



Moray British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030

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Introduction

The Scottish Government aims to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn. BSL users refer to people who are D/deaf and/or D/deafblind whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL).

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in October 2015. The BSL (Scotland) Act promotes the use of BSL in Scotland, primarily by requiring public bodies in Scotland to develop BSL plans that outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language.

The first National British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2017-2023 was published in October 2017. The National Plan is made up of 10 long term goals covering early years and education; training and work; health, mental health and well bring; transport; culture and arts; justice and democracy. It also described 70 actions to make progress towards these goals.

The second National British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2023-2029 was published in November 2023. It is a six-year plan that represents the ongoing commitment to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live, work, visit and learn. It focuses on ten priority areas with emphasis on children, young people and their families, health and well-being, celebrating D/deaf culture and tackling accessibility for BSL users that impacts on a number of areas such as transport, democratic participation and access to justice. The delivery of these actions will lead to improved equality, opportunities and outcomes for BSL users. The national plan can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/bsl-national-plan-2023-2029/>.

This is the second BSL plan for Moray. After consultation with local BSL users throughout Moray, the plan is less ambitious than the first one and is focusing on improving engagement between the D/deaf community, Moray Council and the wider community. The plan is less about strategic objectives, and more about everyday experiences for D/deaf people. It is about small steps we can take to support a dialogue with the D/deaf community, despite the shortage of BSL interpreters in the area. It is also our intention to add to the plan over the next 5 years in response to this engagement.

The context for Moray's BSL plan is challenging. There are no BSL interpreters in Moray with the nearest in Inverness or Aberdeen. Last year, Moray Council invited four interpreters for a local framework bid and only two replied.

According to Scotland Census there were around 260 BSL users in Moray. It is not certain how many of these are D/deaf. What we do know is that it is a mixed group with various needs. A mixed group with various aspirations.

It is difficult to capture this in one plan. This is why the plan focuses on continuous engagement.

We know we have D/deaf BSL users of all ages. Some of these are well used to information technology. Others are struggling to use this, even when this can give them access to assistive technology such as Contact Scotland.

We know we have hearing parents of D/deaf children as well as D/deaf parents of hearing children. Parents and children from all these groups have different issues that can make access to services difficult.

We hope that this BSL plan and the engagement that is a result of it will help overcome some of these problems.

The draft plan was presented to Moray Council's Corporate Committee on 23 April 2024. It was then shared with the D/deaf and wider community for consultation. The consultation ended on 30 June 2024. Comments received during the consultation have been incorporated into the plan.

1. BSL Accessibility

Moray Council shares the Scottish Government's recognition that for public services to be truly accessible for BSL users, there should be awareness around the culture of BSL, providing vital information in BSL, and enabling people to access services using their own language.

Following discussions with BSL users in Moray, the following issues were put forward to be included in the BSL plan:

- Develop an effective 2-way communication between BSL users and Moray Council contact centre
- Ensure that BSL users can access Moray Council's emergency telephone numbers effectively
- Develop ways in which BSL users can be involved in public consultations, especially concerning:
 - New developments as part of Moray Growth Deal
 - Budget consultations
- During the consultation it became clear that many BSL users struggle with written English. This means that they often need BSL interpretation for communications from Moray Council or the NHS. There is a video relay service from Contact Scotland which is available free of charge to BSL users which will be promoted across services and to BSL users in Moray.

- The consultation also highlighted demand for BSL training among Council officers and the general public. Moray Council will liaise with Moray College and North East Sensory Services to explore how demand can be met over the next 5 years.

2. Children and families

A small number of Schools (two primary and two secondary) in Moray have adopted the BSL learning toolkit developed by Highlands. At present, BSL is offered as an elective but has not been offered as part of the 1+2 programme in schools.

There is evidence that in the early years provision, Makaton is often used as a substitute for BSL. It is important to make a clear distinction between the two. BSL is a language in its own right. Makaton is a communication aide for hearing people with learning disabilities.

Although there are similarities, the two do not complement each other and Makaton can become a barrier to D/deaf people's BSL language acquisition. Over the next 5 years Moray Council will:

- Promote inclusion of BSL in 1+2 programme in schools.
- Make professionals aware of the distinction between Makaton and BSL.
- Ensure that D/deaf parents have access to information regarding their child's progress in school.
- Support hearing families of D/deaf children to learn BSL.

3. Access to Employment

Not all D/deaf people see themselves as disabled. However, D/deafness is widely seen as a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) reports that:

- D/deaf people and people with hearing loss are less likely to be employed than the general population.

- Only 37% of people who report BSL as their main language are working, in comparison to 77% of people who are not disabled under the Equality Act.

In order to support D/deaf BSL users in accessing employment:

- Moray Council will ensure that reasonable adjustments are in place to enable D/deaf people to gain fair access to job opportunities with the Council.

4. Access to Services

As a local authority, Moray Council has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that D/deaf people have access to our services and information. Some of the adjustments that can be made are free of charge but staff need to be aware that these exist. To promote access for D/deaf BSL users in Moray, we will:

- promote D/deaf awareness training and BSL training among Moray Health and Social Care staff.
- promote the use of a full range of assistive technology to enable D/deaf people to access to health and social care services.

5. Celebrating BSL culture

D/deaf people in Moray told us that before lockdown, they would travel to Inverness once a year to attend a show that had live BSL interpretation. Since lockdown, they feel they have become more isolated. Current developments in Moray, especially around the development of the cultural quarter, offer a great opportunity to help D/deaf people out of their isolation. Moray Council will:

- support D/deaf in taking part in social and cultural activities in Moray.

- encourage D/deaf people to engage in consultations around the implementation of the Moray Growth Deal such as the Cultural Quarter, Bus revolution and the STEM Centre Network.

6. Transport

Moray is predominantly a rural area. Public transport is a vital element in tackling rural isolation. Moray's M.Connect service is a demand-led public transport service which can play an important role in helping D/deaf people gaining access to all types of services. Over the next 6 years Moray Council will:

- engage with D/deaf people in Moray to explore how its booking system can be made more accessible to D/deaf people.