



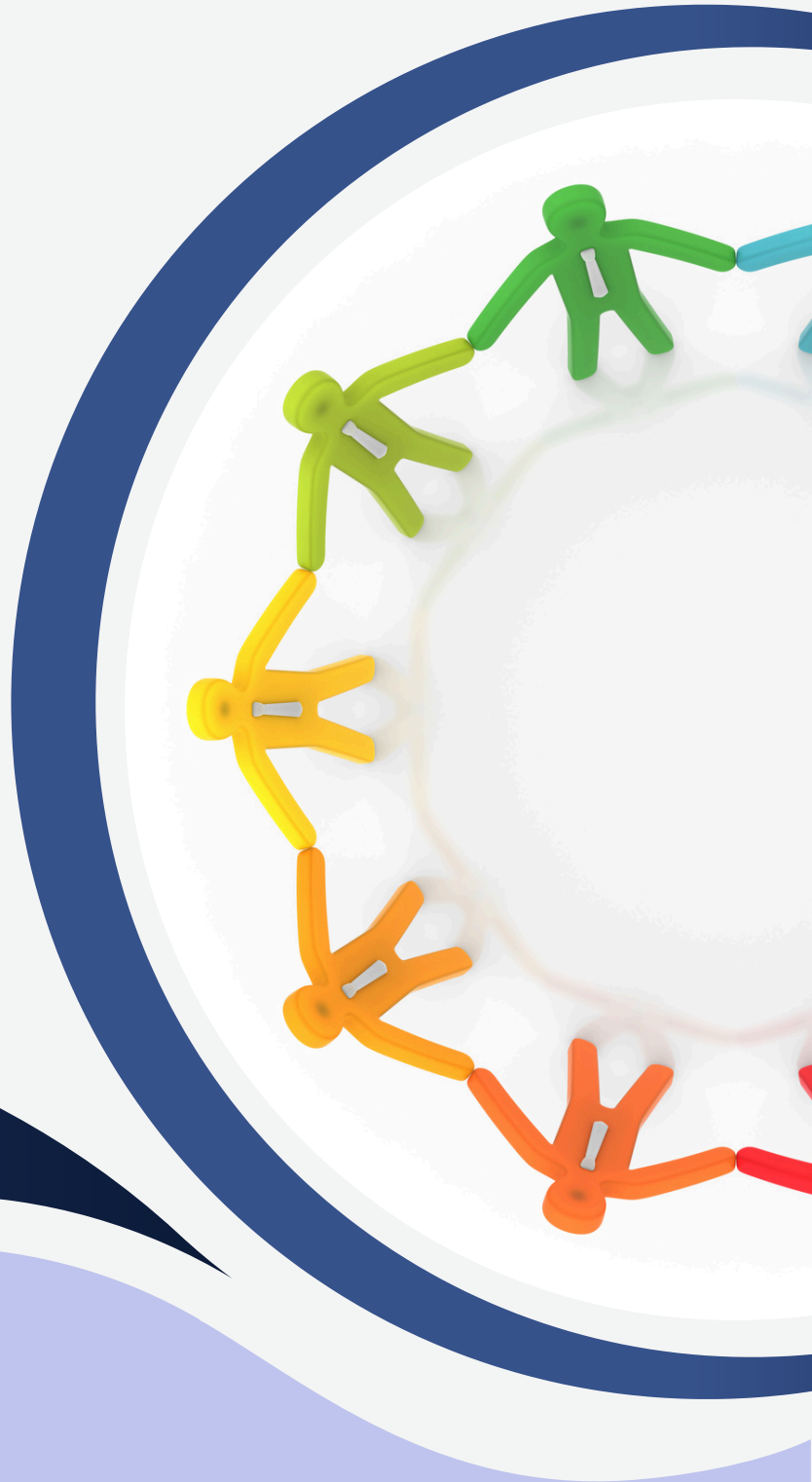
Falkirk Council



# BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE PLAN

## 2023 - 2029

*Working in partnership to create the conditions for BSL users to thrive as engaged, informed, and empowered citizens within our Forth Valley community.*





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**Please note, whenever we refer to ‘BSL users’ we mean Deaf and /or Deafblind people (those who receive the language in tactile form due to sight loss) whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL).**



BSL Accessibility



Children, Young People and their Families



Access to Employment



Health and Wellbeing



Celebrating BSL Culture



BSL Data



Transport



Access to Justice



Democratic Participation



# Foreword

Welcome to NHS Forth Valley's and Falkirk Council's joint BSL Plan 2023-2029. This document shows our commitment to our British Sign Language (BSL) community, and the strength that comes from working together.

We recognise the success of our past work in creating a solid foundation that we can continue to build from. This joint plan is a living document that will continue to change because of ongoing conversations, ongoing dialogues, partnerships with representative organisations, and the continual support, feedback and experiences of our BSL community.

This plan seeks to further improve services that interact with the language, culture, and unique needs of Deaf and Deafblind BSL and Tactile BSL users across NHS Forth Valley and Falkirk Council.

We have involved Deaf, Deafblind BSL Users, Deaf organisations, partner organisations, local communities and our staff when developing this BSL Plan and proposed actions. We will continue to engage throughout the lifetime of this plan, we will report locally on our progress via our governance structures and equality frameworks.

Over the next six years, we will focus on the nine priority areas, as laid out in the Scottish Government's National Plan, making sure our combined efforts are in line with these key goals.



## Foreword cont.

Our goal extends beyond basic accessibility; we aim to create an environment where every BSL user can live, work, learn, and visit with ease and inclusion.

Working in partnership, we strive to create the best overall outcomes for individuals across Falkirk & Forth Valley. We acknowledge our joint services and multi-disciplinary teams are complex, and recognise the importance of promoting knowledge sharing. This ensures that working together is productive, effective, and efficient; making sure we give the best support possible to our BSL community.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 offers us a chance to demonstrate our shared dedication to recognising and appreciating BSL as a distinct language. It's an opportunity to truly integrate the needs of Deaf, Deafblind, and Tactile BSL users into the core operations of our organisations.

Both NHS Forth Valley and Falkirk Council are committed to joint working to improve the lives of BSL users. Whilst this plan recognises the importance of our partnership, it does not take away the responsibility of individual organisations.

In conclusion, this BSL Plan represents a joint commitment to shaping a better future. A future where diversity and inclusivity are integrated into every aspect of our organisations and BSL users can thrive as engaged, informed, and empowered citizens. This is a transformative journey as we work together to make Forth Valley a hub of BSL-friendly excellence, ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals.



## Policy Context and Key Legislation

The development of our BSL Plan is guided by key legislation and policies that ensure the rights and needs of BSL users are recognised and addressed.

The primary foundation is the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, which requires public bodies to promote BSL and publish plans every six years, outlining how they will support BSL users.

Our approach also aligns with the Equality Act 2010, which mandates eliminating discrimination and advancing equality of opportunity for all, including those with disabilities. This Act emphasises accessibility and inclusiveness in service delivery.

The Health and Social Care Standards (2018) shape our BSL Plan by ensuring high-quality, tailored care and support that promotes respect, dignity, and inclusiveness.

Additionally, the Scottish Government's National Plan for BSL (2023-2029) sets a framework for improving the lives of BSL users across Scotland, emphasising accessible information, services, and opportunities.

By adhering to these key policies and legislative requirements, we are committed to creating an environment where BSL users can fully participate and thrive in our communities. Our BSL Plan ensures fair access to services, information, and opportunities, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive society.



## Policy Context Continued

### Falkirk Council

At a local level, the Falkirk Council Plan 2022 – 2027, sets out what the Council aims to achieve over a five-year period. To reflect the current social, economic and environmental challenges that our area faces, the vision for Falkirk is to be a place of "Strong communities where inequalities are reduced and lives are improved".

This refreshed local BSL plan supports the following Falkirk Council's priorities:

- Supporting stronger and healthier communities
- Promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities

### NHS Forth Valley

NHS Forth Valley BSL Plan 2023 – 2029 outlines our goals and commitments over the next six years, in response to the specific needs of our BSL community. Our vision is to create an inclusive environment where BSL users have equitable access to healthcare services, leading to improved health outcomes. We are dedicated to reducing communication barriers, promoting equal opportunities, and ensuring that every BSL user feels supported and respected within our healthcare system.

This is an integral part of our Equality Objectives April 2024 to April 2025;

- Our People Strategy and Values
- Our Workforce Wellbeing Plan 2022-2025
- Person-Centred Care priorities
- Culture Change and Compassionate Leadership Programme
- Scottish Government Escalation Plan
- Anchor Plan
- Once for Scotland policies



# Priority One

## BSL Accessibility

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

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.

### We will:

- Continue to promote the use of Contact Scotland BSL, Scotland's BSL online interpreting Video Relay Service to staff and our local BSL users.
- Continue to improve access to our information, including our websites, information videos, social media platforms and other accessible formats, ensuring inclusivity for all users.
- Offer staff Deaf and Deafblind awareness/culture training and courses for BSL (visual and tactile) that are accredited and non accredited.
- Review and update information available to staff on the wide range of communication support available, including how to book and work with interpreters effectively.







## Priority Two

# Children, Young People and their Families

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach will be fully embedded, with a 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.

### We will:

- Make sure information on all options for language and communication is available to children and their families from the point of diagnosis of hearing loss/deafness.
- Ensure families of Deaf and Deafblind children have access and information on the nationally developed BSL resources and advice.
- Support, signpost and give information to staff working with children, young people and their families on Deaf culture, resources available and communication methods, making sure they have the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively engage with the Deaf community.





## Priority Two

# Children, Young People and their Families Cont.

### We will:

- Continue to work together to ensure integrated approaches that coordinate care and support.
- Offer learning opportunities and professional development opportunities in Deaf, Deafblind awareness & BSL for all staff.
- Maintain the integration of Deaf studies into relevant educational curricula.





# Access to Employment

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

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.

### We will:

- Work with employment specialists to help them better assist BSL users according to their needs.
- We will liaise with our Employability and Training Leads to make improvements and remove barriers for BSL users seeking employment opportunities within our organisations.
- We will engage with current BSL colleagues to learn more about their lived experience and seek their ideas for improvements.
- Promote awareness within the local community about the UK government's 'Access to Work' (ATW) scheme among employers and BSL users.





## Priority Three

# Access to Employment Cont.

### We will:

- Promote inclusive access to employment opportunities for Deaf individuals through ongoing initiatives aimed at fostering diversity and inclusion in the workforce
- Work together with Careers Services, Skills Development Scotland, and other local and national agencies to make sure that BSL users have fair chances for successful and fulfilling opportunities after school.





# Priority Four

## Health and Wellbeing

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

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.

### We will:

- Direct BSL users to accessible health and social care information in visual and tactile BSL through our various NHS, Council and Health and Social Care Partnership communication channels, including websites and social media. Additionally, develop complementary information in BSL and tactile BSL as needed.
- Improve how we provide social care services to BSL users, both in residential settings and at home, to make them easier to access and more effective.
- Ensure that any local work to tackle social isolation explicitly considers the needs of BSL and tactile BSL users.
- Consider the socio-economic impact of being a BSL user and how this may affect financial wellbeing and ability to access services.





# Priority Four

## Health and Wellbeing cont.

- Continue to adopt a person-centred approach to healthcare, ensuring fair and equitable access to all our services. Recognising the importance of treating each individual uniquely, empowering BSL users to access the information and services they need to make informed health choices.
- Continue to highlight the importance of specialised mental health and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) services tailored to the needs of the Deaf community, recognising the importance of ensuring accessibility for BSL users within existing services.





We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

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.

### We will:

- Collaborate with partners, organisations and relevant stakeholders to promote inclusive participation of BSL users in Culture and the Arts as both participants and audience members.
- Provide support and guidance to BSL users interested in pursuing careers in Culture and the Arts by facilitating connections with relevant resources and opportunities.
- Use online platforms to promote BSL information and events linked to historical environments, performing arts, film, cultural events, venues, and opportunities.
- Acknowledge and celebrate various diversity calendar events associated with the Deaf and Deafblind community to raise awareness and promote inclusivity.





# Priority Six

## BSL Data

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

To strengthen the evidence and data on the BSL community in Scotland to better inform decision making in public policy and service design.

### We will:

- Engage with our BSL community, partners, organisations and networks to identify what evidence exists.
- Use the expertise from these groups to inform decision making and improve services for BSL users in the area.
- Work towards making sure our records and databases have the capacity to record preferred contact method, first or preferred language, interpreter/deafblind interpreter and/or guide communicator required.
- Explore how we can improve our systems to ensure efficient interpreter booking, consistent care, and seamless information sharing between services, with a strong focus on meeting patients' communication needs and language preferences.







## Priority Six BSL Data cont.

- Raise staff awareness of the importance of communication methods and language preferences for improving patient-centred care.
- NHS Forth Valley and Falkirk Council will work together to address barriers to gathering BSL data and evidence. We will identify and prioritise gaps in the current evidence base for BSL users in Forth Valley.





# Priority Seven Transport

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland.

## We will:

- Advocate for the needs of BSL users with local and national transport organisations.
- Collaborate with local transport organisations to raise awareness of BSL and explore solutions for improving accessibility for BSL users during travel.





# Priority Eight

## Access to Justice

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland.

### We will:

- Continue to support and promote Forth Valley Sensory Centre as a Hate Crime Reporting Centre.
- Continue to support Forth Valley Sensory Centre to ensure staff can use BSL, have trained with Police Scotland, and can provide support as needed.
- Continue to provide communication support and facilitate BSL interpretation for those accessing Prison healthcare services.
- Continue to provide communication support and facilitate BSL interpretation for those interacting with Falkirk Justice Services.





# Democratic Participation

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

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.

### We will:

- Endeavour to book BSL interpreters for our public meetings upon request, and continue to advocate for better accessibility for BSL users at local election stations and offices.





## Monitoring and Reporting

Our plan will regularly be reviewed and updated as needed. It may change as we improve and discover new things.

A comprehensive progress report on the plan will be presented in the future, showing improvements made and offering useful changes.

We are committed to ongoing, transparent, clear communication with our BSL community. Consultation and engagement will continue after the plan's launch and during significant progress points.

BSL users are encouraged to share their feedback at any time. This can be positive or negative, this input helps us focus on the areas of greatest need and address the priorities of our local community.



## Giving us your Feedback

We welcome any comments relating to our plan. You can provide feedback in the following ways:

Lead: Stacey Gourlay

Email or video to: [fv.equality@nhs.scot](mailto:fv.equality@nhs.scot)

Call: 01324 590871

Text, Video call : 07990690605

Via: [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#)

Mailing Address: NHS Disability Equality and Access Service,  
Forth Valley Sensory Centre, Redbrae Road, Camelon, Falkirk,  
FK1 4DD



Lead: Natalie McKechnie

Email or video to: [sensory@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:sensory@falkirk.gov.uk)

Call: 01324 590875

Text, Video call : 07736149585

Via: [contactSCOTLAND-BSL](#)

Mailing Address: Falkirk Council Sensory Services Team, Forth  
Valley Sensory Centre, Redbrae Road, Camelon, Falkirk, FK1  
4DD





## Alternative Formats

We are happy to provide this document in other languages or formats such as Braille, Audio or Large Print. To request an alternative format, please contact us using your preferred method below:

### Falkirk Council

### NHS Forth Valley



Call: 01324 590875



Call: 01324 590886



Text: 07736149585



Text: 07990690605



Email:  
[sensory@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:sensory@falkirk.gov.uk)



Email:  
[fv.equality@nhs.scot](mailto:fv.equality@nhs.scot)