

To: Youth and Equalities Committee	Subject: British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015
From: Head of Education (Skills, Lifelong Learning and Youth Employment)	
Date: 8 August 2016	Ref: LMcM/EW

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview for committee on the British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act 2015 and the implications of the Act for the Council.

2. Background

2.1 British Sign Language

British Sign Language (BSL) is the visual language of Britain's Deaf community. It is a language that is completely unrelated to English (or any other of Britain's spoken languages). It is a richly expressive language, with a full grammar, a creative and adaptable vocabulary and a long cultural and artistic heritage. However BSL is a language and culture that historically has been widely misunderstood and undervalued by hearing people. Deaf and Deafblind BSL users have experienced discrimination and lack of opportunities throughout their lives. They are more likely to underachieve in relation to their potential in education, and experience unemployment and long term mental health problems. The 2011 census reported that there were 828 BSL users living in North Lanarkshire. BSL was formally recognised as a language in 2003.

2.2 British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015

The BSL (Scotland) Act was given Royal Assent in October 2015. Its main aim is to promote and facilitate the use and understanding of BSL across the Scottish public sector and in so doing, assist public bodies to improve the way they understand and respond to the needs of Deaf and Deafblind BSL users. To achieve this, the Act requires that Scottish Ministers prepare and publish BSL national plans the first of which is to be published by 22 October 2017 and thereafter every six years. Progress requires to be reported on every three years.

3. Considerations

3.1 The BSL National Plan

The BSL National Plan aims to provide a strategic and co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of the BSL community in Scotland as well as to set out what the Scottish Government and national public bodies can realistically deliver. It will also indicate what other public bodies which have to publish their own plans should include. The national plan will be published in BSL and in English.

To produce the plan the Scottish Government has set up a National Advisory Group (NAG) made up of Deaf BSL users and public bodies in order to ensure that the BSL National Plan focuses on the priorities of Deaf and Deafblind people who use BSL

Scottish Local Authorities are represented on the NAG via the Scottish Councils' Equality Network (SCEN). As mentioned in a previous report to Committee this representative is North Lanarkshire Council's Development Officer (Equalities).

To date the NAG has been considering the long-term draft ambitions and aims of the plan which will then inform the actions needed to realise them. The 10 draft ambitions focus on life cycle service areas including:-

- early years
- school education
- post-school education
- employment
- health, mental health and social care
- justice
- transport
- culture, leisure, sport and the arts and
- representation in democracy

Although all of the ambitions are of direct relevance to North Lanarkshire Council, there will be those which require particular focus in terms of direct service provision. The draft ambitions are outlined as Appendix 1.

The NAG is in the process of considering the actions required to deliver the plan. The final draft plan will be subject to an extensive public consultation period in early 2017.

4. Corporate Considerations

4.1 Legal Implications

Following the publication of the National Action Plan, the Council, and all other listed authorities require to publish an authority action plan within a year. The Plan must set out the measures that the Council will take in relation to the use of BSL in connection with carrying out its functions and include timescales.

In developing the authority plan the Council must:

- include the views of people living in North Lanarkshire whose first or preferred language is BSL.
- take the lead taken by the Scottish Government on the National Plan and use a similar template.
- ensure that consultation on the draft plan is fully accessible to Deaf and Deafblind BSL users and
- translate the draft and final plan into BSL.

To enable the Council to contribute to the consultation, as mentioned in section 3.1, and develop the authority plan, it is important to ensure there is an understanding of the issues. As such a BSL awareness raising session will be organised for the Youth and Equality Committee and key Council officers.

This session and the work to develop the authority plan will be co-ordinated through the Corporate Equalities Working Group.

4.2 Resources

4.2.1 Future Provision

At this early stage in the development of the National Plan it is clear that there will be concern as to the resource and budgetary implications for all public bodies. However, there is no timescale set for delivering on the ambitions.

North Lanarkshire Council has been proactive over a number of years to develop inclusive services for the BSL community and build the capacity of the organisation to enable it to do so. The Council is therefore not starting this process with a blank sheet of paper.

4.2.2 Previous and Existing Approach

Some examples of work undertaken to date are outlined below.

The provision of an on-line BSL interpreting service in the First Stop Shops allowed BSL users to access our services without the need to book interpreters. Although this particular service ceased to operate there is now access to Contact Scotland BSL. This is a Scottish Government funded service which connects Deaf BSL users through a dedicated team of interpreters, with all of Scotland's public authorities. The Council is looking at how it can promote this service across the Council.

Engagement with Deaf BSL users in developing the Council's equality outcomes resulting in the needs of Deaf people being directly considered within some of those outcomes.

Publishing summary versions of its Equality Strategy and mainstreaming reports in BSL ensuring accessibility and accountability.

Through participation in training and awareness raising opportunities, employees have a better understanding of the needs of Deaf and Deafblind BSL users.

Partnerships with two local organisations that support Deaf people have:-

- allowed the Council access to qualified BSL interpreters and a BSL video publishing service
- provided training and awareness raising for Council front-line employees; and
- provided the Council with advice, support and access to the North Lanarkshire BSL community when undertaking community engagement activities.

Financial support to organisations that allows the organisations to provide Deaf BSL users with:-

- support and opportunities for social interaction; and
- access to Council's job vacancy bulletin to ensure equality of access to job opportunities with the Council.

The development of the NL Local Mobile App allows Deaf people to report repairs (and other issues) and book appointments without the need to speak with anyone. Deaf BSL users have expressed their appreciation of this service.

5. Next Steps

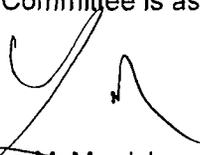
The Council will continue its work to ensure services and communication is accessible and inclusive to Deaf and Deafblind BSL users through:-

- nurturing the partnerships with local organisations representing Deaf and Deafblind BSL users to further advance their social, economic health and well-being outcomes;
- continuing to train and raise awareness for employees;
- developing and promoting the use of Contact Scotland BSL throughout the organisation; and
- continuing to engage with local BSL users to understand their needs and make sure we are getting it right

The Corporate Equalities Working Group will co-ordinate the Council's responses to the consultation on the National Plan and the Authority Plan and in preparation for that activity organise an awareness session for the Youth and Equalities Committee and key officers.

6. Recommendations

Committee is asked to note the report.



Lizanne McMurrich
Head of Education (Skills, Lifelong Learning & Youth Employment)

For further information please contact:

Lizanne McMurrich, Head of Education (Skills, Lifelong Learning & Youth Employment), on 01236 812338

The Draft Ambitions and Long-term Aims of the National Plan for Scotland

1) Our ambition for early years

- 1.1) Families with a Deaf or Deafblind child will be given information about BSL and Deaf culture and will be offered support to learn to sign with their child.

2) Our ambitions for school education

- 2.1) Every Deaf or Deafblind child in Scotland will have the opportunity to be taught bilingually in BSL and in English from nursery, through primary school and secondary school, with full access to the curriculum in BSL (resources and teaching).
- 2.2) Parents whose first or preferred language is BSL can access the same opportunities to be involved in their child's education as other parents.
- 2.3) Children and young people will have the opportunity to learn BSL through the "1 + 2 languages" programme.

3) Our ambitions for post-school education

- 3.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL 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).
- 3.2) People whose first or preferred language is BSL can access lifelong learning opportunities, including community education.

4) Our ambitions for employment

- 4.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will be supported to develop the necessary skills to become valued members of the Scottish workforce, and will have fair and equal access to employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships and employability programmes.
- 4.2) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will be provided with support in the workplace to enable them to remain in and progress in their chosen career.

5) Our ambition for health, mental health & social care

- 5.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will have access to the information and services they need to live active, healthy lives, and to make informed choices at every step of their care pathway.

6) Our ambition for justice

- 6.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will have the information and legal support they need to have full access to civil and criminal justice in Scotland, including where they are victims of crime, and will have the information and legal support they need if they are arrested and charged with a crime in Scotland.

7) Our ambition for transport

- 7.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland.

8) Our ambition for culture, leisure, sport and the arts

- 8.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL will enjoy fair and inclusive access to Scotland's culture, leisure pursuits, sport and the arts and will have every opportunity to share their own Deaf culture with the people of Scotland.

9) Our ambition for all our public services

- 9.1) Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to people whose first or preferred language is BSL.

10) Our ambitions for representation in democracy of people whose first or preferred language is BSL

- 10.1) People whose first or preferred language is BSL should be able to represent the people of Scotland as elected politicians at a national and local level, and to serve on boards of our public bodies.
- 10.2) People whose first or preferred language is BSL should have full access to information about democracy, including voting.