



# **Orkney's British Sign Language (BSL) Plan**

**2024 - 2030**

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# 1. Introduction

The British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023 – 2029 was published on 6 November 2023. The National Plan was developed through extensive engagement with D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. This is the draft BSL Plan for Orkney Islands Council which is framed around the long-term goals set out in the National Plan.

As required by the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, our BSL Plan sets out actions which will improve the way BSL users find out about our services and have access to them. We have strong links with NHS Orkney and UHI Orkney and whilst we will publish separate plans, we will continue to take a partnership approach in the delivery of the outcomes of these plans.

Throughout the plan, 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 also accept that the majority of BSL users are deaf and deafblind, as well as the fact that there are many deaf and deafblind people who do not use BSL. This plan will differentiate where appropriate whether an action is applicable to those who do not use BSL.

## 1.1. BSL in Orkney

Orkney comprises 70 or so islands and skerries, of which up to 19 may be inhabited depending on the time of year. The estimated total population of Orkney as of June 2017 was 22,000 an increase of 0.7% from 21,850 in 2016. Over the period 2016 to 2026, the age group that is projected to increase the most is the 75+ group. In terms of size, the 45 to 64 group is projected to remain the largest.<sup>1</sup>

In comparisons of the 2001 and 2011 Census figures, Orkney was one of the councils to experience the largest increase in people reporting a limiting health problem or disability. The 2011 Census figures show that Orkney recorded the lowest number of BSL users with 25 indicating that they use BSL at home. These figures illustrate all users aged 3 and over and include those using BSL for a variety of reasons including Deafness or partial hearing loss, Blindness and Learning disability.<sup>2</sup> The 2011 Census was the first to include a question on the use of BSL at home.

A BSL Progress Group was established to draft the first BSL plan which included officers from different Council service areas and partner organisations. Core members of this group have been meeting on a regular basis to drive and monitor progress on the actions outlined in the plan. Progress on this first BSL plan is provided below.

The group agreed that the actions outlined in this second plan should be proportionate, practical and beneficial and as such will mainly reflect the long-term goals of the national plan and prioritise them to suit local need. The main actions of the local plan look to the future to create a more inclusive community, continuing to work predominantly through services for children and young people.

Our BSL Plan builds on the already established partnership working relationships operating in Orkney and outlines the actions and activities to be undertaken to provide improvements for BSL users. It also seeks to promote greater inclusion for those who face communication barriers.

<sup>1</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland Orkney Islands Council Area Profile

<sup>2</sup> Source: Scottish Government Overview of Equality Results from the 2011 Census Release 2

## 2.Orkney's BSL Plan 2018 - 2024

It has been six years since our first BSL Plan was published in 2018.

A BSL Progress Group was set up and met regularly to review actions and feedback and this has been predominantly focussed on the education side of the plan over the initial few years.

Some of the key actions delivered include:

- Highland BSL pendrive purchased as a training resource and provided to all schools, nurseries and the College.
- BSL and hearing support resources regularly provided to Nurseries.
- Delivery of short online BSL courses at Stromness Academy and Kirkwall Grammar School (KGS).
- Let's Sign established as the resource to be used in Orkney Schools and resources regularly updated and shared.
- Support Deaf Awareness Week to continue to raise awareness and set challenges on finger spelling.
- Class signing projects with signed stories and signed songs.
- S3 and S5 Wider Achievement BSL class delivered at Kirkwall Grammar School.
- 15 people signed up to six BSL sessions with a Deaf BSL Instructor from Glasgow College and some of the attendees went on to undertake a BSL Level 1 Course and assessment for certification.
- 40 adult learners signed up to the BSL online course with a Deaf tutor.
- 4 KGS S5 students undertaking the online course.
- A number of OIC employees undertaking the online course at <https://www.doncasterdeafsign.org.uk>.
- Two signing training sessions delivered to local Police.
- National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Listening Bus and online sessions have taken place. NDCS visit planned for March 2024.
- NDCS have delivered sessions via Video Conference in KGS.
- Signing sessions delivered to local Brownies and Boys Brigade groups.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, reminder information was sent to Customer Services teams and the Community Support Hub on contactScotlandBSL services and Language Line which provides video interpreting services on demand.
- Promoted the Access to Elected Office Fund which can be used to meet the additional costs of BSL users wishing to stand for election.

The BSL Progress Group continues to look to bring in other areas of the organisation and wider partnership to support the continued progress of other actions relating to BSL and inclusive communication.

## 3. Actions for 2024 – 2030

This plan sets out the actions that Orkney Islands Council will take over the period 2024 – 2030 and includes some actions from the previous plan where appropriate.

### 3.1. BSL users in Orkney

As outlined in the introduction, Orkney has a very small number of BSL users based on the data from the 2011 census. National Records of Scotland is due to publish the latest results from Scotland's Census 2022 from Spring 2024 onwards and this updated information will be used to help inform the implementation of this plan.

In February 2024 a drop in session was hosted for local community members and interested parties to meet and look at the key challenges facing BSL users in Orkney.

Findings from this session included:

- Communication issues – both for BSL users and those with other specific communication requirements.
- Some D/deaf people choose alternative methods of communication than BSL.
- Fewer social and cultural opportunities.
- Lack of data and knowledge about BSL users.
- Lack of BSL awareness and knowledge across services and the wider community.
- Limited opportunities for local BSL users to get together with other BSL users in Orkney with Deaf Clubs in Inverness and Aberdeen expensive to travel to.

### 3.2. 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 2030 we will:

- Use data from local sources to build on good practice and identify where things can be improved.
- Monitor nationally available data such as Scotland's Census.
- Use the data we gather to inform the delivery of the plan.

### 3.3. Training and resources

Our goal is that there will be greater understanding of BSL and inclusive communication approaches in Orkney.

By 2030 we will:

- Continue to provide BSL awareness training opportunities for our employees.
- Provide inclusive communication awareness training opportunities for our employees.
- Promote these training opportunities to the wider community.

### **3.4. Awareness raising**

Our goal is to raise awareness of BSL and inclusive communication in Orkney so that there is an improved understanding of how to engage and support BSL users and those with specific communication requirements.

By 2030 we will:

- Raise awareness of BSL within services.
- Raise awareness of inclusive communication within services.
- Continue to raise awareness of resources such as Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and Video Relay Service (VRS) service.
- Promote BSL awareness across partnerships.
- Promote inclusive communication awareness across partnerships.

### **3.5. 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 2030 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.
- Continue to promote and support the use of Contact Scotland BSL – Scotland's Video Relay Service (VRS) for BSL online interpreting.
- Improve the accessibility of Orkney Islands Council website.

### **3.6. 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:

- Where possible, promote opportunities for BSL users to get together and share their language and experience.
- Investigate opportunities to promote BSL culture such as awareness days.

### **3.7.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.

By 2030 we will:

- Work with partner groups to promote the understanding of the importance of BSL provision on child and family wellbeing.
- Ensure that BSL is considered by relevant groups leading on GIRFEC in Orkney.

### **3.8. 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:

- Develop opportunities for deaf and deafblind young people to learn about transitioning into and navigating the workplace, helping them understand the support available to them and develop their skills. This will include how to work with BSL/English interpreters. Increase the awareness of BSL opportunities for local employers and the support available to sustain BSL users in employment, through the Orkney Local Employability Partnership.
- Increase the awareness of Access to Work for local employers through the Orkney Local Employability Partnership.
- 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.

### **3.9. 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:

- Raise BSL awareness with health and care colleagues to ensure services are person centred.
- Raise inclusive communication with health and care colleagues to ensure services are person centred.
- Signpost health and care colleagues to online learning resource toolkit to raise awareness of BSL and Deaf culture.

### **3.10. 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:

- Raise awareness with transport providers of resources that support improvements to transport services for BSL users.
- Raise awareness with transport providers of resources that support improvements to transport services for those with specific communication requirements.

### **3.11. 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:

- Raise awareness of BSL resources and opportunities with Community Justice partners.
- Raise awareness of inclusive communication resources and opportunities with Community Justice partners.

### **3.12. 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.

By 2030 we will:

- Promote resources that provide support for BSL users to enable participation in democratic life.
- Promote resources that provide support for inclusive communication methods to enable participation in democratic life.



## 4. Monitoring and review

Delivery of the actions in this plan are dependent on the use of existing resources and partnership working.

We will publish a progress report detailing the achievements against the outcomes within our existing Equality Mainstreaming reporting processes.

### 4.1. Have your say

We welcome your comments and feedback at all stages of the plan development.

If you would like to share your views then please contact us by:

- Emailing us at [OD@Orkney.gov.uk](mailto:OD@Orkney.gov.uk)
- Telephoning us on 01856 873535 [contactSCOTLAND-bsl](#)

The final plan will be published in May 2024.

## 5. Terminology

### British Sign Language (BSL)

The main sign language of the UK. Sign language is a visual language which uses hand shapes, facial expressions, gestures and body language. BSL is an independent, complete language with a unique vocabulary. The grammatical structure of BSL is different from that of written and spoken English. Just like spoken languages, BSL has evolved over hundreds of years and developed regional and national dialects.

### Deaf

When the word Deaf is written with a capital D, it refers to the cultural experience of deafness. When someone identifies as Deaf, they identify as a member of the Deaf community and share a sense of Deaf culture with other members of the Deaf community. Most people who identify as Deaf use sign language.

### deaf

When the word deaf is written with a lowercase d, it usually refers to the audiological experience of deafness. This means someone who is not able to hear as well as someone with normal hearing.

### Video Relay Service (VRS)

Enables communication between a deaf person and hearing person when they are in separate locations. The technology enables D/deaf people to make contact with an organisation through telephone by video calling an interpreter who relays the conversation via telephone to the that organisation.

### Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

Enables communication between a D/deaf person and a hearing person when they are in the same place by sharing a video call with an interpreter.