

Shetland's British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024 – 2030



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About This Plan

The Purpose

This is the BSL Plan for Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland, as required by BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. It sets out actions Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland will take over the period 2024-2030. The purpose of this Plan is to set out how these organisations will promote and support British Sign Language.

Our Plan follows the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, published 6 November 2023, which was developed through extensive engagement with D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. Our local Plan is framed around the same long-term goals as the national plan.

This is our second BSL Plan and focuses on local circumstances and considers how to best respond to BSL user's needs within local communities, organisations and services in Shetland.

We are committed to protecting and supporting BSL, including in its tactile form.

We have involved BSL users and those who have worked with BSL users to inform the Plan.

We are committed to continued engagement around implementing actions and providing feedback on progress.

We have taken a Human Rights based approach throughout this Plan.

Throughout the Plan, we refer to 'BSL users', which covers all people of whose first or preferred language is BSL, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss. This includes those who are pre-lingual and post-lingual deaf.

We use Deaf with a capital D to refer to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk. They are pre-lingually deaf. It is an important distinction, because Deaf people tend to communicate in sign language as their first language. For most Deaf people English is a second language, and understanding complicated messages in English can be a problem. The word deaf is used to describe anyone who does not hear very much. Sometimes it is used to refer to people who are severely hard of hearing too¹.

¹ [What is the difference between deaf and Deaf? - SignHealth](#)

The Content

This Plan includes:

- **The Story So Far** – information on what has been achieved since the last Plan, and information on what we know about BSL in Shetland
- **Vision, Goals and Actions** – information on what we hope to achieve and how we will do this.
- **Monitoring and Review** – information on progress and how to have your say
- **Impact Assessments**

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Where to find the BSL version of this Plan

The BSL version of the published Plan is available on Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland websites.

British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact us via [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#)

contactSCOTLAND-BSL

If you require this Plan in an alternative format, please contact the lead officers mentioned above.

A consultation took place on the Draft Plan from Thursday 22nd February 2024 until Thursday 7th March.

The Story So Far

Shetland's BSL Plan 2018-2024

It has been six years since Shetland's first Local Authority BSL Plan was published in 2018, when Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland committed to protecting and supporting British Sign Language including in its tactile form.

Achievements and Learning

Key achievements include:

Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare

- Providing early years staff with information about BSL and Deaf culture, and about resources that are available in BSL, so that they could meet the needs of families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child.

School Education

- Taken 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.
- Contributed to 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.

Health, Social Care, Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Signposted health and social care staff to an online learning resource toolkit to raise awareness of BSL and Deaf culture (this was led by NHS Health Scotland and was rolled out across Scotland by 2018).

Democracy

Taken 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 have made some progress, however, there is much more to do. This Plan sets out the actions Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland will take over the period 2024-2030 and includes, where relevant, ongoing actions from the previous plan.

What We Know

Available Data

The 2011 census stated that there were 62 BSL users in Shetland. NRS Scotland will publish the latest results from Scotland's Census 2022 from Spring 2024 onwards. Anecdotally, there now appears to be much fewer BSL users in Shetland, more likely to be fewer than 10. Research by NHS Shetland and Shetland Community Connections also found that there was a level of uncertainty in health centres whether there were BSL users registered. It is therefore difficult to know how many BSL users there are in Shetland.

There are relatively few BSL users in Shetland, however we are used to this set of circumstances in our development and delivery of Plans and have built on previous experience for this BSL Plan.

Findings from two local research projects, alongside focus groups and interviews with local BSL users and those who work with or may work with BSL users in Shetland have informed this Plan.

In 2022, the Scottish Government, NHS Shetland's Health Improvement Team and Shetland Community Connections developed a project on understanding how to improve access to Primary Care Services for people who use British Sign Language.

In 2022, Shetland Community Connections supported a community action research project which resulted in a publication; a report entitled ['Show Me That You Think of Me'](#). The research investigated the reality of attending social and cultural events or spaces for disabled people, their families and carers in Shetland, and how their experience can be improved.

During December 2023, Partnership Officers from Shetland Islands Council's Community Planning and Development team held focus groups with representatives from Services and Third Sector Organisations. The purpose was to look at challenges and opportunities for BSL users in Shetland.

In January 2024, local BSL users, a representative of British Deaf Association Scotland, an interpreter, and the Partnership Officers met to: look at key challenges facing BSL users in Shetland; opportunities for improvement; and what the top priorities for the Council should be.

Key Findings

Findings from the NHS Shetland and Shetland Community Connections research mirrored much of what was found from the focus groups and interviews. Most importantly, we heard directly from local BSL users. BSL users told us that Shetland is friendly and welcoming, yet, there are challenges.

Taking the published and new research into consideration, the key challenges are:

- A lack of BSL awareness and knowledge across services and the wider community
- BSL users do not have the same opportunities to communicate with services
- Fewer social, cultural and job opportunities for BSL users
- Unreliable internet can be difficult when relying on Video Relay Service (VRS)
- There are resources which can help with translation, but, not everybody knows about them
- Lack of data and knowledge about BSL users
- There is a lack of opportunities for BSL users to get together with other BSL users in Shetland – the closest Deaf Clubs are in Aberdeen and Inverness which is expensive. This can affect the health and wellbeing of local BSL users.

The key recommendations from local BSL users, representatives of organisations and the research is:

- BSL awareness training for staff and members of the community, and for some basic sign to be used
- Training opportunities in BSL, BSL awareness and D/deaf awareness
- Communication methods to consider the needs of BSL users
- The need to involve BSL users lived experience when planning services
- Promotion of the resources available to support BSL users
- Building relationships between services, third sector organisations and members of the BSL community
- To monitor the impact of actions in the Plan
- Explore potential opportunities for local BSL users to offer BSL lessons
- Barriers to job and cultural opportunities for BSL users' needs to be understood and, where possible, removed
- Consideration for opportunities for BSL users to get together with other BSL users.

Vision, Goals and Actions

Vision

The National Plan's vision is to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL signers to live, work, visit and learn.

Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland's vision is that Shetland is a place that BSL signers can thrive and reach their full potential.

Goals and Actions

In recognition of the work we need to do, the first two years of our activity will focus on putting in place a sound foundation from which to achieve further service improvement.

All the actions within this Plan will be undertaken by Council & NHS Shetland, unless otherwise stated.

Building Blocks

BSL Data

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

To strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making in public policy and service design.

By 2026 we will

- Use data from the local research to build on good practice and identify where things could be improved
- Learn more about our BSL community through speaking with the BSL community, BDA Scotland and other partners
- Monitor nationally available data such as Scotland's Census
- Use data we gather to inform delivery of plan.

Training and Resources

Our long term goal is

That there will be greater understanding of BSL in Shetland

By 2026, we will

- Source BSL, BSL awareness and Deaf awareness training opportunities for staff
- Promote training opportunities to the wider community.

Awareness Raising

Our long term goal is:

To raise awareness of BSL in Shetland, so that everyone has a better understanding of how to engage and support BSL users.

By 2026, we will:

- Raise awareness of BSL within services
- Raise awareness of resources such as Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and Video Relay Service (VRS) services
- Continue to build relationships across services who may work with BSL users, providing opportunities for knowledge sharing
- Be advocates for BSL awareness across partnerships.

BSL Accessibility and Communication

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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.

By 2026, we will:

- Promote and support uptake of SignPort as an online portal for BSL/English interpreter bookings which will be launched for public use, within the Scottish Government and public bodies

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- Continue to promote and support usage of ContactScotland BSL, Scotland's Video Relay Service (VRS) for BSL online interpreting
 - Work with British Deaf Association/Deaf Action to investigate incorporating more BSL video consultations on Shetland Islands Council's website
 - Improve accessibility of the Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland websites for BSL users
 - Investigate Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) resource options
 - Ensure accessibility requirements for BSL users are considered in venues when organising events
 - Consider BSL users in how we communicate: face to face; use social media and translate documents
 - Produce accessibility plan and guidance.

Celebrating BSL Culture

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, and 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.

By 2030, we will

- Foster good relations through relationship building in communities between BSL users, BSL representatives and organisations to promote BSL culture in Shetland
- Work with Business Gateway to raise the profile of BSL
- Promote BSL resources through the Visitor Information Service and raise this at their annual network event
- Work with organisations, such as Ability Shetland to raise awareness of BSL, share resources and training opportunities
- Where possible, promote opportunities for BSL users to get together and share their language and experiences, for example 'BSL Blethers' by British Deaf Association (BDA)
- Investigate opportunities to promote BSL culture, e.g. awareness day, role models.

Service Improvement

For the following areas, we will use the building blocks to support services to work towards the national goals.

Children, Young People and their Families

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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

To achieve this, actions include:

- Facilitate the building of partnerships and effective working relationships between NHS teams and BSL providers. This will help to ensure that deaf and deafblind children and their families can access the right support from the earliest stages of childhood and in doing so we can strive to get it right for every child.
- Work with representative groups across Midwifery, Health Visiting, Family Nurse Partnership, Allied Health Professionals and Audiology to help them understand the importance of BSL provision on child and family wellbeing
- Support NHS teams and BSL providers to develop robust referral pathways which will result in deaf and deafblind children accessing both the healthcare and language learning support they require
- Support the development of opportunities for deaf and deafblind children, young people, and their families, to learn about the heritage and culture of BSL, especially in Scotland
- Continue to raise awareness of BSL and training opportunities across the Schools' service
- Ensure BSL is considered by the GIRFEC steering group.

Access to Employment

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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.

By 2030, we will

- Create a transitioning plan to support BSL users into navigating the workplace, helping them to understand the support available to them and develop their skills
- Commit to training SIC Employability staff to basic level in BSL
- Make Shetland employers more aware of BSL opportunities and support available to sustain person in employment, by building this into the Shetland Local Employability Partnership 26-30 (SLEP)
- Through No One Left Behind, deliver place-based employability services which support individuals to overcome structural barriers to entering and sustaining employment. We will tailor our person-centred approach to consider BSL users, ensuring they have access to support to achieve their employment goals.

Health and Wellbeing

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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.

By 2030, we will

- Ensure specific inclusion of BSL to support equity of access to health services within the NHS Shetland Strategic Delivery Plan 2024-2029
- Raise BSL awareness with health and care staff to ensure services are person centred
- Incorporate National BSL resources, for example NHS Inform, into NHS Shetland website
- Improve individual patient health records so that they clearly show when the first or preferred language is BSL and a BSL/English Interpreter is needed

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- Continue to signpost health and care staff to an online learning resource toolkit to raise awareness of BSL and Deaf culture
 - Continue work on health literacy project, sharing findings from BSL user project.

Transport

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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

By 2030, we will

- Improve transport services for BSL users, particularly bus services as part of the Bus Network review
- If funding allows, ensure communications around sustainable travel more accessible for BSL users
- Ensure BSL users input into Shetland's next Active Travel Strategy 27-32.

Access to Justice

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.

By 2030, we will

- Educate staff on the resources available and our responsibilities as services to ensure BSL users have the same experience in the justice system
- Raise awareness of BSL resources and opportunities at Community Justice Partnership.

Democratic Participation

We share the long-term goal set out in the National Plan, which is:

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 also have our Shetland specific long-term goal, which is:

To respond to national initiatives, local circumstances and individual needs and priorities so that BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Shetland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, and as Councillors or members of Council Committees.

By 2030, we will

- Promote resources that provide support for BSL users to enable participation in democratic life
- Facilitate BSL support for users with identified needs within the elected office of Councillor or as members of Council committees.

We will continue to pro-actively work with BSL users to advance service improvement, this includes considering how we can raise awareness of BSL, teach and train BSL and include BSL users throughout our decision-making processes.

Monitoring & Review

Delivery of the actions in this Plan is dependent on the use of existing resources and external funding opportunities.

We will publish a progress report every 2 years detailing achievements and timescales of projected outcomes.

We will continue to use a Human Rights based approach throughout implementation of the Plan, by using the Panel Principles in practice. PANEL stands for Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality.

We will:

- Involve BSL users in the decisions that affect them (P);
- Consider the impact of activities on BSL users and take active steps to remove barriers (A);
- Ensure that all forms of discrimination is prohibited, prevented and eliminated, particularly towards BSL users (N);
- Support BSL users to take part in the implementation of the Plan (E); and
- Ensure all our approaches are grounded through legal rights, as it is our duty to help people have their rights fulfilled (L).

Shetland's BSL Plan will be reviewed every six years, after the publication of the National BSL Plan.

Have Your Say

We welcome comments at all stages of the Plan development.

If you would like to feedback, please contact us through:

- [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#), our direct telephone number is: 01595 744148
- Email us at Shetlandpartnership@shetland.gov.uk
- www.shetland.gov.uk/bsl

The final Plan will be published by May 2024.

Impact Assessments

We have assessed the impact of this Plan in relation to the following statutory duties:

- Equalities Act, 2010
- Fairer Scotland Duty, which came into force in 2018
- Islands (Scotland) Act, 2018.

For more information, please contact the Lead Officers.