

A nighttime photograph of a city street, likely in Edinburgh, featuring a prominent tall, dark spire on the left and various illuminated buildings in the background. The sky is a deep blue, and the street is lit with warm yellow lights from buildings and street lamps. The overall scene is a vibrant urban nightscape.

DRAFT BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE PLAN

2024-30

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Executive Summary

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in October 2015. It aims to make Scotland the best place in the world to live, work and visit for people whose first or preferred language is BSL.

Now that the Scottish Government have published their second plan for 2023-2029, local authorities and other public bodies must publish their own BSL plans in 2024, to outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language.

This is Edinburgh's second plan, which will cover the period 2024-2030. The plan builds on the progress made in Edinburgh since 2018 when the first plan was published. During this period, partners have focused on the delivery of actions to:

- Improve awareness of BSL among managers and staff.
- Improve accessibility for BSL users.
- Improve communications to BSL users.

The plan sets out our ambitions and broad actions for this second phase to 2030.

Our ambition is for BSL users to be fully involved in daily and public life in Edinburgh, as active, healthy citizens, and be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

We have developed the plan around nine themes, in line with the national plan, to help us to achieve this ambition. These themes are described below, along with what we are aiming to achieve:

1. **BSL Accessibility.** BSL users will have access to the right information at the right time so that they can take full advantage of opportunities for learning, work, and leisure, and getting any help or advice that they need.
2. **Children, Young People and their Families.** Our aim is for every child who uses BSL to reach their full potential.
3. **Access to Employment.** BSL users will fulfil their potential by having the support they need to progress in their chosen career.
4. **Health and Wellbeing.** BSL users will have the relevant information and services they need to make informed choices about their health.
5. **Celebrating BSL Culture.** BSL will be recognised and celebrated as a language and a rich culture, and BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Edinburgh with equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts.
6. **Transport.** BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport, and the systems that support transport across the city.
7. **Access to Justice.** BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems across Scotland. This would include BSL users as perpetrator, witness, or victim.

8. **Democratic Participation.** BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Edinburgh, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians, and as board members of our public bodies.
9. **Delivering the BSL Plan.** Making real improvements for BSL users by collaborating with them and with partner organisations to deliver our plan effectively and developing data and evidence to shape services.

The plan will be reviewed and revised throughout its lifespan, through ongoing engagement with key BSL stakeholders, to make sure that it is as effective as possible, responding to developments and challenges as they emerge.

Foreword

The City of Edinburgh Council is committed 'ensuring that Edinburgh plays its part in making Scotland the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) signers to live, work, visit and learn. As Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh has a special responsibility to promote and raise awareness of the language.

We know that for many people who use BSL, English is a second language, bringing challenges in everyday life – in school, work, healthcare, leisure, and in day to day activities like using buses or looking for information online.

Our ambition is for BSL users to be fully involved in daily and public life in Edinburgh, as active, healthy citizens, and to be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

We have spoken to BSL users in Edinburgh and they have told us what needs to change. This plan sets out a series of broad actions that the Council will take over the next six years for our ambition to be realised.

This plan will be delivered with the leadership of elected members and the support and dedication of staff across the council and its partners. We will work with BSL users throughout the life of the plan to review and develop our actions to make sure that we are making a real difference.

Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of the Council

Paul Lawrence, Chief Executive

Introduction

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act, 2015

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act came into force in October 2015. It requires certain authorities, including local authorities, to develop British Sign Language (BSL) plans that outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language.

The Scottish Government published their second plan for 2023-2029 in October 2023.

Following this, the City of Edinburgh Council's new plan will cover the period 2024-2030. It builds on the progress made over the course of the first plan and responds to feedback from BSL users and stakeholders about the challenges, their experiences, and their ambitions for the future.

This plan sets out aims, objectives, and action areas to meet the needs of BSL users in Edinburgh. A detailed implementation plan for the delivery of these actions has been developed, responding to the feedback from BSL users, and will be reviewed throughout the life of the plan. The section on [Delivering Our Plan](#) provides an overview of the governance and partnership structures in place to lead the implementation of the plan.

Strategic context

The Council's plan for 2024-2030 aligns with the Scottish Government's [British Sign Language \(BSL\): National Plan for 2023-2029](#).

It also aligns with the [2050 Edinburgh City Vision](#) where Edinburgh aspires to be a connected, inspired, fair and thriving city, and with the key priorities of the [City of Edinburgh Council Business Plan](#), which are to:

- Create good places to live and work in Edinburgh.
- Take all the local actions needed to end poverty in Edinburgh.
- Work to deliver a net zero city by 2030.

Our People Strategy 2024 to 2027, *Creating a Great Place to Work Together for the People of Edinburgh*, outlines our vision for how we deliver the Business Plan through our people and our commitment to improving the working experience of all colleagues. Equality, diversity and inclusion is central to the strategy and will be delivered through a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which will be launched in 2025.

The BSL plan forms part of the Council's work to make a tangible difference to the lives of citizens who share protected characteristics, through the [Equality and Diversity Framework](#) for 2021-25, with the aims and vision of Edinburgh Learns for Life, and the Edinburgh Imperatives, which form the Council's strategic framework for Education.

Finally, the principles of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), our commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time, is core to our BSL plan.

Why do we need a BSL Plan?

BSL is a language with its own grammar and syntax. The 2022 Census shows us that there were 202 people in Edinburgh whose main language was signed, including BSL, and that there are 20 pupils in Council schools who use BSL. We know that for people who use it, BSL may be their first language, relied upon by them to take part in everyday life as an essential part of their communication and social interaction.

Many people think that BSL is a signed version of written or spoken English and so subtitles or written English are an adequate alternative for BSL users. However, this is not the case, particularly for individuals who have been deaf from birth or early childhood. This means that BSL users can face barriers as a direct result of being excluded from communication and this can have negative impacts on every aspect of their life, including education, employment, and access to healthcare. Examples include:

- **Challenges with everyday activities** which involve communication, for example, booking a gas repair, using buses or trains, not being able to hear public/ travel announcements, and not being able to use roadside phones to report a breakdown.
- **Children who use BSL** face challenges at school as they are learning in a language, English, which is not their first language and which is in a different modality (using speech and hearing rather than signing). Their communication needs are greater than and different to hearing learners, with English as an additional language; these children miss out on much of the incidental learning which their hearing peers have access to.
- The need for interpreters and communication support workers at school can also affect the **child's social interactions** in the classroom as their presence unintentionally affects interactions with others.

There are other pressures and challenges in providing support to BSL users:

- **The Covid-19 pandemic** had a particularly negative impact on BSL using children through reduced access to language and communication. This has led to an increase in the need for intensive medium-term support with language, literacy, and communication.
- **The delays in diagnosis of deafness** among some babies and children, identified by the [British Academy of Audiology review of NHS Lothian Paediatric Audiology](#) (2021), led to delays in treatment and to an increased demand for support from the Council's services, including helping families to understand their child's deafness, and know how best to support their child at home and with their education.
- **Teacher of the Deaf** caseloads in Edinburgh are around 73% higher than the national average, and across Scotland. A high proportion of the teacher population are

nearing retirement, and so additional appropriately qualified teachers of the deaf are needed.

- **Obtaining skills.** Achieving qualifications in BSL is time consuming and expensive, with limited opportunities in Scotland.

Progress since 2018

Our BSL plan 2024-2030 builds on the progress made since 2018, when Edinburgh's first plan was published, including:

Awareness raising

- Deaf Awareness sessions are provided around three times a year, targeting managers and front facing staff.
- A BSL e-Learning course is mandatory for staff in the Council's Customer Division.

Education

- We have developed deaf awareness training specifically for early years and childcare workers, giving information and resources to families as early as possible in their child's life. We offer drop-in sessions for parents of pre-school children to meet Teachers of the Deaf and third sector partners, as well as other families with deaf children in order to share information and the support available to them.
- We have developed access to and celebration of BSL in early years, schools and lifelong learning since 2018.
- There has been good uptake of professional learning via the Highland Programme (a tool for teachers to learn and teach BSL as part of the curriculum).
- We are improving how our teachers and support staff can engage more effectively with parents who use BSL, to encourage them to become more involved in their child's learning, and we are exploring the use of new technology to communicate and share resources effectively.
- We consult regularly with parents of deaf BSL using children and young people in schools, to identify any areas for improvement we can make.
- We offer British Sign Language (BSL) support and other communication needs within our Adult Education programme. We have provided specialised courses for BSL users, supported deaf individuals who want to partake in a mainstream course through our Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Adult) service, and had discussions with our youth service team to include deaf children in our youth programmes.

Health and wellbeing

- We have improved information and access to support, including promotion of Contact Scotland BSL and Contact 999.
- We have worked with NHS Lothian to share video clips e.g. on Covid vaccinations.

- A See Hear Fest was held in September 2023, which was attended by over 300 people with over 40 groups and organisations who offer help, information, and advice to people with sensory loss participating.
- We provided funding for BSL courses and Deaf and BSL Awareness raising to staff.

Accessibility

- We introduced the Welcome application onto the Council website which allows service users to request support, including BSL interpreters, in advance of attending our offices.
- We installed five Microsoft computers with large screens for use in quiet rooms in four localities and one city centre location, with the potential to support video call interpretation, utilising the appropriate software.
- We have improved accessibility of the Council website and the Consultation Hub, including commissioning BSL videos for the top seven transactions with the Council.
- We have worked with placement students to create detailed access guides for all our cultural venues, as part of a project called Museums 4 All, which link up from the venues' landing pages onto our website to <https://www.accessibilityguides.org/>.

Culture – Museums and Galleries

- We introduced BSL provision to the Council's culture strategy service events and conferences.
- We have worked with BSL providers to make sure that the provision is timely.
- We worked with See Hear to run in-person BSL and Visual Impairment tours from 2018-2020.
- We created BSL signed video tours for City Art Centre exhibitions between 2021-2023, making sure that these can be used in the future.
- We produced BSL video tours for each of the Council's venues, including the Scott Monument and Nelson Monument, which are available on the venues' website.

Developing our BSL plan for 2024-2030

We developed a first draft of our plan for 2024-2030 using the themes of the ambitions set out in the National Plan¹, and the feedback received during the extensive consultation² carried out by the Scottish Government in development of that Plan – including an online consultation, which received 80 responses, and 43 community events across Scotland.

Our draft plan included a vision, outcomes and actions. We asked people for their views on these at three consultation events in Edinburgh, two in person, attended by around 30 people in total, and one on-line session, attended by five people. We also made our draft plan available on the Council's Consultation Hub, and invited people to provide their views by email or through discussion.

Feedback from BSL users and stakeholders highlighted a range of issues and challenges that face BSL users:

- Accessing BSL interpreters, which impacts on all areas of life, including health care, education and leisure. The limited numbers of BSL interpreters, teachers and tutors is a challenge for deaf people who are BSL users, as well as for parents and families who need support to develop their BSL.
- Finding information on:
 - i. How to access services, reporting a fault, or getting help on Council housing, rent arrears, benefits, and repairs.
 - ii. How to buy a tram ticket.
 - iii. How to find out about getting involved in community activities.
 - iv. Whether an interpreter will be available.³
- Receiving communication from the Council such as a parking fine and having to go online to pay – *“there’s too much information and it’s a dense and difficult process. If there is a phone number to pay your parking fine, how can a BSL user do that?”*
- Behaviours which do not feel respectful because people lack awareness of BSL.
- Front line Council staff who do not know how to have good conversations with BSL users and ask meaningful questions.
- The isolation that BSL users can face in schools - BSL pupils can experience isolation and lack of opportunities for chatting with their peers if they have to speak through an adult interpreter.
- More engagement from Elected Members would be welcomed.

¹ [British Sign Language \(BSL\) National Plan 2023-2029](#)

² [British Sign Language \(BSL\) National Plan 2023-2029: consultation analysis](#)

³ In response to this feedback, we have added a link to Contact Scotland BSL from the Council's website page.

Further details are shown in Appendix 1.

The feedback from these sessions was used to develop a further draft of our BSL plan for 2024-2030 for consideration by the Elected Members Equalities Working Group and the Council's Policy and Sustainability Committee.

The Council's BSL Plan for 2024-30

Our ambition is for BSL users to be fully involved in daily and public life in Edinburgh, as active, healthy citizens, able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

For this to happen, equal access, opportunity, representation, and inclusion for all BSL users, needs to be understood as a fundamental right.

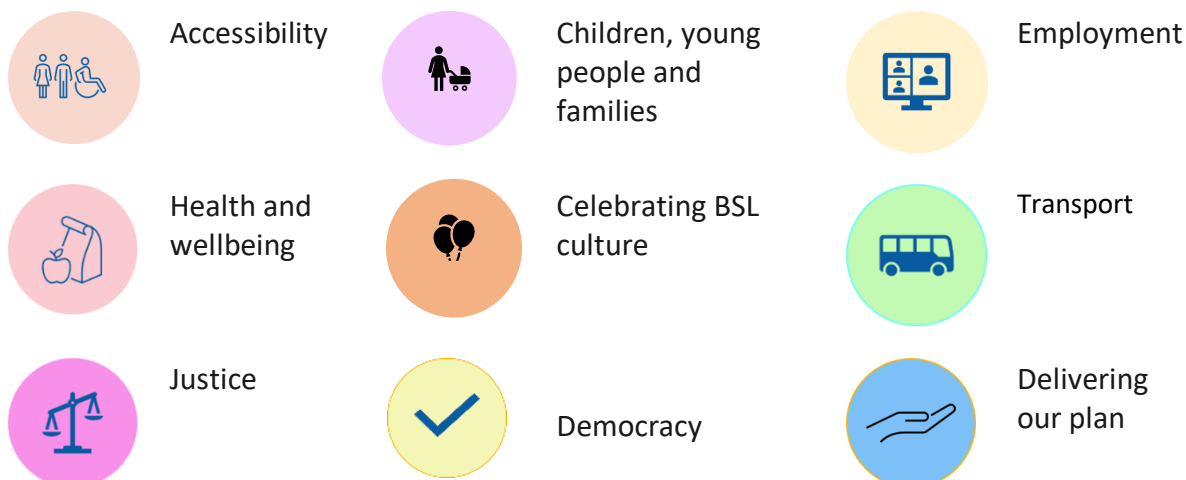
Principles

Feedback from the national plan highlighted a range of principles to guide delivery of the plan:

- **Equality** of access, opportunity, representation and inclusion for BSL users are a fundamental right.
- **Whole system approach**, which embeds actions across policies and services to address the barriers faced by BSL users.
- **Collaboration and partnership working** with BSL users in shaping how information and services are provided.
- **Choice**: BSL users need to have the freedom to choose and make informed decisions about their communication preferences and their access to public life is a key measure of equality.
- **Staff are supported** in their role to have the knowledge and skills required to effectively support BSL users.
- **We celebrate the strengths and value** of the Deaf community and Deaf culture.


Action areas

There are nine themes which frame the actions for the plan:



Each of the nine themes is set out in the next section. For each, we have set out what we want to achieve and the broad actions that we will take over the next six years. Detailed implementation plans for the delivery of these actions will be developed in collaboration with BSL users throughout the life of the plan.

1. BSL Accessibility

	BSL users will have access to the right information at the right time so they can take full advantage of opportunities for learning, work, and leisure, and get any help or advice they need.
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BSL users can face barriers and exclusion through language, which can impact their access to employment, education and learning, support and advice, culture and healthcare.

Action areas:

- **Improve awareness and access to BSL/English interpretation.**
- **Improve the availability and quality of information about services**, especially through BSL videos, alternative options for contacting the Council, and increase awareness through promotion.
- **Improve the accessibility of information and support to vote.**
- **Explore the extension into further frontline services** of the [WelcoME application](#) which allows service users to request support, including BSL interpreters, in advance of attending offices.
- Continue to provide and promote **BSL and deaf awareness sessions** to staff through the online learning hub and other internal channels, and to members of the public via the Adult Learning Programme.

2. Children, Young People and their Families



Our aim is for every child who uses BSL to reach their full potential.

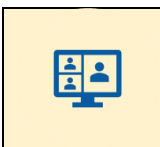
In this section, our aims and actions extend to include all children with a hearing impairment and those who are deafblind, as well as BSL using children and young people. The actions include mainstream and special education.

We are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all learners, and we will continue to work towards this goal.

Action areas:

- **Strengthen partnerships** between organisations to make sure that BSL users have the support they need at all stages of their learning.
- Develop the **support and resources available to parents** of deaf and deafblind children, including those who use BSL.
- Ensure that **staff are appropriately qualified, skilled and knowledgeable** to support BSL users effectively.
- Strengthen **post school destinations** for young people who are deaf, deafblind and users of BSL.

3. Access to Employment




BSL users will fulfil their potential by having the support they need to progress in their chosen career.

People from all backgrounds should receive appropriate advice and support to be able to consider the employment route that is right for them.

Action areas:

- **Signpost BSL job seekers** to the wide ranging employability information, advice, and guidance available to advance their careers and learning choices through the Edinburgh Guarantee.
- Ensure **Edinburgh Guarantee employability support** and information is promoted across the city and provided in BSL format where appropriate.
- Ensure Edinburgh Guarantee **providers and employers** are supported and upskilled, so they can provide meaningful employability support (including work experience, and training) to BSL users who wish to enter employment, education, or volunteering.
- Raise awareness of the UK Government's "**Access to Work**" Scheme with employers, employability providers, and BSL users to utilise the funding available for BSL/English interpretation and adjustments.

4. Health and Wellbeing

	BSL users will have the relevant information and services they need to live active, healthy lives and to make informed choices.
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Clear and accessible information is key.

Action areas:

- Promote and support the **learning of BSL as a second language** for the hard of hearing, deafened people and people at risk of a sensory loss.
- Continue work to address **social isolation and loneliness**.
- Provide information on the **support available** to people to take part in community events like gardening, including how to get an interpreter.
- Promote and support **active travel**.

Improving health and wellbeing is the responsibility of both the Council and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB). The EIJB through the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership will support BSL users through its strategic planning and commissioned services.

5. Celebrating BSL Culture

	BSL will be recognised and celebrated as a language and a rich culture, and BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Edinburgh with equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts.
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Culture can improve the life chances of all people at every stage in their life. Our actions focus on supporting access, participation and opportunities for careers in the cultural and creative sectors.

Action areas:

- Continue to support **professional pathways** for BSL users to consider careers in culture, through volunteering opportunities, career talks and internships.
- Continue to run **deaf awareness staff training** sessions.
- Look for opportunities to **highlight BSL and Deaf culture in our collections**, and to actively seek to collect material that reflects BSL and Deaf culture in Edinburgh to add to our collections.
- Explore options and costs for **hand-held tablets** which can be used in the Council's museums to access a BSL tour.
- Explore options and costs for **making Council museum events available** to BSL users (e.g. films with BSL added).
- Engage with BSL users to consider the most appropriate **fire alerts** in Council venues.

6. Transport



BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport, and the systems that support transport across the city.

Access to, and confidence in public transport is important for everyone who uses it. BSL users, particularly those who are deaf and deafblind, should have access to the right information at the right time in order to make public transport more accessible for them.

Action areas:

- Meaningful engagement will be undertaken to **support the design of public streets and spaces**, taking into account the communication needs of BSL users.
- Engage with BSL users to extend **BSL communication about public transport**, for example, by using digital screens on buses and in bus shelters to welcome people to Edinburgh in BSL and point them to where they can get help.
- Explore options for including screens which give instructions in **BSL at payment points for trams**.

7. Access to Justice



BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland. We would clarify that this would include BSL users as perpetrator, witness or victim.

For BSL users to participate in the justice system, they need to have ready access to BSL/English interpretation support to ensure that they understand the process from the point of arrest onwards. A range of organisations have a role to play in contributing to this, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Court and Tribunal Services and the Scottish Prison Service. The actions below relate to Justice Social Work Services.

Actions areas:

- Explore what additional information and support interpreters might need around Edinburgh Justice Social Work Services.
- Review information about Edinburgh Justice Social Work Services to ensure that it is accessible to BSL users.
- Ensure that Justice Social Work Services colleagues know how to book interpreters when people using our services require an interpreter.

8. Democratic Participation



BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Edinburgh, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies.


People should be involved in and able to influence decisions that affect them, so that public services can be effective in improving their lives.

Action areas:

- **Ensuring people can vote:** by improving the information and support that BSL users might need from the point of registering to vote, receiving and completing a postal vote, right through to attending a polling station to vote.
- **Support BSL users as candidates, agents and other stakeholders** and ensure that nomination packs signpost candidates towards the financial support available via Inclusion Scotland's Access to Elected Office Fund.
- **If elected, support BSL users** through our normal HR support processes and through the Access to Work initiative from the DWP.
- Ensure that **all staff involved in elections** are trained and familiar with the support measures available and can advise or signpost the voter, supporting organisation, or carer, as appropriate to need.

- Explore **opportunities for politicians** to speak to members of the BSL community e.g. through “open table” meetings hosted by the Council Leader.

9. Delivering our plan

	<p>We will collaborate with BSL users and partner organisations to deliver our plan effectively and make real improvements for BSL users in the city.</p>
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We will continue to review, revise and refine this plan over its lifespan in collaboration with BSL users and other key stakeholders.

Action areas:

- Developing engagement and collaboration:
 - o With BSL users, including children, young people and their families, to respond to their needs and aspirations, and to find out what is working.
 - o With NHS Lothian, East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian Councils, to share approaches, learning and resources, whilst improving experiences and outcomes for BSL users across the Lothian area.
- Identify key data needed across the Council to support the monitoring and delivery of the plan.

There are two important early actions for us to take in delivering the plan. The first is for us to develop ways to collaborate with BSL users to help prioritise and shape actions into an implementation plan, and to consider how the plan will be reviewed and refreshed over the six year period.

The second will be to collaborate with colleagues in NHS Lothian and the other three Lothian local authorities on implementing our plans, looking for opportunities to share learning, resources, and approaches.

The work will be taken forward by:

- An officers group, chaired by a Lead Policy Officer, with representatives from all relevant service areas – this will meet twice a year to share progress across the life of the plan.
- Two working groups, which will develop detailed implementation plans and monitor progress with delivery:
 - o Accessibility, chaired by the Communications Manager, with representatives from relevant service areas.
 - o Children, Young People and their Families, chaired by the Head of Education (Inclusion), with representatives from relevant service areas.
- Managers from the relevant service areas will be responsible for developing and monitoring actions, covering the remaining themes.

Progress will be reported to the Elected Members Equalities Group and to Policy and Sustainability Committee on an annual basis. We will review and revise the plan throughout

its lifespan, through ongoing engagement with key BSL stakeholders, so that it is as effective as possible, and can adapt to developments and challenges as they emerge.