



Joint Local British Sign Language Plan for Argyll and Bute (2018 – 2024)

“We Asked, You Said, We Did” Analysis of Responses to Public Consultation Exercise

September 2018

In this document we refer to 'BSL users'. This covers all people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss.

We Asked

From 2 August to 2 September 2018, Argyll and Bute Council, NHS Highland Health Board and liveArgyll consulted on what should be included in the Joint Local British Sign Language Plan for Argyll and Bute. We wrote a Draft Plan and put this on Argyll and Bute Council's website. We also put a BSL version of the Draft Plan on the Council's YouTube channel. We told people about the Draft Plan on social media, Healthy Argyll and Bute and the Facebook pages of 2 national deaf organisations. We wrote to deaf parents and parents of deaf children who are supported by the Council's Teacher of the Deaf to tell them about the Draft Plan. We also invited BSL users who have had contact with our Sensory Impairment Team previously, to tell us what they thought of our Draft Plan.

You Said

33 responses were received in total – 6 people came to our consultation events in Lochgilphead and/or Tarbert; 1 person filled in a hard copy consultation questionnaire and 26 people completed our online survey. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to give us their ideas, suggestions and, in some cases, details of their life experiences which helped us to gain a better understanding of some of the challenges which British Sign Language (BSL) users can face on a day-to-day basis.

You told us it can be particularly difficult for BSL users when:

- a) They are not known to a service
- b) Their communication needs are not stated on their records
- c) They need urgent support
- d) Employees are not deaf aware and use inappropriate forms of communication

We Did

Based on the feedback which you gave us, we put together a final Plan to tell you what we expect to do between 2018 and 2024 to protect and support British Sign Language, including in its tactile form, in Argyll and Bute.

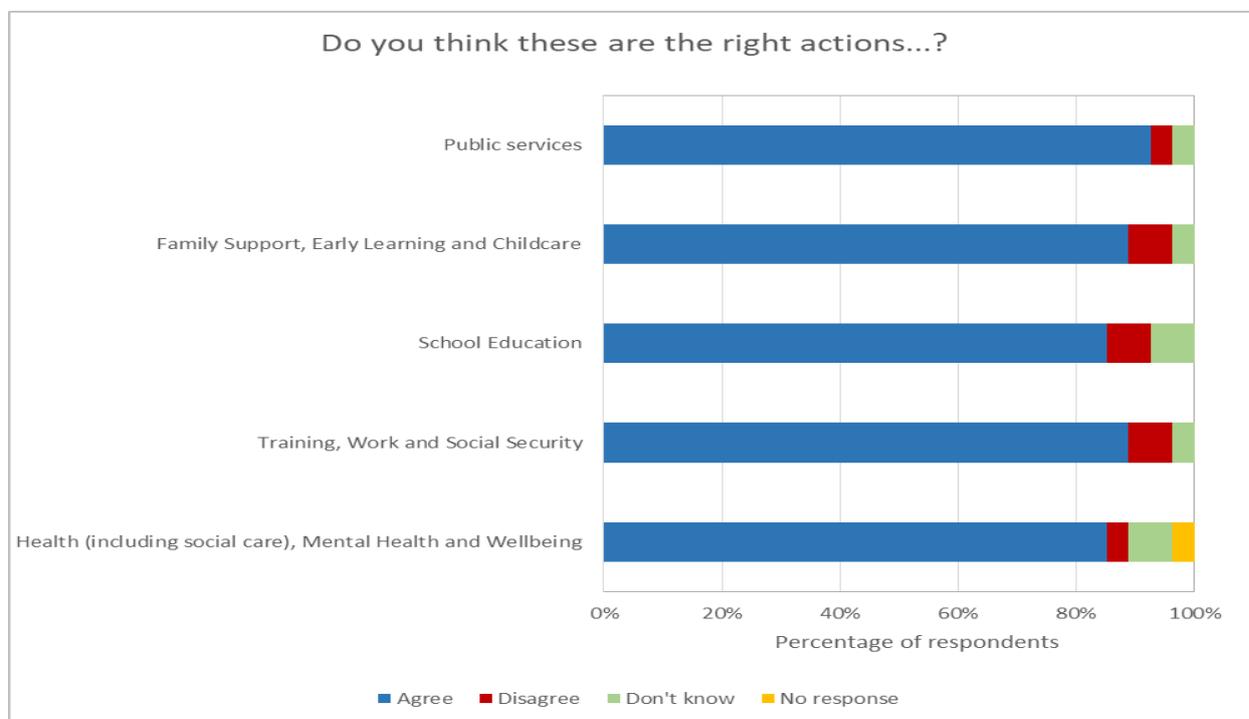
You can find a copy of our final Plan here <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/have-your-say/consultation-diary>

General reaction to the Draft plan

We listed 9 goals and asked you whether or not you agreed with the actions under each of these goals. We also asked you to tell us if, and how, they could be done better.

There was a high level of support for the actions outlined in the Draft Plan (Figure 1). This shows the goals which generated the most responses only. Where you did not agree with the proposals, this did not seem to be because you disagreed with specific actions so much as you felt that more could/should be done.

Figure 1



Most of the comments were positive and people felt the actions should make a big difference to the lives of Deaf/Deafblind BSL users.

Common themes across all areas

Something which was said a lot was the need for training in BSL, and the idea that children (both deaf and hearing) should be taught BSL from a young age. These actions would increase awareness, allow greater inclusion and engagement of deaf children, and promote a more inclusive society, more widely.

The need for education and training came across in all areas of the consultation, not just in the section devoted to 'School Education'.

The need for better communication and explanations was highlighted throughout the consultation as these remove barriers, and make it easier and more comfortable for people to use and access all types of services.

A few people were worried that some of the actions require people to access the internet and social media in order for them to work, as not all deaf people have access to these facilities. Practical considerations were also raised around internet solutions (e.g. Facetime) as these may not work in areas where the internet signal is not adequate. We recognise that some of the actions which we have suggested may take a while to put into place and also rely on BSL users having access to the necessary technology. We know not everyone is comfortable with these new technologies and there will always be occasions when a “human element” is required. However, we also hope this technology can help us to overcome some of the geographical challenges which an area as large as Argyll and Bute can create. We know from what you told us that social isolation and loneliness can be a very real problem for BSL users, and we hope that some of the actions which we intend to put into place will help to overcome that.

Having the necessary funding and resources to deliver the actions set out in the local plan will be key. All of the organisations involved in delivering the plan have limited resources and are facing budgetary constraints. We will continue to seek national and other sources of funding and support to help us to put our actions into practice wherever possible.

Public services

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for Public Services were the right ones, and whether there was more that you thought we could do.

You said you generally agreed with the actions proposed; with efforts to enable and promote more inclusivity being welcomed from deaf and hearing respondents.

You felt the proposals would:

- Assist communication with public services
- Help people to access information

Some of the things you said would also help included increased staff awareness and training.

Suggestions included:

- Training staff at all levels of the organisations in basic BSL, particularly those who work with the public on a day-to-day basis

- Being proactive to reach out to individuals and families who are not already accessing services. You said this could be done via schools; public notices; social media; television and radio.
- Have face to face BSL translators available, rather than relying on letters and notes to communicate, as deaf people may struggle with spelling and grammar.

We already have arrangements in place to book face-to-face interpreters for planned meetings but we know it can be difficult to get an interpreter at short-notice and/or in an emergency situation. One of the common themes to come out of the Scottish Government's consultation on the National Plan was to ensure there are sufficient numbers of BSL/English translators in Scotland. We know there are only a small number of qualified BSL translators within Argyll and Bute, and with the size of the area that we cover it can still take interpreters several hours to travel from one part of the county to another. We are, however, looking at whether we can source BSL interpreters more locally, and will use video translation and interpretation services where appropriate.

We have already included a link to contactSCOTLAND-BSL on Argyll and Bute Council's and NHS Highland's websites and will continue to promote this with our employees. NHS Highland have recently sent out posters to GPs and the third sector, and Argyll and Bute Council's Sensory Impairment Team have been making BSL users aware of the service offered by contactSCOTLAND-BSL as part of their regular contact with service users.

Some people who attended the consultation events in Tarbert and Lochgilphead had not heard about contactSCOTLAND-BSL before and so we showed them how it worked by giving them a live demonstration and encouraged them to register for the service. contactSCOTLAND-BSL is Scotland's free BSL interpreting video relay service which enables BSL users to have contact with all of Scotland's public bodies and third sector organisations. You can find out more about it at:

<https://contactscotland-bsl.org/>

Family support, early learning and childcare

We recognise the early years of a child's life are very important and you felt a lot of support should be available to parents and guardians at this time. **We asked** if you thought the actions which we had suggested for family support, early learning and childcare were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

Whilst there was general agreement with regard to the proposals, a desire to see more awareness raising and training for GP's, health visitors and early year's staff was evident.

You said you agreed with the proposals because:

- You feel it is currently difficult to access information within Argyll and Bute as not all parents or guardians may be aware of the help and support available from the National Deaf Children's Society (Scotland) and the West of Scotland Deaf Children's Society can be difficult to get to for residents of Argyll and Bute.
- Parents need to be given full information from the beginning, including information about BSL, so they can make informed choices about how to raise and communicate with their children.

You said using sign language has potential benefits beyond the Deaf community. You also felt it could benefit non-verbal children and children on the Autistic spectrum, as well as helping peers to better understand their classmates.

One respondent suggested cultural change takes time. Parents learn from their children: if children/young people see BSL as the norm, it will become habit and deliver that cultural change.

Ideally, you would like to see at least one employee in any educational establishment being confident in BSL, as well as all staff members knowing the basics.

You were keen for this learning to continue beyond pre-school and primary school and into secondary school education.

Two respondents felt the proposals could be further developed by:

- Every deaf child should meet the Teacher of the Deaf within one month of diagnosis, regardless of age and stage of education.
- Educate GPs on BSL and have more information available in doctors' surgeries. GPs need to be familiar with the issues faced in school and home settings that children with a hearing deficit face.
- Provide more BSL training for teachers to allow them to communicate with deaf children. BSL also helps classmates to learn how to communicate more with deaf children.

We will put together a pack containing deaf friendly educational resources and information about deaf culture for parents, nurseries and health visitors which will also include links to additional online resources.

In the 2018-2019 academic year, Early Years' employees will have access to training on basic BSL and fingerspelling as part of their Continuing Professional Development programme. We will also make sure our children's services have access to nationally developed BSL resources and advice within key programmes such as Bookbug once they are available.

School Education

The section on School Education invited the most comments and seemed to be the single most important issue for those who responded to our survey.

There is no reason why, with the right support, deaf children cannot achieve what they want to.

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for school education were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

There was general agreement with the actions which we propose to take.

You said you agreed with them because they included teaching BSL in schools and nurseries from a young age. One respondent noted that BSL is as important as any other language.

Whilst there was general agreement that raised awareness of BSL is important, one respondent suggested that awareness training on its own did not go far enough.

You felt there are courses available in the central belt that could be accessed by people in Dunoon and Helensburgh, but that opportunities to access such courses is more difficult in the remoter parts of Argyll and Bute.

Suggestions made for additional actions and solutions included:

- Making BSL a part of the curriculum, and of daily school life
- Funding needs to be made available to employ more specialist Teachers of the Deaf, and for these Teachers to have sign language skills up to Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6
- Consult with the National Deaf Children's Society (Scotland) to promote BSL and other sign supported language
- Provide training for teachers and Additional Support Needs Assistants in the use of BSL
- Include solutions for the employment of teachers who use BSL as their first language. Solutions to address the barriers to employment of Deaf teachers should be examined by way of consultation with teachers who are deaf, and also teachers who teach deaf children.

We will carry out a survey every year in schools to collect information on the level of BSL held by teachers and support staff. We will also keep up to date records on where, and how, BSL is being offered in schools in Argyll and Bute, and will report this to the Scottish Government.



Between August 2018 – June 2019 we are running a pilot project to teach BSL101 to Primary 4 hearing and deaf students at one of the larger primary school's within Argyll & Bute. BSL101 is an Introduction to British Sign Language course which teaches learners how to meet and greet; understand basic conversation and numbers, and to give and follow simple directions and information. We will review how this goes and share examples of good practice with Scotland's National Centre for Languages (SCILT).

We recognise the valuable support the Council's Teacher of the Deaf provides to deaf children and their parents, and that you would like us to employ more specialist Teachers of the Deaf. This is an important service and one which you appreciate. We also know that we have to balance this need with the funding challenges and budgetary constraints that we face, and the general difficulties across Scotland in recruiting suitably qualified teachers. This is a significant issue and one which was also raised in response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the National BSL Plan.

The distances that our staff have to cover, together with the time spent travelling to visit service users or to attend face-to-face training courses can sometimes make the challenges that we have to overcome even greater.

The Council's Teacher of the Deaf **will continue to** help families who wish to use signing to learn it as part of her regular visits with them.

To date, the National Deaf Children's Society (Scotland) (NDCS) have funded family home signing sessions for three families within Argyll and Bute, as well as organising and delivering an online BSL Level 1 course at one of the schools within the area. **We will continue to** work with NDCS and value the support and assistance which they give to us.

Sign Supported English (SSE) is currently used in six schools within Argyll and Bute to help deaf children to communicate with their friends and staff, and to assist them to access the curriculum. SSE takes the signs from BSL and uses them in the order that the words would be spoken in English. This means a working knowledge of the signs for different words is needed in order to understand and use SSE, but the more complex grammar of BSL is not. At one particular school, SSE has been used in class for at least 3 years giving children a basic level of sign vocabulary which is used throughout the day. Employees went to training sessions which took place out of school hours to help them to develop their signing. This has resulted in increased interest and use of signing around the school.

We will make BSL online resources readily accessible to early learning practitioners through the Argyll and Bute Education blog.

We will continue to make sure interpreter support is available for young people to access work placements whilst at school, and deaf awareness training is provided before the placement starts.

Training, work and social security

We asked if you thought the actions which we suggested for training, work and social security were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

There was broad agreement with the proposals and a strong view that employment not only provides an income, but also helps to promote self-worth and independence.

You agreed because the proposals would:

- Allow pupils the best opportunity to get the most from their education and to provide the greatest choice of career pathways and options
- BSL for a deaf child should be a way of life. They should not miss out on any opportunity to be great and to achieve what they want in life
- More people will be able to access work that uses BSL

You said it was important pupils did not view hearing loss as a barrier to education and future career choices, and employers did not perceive hearing loss to be an impairment to staff progressing in their careers.

You were concerned that “Access to Work” can be difficult to contact if you are a BSL user, and more support should be available with this, if required. Access to Work is a national scheme run by JobCentrePlus on behalf of the Government. It can provide financial assistance to disabled people who may need support to do their job. Support is based on the disabled person’s needs, and may include a grant to help cover the costs of practical support in the workplace. An Access to Work grant can pay for:

- special equipment, adaptations or support worker services to help disabled employees to do things like answer the phone or go to meetings
- help getting to, and from, work

Argyll and Bute Council will refer to the services of “Access to Work” in recruitment documentation, Council policies and through the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme. **Our Education Service will** work with the regional officer for Developing the Young Workforce, employers and relevant partner agencies to raise awareness of the “Access to Work” scheme for employers. This will make sure BSL users who are in employment are aware of the “Access to Work” scheme and can benefit from the support it provides.

Ideally you would like localised training in BSL to be delivered in various locations throughout Argyll and Bute so as many people as possible can benefit from it. Our geography makes this difficult and it is challenging for us to achieve.

Health, mental health and wellbeing

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

There was broad agreement with the proposals made because **you said** they would:

- Encourage individuals with hearing loss to feel involved within the community.
- Improve social contact opportunities and hopefully will reduce loneliness and isolation.

You said sometimes it is difficult for you to access good quality health information and appropriate services, and suitably qualified and experienced BSL/English interpreters should be provided at all medical appointments.

You said mental health is a big issue for people who use BSL, and better access to services to prevent and treat mental illness is important.

Suggestions made for additional actions and solutions included:

- Offer more mental health support and awareness for hearing loss particularly during the education years.
- Ticket numbering system for appointments and/or provide a visual information screen to assist in alerting Deaf people about when it is their time to be seen by a medical professional
- Provide deaf awareness training for all NHS staff in frontline services
- BSL interpreters to be provided either in person or via a Video Relay Service (VRS).
- Ideally you would like BSL training for at least one counsellor in the Argyll and Bute area who could work on a peripatetic basis.

We will review what mental health support is available to the deaf community and, where possible, will develop psychological therapies that can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users. Our geography and resources can sometimes make this difficult.

We will also review our guidance and policies on arranging interpretation and translation services. We will make sure staff can easily access the translation services and appropriate communication methods for patients/service users.

NHS Highland Health Board has an existing partnership and service level agreement with Highland Council to provide BSL interpretation and translation to anyone who requires support when accessing its services or attending appointments.

We recognise it is important to have effective communication. For all patients/service users who have sensory impairment (sight, hearing, multi-sensory), we aim to overcome any communication challenges. This can include face to face interpretation services.

Some people asked why the Council only had plans to introduce a “loop capital” in Dunoon when there are deaf people in all parts of Argyll and Bute. The Council is currently in consultation with local businesses in the Dunoon area, gauging interest in the project. This is still in the planning stage but we would like hearing loops to be available in all shops/businesses in the town. If this is considered to be a success then we would like to roll the idea out across Argyll and Bute. One respondent made the very good point about loops being accidentally used to hear other peoples’ conversations. To address this very real issue the plan is to adopt portable loops to be placed on the counter in shops, for example next to the till. These have a range of 1 metre only. The loops will be tested to make sure they are working.

Transport

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for Transport were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

Comments around transport are limited. Although there was general support for providing accessible information in transport hubs, **you also said** that information is needed on all public transport, especially when transport plans are disrupted.

Of the people who answered questions relating to transport, respondents said they agreed because:

- Deaf people find it difficult to state their destination to bus drivers
- Deaf people can experience problems when things go wrong on a journey, and messages do not get communicated clearly.
- Adoption of journey assistance cards could be useful.

The Journey Assistance Card has been developed by the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) specifically to help passengers with hidden disabilities use public transport (buses and coaches) with confidence and remove the potential conflict or upset situations that can occur on boarding the bus. **We have already** put links to Journey Assistance Card information on Argyll and Bute Council’s website and we have made local bus operators aware of them, if they were not already using them.

We will encourage the private transport providers that we contract with to provide services on our behalf to have access to technology to support communication with BSL users. We will also encourage them to provide deaf awareness training to their staff.

We publish timetable and fares information for ferries on Argyll and Bute Council's and Caledonian MacBrayne websites, and hardcopy timetables are available in ferry waiting rooms and on board vessels. We recognise it can be potentially distressing for BSL users when transport arrangements do not go to plan as they are not always told what is going on. Some of the larger ferries do have electronic boards which can be used to update passengers but not all, and these may still be difficult for some BSL users to understand.

Information on local air services is currently available on Argyll and Bute Council's website.

Printed timetables are also available for customers and these can be picked up at Oban Airport. Flights can be booked online via the Hebridean Air Services website, over the phone and also at Oban Airport. Staff at Oban Airport assist passengers to get on and off the aircraft. Pilots are also advised when passengers with disabilities are travelling.

In addition to flight booking and timetable information, there is also signage at the Council's airports which complies with EU regulations and includes pictograms detailing health and safety and general information.

Culture and The Arts

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for Culture and The Arts were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

Comments on this goal were limited but recognise that being able to access sports and leisure facilities is important, and can help improve physical and mental health, as well as providing good opportunities to meet other Deaf/Deafblind BSL users.

Respondents said they agreed with our proposed actions because:

- This area and tourism are already open to the idea of accessibility and social inclusion

Suggestions made for additional actions and solutions included:

- Making cinemas more accessible. **You said** cinemas are not accessible as they turn off the subtitles, sometimes at the request of others in the cinema.



- Run clubs in the morning rather than the evening; this would help older Deaf people who may not want to travel at night.

The geography of Argyll and Bute makes meeting other BSL users very difficult, and we are aware of only one deaf club in the whole area which meets regularly in Dunoon.

Argyll and Bute Council, working with liveArgyll, will consider how we can support BSL users to take part in sport, culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals but this is a long-term goal and we recognise that achieving it will be challenging.

Democracy

We asked if you thought the actions which we had suggested for Democracy were the right ones, and whether there was anything more that you thought we could do.

Comments on this goal were limited but focused on difficulties that BSL users can sometimes have in communicating with staff at polling stations when an interpreter is often not available. Some respondents **told us** they had chosen to have a postal vote for this reason.

It is important to us that Deaf and Deafblind BSL users can participate fully in the democratic process. **We will** make sure any BSL training information provided by the Electoral Commission is given to all relevant electoral staff. We will also make sure that any BSL video information on voting processes, developed by the Electoral Commission, is available on Argyll and Bute Council's website, or links are provided to the relevant partner(s) website.