

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan

2024 – 2030

June 2024



Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this report outlining our Dumfries and Galloway Council British Sign Language (BSL) Plan. As an Elected representative committed to accessibility and inclusion, I recognise the profound impact that language has on individuals' lives and the need for equitable access to services. Our Council is committed to equality of opportunity for all our people within our community.



Councillor Ian Blake

This plan demonstrates our commitment to make Dumfries and Galloway a better place for British Sign Language (BSL) users to live, work, visit and learn and ensure BSL users voices are not only heard but fully understood. British Sign Language is not just a form of communication; it is a cornerstone of identity and culture for our deaf communities. This plan underscores our commitment to our Councils commitment of equality and diversity.

We have taken steps to enable the BSL Plan for our Council to be developed based on the needs identified by those in our local community who are deaf, hard of hearing or use British Sign Language, Elected Members and wider stakeholders. The actions within the BSL Plan are a reflection of the insight provided by the participants and the shared ambitions for our work over the next six years.

Councillor Ian Blake

Chairperson of Communities Committee
Dumfries and Galloway Council

Introduction

Our Council is developing our British Sign Language (BSL) Plan to support the BSL users within Dumfries and Galloway and deliver on the Scottish Government's commitment to making 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, health citizens and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public bodies to publish plans every six years that show how they will promote and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding of BSL in Scotland. These plans will take account of local circumstances and consider how best to respond to BSL users' needs within local communities, organisations or services.

The second BSL National Plan 2023-2029 was published by the Scottish Government in November 2023. A copy of this plan can be found here - <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2023/11/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/documents/british-sign-language-national-plan-2023-2029/british-sign-language-national-plan-2023-2029/govscot%3Adocument/british-sign-language-national-plan-2023-2029.pdf>

Background

The BSL Plan 2018 to 2024 was a shared Plan for Dumfries and Galloway with NHS Dumfries and Galloway, Police Scotland V Division, Dumfries and Galloway College, and Dumfries and Galloway Council. A full consultation with key local stakeholders, including members of the local deaf community, took place when the Plan was developed.

The shared plan set out our collective intentions on how we were going to improve communication and access to services for people who use BSL and live, work and learn in Dumfries and Galloway.

A copy of our BSL Plan 2018 – 2024 can be found here - <https://dumgal.gov.uk/BSL-plan>

¹ Wherever we refer to 'BSL users' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

Progress

Since the publication of our first plan in 2018, improvements and progress have been made to the way we engage with our BSL community to ensure they can fully participate in daily life, highlights include -

- Introduction of a new application called LanguageLine InSight Video Interpreting which allows on demand access to language translation and BSL interpreting services within seconds at the click of a button and provides both audio and video translation and interpreting services. This new service is being promoted across all public facing buildings over during Summer 2024 and will significantly enhance the support we can provide across all Council services.
- Introduction of BSL Drop-In Clinics for the Deaf BSL Community, led and facilitated by the Social Work Sensory Support Team. The drop-in sessions run in Dumfries on a weekly basis and on a monthly basis in Stranraer and Annan and cover a wide range of topics, including access to communication, cost of living, form filling, social care along with many other topics.
- Dumfries and Galloway Society for the Deaf are now a key Partner within the Equality and Diversity Working Group who work in partnership to empower people to make positive contributions to their communities by challenging discrimination, promoting greater integration and by maximising support for everyone across Dumfries and Galloway.
- Our film theatres have worked in partnership with relevant organisations to provide screenings with BSL interpretation, and has been trialling the provision of captioned films on a weekly basis.
- SWestrans has been working with rail organisations to review BSL improvements required at train stations within the region. ContactSCOTLAND-BSL and SignVideo which enables their staff to be able to communicate with BSL users at any of their stations. The app is installed on all mobile phones for frontline staff, managers and across the business. We will continue to work with ScotRail to promote the availability of this vital communication channel.

Engagement and Consultation

Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway took a partnership approach to engagement and consultation with local BSL users. This approach was taken as an opportunity for shared understanding of the priorities and issues faced by our local BSL communities.

During early 2024, ten engagement events took place across the region, including seven in-person events and three online events. An online survey was also launched to capture the views of those who could not attend one of the events. This engagement with the BSL community was undertaken with appropriate BSL language interpreters to ensure clear two-way dialogue to assist us in capturing their views in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way.

Information about the engagement events was shared via the British Deaf Association (BDA), across Council and NHS communication channels, through Partner organisations and local Diversity Groups, the Equality and Diversity Working Group and via the Social Work Sensory Support Team at Dumfries and Galloway Council.

A consultation mandate was agreed by Dumfries and Galloway Council on 6 June 2023.

Key Findings

There was general agreement that things have improved in Dumfries and Galloway since the introduction of the BSL Plan in 2018 and there is more deaf/ BSL awareness and good practice locally within services. The key findings from our Public Consultation events told us -

- Individuals can see there has been an improvement in BSL Awareness for the BSL Community over the last 6 years
- Individuals can see there has been an improvement in BSL good practice locally within services over the last 5 years
- Whilst awareness has improved within some services, there is still a lack of staff awareness around BSL awareness and the interpretation and translation support available, particularly for public facing staff
- There is a keen interest within the hearing community to learn BSL but there is a lack of training opportunities available
- There is an interest to get BSL taught in schools
- Access to interpreters locally is an ongoing issue and there needs to be more proactive attempts to 'grow our own' interpreters locally
- Ensuring that key communications and information is available in BSL
- A lack of awareness/use of communication services such as Contact Scotland BSL and BSL 999
- Lack of job opportunities for BSL users and support once in the workplace to raise awareness and ensure reasonable adjustments are in place, including promotion of the access to work scheme to managers
- Accessibility issues when it comes to accessing culture and arts facilities such as museums, galleries and cinemas

We acknowledge that ongoing engagement and collaboration with the local BSL community across Dumfries and Galloway is vital to understand local experiences and priorities and to ensure that the aims of our local plan aligns with the needs of local BSL users.

Consideration will take place in year 1 of the plan to explore options for creating a local BSL working group that will include membership from both the BSL community and the local public sector organisations and this would be a sub-group of the Equality and Diversity Working Group.

Our 2024 -2030 BSL Plan

This is the BSL Plan for Dumfries and Galloway Council as required under the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. This sets out the actions that Dumfries and Galloway Council will take over the period 2024-2030, to support us in meeting the aims of the legislation and to continue to make Dumfries and Galloway a better place for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn.

The Dumfries and Galloway Council BSL Plan is reflective of the relevant national priorities contained within the Scottish Government's National BSL Plan but importantly reflects the priorities for local BSL users and will be consistent and complimentary of NHS Dumfries and Galloway's BSL Plan.

This BSL Plan sets out the priorities identified through engagement and consultation with BSL users living and working in Dumfries and Galloway. The priorities included within this plan cover:

- BSL Data
- BSL Awareness and Training
- BSL Accessibility
- Transport
- BSL Culture
- Access to Employment
- Education

This plan has been designed to set achievable goals that can be delivered within the six-year period.

Monitoring and Reporting

The actions will be reviewed in partnership with our local BSL users to incorporate any additional or emerging priorities, and we will publish a progress report in 2027.

The plan will be fully reviewed in six years, following publication of the National BSL Plan.

**British Sign Language
(BSL) Action Plan
2024 – 2030**

Theme	BSL Data
Statement of Intent	To strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL Community in Dumfries and Galloway.
Action	To understand who the BSL Community are and their demographics and understand the level of BSL qualifications across Dumfries and Galloway.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and gather nationally available data, e.g. via Scotland's Census 2022 • Learn more about our BSL community through engagement with the BSL community, BDA Scotland and other partners • Use the data to ensure accessibility and access to services across our Region • Develop our workforce data to better identify and support our BSL colleagues
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme – BSL Data Action – 37
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2023 – 2028 – Support our Citizens • Equality Outcomes 2021 - 2025

Theme	BSL Awareness and Training
Statement of Intent	There will be a greater understanding of BSL in Dumfries and Galloway so that everyone has a better knowledge of how to engage with and support BSL users.
Action	To increase both staff and citizens knowledge and awareness of BSL and provide training opportunities.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of BSL within Council services and the wider community • Include BSL Users as a category within our Council's Impact Assessment Toolkit • Raise awareness of resources such as Contact Scotland and BSL 999 • Develop training opportunities and resources for staff and Elected Members, and third party organisations prioritising those who may work with BSL users • Develop materials in partnership with BSL users around good practice/ etiquette when working with and supporting BSL users • Continue to provide and promote training opportunities to the wider community • Explore options to 'grow our own' sign language interpreters locally
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme – BSL Accessibility Action – 8
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2023 – 2028 – Support our Citizens • People Strategy 2021 - 2026 • Equality Outcomes 2021 - 2025

Theme	BSL Accessibility
Statement of Intent	To remove accessibility as a barrier for BSL users in all aspects of life, recognising the importance of having the right information at the right time, utilising technology and increasing people's awareness of communication tools.
Action	To ensure our Council services are accessible for BSL users.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of resources such as Contact Scotland and BSL 999 • Improve accessibility on the Council's website for BSL users • Prioritise and produce signed videos to provide information about Council services • Consider BSL users in how we communicate, use social media and translate documents • Consider developing a policy on Interpreting, Communication Support and Translation • Explore options for establishing a local partnership BSL working/ advisory group as a sub-group of the Equality and Diversity Working Group • Launch of the Language Line InSight Video Interpreting app
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme – BSL Accessibility Action – 6 and 8
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2023 – 2028 – Support our Citizens • Equality Outcomes 2021 - 2025

Theme	Transport
Statement of Intent	BSL users in Dumfries and Galloway make successful public transport and active travel journeys more often.
Action	SWestrans will work with the BSL community in Dumfries and Galloway to develop transport and travel information in an accessible format.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of local initiatives, as part of the new public transport model, will ensure that all information is fully accessible to the BSL community • Assist with the promotion of SWestrans Thistle Card Scheme • Work with the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland (MACS) • Give due consideration to BSL users when delivering the actions from the Regional Transport Strategy and Active Travel Strategy
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme - Transport Action – 38 and 39
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2023-2028- Transport, Connectivity, and Infrastructure • SWestrans Regional Transport Strategy 2023-2042 • Dumfries and Galloway Active Travel Strategy 2022-2032

Theme	BSL Culture
Statement of Intent	Enable BSL users to take part in culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.
Action	Ensure cultural opportunities are accessible and relevant to BSL audiences, working to remove barriers to participation by building and strengthening relationships with BSL users and organisations.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to offer BSL interpreted tours, screenings and events • Develop opportunities for inclusive programming to include stories of deaf culture and heritage • Improve DG Culture website accessibility for BSL users and encourage reviews which focus on accessibility
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme - Celebrating BSL Culture Action - 32
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Strategy • Museums and Galleries Forward Plan

Theme	Access to Employment
Statement of Intent	BSL users will receive person-centred support to develop their skills, consider what route to employment is right for them and enter into the workforce so 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.
Action	To support BSL users in the recruitment, retention and development of our workforce.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with partners who deliver employment services, and with employer groups already supporting employability, to help signpost them to specific advice on the needs of BSL users and to improve the knowledge of Deaf culture. • Work with local colleges and universities to provide development opportunities to support them in their role and career. • Continue to promote the availability of Access to Work to ensure appropriate support can be put in place pre and post employment. • Review our website and recruitment framework to promote support available for potential and existing employees who use BSL. • Engage with employees who use BSL on how we can fully support them in their role and career development. • Continue to promote Dumfries and Galloway Council as an employer of choice through displaying our Disability Confident Employer status and continuing to work towards Disability Confident Leader status.
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme - Access to Employment Action – 22
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Outcomes 2021- 2025 • People Strategy 2021 - 2026 • Council Plan 2023-2028 – Support our Citizens

Theme	Education
Statement of Intent	All children and young people whose chosen means of communication is BSL have the support they need at all stages of their learning so they can reach their full potential.
Action	Raise the awareness and understanding of BSL and the needs of deaf learners among school staff and children and young people.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the opportunities for children and young people in Dumfries and Galloway to develop their awareness of the deaf community and learn BSL so they can communicate and interact with deaf peers, improving their inclusion in education settings. • Build the awareness and capacity of teaching and non-teaching staff in schools of strategies to enable deaf learners so that teaching and learning methodology meets the needs of deaf learners effectively. • Provide more opportunities for children and young people to learn BSL as part of the modern languages accredited curriculum. • Continue to build the BSL skills of Teachers of the Deaf and those non-teaching staff working directly with young people for whom BSL is their chosen language for communication to ensure that they get the support they need throughout their education journey.
Link to National BSL Plan	Theme - Children, young people and their families Action – 15, 16 and 17
Link to Council Policy/ Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Services Plan 2023 - 2026 • Council Plan 2023-2028 – Support our Citizens

Further Information

For further information, please contact us by telephoning 030 33 33 3000 or emailing us at **contact@dumgal.gov.uk**

British Sign Language users can contact us via contactSCOTLAND-BSL.

A BSL version of the plan is available on our website.

<https://www.dumgal.gov.uk/BSL-Plan>

If you would like this document in an alternative format, please contact us using the details above.