

# Introduction

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## **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 2025-2030. It builds on the progress made over the course of the first plan and responds to the feedback from BSL users and stakeholders about their challenges, experiences, and ambitions for the future.

This plan sets out aims, objectives, and action areas needed 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 2025-2030 aligns with the Scottish Government's [British Sign Language \(BSL\): National Plan for 2023-2029](#).

It also aligns 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 and plan from April 2026 onwards.

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 and not being able to hear 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), so 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 in 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.