

To: Leadership Board

On: 1st May 2024

Report by: Chief Executive

Heading: Renfrewshire Council British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024 - 2029

1. Summary

- 1.1 A British Sign Language Plan has been developed to ensure that Renfrewshire Council can better meet the needs of BSL users. The actions cover a range of Council services, from improving BSL content on the website to encouraging BSL using parents on to Parent Councils.
 - 1.2 Renfrewshire Council are required by the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 to publish a BSL plan by 6th May 2024.
 - 1.3 The plan was developed in consultation with BSL users in Renfrewshire and is available in BSL and English.
 - 1.4 The plan has been developed in line with guidance produced by Scottish Government which requires local authorities to include specific actions from the national plan in local authority plans.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that elected members:

- Approve the Renfrewshire Council BSL Plan attached at Appendix 1 for implementation.
 - Note the summary of feedback from Renfrewshire BSL users.
 - Agree that Renfrewshire BSL users continue to be involved in monitoring the implementation of the plan and adjust goals and activities according to local need when appropriate.
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3. Background

- 3.1 The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to raise awareness of BSL and improve access to services for those using the language by requiring the Scottish Government and listed local bodies to publish and implement their own plans for how they will promote the use of the language.
- 3.2 The Plan follows the BSL National Plan 2023-2029, published on 6 November 2023, which was developed through extensive engagement with D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them. The long-term goals of the national plan have been used to structure the Renfrewshire plan. Local Authorities are required to publish a BSL Plan by 6th May 2024.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government has produced a template for local authorities outlining the actions that must be included from the National Plan. It is then expected that local authorities develop additional actions specific to their area. The Act requires development of the plans to:
- Involve BSL users (including those who use the tactile form of the language) and those who represent them;
 - Ensure that the consultation on the draft plan is accessible to D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users; and
 - Be published in BSL as well as in English in both draft form, and in final form.
- 3.4 These requirements have guided the development of the Renfrewshire Council BSL plan and are assessed as being met.
- 3.5 Work has been undertaken with all Council services to recognise both areas of good practice, as well as areas for development. A wide range of Council services have high level actions included, in line with the guidance for the plan.
- 3.6 The full Plan is attached as Appendix 1 to this report with key actions including:

- Promoting the availability of accessible BSL interpreting services locally, and improving BSL awareness across our services and partners.
- Improving access to our information and services for BSL users, including producing information in BSL videos and highlighting BSL accessible ways to get in touch.
- Promote BSL awareness in pupils, parents, and staff by providing opportunities for raising BSL awareness.
- Build our understanding of BSL in Renfrewshire through improving evidence and data, as well as engaging with the local communities.

Consultation

3.7 The draft plan was made available on the Renfrewshire Council web site as both a BSL video and in written English. Feedback was encouraged in videoed BSL form, in English and also through meetings with individuals. A consultation event was held in Paisley with BSL interpreters and electronic note takers present. 18 local BSL users attended the event to provide input. Much of the input reflected the actions and themes already covered in the draft Plan, but where new ideas were raised, these have been included in the final plan where possible.

3.8 Most frequently raised points raised during the consultation process included:

- Improving access to our information and services for BSL users, including making our website more accessible to BSL users by including BSL videos and highlighting BSL accessible ways to get in touch.
- Promoting BSL awareness in pupils, parents, and staff by providing opportunities for raising BSL awareness.
- Including BSL content in the school's section of Renfrewshire Council's website, including key information on sending your child to school.
- The need for support in applying for jobs, and on improving accessibility within recruitment.
- The need for more involvement for young BSL users, to understand their needs and make sure enough BSL provision for D/Deaf children in Renfrewshire, including in schools and socially.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 If approved, the Renfrewshire Council BSL Plan will be translated into BSL and placed on the Renfrewshire Council website before the end of May 2024. The summary of discussion, feedback and next steps will also be translated into BSL and placed on the Renfrewshire Council web site.
- 4.2 Ongoing involvement with the BSL using community is planned to implement the plan and assess progress. It is intended that the plan responds to the needs of local BSL users through ongoing involvement, including prioritising the actions and adjusting them as needed. Collaboration will continue with Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership to support input from local BSL users about services across the organisations.

Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – There are no financial implications associated with the BSL Plan, and actions will be met within existing resources.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – There are some implications for staff training, which are accounted for.
3. **Community/Council Planning** –
 - *Our Renfrewshire is well – the Plan has been developed jointly with the HSCP and NHS to ensure that BSL users have better access to mental health services and health improvement*
 - *Our Renfrewshire is fair - the plan will promote better BSL inclusion*
 - *Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all – equality will be promoted by this plan and opportunities improved in BSL*
 - *Working together to improve outcomes – the Plan has been developed in partnership with the local BSL community and partner organisations*
4. **Legal** – The publication of the Plan ensures that Renfrewshire Council complies with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.
5. **Property/Assets** - none
6. **Information Technology** - none

7. **Equality & Human Rights** – It is anticipated that the BSL Plan will have positive equality and human rights impacts, particularly for deaf and deafblind residents locally. It is recognised that there is a lack of data on the equalities characteristics of the local BSL user community, but further engagement with BSL users will support the development of the Council’s understanding of the needs to local BSL users.
8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** - none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none
12. **Cosla Policy Position** – none

List of Background Papers

- (a) Renfrewshire Council British Sign Language Plan
- (b) Summary of BSL users’ input during consultation

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Renfrewshire Council British Sign Language (BSL) Plan

2024-2029

www.renfrewshire.gov.uk



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1. Introduction

This is the BSL Plan for Renfrewshire Council, as required by the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. It sets out actions that Renfrewshire Council will take over the period 2024-2029.

It 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. The long-term goals of the national plan have been used to structure the Renfrewshire plan.

Renfrewshire Council provides a large variety of services. Some services are accessed by everyone who lives in Renfrewshire, such as bin collection, whereas others are for specific groups, such as primary schools. To develop this plan, different services have looked at what they are doing for BSL users and what they could do in the future. The draft actions were then consulted on with Renfrewshire's BSL users.

Involvement & where to find the plan

This plan is a living document and will be updated through the lifecycle of the National Plan.

Involvement and input from local BSL users are welcomed to inform how the plan is developed.

The BSL version of this plan can be found on Renfrewshire Council's website at <http://www.renfrewshire.gov.uk/article/7803/Renfrewshires-BSL-Plan>

If you want to discuss the plan please contact Stuart Graham on:

- 0141 487 1509 via the Contact Scotland BSL relay service
- email communityplanning@renfrewshire.gov.uk
- write to Stuart Graham, Chief Executive's Service, Second floor Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1WB.

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

2. Summary

This plan will raise the profile of BSL in Renfrewshire and ensure that BSL users have good access to Council services. While it is divided into sections related to long term goals for Scotland, it shows how these will work in a Renfrewshire context.

Key actions within the Plan include:

- Promoting the availability of accessible BSL interpreting services locally, and improving BSL awareness across our services and partners.
- Improve access to our information and services for BSL users, including producing information in BSL videos and highlighting BSL accessible ways to get in touch.
- Promote BSL awareness in pupils, parents, and staff by providing opportunities for raising BSL awareness.
- Build our understanding of BSL in Renfrewshire through improving evidence and data, as well as engaging with the local communities.

About BSL in Renfrewshire

Figures from the 2011 Census show that in Scotland 12,533 people said they used BSL (About 0.24% of the population). In Renfrewshire, that number was 349 (0.2% of Renfrewshire's population).

The 2022 Census included a question about whether people can use BSL. Another question asked what people's main language was, with BSL and tactile BSL as options. Figures for the 2022 Census on language have not been released yet but data released on population estimates that the Renfrewshire population is 183,800. If we use this estimate, then the number of people saying that they use BSL would have increased by 19 people to around 369 (0.2%).

Throughout the plan, we refer to 'BSL users', which covers all people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including those who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss. BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary. 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.

3. BSL Action Plan 2024-2029

3.1. BSL Accessibility

“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.” (BSL National Plan)

The Council’s approach is to involve our customers and make a difference to the service we provide for the benefit of our customers. Meeting the needs of BSL users is a part of this strategy.

The Council has developed an accessibility guide for Communications and Marketing activities, which includes guidance on the use of BSL in our communications and marketing.

By 2029, we will:

Analyse existing evidence we have about BSL users in our organisation; identify and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure our progress, including exploring ways to identify BSL communication needs on customer records.

Implement any duties regarding inclusive communications emerging from the review of Public Sector Equality Duties and ensure that the needs of BSL users are reflected in any local response.

We will get feedback from BSL users during the development of the new Council website and its information so that we can improve access to our information and services for BSL users.

Improve access to our information and services for BSL users, including producing BSL videos and highlighting BSL accessible ways to get in touch.

Promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay services called ‘contactSCOTLAND-BSL’ to staff and to local BSL users.

Further options for improving BSL users’ access across Council services will be explored in consultation with the local community.

3.2. Children, Young People and their Families

“The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a D/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.” (BSL National Plan)

Renfrewshire’s approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of children’s services is robust and underpinned by the views and needs of our children and young people.

Renfrewshire Council’s Teachers of the Deaf work with children across Renfrewshire and our schools are working to meet the needs of pupils and parents to raise awareness of BSL in different ways. The ethos of the Additional Support Needs Education Policy is to aim for mainstream schooling, where schools are responsive to the needs of individual pupils. Where BSL provision is needed, this is provided at Garvel Deaf Unit in Inverclyde, but there is parental choice to pick other schools.

By 2029, we will:

Ensure that services for children and families reflect the United Nations Convention On The Rights Of The Child (UNCRC) as related to BSL users.

Explore opportunities for BSL users to inform work on Whole Family Wellbeing in Renfrewshire.

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

Take 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.

Share good practice already in place in some Renfrewshire schools for BSL using parents' involvement.

Work with Parent Councils to improve awareness of BSL and Deaf culture and encourage representation from BSL using parents through the Renfrewshire Parent Council Liaison Group meetings.

Promote BSL awareness in pupils, parents, and staff by providing opportunities for raising BSL awareness.

Explore producing BSL information for families with children, including key information on sending your child to school.

Contribute to the national language learning programme (1+2) to support the learning of BSL in schools for hearing pupils, including sharing best practice and guidance.

3.3. Access to Employment

“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.” (BSL National Plan)

In Renfrewshire, our Invest In Renfrewshire team support many people with specific needs to access employment and our widening access work in schools supports pupils making choices about their future.

Renfrewshire’s core employability services, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Renfrewshire Council (Invest Employability and Business Development Services) all have access to interpretation/translation services, using several specialist providers. Other local training and employment services also provide support to BSL users.

As a Disability Confident organisation, when advertising for jobs, we welcome applications from all disabled people including D/deaf people. We use a range of options to simplify the application process and make it more accessible for applicants who use BSL.

Renfrewshire Council Business Development Team/Business Gateway has support in place to help BSL users who are interested in self-employment to access business development support and will identify the most appropriate solution for individuals attending workshops and webinars.

For BSL clients, where written support is the best option in the first instance, further Business Support can be arranged through an appointment with an advisor and 1-1 Expert Help Surgeries can be provided in person using a BSL interpreter.

By 2029, we will:

Renfrewshire Local Employability Partnership will work with relevant specialist organisations such as RNID and Sense Scotland to further develop our Employability service offer and staff awareness and expertise. This will help to ensure Renfrewshire residents with hearing loss or impairment including those using BSL **are aware** of the employability support available, **are able to access** this and receive the support they require **to progress into and within employment**.

Signpost pupils and students to a wide range of information, advice, and guidance in BSL about their career and learning choices and the transition process, as part of our widening access work in secondary schools.

Work with partners who deliver employment services, and with employer groups already supporting employability to help signpost them to specific advice on the needs of BSL users.

Continue to raise awareness locally of the UK Government's 'Access to Work' (AtW) scheme with employers and with BSL users (including those on Modern Apprenticeships) so that they can benefit from the support it provides. Invest In Renfrewshire also provide money management and financial capability support to individuals as part of a package of support.

3.4. Health and Wellbeing

“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” (BSL National Plan).

The Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership work to deliver adult social care services and all community health services for adults and children in Renfrewshire. The partnership brings together staff and services from Renfrewshire Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The sensory impairment team is part of the Health and Social Care Partnership.

These actions are joint with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership.

By 2029, we will:

Signpost BSL users to health and social care information available in BSL (to be produced by NHS Health Scotland and NHS24), and b) develop complementary information in BSL about local provision, as appropriate.

Ensure information and services about mental health services are accessible to all individuals.

Through the Integration Joint Board, ensure that psychological therapies can be offered on a fair and equal basis to BSL users.

Take steps to improve access to information about sport, and to local sports facilities and sporting opportunities.

Ensure that any local work to tackle social isolation explicitly considers the needs of BSL users.

3.5. Celebrating BSL Culture

“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.” (BSL National Plan)

Renfrewshire makes a significant contribution to culture and the arts, with a vibrant arts and cultural scene. This includes events at the newly refurbished Paisley Town Hall, the new Paisley Central Library in High Street, Paisley and the ongoing work on Paisley Museum and Art Centre.

In 2023 Renfrewshire Council’s Communications Team developed an accessibility guide for the communications and marketing team which outlined the process for securing BSL interpreters so that knowledge is shared among the team.

By 2029, we will:

Continue to incorporate BSL provision into our events programmes.

Enable BSL users to take part in culture and the arts as participants, audience members and professionals.

Encourage and support BSL users to consider a career in culture and the arts.

Make information in BSL available about culture and the arts on relevant websites and at venues.

Improve access to the historical environment, cultural events and performing arts and film for BSL users.

3.6. Democratic Participation

“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” (BSL National Plan)

Renfrewshire Council has 43 elected members who make decisions across a variety of Boards and committees. Local people are also encouraged to get involved in decisions about their communities.

Renfrewshire Council has carried out a review of community level governance which has shown that local people want easier ways to share in setting local priorities and input into local decision making. Improving access is a theme of this work, which will support BSL users to contribute.

Renfrewshire Council has established a Fairer Renfrewshire Sub Committee as part of its commitment to tackling inequalities.

By 2029, we will:

Ensure that support is available around the whole electoral process so that BSL users are not excluded. This will include appropriate support and information to ensure that they can register as electors and can cast their vote.

Ensure that BSL users are supported to participate fully and fairly should they choose to seek elected office, by ensuring that information is accessible and regularly reviewed and updated.

Continue to work in partnership with other stakeholders to support BSL users including political parties and the Electoral Commission.

Ensure that candidates wishing to stand will be signposted towards the financial support available via Inclusion Scotland’s Access to Elected Office Fund.

4. What happens next?

- This final version of the plan will be available in BSL and English following approval by Renfrewshire Council's Leadership Board.
- Please contact Stuart Graham if you want to continue to be involved with Renfrewshire Council as we further develop and implement the actions in our plan on:
 - 0141 487 1509 via the Contact Scotland BSL relay service
 - email communityplanning@renfrewshire.gov.uk, or
 - write to Stuart Graham, Chief Executive's Service, Second floor Renfrewshire House, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1WB.
- Some of the actions within this final plan will require further discussion to inform the detailed implementation. This will take place with those BSL users who have agreed to continue their involvement with the plan. Progress will be measured and reported on annually, with feedback provided for local BSL users.
- A Renfrewshire Council officer steering group, consisting of officers with commitments to implement elements of the BSL Plan, will be established to take the work forward.
- As part of our Fairer Renfrewshire programme, we will set up a forum for local BSL users to support the Council to improve knowledge about current community needs and inform the Council's policy and practice.



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