

Argyll and Bute Council's British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030.

Introduction

Following the Scottish Government's publication of its National British Sign Language Plan in November 2023, Argyll and Bute Council is producing its own, local British Sign Language plan.

This plan differs from the previous plan for Argyll and Bute in that the previous plan was produced jointly with NHS Highland and Live Argyll. While we will continue to coordinate our activities, the council's 2024-2030 plan has been produced as a single-agency plan. In keeping with this approach, NHS Highland is reporting separately on progress made with its actions from the previous plan; they are not reported here.

Because this plan focuses on the council, the number of actions is reduced compared to the previous plan. We have also worked to keep this realistic within the resources available.

This plan is indicative. One of the actions within it is to produce a more detailed implementation plan within the first 12 months of this plan's life.

The document is comprised of two parts. The first reports on progress made during the lifetime of our previous plan. The second outlines our goals and objectives for the second plan.

Progress made over the life of the previous plan (2018-2024).

We Said, We Did

1. In the previous plan, we said we would **add a link to the Contact Scotland BSL service on each school's website**

This action was completed by October 2020.

As a number of websites have been updated or replaced since 2020, we will carry out a review to ensure the links have remained in place.

2. We said we would **provide early years staff with information about BSL and Deaf culture, and about resources that are available in BSL, so that they can meet the needs of families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child.**

A deaf educational resource has been created, and a training course was developed in November 2018; however, subsequent changes in personnel and job descriptions have resulted in changes to the level and focus of ongoing support available.

In line with the actions in the previous plan, Bookbug resources are distributed. More information about Bookbug, including resources for children with additional support needs, is available on the Scottish Book Trust website: [Bookbug - Scottish Book Trust](#)

3. We said we would **continue to give staff and children at nurseries basic BSL training in preparation for deaf children attending these establishments.**

Early Years staff have access to the Deaf Resources which have been developed by the council's Teacher of Deaf.

4. We said we would **contribute to the Scottish Government's investigation of the level of BSL held by teachers and support staff working with D/deaf and Deafblind pupils in schools and take account of any new guidance for teachers or support staff working with pupils who use BSL.**

We carried out a survey in 2019. At that time, seven schools had staff who held the Level 1 qualification with 4 of these schools also having employees who were qualified to Level 2 with additional staff undergoing training. This survey has not been repeated.

5. We said we would **take forward advice developed by Education Scotland to a) improve the way that teachers engage effectively with parents who use BSL and b) ensure that parents who use BSL know how they can get further involved in their child's education.**

Our Education records system does not hold any information about parents; it only holds information about the child. The needs of each child are identified on a case-by-case basis.

6. We said we would **contribute to the Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT) programme of work to support the learning of BSL in schools for hearing pupils as part of the 1+2 programme, including sharing best practice and guidance.**

In the early years of the plan, a pilot project was undertaken at one of our schools; seven pupils passed an introduction to British Sign Language course. While the school continued the project in 2019/2020, the project has not been rolled out more widely.

From 2021 every child has been entitled to learn a first additional language from primary one and a second from primary five. This entitlement continues until the end of S3. Although BSL has been promoted as a language which can be learned as part of the 1+2 Languages policy, with schools across Argyll and Bute being invited to use resources developed by Highland Council, there is limited demand and take up has been low.

7. We said we would **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 raise awareness locally of the UK Government's 'Access to Work' scheme with employers and with BSL users (including those on Modern Apprenticeships) so that they can benefit from the support it provides.**

We encourage employers in contact with Developing the Young Workforce to sign up to the Young Person's Guarantee. The Young Person's Guarantee asks employers to show their commitment to the Fair Work agenda, including the Disability Confident scheme; this helps employers recruit and retain great people, and to:

- challenge attitudes and increase understanding of disability;
- draw from the widest possible pool of talent;
- secure high-quality staff who are skilled, loyal and hard working;
- improve employee morale and commitment by demonstrating fair treatment

This also helps identify those employers who are committed to inclusion and diversity in the workplace. We can also include Access to Work scheme when promoting Disability Confident.

- 8. We said we would continue to make sure interpreter support is available to young people to access work placements, and deaf awareness training is provided before the placement starts.**

Support for people on placements is considered on a case-by-case basis.

- 9. We said we would signpost pupils and students to a wide range of information, advice and guidance in BSL about their career and learning choices and the transition process.**

Skills Development Scotland has produced a Careers Information Advice and Guidance offer video available on the [My World of Work](#) site, with BSL interpretation added.

Customers can use Contact Scotland service to make phone calls with BSL to Skills Development Scotland.

Skills Development Scotland has also produced a webinar playlist for parents and carers. The playlist outlines Careers Information Advice and Guidance and Apprenticeship offers and includes BSL interpretation.

- 10. We said we would take steps to improve access to information about sport, and to local sports facilities and sporting opportunities.**

Our partner agency, Live Argyll, posted information and the Contact Scotland BSL link on its website. Posters were displayed at Live Argyll facilities to raise awareness of the Contact Scotland BSL service.

- 11. We said we would develop and provide training for transport providers which includes strategies for communicating with BSL users.**

We will signpost drivers of school transport to the council's Deaf Awareness training course.

- 12. We said we would enable BSL users to take part in culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.**

Awareness raising activities about the plan were carried out with Area Managers at Live Argyll, and reception staff were given background information and posters. Accompanying information was shared throughout Live Argyll, and the Live Argyll website was updated.

- 13. We said we would 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 or Scottish Parliament elections.**

We provided a link to Access to Elected Office Fund on the Council's elections page on the website and also within guidance document designed to encourage people to stand as a local councillor. This information is also featured during periods of election activity.

Information about Contact Scotland BSL is provided in the Elected Member's section of our intranet.

We will carry over training of electoral staff on accessibility and signposted materials to the new plan.

Lessons learned from the previous plan:

The Joint BSL plan 2018-2024 for Argyll and Bute was approved in 2018. Since then, the environment in which we operate has changed considerably. The upheavals associated with the covid pandemic brought BSL into our living rooms with every First Minister's briefing, raising awareness around the language while also causing some areas of work to be put on hold.

More lastingly, Covid has accelerated changes to the way we work and deliver services, with a move towards remote and hybrid working and the adoption of more digital working.

- A key lesson, then, is the need for any plan to be flexible.

Other lessons include:

- A need to put mechanisms in place to make sure activities are delivered and maintained throughout the life of the plan.
- A need to make sure actions are handed over when there are changes to staff or when there are changes to management arrangements.
- To be realistic about what we can deliver with the resources available.

To ensure effective monitoring and flexibility, the plan will be monitored through regular reporting to the council's Equality Forum, which also has membership from partner agencies including NHS Highland and the Health and Social Care Partnership. This will enable ongoing coordination of activities.

We have also included an action to produce a progress report half-way through the lifetime of the new plan.

Argyll and Bute Council British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030

About the new plan

The goals and actions in the Argyll and Bute Council Sign Language Plan 2024-2030 align with the Scottish Government's BSL National Plan 2023-2029.

The Argyll and Bute Council British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030 contains both actions carried over from the previous plan and new actions.

Delivering Argyll and Bute's BSL Local Plan 2024-2030

Long-term goal: **To improve outcomes for BSL users by developing solutions to the barriers faced by BSL users in their daily lives.**

Actions:

1. Develop a detailed implementation plan in consultation with BSL users and other stakeholders.
2. Monitor the implementation of actions from the National BSL plan to ensure we follow good practice where practicable.
3. Keep a watching brief on the development of the National BSL plan over its life to ensure we contribute appropriately, as required.
4. Network and participate in order to be aware of best practice.

5. Comply with the inclusion communication regulation.
6. Publish a progress report in 2027, halfway through the life of the plan, being mindful of its relation to the national plan.

These actions align with the national Plan goal: To improve outcomes for BSL users by embedding BSL in relevant Scottish Government policies, plans and strategies in order to develop solutions to the barriers faced by BSL users in their daily lives.

BSL Accessibility

Long-term goal: **Raise awareness around the culture of BSL and enable people to access services using their own language.**

Actions:

7. Ensure our website is accessible for BSL users and an agreed range of content is provided in BSL format.
8. Continue to have Contact Scotland BSL on website.
9. Carry out awareness raising activity, so all council officers and elected members are aware of what this is and how to use the service.
10. Continue to ensure information about Contact Scotland BSL is provided on the elected members' section of the intranet or successor websites.

These actions align with the national Plan goal: 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.

Children, Young People and their Families

Long-term goal: **Ensure the needs of deaf or deafblind children and their families are supported.**

Actions:

11. Continue to support children to learn in environments that best suit their needs.
12. Offer opportunities to teachers to build on their BSL learning.

These actions align with the national plan goal: 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.

Access to Employment

Long-term goal: **Support BSL users to access the labour market.**

Actions:

13. Ensure BSL users are signposted to the employability programme which best meets their individual needs.

This action aligns with the national plan goal: 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 Scotland's economic performance. They will be provided with support to enable them to progress in their chosen career.

Democratic Participation

Long-term goal: **To enable BSL users to participate in our democratic processes.**

Actions:

14. We will continue to provide the Electoral Commission's training information to all relevant electoral staff, and we will signpost staff to materials about accessibility.

This action aligns with the national Plan goal: 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.