
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

30 April 2024

Cabinet

Title: **Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan (BSL) 2024 -2030**

Purpose: To outline the Council's partnership approach to developing and implementing the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language (BSL) Local Plan 2024 - 2030

Recommendation: It is recommended Cabinet approves the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language (BSL) Local Plan 2024-2030.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 ("the Act") places a duty on public sector bodies including local authorities, to promote and facilitate the promotion of British Sign Language (BSL) within their areas of influence. This includes the development of six-yearly plans that consider the national BSL plan and local needs.
- 1.2. The Scottish Government launched its second six-year plan in November 2023 – the '[British Sign Language \(BSL\): National Plan 2023-2029](#)'. Under the Act, following publication of the national BSL plan, public sector bodies have six-months to engage and consult with local BSL communities and develop a new plan. The deadline for publication is 6 May 2024.
- 1.3. The Ayrshire Equality Partnership (AEP), of which North Ayrshire Council is a member, decided there was merit in sharing resources and reducing consultation fatigue by developing a pan-Ayrshire plan. The first Ayrshire Shared BSL Plan (2018-2024) was published in November 2018.
- 1.4. In line with the previous plan, the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030, is a collaboration of public sector partners, including South, East and North Ayrshire Councils and Health and Social Care Partnerships, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and Ayrshire College. It is a high-level partnership plan, however it was agreed with our BSL users that an operational BSL plan will be developed with further detailed actions. The plan (attached in Appendix 1) is in raw text form and will be made fully accessible.

- 1.5. Following approval of the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030, BSL videos will be produced and shared on partner agencies websites. An implementation group will be formed, including representation from the BSL community. This group will co-produce the operational actions by autumn 2024 to ensure delivery of the strategic level aims of the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan.
- 1.6. As progress on the initial Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan (2018-24) is due to be reported by November 2024, the implementation group will be able to use progress to date to inform these actions. The period of overlap between the plans was unavoidable due to the timing of the Scottish Government's second national plan and statutory obligations.

2. Engagement and Consultation

- 2.1. From the outset, representatives from the various partner organisations have taken steps to directly involve BSL users from across Ayrshire in the development of this plan. We have engaged with representatives from the Ayrshire Society for the Deaf, BSL students from Ayrshire College, the Ayrshire Deaf Education Service and representatives from Elderbank Primary School, Grange Academy and Greenwood Academy. Key themes were identified that we have reflected in the plan's aims.
- 2.1. This engagement with the BSL community was undertaken with appropriate BSL language interpreters to ensure clear two-way dialogue to assist us in capturing their views in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. We will continue to work with BSL users on an ongoing basis in the development of operational actions and keep them up to date and receive their feedback as the delivery of the plan progresses. A national implementation group is being convened involving BSL users that will look at more detailed actions over the next 6 month period.

3. Proposals

- 3.1. That Cabinet approves the Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language (BSL) Local Plan 2024-2030.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1. There may be financial implications arising through translation services required to fulfil our statutory obligations, however this will be sourced from existing budgets.

Human Resources

- 4.2. None

Legal

4.3. The Council has a legal duty under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 to produce and implement a British Sign Language plan.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4. None

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5. None

Key Priorities

4.6. This plan directly supports our Council Plan Priorities of 'Wellbeing', 'Communities and Local Democracy' and 'A Sustainable Council'.

Community Wealth Building

4.7. None

5. Consultation

5.1. Consultation took place with the Ayrshire Society for the Deaf, BSL students from Ayrshire College, the Ayrshire Deaf Education Service and representatives from Elderbank Primary School, Grange Academy and Greenwood Academy.

Aileen Craig
Head of Service (Democratic)

For further information please contact **Andrew Hale, Health Improvement and Equalities Officer**, email AndrewHale@north-ayrshire.gov.uk.

Background Papers

Ayrshire Shared British Sign Language Plan 2018-2023

Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan 2024 - 2030

This shared local plan has been created with input from the following partners -



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1. Introduction
2. The Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan
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Appendix A: Partnership Approach to Shared BSL Local Plan

1. Introduction

The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users* to live, work and visit. This means that people whose first or preferred language is BSL will be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens, and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public bodies in Scotland to publish plans every six years, showing how they will promote, and facilitate the promotion of the use and understanding BSL in Scotland. These plans will take account of local circumstances and consider how best to respond to BSL users' needs within local communities, organisations or services.

This is our second Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan developed in partnership with Ayrshire College; East, North and South Ayrshire Councils; East, North and South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnerships and NHS Ayrshire & Arran.

This BSL Local Plan sets out the priorities identified through consultation with BSL users living, working and studying in Ayrshire. The priorities included within this Plan cover:

- Delivering actions to support the implementation of the BSL National Plan
- BSL Accessibility
- Children, Young People and their Families
- Access to Employment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Celebrating BSL Culture
- BSL Data
- Democratic Participation

It describes the strategic aims the partners will take between 2024 and 2030 to enable BSL users to be involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens, and will be able to make informed choices about every aspect of their lives. The partners will develop a co-produced operational plan (Aim 2) to deliver on the strategic aims.

* Wherever we refer to 'BSL users*' we mean D/deaf and/or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language.

2. Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan

This second Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan is reflective of the priorities contained within the Scottish Government's [National BSL Plan 2023-2029](#), which was published on 6 November 2023, but importantly the priorities for our local BSL users. We have carried forward a few of the actions from our previous plan as they were delayed due to the pandemic and remain priorities for our local BSL users.

The Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan has been developed in partnership with our local BSL users throughout Ayrshire. This ensures that their concerns and issues have been listened to and are reflected in the aims we propose to take forward in the Plan.

The Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan has been designed by the partners (Appendix A) to have flexibility in the way that it is implemented, so that the Plan is able to adapt to

changes in priorities and address any new issues that may arise in the six year period. Taking this approach also allows the partners to build on the policies and practices already in place for the BSL community in our local area.

We will publish a progress report in 2027 as well as engage with our local BSL users to incorporate any additional aims identified through this process with a goal of delivering by 2030.

This partnership approach reduces consultation fatigue with our local BSL users and supports work that is cross cutting and will impact on all partners to ensure consistency and cohesiveness.

This partnership approach also provides the opportunity for shared understanding of the priorities of our local BSL users.

3. Rationale for Shared BSL Local Plan

In Ayrshire, there is already a strong partnership approach to working between the three Councils, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Ayrshire College and NHS Ayrshire & Arran. Therefore, it makes sense to build upon this strong partnership working to develop and deliver the aims to improve the lives of BSL users through a shared BSL Local Plan.

We acknowledge it is crucial to maintain ongoing collaboration with the BSL community in Ayrshire to understand the impact of our aims and to amend and update those aims ensuring it aligns with the needs of the BSL community.

A BSL Action Plan working group was established in September 2017 consisting of partner representatives and BSL service users. The group met a number of times to discuss the work to be taken forward. However, the work of this group was impacted by the Covid pandemic, and some of the members have changed roles and one of the BSL members moved out with the Ayrshire area.

Through the engagement and consultation work to develop this second plan, agreement has been reached that a new BSL Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group will be established (Aim 1). Although the working group was disbanded, it should be noted that regular engagement with the local BSL community has continued through attendance at meetings, text messaging and emails.

The new BSL Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group will have representation from the three Councils, three Health and Social Care Partnerships, Ayrshire College, NHS Ayrshire & Arran and representatives from our local BSL community. Having representation from our local BSL community is essential to drive forward the priorities outlined in this plan.

4. Engagement and Consultation

From the outset, representatives from the various partner organisations have taken steps to directly involve BSL users from across Ayrshire in the development of this plan. We have engaged with representatives from the Ayrshire Society for the Deaf, BSL students from Ayrshire College, the Ayrshire Deaf Education Service and representatives from Elderbank Primary School, Grange Academy and Greenwood Academy. Key themes were identified that we have reflected in this plan's aims.

This engagement with the BSL community was undertaken with appropriate BSL language interpreters to ensure clear two-way dialogue to assist us in capturing their views in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way. However, given the tight timescales this engagement was limited to ensure delivery by 6 May 2024 but we will continue to work with BSL users and keep them up to date as the delivery of the plan progresses.

Ayrshire is unusual in that there are no voluntary sector organisations of and for, BSL users in the area, however, representation from the British Deaf Association (BDA) in Glasgow has been integral to taking this work forward.

Representatives from the various partner organisations also attended an event in Glasgow in November 2023 where the national plan and associated actions were discussed.

5. Finalising Our BSL Local Plan

The feedback from the aforementioned engagement and consultation works informed the final aims contained within our Plan. The aims proposed within this second BSL Local plan contain our continued commitment to support equal access, opportunity, representation, and inclusion for all BSL users.

We have taken consideration of the national BSL Plan and national policy context in the development of our Ayrshire Shared BSL Local Plan to ensure robust and effective aims are set for the next six years. To ensure the successful delivery of these strategic aims, the partners committed to the development of a co-produced operational plan (Aim 2) with representation from our local BSL community which will be published in Autumn 2024.

Delivering actions to support the implementation of the BSL National Plan.

We will deliver local actions to support the ambition of the BSL national plan. Our BSL Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group will provide feedback on our plan, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience are included.

Aim 1

Establish a BSL Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group with representation from the local BSL community.

Aim 2

By autumn 2024, develop an operational plan through the BSL Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group to deliver the strategic aims.

Aim 3

Follow guidance on inclusive communication from Scottish Government, when available, in line with the PSED review to ensure BSL users are considered in communications.

Aim 4

Based on the Scottish Government guidance on BSL access for public engagement, adopt inclusive public engagement guidance.

Aim 5

Publish a progress report on the actions in 2027, the midway point for this plan. As a living plan, this will enable us to reflect on what further actions are required to help us meet our longer-term goals and overall vision for BSL in Ayrshire.

BSL Accessibility

We will strive to remove accessibility as a barrier for BSL users, 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.

Aim 6

Develop a specific page on our public websites with information in BSL or signposting to relevant information available in BSL.

Aim 7

Continue to engage with BSL users and promote Contact Scotland BSL.

Aim 8

Promote and utilise the Scottish Government Signpost Portal for BSL/English interpreters.

Children, Young People and their Families

We will work to ensure deaf or deafblind children and their family are 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.

Aim 9

Facilitate BSL users, deaf and deafblind children and their families to access support.

Aim 10

Continue to promote BSL service provision to ensure staff understand the importance of BSL provision.

Aim 11

Support NHS teams and BSL providers to develop robust referral pathways which will result in BSL users, deaf and deafblind children accessing both the healthcare and language learning support they require.

Aim 12

Promote access to the Scottish Government opportunities for targeted workers to learn BSL up to an appropriate SCQF Level.

Aim 13

Signpost BSL users and their families to access the Scottish Government opportunities to learn about the heritage and culture of BSL, as well as hold local events.

Access to Employment

We will work towards ensuring BSL users receive the correct support and information 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.

Aim 14

Promote and support implementation of the nationally identified solutions to specific barriers for BSL users to support an easy transition from school to a positive destination.

Aim 15

Through No One Left Behind, deliver place-based employability services that support individuals to overcome structural barriers to entering and sustaining employment. We will work with the Implementation Advisory Group for this plan to identify solutions to specific barriers for BSL users accessing devolved employability support.

Health and Wellbeing

We are committed to ensuring BSL users 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.

Aim 16

Promote opportunities for engagement and embed actions related to BSL users, based on the work set out within the social isolation and loneliness strategy.

Aim 17

Promote access to support services during the cancer journey.

Aim 18

Support BSL users to understand the use of the remote video BSL interpreting service.

Celebrating BSL Culture

We are committed to assisting BSL users to have access to cultural activities in Ayrshire, and equal opportunities to enjoy and contribute to sharing the importance of BSL and D/deaf culture with the people of Ayrshire.

Aim 19

Work to help embed BSL further within culture and the arts including increasing availability of signed events and performances.

BSL Data

We will work to better understand our local BSL community in Ayrshire to help inform decision making in our policies and practices.

Aim 20

Utilise the data from the Census and any other sources to better understand our local BSL population, as well as explore issues such as accessibility and access to services.

Democratic Participation

We will strive to support BSL users to be fully involved in democratic and public life in Ayrshire, as active and informed citizens, and as voters in local and general elections.

Aim 21

Publicise resources from the Electoral Commission, once available, to provide ongoing support for BSL users' participation in democratic life.

Aim 22

Ensure relevant electoral staff are aware of the need to provide appropriate information on voting processes to BSL users.

Partnership Approach to Shared BSL Local Plan

Below is some information on the partners involved in the shared BSL local plan.

Ayrshire College

Ayrshire College is a large regional college which operates from three main campuses in Ayr, Kilmarnock and Kilwinning. The College provides education, skills development, and training for learners across Ayrshire and beyond and has approximately 11,000 learners enrolling in college programmes every year.

The College delivers programmes at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) levels 1 to 8, including a range of Foundation and Modern Apprenticeships and bespoke delivery for businesses.

Ayrshire College currently provides extended learning support (ELS) for students with additional support needs, including students who are BSL users. This includes arranging BSL support to enable students to fully participate in all aspects of their College experience.

The College has a number of Communication Support Workers who provide BSL support and a number of permanent staff members who are proficient signers.

East Ayrshire Council

East Ayrshire Council serves just over 122,000 people living in diverse communities in both urban and rural settings. The majority of people live in mainly rural settings across some 30 small communities set against a background of some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery.

Internal and External support to BSL users is provided to access Council services, attending meetings, forums, and events as required. Internal support is provided via our Sensory Impairment Team, and we are one of a few local authorities who employ a BSL interpreter who provides support, guidance, BSL and Deaf Awareness Training to staff.

Grange Academy has three Teachers of the Deaf, one of whom is a Principal Teacher who line manages the deaf base. There are currently five pupils who are supported.

East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership combined the services of NHS Ayrshire & Arran and East Ayrshire Council to develop and deliver services that are more personalised and meet the needs and aspirations of our residents. Specifically, our focus is on ensuring that children and young people get the best start in life, that people live healthier, longer lives and are supported to be independent and included and have choice and control - no matter who they are or where they live.

East Ayrshire Council Sensory Impairment Team provide services for people with a visual, hearing or dual sensory impairment and includes British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation. They provide information, telephone support, assessment and equipment provision.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran

NHS Ayrshire & Arran want the best for our local people and our staff. We pride ourselves on improving health and providing a comprehensive range of high quality, safe, effective and person-centred health services. Our strategic direction is based on continuous improvement and services that are centred on the patient or service user. Our purpose is 'Working together to achieve the healthiest life possible for everyone in Ayrshire and Arran'.

NHS Ayrshire & Arran provides BSL interpretation to anyone who requires this support when accessing health care. This support is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week when accessing our hospitals, community based services, family doctor (GP), dentist and opticians. Due to the need to be pre-booked we are aware that pharmacy is more challenging and we will look to ways to improve this in the future.

North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire Council serves a population of 134,220 residents, the council area includes the mainland, Isle of Arran and Isles of Cumbrae. Our Council's vision is 'A North Ayrshire that is fair for all' and our mission is 'Working together to improve the lives of our people in North Ayrshire'.

External interpretation services are used to support BSL users in their interaction with Council services during formal meetings and proceedings. Sensory Awareness training (including BSL awareness) is available for employees, alongside a Deaf awareness e-learning programme. Support is provided to Council services from the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), who provide advice and guidance to employees. Council and HSCP employees can make direct referrals for communication support via the duty system, a dedicated email address or CareFirst.

Elderbank Primary School contains the Pan Ayrshire Hearing Impairment Service for primary aged pupils.

North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership was established to manage and monitor the joining together of community health and social care services. Through partnership working our vision is that: 'All people who live in North Ayrshire are able to have a safe, healthy and active life'.

All of our work fits within five strategic priorities. The aim of these priorities is to work together with local people to tackle the significant social and health inequalities that exist in North Ayrshire. We will meet our priorities by making changes to the Health and Care services we deliver. In doing this we will support local people to live safely at home, or in a homely setting, as close to family, friends and the local community as possible.

The Sensory Impairment Team has a dedicated 'smart phone' and clients contact the service to request assistance Monday to Friday. A duty system is in place on a Tuesday and Thursday every week where clients can come into the office without an appointment for help and communication support. There are two employees within the team who are very proficient signers. The team works across the local authority providing BSL support to clients who are accessing services and on occasion outside agencies.

South Ayrshire Council

South Ayrshire stands out in Scotland as an area of outstanding natural beauty, with its coastal and rural communities, and a long record of innovation and ambition. We are an area rich in heritage, with strong historical connections, fantastic community spirit, welcoming people, a thriving voluntary sector, beautiful scenery, and strong ambitions for an economic and sustainable future where people choose South Ayrshire as a place to live, visit and invest in.

We have a population of 112,450 and by 2043 is projected to increase considerably. Our purpose is to serve South Ayrshire, our vision is to make a difference every day and our values are to be respectful, positive, supportive, proud and ambitious. We have 3 priorities for 2023-2028:

- Space and Places
- Live, Work, Learn
- Civic and Community Pride.

Teachers of the Deaf provide Deaf awareness training and introductory BSL training for families and stakeholders. As part of our internal e-learning programme, BSL Awareness and Deaf Awareness modules are available, the courses can be accessed by staff members. Our Sensory Impairment team provide Sensory Loss awareness sessions on a regular basis to staff as well as on an ad hoc basis to internal and external organisations. External interpretation services are used to support BSL users and their interaction with Council services as required, including formal meetings and proceedings.

South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

South Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership brings together a wide range of health and social work services into a single operational delivery unit. The Partnership's Integration Joint Board is responsible for planning and overseeing the delivery of a full range of community health and social work/social care services, including those for older people, adults, children and families and people in the Criminal Justice system in South Ayrshire. It is also responsible for a number of Pan-Ayrshire health services relating to Allied Health Professionals, Continence, Joint Equipment and Technology Enabled Care.