six years thereafter.
- 3.2 The Council adopted its [BSL Plan 2018-2024](#) in September 2019. This set out local priorities and actions identified through engagement with BSL users and based around the ten long-term national goals adopted by the national plan.
- 3.2 The Scottish Government published its second British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023- 2029 in November 2023. It has ten long-term goals which were co-produced with BSL users across Scotland. The core long-term goal is that *'the Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit'*.
- 3.3 In line with the legislation local authorities have been mandated to produce their new BSL Plans for 2024-2030 by May 2024. In March 2024, the Council held two engagement events with the support of NHS Lothian

colleagues and the British Deaf Association (BDA) to gather feedback on the existing plan. The views and comments of participants have been taken into account in developing the 2024-2030 Plan.

3.4 This plan, which replaces our current commits the Council to continue to:

- Improve communication and access to services for people who use BSL in East Lothian
- Promote the use of and understanding of BSL across the county; and
- Engage with BSL users.

3.5 The Plan includes an action plan covering key services for BSL users:

- Accessing information and support
- Education and learning – from pre-school onwards
- Culture and arts
- Health and wellbeing
- Employment
- Transport

3.6 The actions build on the actions set out in the 2018-2024 Plan taking account of the financial and other challenges the Council faces. Engagement with the BSL community will continue and the Council will be interested in the views of BSL users throughout the life of the Plan to assist in reviewing the Plan and its implementation.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The 2024-2030 BSL Plan fulfils the Council's responsibility under the [BSL \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) to publish a BSL Plan within six months of the publication of the Scottish Government's national BSL Plan. The Plan is an integral part of the Council's Equality Plan and helps it to fulfil its commitment to lead in the planning and delivery of services which are inclusive, accessible and meet need.

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and no negative impacts have been identified.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial – The Council has been allocated £11,000 per annum to support the development implementation of the plan.

6.2 Personnel – none.

6.3 Other – none.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 [East Lothian Council BSL Plan 2018-2024](#)

Appendix 1: East Lothian Council British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030

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DATE	15 th April 2024

East Lothian Council
British Sign Language (BSL) Plan
2024-2030



May 2024

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Introduction

The Scottish Government published its second national British Sign Language (BSL) plan in November 2023. It sets out 10 national outcomes identified through face-to-face engagement and online consultation with Scotland's BSL users.

This new National BSL Plan 2023-2029 and the resultant Plan for East Lothian is produced as a requirement of the [BSL \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#). This requires each local authority to produce its own plan in response to national aspirations and to address local priorities.

The East Lothian BSL Plan, therefore, sets out the ten long-term national goals alongside local priorities identified through engagement with BSL users. This plan replaces our current [BSL Plan 2018-2024](#) it commits us to continue to:

- Improve communication and access to services for people who use BSL in East Lothian
- Promote the use of and understanding of BSL across the county; and
- Engage with BSL users.

What is British Sign Language (BSL)

BSL is a visual-gestural language with a distinctive grammar using handshapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language to convey meaning.

The word deaf is commonly used to describe or identify people with a severe hearing difficulty. Often deaf is written with a capital 'D' and refers to people who have been deaf since birth or prior to language development. As with any population Deaf people/BSL user/s have a distinct community with a shared history, culture and sense of identity based on a shared language¹. Recent medical procedures such as cochlear implants are a point of discussion in what this means for identity, culture and belonging. Lower case 'deaf' describes people who have lost some or all their hearing in early or later life. This group, who choose to use speech and lip-reading and regard English as their first language.

The [British Deaf Association](#) estimates that 151,000 people in the UK use British Sign language and it is the preferred language of over 87,000 Deaf people. The 2011 Scottish Census recorded 12,566 users of BSL at home, and that BSL is the preferred language of 7,200 people in Scotland. It recorded 182 BSL users in East Lothian. At the recent engagement events to consult on the Council's BSL plan those present indicated that there are currently around 90 BSL users in East Lothian. The results of the 2022 Scottish census question 'Can you use BSL?' will provide up-to-date data on the number of BSL users in East Lothian.

¹ Solas: [British Sign Language in Scotland – SPICe Spotlight | Solas air SPICe \(spice-spotlight.scot\)](#)

The Scottish Government BSL Plan 2023-2029

The [Scottish Government British Sign language \(BSL\) Plan 2023-2029](#) {BSL signed version: [BSL National Plan \(bslscotlandact2015.scot\)](#)} sets out “a vision for better inclusion, opportunities and outcomes for Scotland’s sign language users. It aspires to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work and visit. This means that people whose first or preferred language is BSL will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens, and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.” The national plan sets out ten priorities. In summary these are:

Delivering the plan: Embed the ambition of the plan within other government areas to make progress across the system.

Accessibility: Address the underrepresentation of BSL communities ensuring access to opportunities and services, coupled with information in the right format and at the right time.

Children, Young People and their Families: Embed the commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child to ensure the right support at the right time.

Access to Employment: Embed the principles of No One Left Behind, our all-age approach to employability to enable BSL users to find their best route to employment.

Health and Wellbeing: Person-centred healthcare involves access to, and delivery of, equitable services. It is important that BSL users have relevant information and the services needed to make informed health choices.

Celebrating BSL Culture: BSL users have access to, and can participate in, the cultural life of Scotland, which celebrates their own culture and heritage.

BSL Data: Build an evidence base of BSL data in Scotland, to inform our work in delivering this BSL National Plan and to inform local plans.

Transport: Embed BSL within our transport system to ensure safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport.

Access to Justice: Take steps to ensure BSL users have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.

Democratic Participation: Deliver actions to help BSL users participate in democratic and public life in Scotland, addressing accessibility and information requirements.

East Lothian Council Commitment

East Lothian continues to grow significantly in population size and with this an increasing diversity of need and expectation. Budgetary constraints are well documented as the council continues to deliver responsive, accessible and inclusive services within these limits. In our local [BSL Plan 2018-2024](#) {BSL signed version: [British Sign Language Plan | British Sign Language Plan | East Lothian Council](#)} we committed to modernising the way we deliver our services, to work collaboratively to ensure everyone can take part in local decision making, and to tackle inequalities and thereby promote the inclusion of BSL users.

The new 2024-2030 BSL Plan sets out our achievements to date and how we will meet the national priorities within our local remit. These being:

- Accessing information and Support
- Education and learning – from pre-school onwards
- Culture and arts
- Health and wellbeing
- Employment
- Transport

East Lothian Council continues to lead in the planning and delivery of services which are inclusive, accessible and meet need.

This Plan is published in BSL and English, with English subtitles and can be accessed at:

- 2024-2030 British Sign Language plan [add link](#)

East Lothian Council BSL Plan 2024-2030

The Scottish Government in partnership with the British Deaf Association and other Deaf organisations consulted and engaged widely in the development of the national BSL plan. It provided opportunities for local residents to contribute to and define areas for improvement.

East Lothian Council updated and communicated our progress with the 2018-2024 Plan in January 2022, and in the spring of 2024 held face-to-face events inviting BSL users, and other deaf and deafblind people to inform the next plan.

As part of this work, we continue to work in partnership with Lothian councils (Edinburgh, West Lothian and Midlothian) and NHS Lothian colleagues to share information and best practice with the aim of ensuring BSL users can access the services needed, in a way that is consistent and responsive across Lothian.

Review BSL Plan 2018-2024 Actions

This plan provides a summary of our work to date and our commitments for the next six years. Within the period of the 2018-2024 plan, we experienced and worked through the Covid19 pandemic, ensuring vital services continued and were accessible to all, including BSL users. Lockdown limited our intention to work with BSL users to develop relevant and appropriate resources and information, so these will be followed up in the 2024-2030 plan.

In accordance with the commitments made in the 2018-2024 BSL Plan we have:

- Promoted the use of the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service, [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#). This facility enables BSL users to contact us directly prior to a BSL interpreter being provided.
- Increased staff awareness, knowledge and understanding of Deaf culture, language and service provision, including access to BSL learning and development opportunities for frontline staff through a partnership with Edinburgh college.
- Taken forward advice developed by Education Scotland to improve the way teachers engage with parents who use BSL, and ensure parents know how to get further involved in their child's education.
- Employed two teachers of deaf children who are informing best practice in this work. This also forms part of the SCILT (Scottish National Centre for languages) programme to support the learning of BSL in schools for hearing pupils as part of the 1+2 programme.

- Facilitated inclusion in local culture and the arts, as participants, audience members and professionals by ensuring ELC licenses take account of BSL provision.
- Promoted audio described and signed performances locally. For example, the Brunton Theatre Panto included performance signing, and visiting companies offer signed performances and audio description if they are able.
- Where face to face consultation is taking place, we communicate the requirement to provide BSL to English interpreters, especially where we are made aware of a personal requirement. Unfortunately, due to interpreter availability it has not been possible to provide this for every occasion. We continue to build good practice to embed BSL and other access requirements into our services. This is an integral part of the Council's new Customer strategy, launched in 2023.
- Whilst the council does not provide public transport, we have encouraged public transport provider companies to develop and use technological solutions to support accessible information in transport hubs (for example bus stops and stations and train stations). We have had limited success.
- Refreshed our equality monitoring guidance to include a BSL question.
- Provided links to Scottish Book trust pages for BSL and Call Scotland resources within the Bookbug pages on the library's website.
- We continue to support BSL users into work and training opportunities when approached or referred. This continues in our implementation of the [No one left behind-Employability Scotland](#) work.

Developing the 2024-2030 Plan

In March 2024, the Council held two engagement events with the support of NHS Lothian colleagues and the British Deaf Association (BDA). Those present were asked to consider:

- What is working well?
- What could be better?
- What matters to you?
- What do we need to do?

Feedback from participants highlighted frustration with East Lothian Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership in relation to BSL communication, information and availability; in particular, the need to access appropriate information in a timely

BSL format both online and face-to-face. Those present were keen to be involved in supporting better services and outcomes for BSL users.

The following comments helped to inform the development of the 2024-2030 plan:

- The need for timely and relevant information in BSL, with interpreters available for in person communication. Some BSL users reported having difficulty booking interpreters, with misunderstandings in relation to responsibility resulting in missed appointments, and family members interpreting, which raised some protection considerations.
- Check preferred communication, e.g. some BSL users prefer being contacted by email rather than by phone or letter.
- Deaf children missing school, and concerns about staff minimum BSL levels, a lack of knowledge of Deaf culture, and the requirement for BSL interpreters to be in place for parents' meetings and other school events.
- Concern that mainstreaming is impacting children who use BSL in relation to their educational outcomes, making friends, as well as their prospects and wellbeing in adulthood.
- Children wearing a cochlear implant should be able to access Deaf culture including BSL.
- A desire to be included and engaged with planning and policy making.
- Forward planning: BSL user support in anticipation of an older population, to provide intermediate care, care at home, access to day centres.
- Difficulty accessing a range of health services due to no BSL interpretation.

'It's very frustrating when you don't get the access you are entitled to'.

BSL Plan 2024-2030 Action Plan

Our aim is to ensure that East Lothian is a place where all people can thrive, whether they live, work or visit the county. To deliver this for BSL users, we endeavour to make changes to ensure people get the right information and the right support at the right time across everything we do. This will include anticipating different communication and access requirements and doing things differently to meet those needs.

Building on existing practice we will implement the following 2024-2030 BSL Action Plan.

Accessing information and support

Aim: Address the needs of BSL users by ensuring access to opportunities and services, coupled with information in the right format and at the right time.

Actions:

- Provide timely and relevant information in BSL formats, with interpreters in place for face-to-face communication online or in person, in line with the Council's Interpretation and Translation services provision
- As we consider improvements to website accessibility, we will explore the feasibility of providing increased access to BSL versions of information provided on the Council's website and associated sites
- Review and communicate council guidance on access to interpretation and translation services, including best practice, such as recording preferred communication method and providing interpreters for scheduled meetings
- Promote the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service [contactScotland-BSL](#)
- Refresh Deaf awareness training and information for council staff
- Review engagement and participation methods including online accessibility.

Note: This approach is the cornerstone of the newly revised Customer Strategy which supports the aim of all customers to be able to get the right information, at the right time and in the right format.

'We don't want to be a nuisance – we just want our rights'.

Education and Learning from pre-school onwards

Aim: Embed the commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child to ensure the right support at the right time.

Actions:

- Refresh Deaf awareness training for all staff around the child
- Explore how we can provide school web-based information in BSL
- Support opportunities for staff to develop BSL fluency in line with Scottish Government recommended skill levels
- Put in place BSL interpreters for parents' evenings, and other school activities where we know of this requirement.

Culture and the Arts

Aim: BSL users have access to, and can participate in, the cultural life of Scotland, which celebrates their own culture and heritage.

Actions:

- Work in partnership with providers of cultural events and activities across East Lothian, to, where possible, increase availability of signed performances and enhance an individuals' access to engagement in cultural activities within East Lothian
- Explore the use of technology to enhance the experience of BSL users visiting East Lothian Council exhibitions or accessing Council museum collections
- Where we provide licences within East Lothian, we will enable BSL users to take part in culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.

Health and wellbeing

Aim: BSL users have access to, and delivery of, equitable person-centred health and wellbeing services, activities and information, to make informed choices.

Actions: The East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) will continue to:

- Signpost BSL users to health and social care information available in BSL (to be produced by NHS Health Scotland and NHS24), and develop complementary information in BSL about local provision, as appropriate
- Through the Integration Joint Board, ensure that psychological therapies can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users
- Through the Integration Joint Board, ensure that mental health services can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users
- Through the Integration Joint Board, ensure that outpatient services can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users
- Take steps to improve access to information about sport, and to local sports facilities and sporting opportunities
- Ensure that any local work to tackle social isolation explicitly considers the needs of BSL users.

Building on current practice the following will be progressed:

- HSCP to work with the local Third Sector Interface, Volunteer Centre East Lothian (VCEL) to ensure community information is accessible to BSL users and develop a Deaf Social Club.

Employment

Aim: ensure BSL users receive the information and support needed to access training and employment.

Actions:

- Continue the implementation of our No-One Left Behind work through East Lothian Works and the Local Employability Partnership
- Through the Local Employability Partnership (LEP), ensure that BSL users can access employability services on a fair and equal basis.

Transport

Aim: Ensure any transport provided by East Lothian council can keep BSL children and young people safe, and adults using BSL are able to receive information in the right format at the right time.

Actions:

- We will encourage private transport providers to use technology to support communication with BSL users and ensure designated drivers have basic BSL awareness
- School transport: continue to raise awareness of deaf culture and the needs of BSL users and include BSL awareness into the annual disability awareness training delivered to taxi drivers and escorts.

Conclusion

This plan sets out the actions we will undertake to ensure BSL users, in relation to our areas of responsibility, receive timely responsive services and inclusive communications. We have delivered on many of the intentions set out our first plan and will continue to monitor those actions embedding best practice.

The appetite to develop and support a Deaf club is welcomed, as we continue to engage with BSL users locally and work with Lothian partners to facilitate accessible and inclusive services towards a Pan Lothian approach.

What happens next?

East Lothian Council continues to be interested in your views on this Plan throughout its life.

This Plan has been published in BSL and English with English subtitles and can be accessed at www.eastlothian.gov.uk/bslplan

If at any time you would like to comment on this BSL Plan, then you can do this by emailing equalities@eastlothian.gov.uk in English or with BSL attachment

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