

Aberdeenshire Council
British Sign Language (BSL)
Local Plan 2024-2030



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SECTION 1: Introduction

The Scottish Government published its [British Sign Language \(BSL\) National Plan 2023-2029](#) (“the national plan”) on 6 November 2023. The aim of the plan is to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL signers to live, work, visit, and learn.

The national plan focuses on ten priorities with an emphasis on children, young people and their families, health and wellbeing, celebrating deaf culture and tackling accessibility for BSL users. Each of the priorities has a mix of short, medium and long-term goals that will be delivered throughout the life of the plan that will build the foundations required to meet the longer-term ambition for BSL in Scotland.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Scotland to develop and publish a local plan which demonstrates how they will work towards supporting the implementation of the national plan.

This plan sets out the goals and actions for Aberdeenshire Council from 2024-2030 and is framed around the same priorities as the national plan. Additionally, the Aberdeenshire BSL plan (“the local plan”) aims to ensure equal access to services and support for BSL users across Aberdeenshire.

Consultation was carried out using the Engage Aberdeenshire platform from 18 December 2023 to 19 January 2024. The consultation was shared widely through SignVine, a social media page for the deaf community in Aberdeenshire, through Aberdeenshire See Hear strategy group. Face-to-face engagement took place with the deaf community through the Aberdeen Deaf Club, which includes BSL users in Aberdeenshire, on 13 January and 12 February 2024.

Engagement with BSL users will continue during the implementation and throughout the duration of this plan.

Aberdeenshire Council is committed to working in partnership whenever possible with Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership and local organisations working with BSL users and the deaf community in the development of common approaches to the delivery of our local actions.

Scotland’s Census 2011 for the first time asked the question ‘Do you use a language other than English at home?’ [The results are analysed in the publication Census 2011 equality results: analysis, part two, which includes a section on BSL users](#). Based on the responses, the publication states that it is estimated that around 12,500 people in Scotland use BSL at home and that this makes it 24 BSL users per 10,000 individuals. [Scotland’s Census 2022 asked ‘Can you use BSL?’ for the first time](#). The results of the 2022 Census are expected to be published during 2024 and are expected to provide data at a local authority level.

SECTION 2: Short summary of the plan

Aberdeenshire Council BSL plan is framed around the same long-term goals as the Scottish Government BSL National Plan 2023-2029 which include:

- BSL Accessibility
- Children, Young People and their Families
- Access to Employment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Celebrating BSL Culture
- Transport
- Democratic Participation

The local plan aims to improve equality of access to services or support for services for BSL users in Aberdeenshire. The plan sets out actions that we are going to deliver during the period 2024-2030. The Plan supports the Getting It Right For Everyone (GIRFE) principles, which place the person at the centre of decisions that affect them, in accessing help and support when it is needed and to achieve the best outcomes based on a joined-up and consistent multi-agency approach at any stage of life. Here are the key outcomes with the actions in Section 4 that will help us achieve these:

1. Aberdeenshire Council will improve accessibility of its website for BSL users, providing information in an accessible format, consistently across the platform.
2. The [Getting It Right For Every Child](#) (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with Deaf and Deafblind children and their families offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL.
3. Promoting Aberdeenshire Council as an employer of choice.
4. BSL users will have access to information and services with regard to Health (including Social Care), Mental Health and Wellbeing.
5. BSL users will have access to the cultural life of Aberdeenshire and will be encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Aberdeenshire.
6. BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Aberdeenshire.

SECTION 3: Where are we now?

Aberdeenshire Council has supported BSL users to be involved in all aspects of life. We have done this by:

- Ensuring that services can request BSL interpretation through our translation contract.

- Publishing a link to [Contact Scotland BSL](#) on our [website](#) which provides short contact designed to support initial access to services for BSL users who have internet access.
- Developed a Deaf Awareness Card and booklet to signpost BSL users to different services.
- Employed two full-time Communicators in the Education Sensory Support Service to support BSL users in schools, to promote the BSL skills of colleagues and to support parents who are BSL users in their interactions with nurseries and schools.
- [Deaf Action Scotland](#) is commissioned by the Health and Social Care Partnership to provide information and advice to people who are deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind, and to support access to equipment and support services. Information is provided in a range of formats and settings to maximise engagement with people who are deaf or have hearing impairments. This may include the sign-posting of people to other agencies including statutory and third sector organisations, and rehabilitation input for example training in relation to hearing aid use.
- The Elections Team have made information on the [Access to Elected Office Fund](#) available on the Council website.

SECTION 4: BSL Aberdeenshire Council Plan – Actions

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council

We recognise that for BSL users BSL is their first language and it is a language of its own right with its own distinct grammar and syntax. We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the national plan:

To remove accessibility as a barrier for BSL users in all aspects of life, recognising the importance of having accessible information in the right format at the right time, utilising technology and increasing people's awareness of communication tools.

We will:

1. Improve accessibility of the Aberdeenshire Council website for BSL users. We will publish BSL videos on services and key information.
2. Continue to promote the use of Contact Scotland BSL, the BSL online interpreting video relay service to staff and local BSL users.
3. Continue to promote the availability of BSL interpretation across the Council.
4. Promote availability of Deaf awareness training on ALDO (Aberdeenshire Learning & Development Online) for Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership staff, and awareness training for frontline staff around use of Contact Scotland.

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4.2 Children, Young People and their Families

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a deaf or deafblind child and their family offered the right information and support at the right time to engage with BSL. We will strengthen partnerships between relevant organisations to overcome barriers for BSL users and deaf/ deafblind children to ensure they have the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential.

We will:

1. Where there are BSL users in the setting we will continue to provide Early Years staff with information about BSL and deaf culture and resources that are available in BSL.
2. Continue to deliver deaf awareness and basic signing to all staff i.e. teachers, nursery nurses/assistants, office staff, kitchen staff, visiting staff etc, prior to and during a BSL pupil being in the Early Years setting.
3. In settings where there are BSL users, we will continue to roll out BSL signage in nurseries e.g. in bathrooms and cloakrooms. We will facilitate the use of visual timetables using BSL signs.
4. Where appropriate, provide equipment to help the child access the curriculum.
5. At the time of referral we will continue to use the current induction programme to introduce families to the service. That includes: an initial call from a manager, visit from teacher of deaf children, sending a service leaflet or a BSL video and any information relevant to the child from other sources that might be helpful.
6. We will continue to offer regular visits to build up a relationship with parents/families, offer basic family signs and signed resources and offer deaf awareness to extended family, e.g. grandparents.
7. We will continue to promote deaf culture and to address social isolation by working with schools and nurseries and enabling families with deaf children to network.
8. Support parents who wish to access formal signing classes but cannot afford to, by collaborating with partner organisations.

4.3 Access to Employment

We share the long-term goal for access to employment set out in the BSL National Plan.

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 that they can fulfil their potential and improve Aberdeenshire's economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career.

We will:

1. Continue to support managers and staff to make reasonable adjustments in the workplace.
2. Continue to promote Aberdeenshire Council as an employer of choice through displaying our Disability Confident (Employer) logo and continuing to work towards achieving Disability Confident Leader Status.
3. Continue to signpost managers, staff and Elected Members who use BSL to the [Access to Work](#) scheme for information on support available to undertake their role.
4. Continue making full use of the information and support provided through Skills Development Scotland to assist pupils and students in their career choices through attendance and promotion at school and university career fairs.
5. Produce BSL videos on Aberdeenshire Developing the Young Workforce website.

4.4 Health (including Social Care), Mental Health and Wellbeing

We share the long-term goal for health, mental health and wellbeing set out in the BSL National Plan

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 will:

1. Work with NHS Inform, Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership, Live Life Aberdeenshire and local third sector and community groups to identify and promote a range of community healthy living opportunities to BSL users to reduce social isolation and to support individuals to live healthy independent lives (including healthy eating and healthy weight, active living and mental health and wellbeing).
2. Work with Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership to raise awareness of the availability of [Scottish Mental Health Service for Deaf People](#).

4.5 Celebrating BSL Culture

We share the long-term goal for culture and the arts set out in the BSL National Plan:

BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts and are encouraged to share BSL and deaf culture with the people of Scotland.

We will:

1. Seek guidance from sector governing bodies regarding activity being supported and/or funded to support BSL users in other Local Authorities and services to Aberdeenshire.
2. Engage with the BSL community to understand how best to support inclusion and participation in Aberdeenshire cultural activities in conjunction with the Policy & Performance team.
3. Improve accessibility and raise awareness of BSL-supported events and programmes via Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA) website & social media platforms.
4. Introduce BSL guidance to inform interpretation and customer experiences at the new Museum of Aberdeenshire (Peterhead).

4.6 Transport

We share the long-term goal for transport set out in the BSL National Plan

BSL users have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland.

We will:

1. Follow guidance issued by Transport Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework as much as is feasibly possible.
2. Seek to work with local transport operators to collaborate and identify practical solutions to make public travel more accessible for BSL users.
3. Promote existing services and support that can be accessed through THInC (Transport to Healthcare Information Centre for the NHS Grampian area) which provides advice on travelling to health and social care appointments, and also the Council's A2B service.

4.7 Democratic Participation

We share the long-term goal for democracy set out in the BSL National Plan

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.

We will:

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1. Take opportunities to promote the Access to Elected Office Fund locally, which can meet the additional costs of BSL users wishing to stand for selection or election in local, Scottish or UK Parliament elections.
2. Information on the Access to Elected Office Fund will be available on <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/elections> and highlighted within the nomination pack for any relevant election event.
3. Explore the use of BSL interpreters at Committee meetings.

SECTION 5: What happens next?

Aberdeenshire Council will continue to engage with the BSL community around implementing our actions. Progress will be reported through the Equality Outcomes mainstreaming progress reports.
