

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL &
NHS BORDERS:

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024 to 2030





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FOREWORD BY SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S CHAMPION FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY

I am honoured to be asked to present the Scottish Borders Council British Sign Language 2024 –2030, a joint plan between Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders.

BSL is an amazing and an incredibly visually expressive language and I am really lucky that I can sign albeit slowly and carefully nowadays.

I can hear and use sound communication devices with ease. People whose first language is BSL cannot, but they have the same rights to services, participation, support, and engagement that those of us who have hearing do.

This is Scottish Borders Council's refreshed plan and NHS Borders first plan is to ensure that BSL users are able to live, work and play in their communities.

I want to extend my thanks to every single person who participated in the consultation process to formulate the refreshed plan and look forward to this being a live document we all refer to regularly and measure the improvements against.

Cllr. Elaine Thornton-Nicol
Scottish Borders Council's Champion for the Deaf Community
3rd June 2024

FOREWORD BY NHS BORDERS DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH - DR SOHAIL BHATTI

I am pleased to present the Scottish Borders BSL Plan 2024-2030, a joint plan between NHS Borders and the Scottish Borders Council.

As the NHS Borders Director of Public Health, my role, and the role of the Public Health Directorate, is to promote good health, prevent poor health and proactively work towards closing the Health Inequalities gap here in the Scottish Borders. Our THISBorders Health Inequalities Strategic Plan has recently been published. NHS Borders also has a legal duty and responsibility in terms of protecting Equality and Diversity.

This British Sign Language Plan aims to ensure that our BSL users, and the deaf community, who live and work in the Scottish Borders are able to fully access information and services in their first language and fully participate in every aspect of their lives across the life stages as is their Human Right.

Working together in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, we share the responsibility to ensure that BSL users and the deaf community have the same, and equal, opportunities as their hearing peers.

Dr Sohail Bhatti
NHS Borders Director of Public Health
17th June 2024

INTRODUCTION TO SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S AND NHS BORDERS BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN 2024-25

The Scottish Government wants to make Scotland the best place in the world for (British Sign Language) BSL users to live, learn, 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 support BSL. This is the first BSL Local Plan for Scottish Borders Council (SBC) developed in co-ordination with NHS Borders, Borders College and the local BSL community.

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 tactile¹ form due to sight loss.

BSL is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. It has its own dialects and rich variation. Most importantly, it is a language which enables many of our D/deaf (D - people born deaf, d - those who become deaf) and Deafblind citizens to learn, work, parent, be creative, live life to the full, and to make their contribution to our communities, our culture and our economy.

This plan follows on from the Council's previous BSL Plan, covering the period 2018 to 2024. The current BSL Plan has been put together in conjunction with NHS Borders and contains the actions that Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders will take between 2024 and 2030 to comply with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.

A BSL version of the Scottish Borders Council BSL Plan can be found on the Council's website. [The Council & NHS Borders BSL Plan 2024 to 2030](#)

Key Contact for Scottish Borders Council' & NHS Borders BSL Plan are:

- Sarah Downie, NHS Borders & Sylvia Mendham, Scottish Borders Council
- Public Health Email (PublicHealth@borders.scot.nhs.uk)
- Scottish Borders Council: smendham@scotborders.gov.uk
- Public Health Telephone number (01896 825 560) & Scottish Borders Council (01835 824000)

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

Contact Scotland BSL

¹**Tactile BSL** is used by those whose first and preferred language is BSL. It has its own BSL grammatical structure, syntax, lexicon, vocabulary, and emanates from the BSL community, for use by those BSL users who can no longer see and have to adapt to using tactile means.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S AND NHS BORDERS BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN 2024-25

The Scottish Government published the second British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2023-2029 in November 2023, as a requirement of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. Scottish Borders Council, like other public bodies specifically NHS Borders and Borders College are required to produce a BSL Plan 2024-2030 by May 2024. These plans must:

- 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 forms, and in final form.

The legislation says that BSL plans should 'try to achieve consistency' with the BSL National Plan 2023 to 2024.

According to the 2011 Census, the Scottish Borders had 228 people aged 3 and over that identified that BSL was a language used at home.

Given that the BSL community in the Scottish Borders is very small, the three local public bodies (Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders, and Borders College) agreed to have joint approach to BSL Plan development.

To help develop of the local plans with the BSL community in the Scottish Borders there a number of briefings held so that the BSL community and other interested parties could contribute to the BSL Plan, and these are as follows:

- Tuesday 16th January 2024, the purpose of the meeting was to review the first draft of the BSL plan. The meeting was attended by representatives (adults and young people) from the Deaf Community, British Deaf Association (Scotland), Councillor Thornton Nichol, Education representatives, Police Scotland, staff from Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders.
- Monday 4th March 2024, the purpose of this meeting was to concentrate of the actions in regard to Education and Transport. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Deaf Community, Scottish Borders Council, NHS Borders, and British Deaf Association (Scotland). Wednesday 6th March 2024 Saturday 13th April 2024.
- Wednesday 6th March 2024, a joint meeting with Borders College, Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders. This meeting was open to anyone who wished to be involved.
- Saturday 13th April 2024 Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders held an open event in Eyemouth, so that people unable to attend the previous events due to work, were afforded an opportunity to contribute on the Council's and NHS Borders BSL plan.
- Consultation with the See Hear Group, who are comprised of representatives of the Scottish Borders community planning partnership and people with sensory impairment (primarily those that are deaf / hearing impaired and blind / partially sighted).

Support from the BDA (British Deaf Association – Scotland) was made to ensure SBC's & NHS Borders BSL plan was consistent with the plans from other Councils and following guidance from the Scottish Government.

- There was also a full public link to consultation for the Local BSL Plans that ran between 14 May 2024 and 27 May 2024. There were 19 respondents to the consultation all of which were positive to the proposed actions of SBC, and NHS Borders.

NATIONAL BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN


The actions within Scottish Borders Council & NHS Borders BSL plan support the 10 long-term goals in the National BSL Plan, and these are:

Symbol	Goal Name	Goal Description
	Across all our services	Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.
	Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare	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
	School Education	Children and young people who use BSL will get the support they need at all stages of their learning, so that they can reach their full potential; parents who use BSL will have the same opportunities as other parents to be fully involved in their child's education; and more pupils will be able to learn BSL at school
	Post-School Education	BSL users will be able to maximise their potential at school, will be supported to transition to post-school education if they wish to do so, and will receive the support they need to do well in their chosen subject(s)
	Training, Work and Social Security	BSL users will be supported to develop the skills they need to become valued members of the Scottish 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
	Health (including social care), Mental 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
	Transport	BSL users will have safe, fair, and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland
	Culture and the Arts	BSL users will have full access to the cultural life of Scotland, an equal opportunity to enjoy and contribute to culture and the arts, and are encouraged to share BSL and Deaf Culture with the people of Scotland
	Justice	BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal, and juvenile justice systems in Scotland
	Democracy	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

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AND NHS BORDERS BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN 2024-2030

SBC British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024 -2030 has ten actions which are consistent with the ten long term goals of the National BSL plan. These actions were identified for Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders following consultation with the BSL community, Borders College, British Deaf Association (Scotland), the Scottish Borders See Hear group, Scottish Borders Council departments, Live Borders, and the public.

The actions in the Scottish Borders Council and NHS Borders British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030 focus on embedding BSL within its approach to customer services, communication, and training. The actions are listed in the table below.

	<h2>Across Our Services</h2>	
Action	Comment	
<p>1. Delivering the BSL National Plan – 2023 to 2029 the Council and NHS Borders will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure records hold accurate information about BSL Users. • BSL Users can engage with services in the manner they choose (interpreter, Contact Scotland, written format etc). • Ensure that staff of the Council and NHS Borders are afforded opportunities to train in BSL awareness (this includes training in basic BSL). 	<p>Improving information about who uses BSL in Scotland.</p>	
<p>2.1 BSL Accessibility – improving access to, and the use of BSL by Scottish Borders Council & NHS Borders</p> <p>2.2 To continue to engage with the Deaf Community throughout the duration of the BSL Plan</p> <p>2.3 Consider setting up a working group to monitor the BSL plan during 2024 to 2030</p>	<p>To review BSL videos on the Council website</p> <p>Improving access to, and use of, BSL by Scottish public services. Contact ScotlandBSL</p> <p>British Sign Language (BSL) NHS inform</p> <p>Addressing the shortage of BSL interpreters and other professionals in Scotland</p> <p>Currently through HA Sensory Team requires 3 weeks' notice (min)</p>	

Action	Comment
<p>3.1. To raise awareness of BSL as part of the 1 + 2 package and support schools wishing to include this as part of their curriculum.</p> <p>3.2 Promote and support learning in BSL across schools/ELC in the Scottish Borders</p> <p>3.3 Consideration of nominating a BSL lead in schools, to work with BSL user to promote BSL learning in schools.</p> <p>3.4 To look at compiling a list of Deaf BSL users who would like to be Deaf role models for Deaf children & young people. To help them become more confident in having BSL identity and having access to BSL culture.</p> <p>3.5 Work in partnership with Borders College to look at options for further qualifications in BSL for staff and students.</p> <p>3.6 Consideration towards making deaf awareness training mandatory.</p> <p>3.7 Consider working with other agencies in the Scottish Borders to provide BSL/ Deaf awareness classes.</p>	<p>Children and Young People & their families.</p> <p>In relation to BSL from our Teachers of the Deaf Service we offer an Introductory Session to BSL 1+2 languages.</p> <p>Support for deaf children and their families learning BSL in the early years. Gap identified for under 5.</p> <p>Contact Scotland</p> <p>Accessing social care and wellbeing services in BSL.GIRFEC</p>
<p>4. Access to employment Support BSL Users in the workplace/access work grant to provide Interpreters, adaptations to ensure their health & wellbeing.</p>	<p>ATW grant – Focus on CYP GIRFEC No one left behind.</p> <p>To make any job opportunities service accessible in BSL so Deaf BSL users could feel confident to apply.</p> <p>Consider staff training in BSL to mentor a Deaf BSL user</p>
<p>5. Health & Wellbeing. Appropriate support to access relevant services – apps available – Contact Scotland</p>	<p>Key – communication</p> <p>NHS Borders will improve identification of when an interpreter is to be booked ahead of an appointment so appropriate provision can be made.</p> <p>There are a range of options available to BSL users in accessing services, e.g., an interpreter, Contact Scotland, written format, etc. Depending on BSL Users preferred method of communication.</p>

Action	Comment
6. Celebrating BSL Culture – supporting access to culture and promoting Deaf heritage	Promoting Deaf heritage and culture in BSL. Grants to deaf clubs?
7. BSL Data – That data on BSL users is used to inform statutory services to provide services - (with consent) Continue to collect feedback and information from Deaf BSL users via face-to-face engagement as part of Data collection.	
8. Transport- support access for BSL users to access transportation they require - – to work in partnership with other agencies to share resources to make transport more accessible to people and young people when they require it.	Accessibility to information in BSL- sign in real time proposed (so people know when bus is due) – look at text alerts /other options for young people when services are cancelled.
9. Access to justice – provision of interpreters/ translation into BSL for anyone BSL user requiring access – Police app	As above
10. Democratic participation – Support to vote, information in BSL format.	As above

CONCLUSION

The Scottish Borders Council & NHS Borders British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030 will be implemented and monitored by the Resilient Communities & Human Resources Directorates. It is important to note that the Scottish Borders Council & NHS Borders BSL Plan 2024-2030 has been developed with the help of the Scottish Borders Deaf Community, with a focus on children and young people, to encourage the take up of BSL within schools & College. To encourage young people to celebrate their culture and most importantly so that BSL users' access to the services they need.

The local See Hear Strategy Group and the Deaf Community will continue to act as a reference group for the BSL Plan and implementation.

Scottish Borders Council & NHS Borders will contribute to the national progress report in 2025.