



REPORT TO: CORPORATE COMMITTEE ON 23 APRIL 2024

SUBJECT: MORAY DRAFT BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL) PLAN 2024-2030

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The reason for this report is to provide an update on progress against the Moray British Sign Language Plan 2018-2024 and present the draft Moray British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (B) (41) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to Council wide policy, strategies, priorities and objectives in relation to cross cutting issues.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Committee is invited to:-

- (i) **Consider and note progress made against the Moray British Sign Language Plan (BSL) 2018-24; and**
- (ii) **Approve the draft Moray British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2024-2030 for consultation.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 BSL is a recognised language and is the first and preferred language of many deaf people in the UK. There is a distinction between those with a hearing loss who communicate in ways other than through BSL, referred to as 'deaf' with a small d. Those people who identify culturally as being deaf and part of the Deaf community are referred to as 'Deaf' with a capital D. When reference is made to both groups the term D/deaf is used.
- 3.2 The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 came into force in October 2015. The Act promotes the use of BSL in Scotland, primarily by requiring public bodies in Scotland to develop BSL plans that outline how they will promote and raise awareness of the language.

3.3 The Council's first BSL plan was approved by full Council on 31 October 2018 (para 7 of the Minute refers). In a national first, the agenda item was supported by BSL interpretation. The period of the Plan covered the Covid pandemic and this had a major impact on engagement with D/deaf people in Moray and on the implementation of the various actions in the plan. A summary of progress against planned actions that were achieved is provided below –

- Local taxi firms shared their mobile numbers with D/deaf people so they can use text messages to order taxis.
- Dyke and Bishopmill Primary Schools, Elgin Academy and Keith Grammar have adopted the BSL resource developed by Highland Council. In those schools BSL can be taught as an elective.
- Guidance was drafted on reasonable adjustments, which will be included in the review of the current equality and diversity policies.

3.4 The BSL National Plan 2023-2029 was published in November 2023, providing a template for public bodies to use for their plans, required to be published by 16 May 2024. Following consultation, the Scottish Government has recognised that the infrastructure for BSL interpretation varies greatly from region to region. In response, it will allow local plans to be focused on local needs, rather than national objectives.

3.5 Following initial engagements with D/deaf people in Moray it became clear that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to improving access for D/deaf people to Council services and information. For example: Contact Scotland is an online aid which can provide on demand BSL interpretation for D/deaf service users free of charge. However, among older Deaf people there is a nervousness and resistance about using this service due to restricted access to information technology.

3.6 British Sign Language is a language in its own right, with its own grammar. For many D/deaf people it is their first language. This means that most written information from Moray Council is difficult for D/deaf people to understand. BSL is also different from communication supports such as Makaton. Such supports are aimed at hearing people who have communication or learning difficulties. But Makaton is not compatible to BSL and should not be seen as a stepping stone towards learning BSL. The Council must therefore consider the needs of BSL users in its publications, in particular producing BSL versions of key publications.

3.7 An initial engagement event with D/deaf people in Moray was held at the Gallery, Elgin Library on Monday 11 March 2024 that informed the draft Plan. Formal consultation will begin following submission of the draft Moray Plan to this meeting and will close on 14 May 2024. Consultees will be able to submit their views by email, text, in BSL video or in writing. Contact details for the consultation are given in the draft plan.

3.8 Following the consultation, the draft plan will be amended to reflect feedback and presented to this Committee on 11 June 2024 for approval and publication in text and BSL format. The draft plan is attached in **Appendix 1**.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The BSL plan will assist Moray Council in promoting its values of Fairness and Responsiveness.

(b) Policy and Legal

The BSL Plan for Moray is a legal requirement under the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015.

The BSL Plan for Moray will also assist in the Scottish Government's extension of the Public Sector Equality Duty due to come into force in 2025. The extension will impose a duty of inclusive communication upon local authorities.

(c) Financial implications

There are no financial implications to the report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risks associated with the BSL Plan.

(e) Staffing Implications

Accommodations to enable D/deaf people to access Moray Council services and information will be made with existing staffing levels.

(f) Property

There are no implications for property arising from this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

An Integrated Impact Assessment is attached in **Appendix 2**.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

None

(i) Consultations

D/deaf people in Moray, Moray Council's Public Transport Unit and Sensory Educational Services have been consulted and their input has been incorporated in the report. Services impacted by the actions included in the Plan have also been made aware.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 That the Committee considers the recommendations set out in Section 2 of the report in noting progress made against the previous Moray British Sign Language Plan and approve the 2024-2030 Plan for consultation.

Author of Report: Don Toonen, Equal Opportunities Officer

Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-2045703626-381