

Agenda Item	20.
Report No	CLH 51/18

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing Committee

Date: 18 October 2018

Report Title: The Highland Council's British Sign Language Plan 2018 - 2024

Report By: Acting Head of Policy

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces the first British Sign language (BSL) Plan for the Highland Council and sets out the steps taken to develop the plan.

Following the introduction of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, the Scottish Government published its first BSL National Plan 2017 – 2023 in October 2017. The Act also requires listed public bodies, including local authorities, to publish local action plans by October 2018 and on a six yearly basis thereafter, showing how they will promote and support BSL and reflecting the goals of the national plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report including current activities outlined in section 4.
- Note the range of consultation and engagement carried out with partners, BSL users and stakeholders in the development of the plan.
- Agree the draft plan and actions attached at Appendix 1.
- Agree to progress reports every two years

3. Background

- 3.1 The Scottish Government's National Plan sets the ambition for Scotland to be the best place in the world for BSL users to live, 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 part of their lives.

- 3.2 The national plan is framed around ten long-term goals covering, for example, early years and education; training and work; health; culture and the arts; transport; justice and democracy. It includes 70 actions and an interim progress report will be published in 2020. Local action plans are expected to reflect the goals of the national plan, and to contribute to a national progress report in 2020. Contribution to the goals will vary depending upon the role of each listed public body.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government held a series of roadshows in early 2018 to provide advice on the production of local plans, and developed template documents for their use. A grant of £11,000 was also made to local authorities to assist with the development of plans, primarily to support engagement and communication with BSL users in appropriate formats.
- 3.4 Throughout this document we refer to 'BSL users' to cover D/deaf people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including Deafblind people who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss. In the development of the Council's plan we also involved other stakeholders such as family and carers of BSL users, BSL English interpreters and providers of Deaf Services.
- 3.5 BSL is the first and preferred language of many Deaf people in the UK. BSL is a language with its own structure and grammar, and there are often regional variations. Commonly, people who use BSL as their first or preferred language will either have been born deaf or will have become profoundly deaf at a young age. Many BSL users consider themselves part of the Deaf community - a minority group with a shared language, culture and identity.
- 3.6 The census 2011 identified 632 people in Households with BSL users in Highland. We know from users of the local communication support service that around 40 people use the support of BSL/English interpreters. Within school education in Highland around 25 pupils use BSL or Sign Supported English as part of their communication toolkit.

4 Current Provision

- 4.1 Any services within the Council may have contact with BSL users as customers or employees. The Services most likely to have the highest BSL user contact currently are Deaf Education Services, and Communication Support Services which are delivered by Customer Services and managed in the Policy Team on behalf of the Council and NHS Highland.
- 4.2 Following the integration of health and social care in Highland, Deaf Services Social Work are now part of NHS Highland. Deaf Services also manage See Hear Highland Education and Learning Service (SHHELS) who deliver BSL training and deaf awareness training, and lead on the See Hear Improvement work.
- 4.3 The role of Education Services in particular is strongly emphasised in the BSL National Plan, and some of the Council's key actions are focused on that Service. The Highland Deaf Education Service is held in high regard nationally and has provided leadership around the development and support for BSL in schools. Some key achievements to

note:

- Dingwall Academy has delivered courses in British Sign Language for the last 27 years from Scotvec modules, to SQA units, to piloting the new National Qualification in BSL (Highland were part of the development team in the two latter initiatives).
- Both hearing and deaf pupils have taken these classes. The pupils have also shaped national developments by contributing to the BSL Act at all stages of development and locally by contributing to the Local BSL Plan. Four former pupils from Dingwall Academy have gone on to study BSL at University, another 2 have deferred their places until next year.
- When a child is diagnosed with a severe or profound loss, sign language tuition is offered to the family. Similarly, if there is a deaf sign language user, staff in the local education establishment are offered training.
- The Scottish Government's 1+2 language initiative offered an opportunity to get BSL into schools where there is not a deaf pupil. Highland saw this opportunity and the Highland Deaf Education Service were tasked with producing a pack for delivering BSL in upper Primary school. This pack contains lesson plans, resources, activities and video clips to make a fun, interactive learning experience for the pupils. The pack is the first of its kind and has been widely praised. The first of 3 training days this Academic year took place in September 2018 where 40 staff from 29 different educational were introduced to Highland's 1+2 BSL Introductory pack. Such is the demand, that another 3 days of training is already planned for 19/20 session.
- The Deaf Education Service has also had a key role in campaigning for national improvements, such as the introduction of the qualifications referred to above and in lobbying for deaf people to be allowed access to teacher training.

5 Developing the Council's Plan - Consultation and Engagement

5.1 The Council is required to publish its BSL Plan by October 2018. The Plan 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 form, and in its final form.

5.2 The Council's plan has been informed by the experiences and priorities of BSL users in Highland. This included Deaf and hearing BSL users, BSL/English Interpreters and parents or carers of Deaf people. Steps have been made to consult widely with BSL users in Highland using a range of methods, however not all BSL users will have engaged with the development of the plan.

5.3 In an effort to avoid duplicating consultation effort on the local deaf community, the Council worked with partners agencies in Highland to find out what is important to BSL users. In particular, both NHS Highland and the University of the Highlands and Islands are also required to prepare plans, however a range of other public bodies not required to prepare their own plans also became involved in the engagement due to their interest in the views of BSL users. These included Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, High Life Highland and Police Scotland.

5.4 A range of engagement methods were used by the above partners during March - July 2018, gathering views through:

- A focus group held for young BSL users in school
- A drop-event in a community centre in Inverness which was well attended by BSL users and their families
- A focus group with adults in Wick
- A survey which could be completed online or in paper format
- Comments were also welcomed by email or through video clips.

BSL/English interpreters were available to provide communication support at the events, and the survey and introductory information were made available in BSL format (video clips) on the Council website.

In each method of engagement we asked the same questions:

- What is important to you or your family as BSL users?
- What barriers do BSL users face?
- What do you think public bodies can do better to promote BSL?

We promoted engagement in press releases, Facebook and Twitter, through a BSL video clip, through the British Deaf Association (BDA) and the local Deaf Club.

5.5 BSL users shared a wide range of views and comments with us:

- Many people told us of their experiences when trying to access services and information. This included the barriers many faced to access information in a format they could understand - often Deaf people with BSL as their first language find it difficult to understand written information in English.
- BSL users rely on a small number of local BSL/English interpreters to communicate with public bodies. Supporting BSL users to participate in community and leisure activities is even more challenging.
- Not all BSL users are comfortable using technology to communicate with public bodies (for example via ContactSCOTLAND-BSL).

An important message was the need for staff in public bodies to have a better understanding of Deaf/BSL awareness, Deaf culture and the experiences of BSL users. It is also important for them to be aware of when to use BSL/English interpreters and how to do this.

5.6 This feedback helped to inform the Council's BSL plan. A draft plan for consultation was prepared and made available on the Council's website in English and BSL. The consultation ran from 31 August to 28 September 2018. A small number of responses to the consultation draft were received by email and in BSL, and the draft plan has been revised to take account of these wherever possible.

6. The Highland Council BSL Plan

6.1 The Council's BSL Plan is set out in Appendix 1. It sets out the draft actions that

Highland Council will undertake during 2018-2024. It shares nine of the long-term goals of the national BSL plan and covers:

- Public Services
- Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare
- School Education
- Training and Work
- Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Transport
- Culture and The Arts
- Justice
- Democracy

6.2 The Council's Plan aims to:

- Better promote the use and understanding of BSL in Highland, and
- Improve access to information and services for BSL users in Highland

6.3 The development of the Highland Council Plan has been led by the Policy Team in the Chief Executive's Office and through a small working group including staff in Deaf Education Services and Children's Services. In forming the actions, input was broadened out to include a range of relevant services such as Customer Services, Learning and Development, Employability, Elections and Criminal Justice Services, as well as colleagues in High Life Highland.

6.4 Reflecting on the feedback to the engagement and consultation activities, key actions in the Council plan include aims to:

- Train Council staff in BSL and Deaf awareness, and promote the availability of courses in learning BSL.
- Promote and raise awareness of the importance of BSL in schools through the work of Highland Council's Deaf Education Service.
- Work with BSL users and partners to improve access to information about services, e.g. information in BSL.
- Ensure the Highland Council's information on reasonable adjustments in the workplace and recruitment includes reference to Access to Work and BSL.
- Work with Council Services and partners to promote the use of ContactScotland-BSL.
- Engage with the BSL community in Highland to inform and develop prioritised transport and travel information.

6.5 A number of the resulting actions will be taken in partnership with other bodies, in particular with NHS Highland and High Life Highland.

The final version of the Council's plan will be filmed and made available on the website once it has been agreed by Members.

7 Next steps

- 7.1 Should the plan be agreed by the Care, Learning and Housing Committee on 18 October, the final version will be filmed as BSL video clips and then posted on the Council website in both English (written) and BSL (video).
- 7.2 The implementation working group will continue to meet to prepare a detailed timescale for actions with identified lead officers. The plan will be monitored annually and progress reports made every two years.

8. Implications

- 8.1 Resources: The Plan will require to be delivered using existing resources, including those within Education Services and Communication Support (BSL/English interpretation). No additional resources are provided by the Scottish Government to implement the BSL Plan.
- 8.2 Legal: None identified
- 8.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) impacts: BSL users would be treated as having a protected characteristic (disability) under the Equality Act 2010. The plan has the potential for positive impact as it seeks to improve access to information and services for BSL users, and to encourage engagement with BSL users in the implementation of the plan.
- 8.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: None identified
- 8.5 Risk: There may be cost implications if we seek to improve communication, raise awareness, and increase access to information, for example to identify and consider what information could, or should, be presented on the Council website in BSL format. Although all efforts have been made to reflect the views of BSL users in the preparation of the plan, there may be expectations that increased resources are available.
- 8.6 Gaelic: None identified

Designation: Acting Head of Policy

Date: 8 October 2018

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Background Papers:

British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/11/contents>

National Plan

<https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/3540/downloads>

Highland Council Draft Plan video clips

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/751/equality_diversity_and_citizenship/820/british_sign_language_plan_engagement



Highland Council

British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2018 - 2024

DRAFT PLAN



Introduction		Page 3
Engagement and Consultation		4
What we were told by BSL users		4
Key messages		5
Draft BSL Action plan – long term goals, actions and consultation questions		
Section 1	Across all our services	6
Section 2	Family Support, Early Learning and Childcare	7
Section 3	School Education	8
Section 4	Training and Work	9
Section 5	Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing	10
Section 6	Transport	11
Section 7	Culture, Leisure, Sport and the Arts	12
Section 8	Justice	13
Section 9	Democracy	14
Next steps		15
Contact details		15

Introduction

The Scottish Government wants Scotland to be the best place in the world for British Sign Language (BSL) users to live, work and visit. They want BSL users to be involved in daily and public life and to be able to make informed choices about every part of their lives.

A six year BSL National Plan (2017 – 2023) sets out ten long term goals. These will show how the Scottish Government will support and promote BSL.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires local public bodies to also publish a six year BSL Plan by October 2018. This is the Highland Council's first BSL Plan. We have worked with other local public bodies to gather views from BSL users in Highland.

'BSL users' covers people who use BSL as their first or preferred language, including Deafblind people who receive the language in a tactile form due to sight loss.

We have also welcomed views from others including hearing BSL users, BSL/English Interpreters and parents or carers of Deaf people.

The Highland Council's first BSL Plan 2018 – 2024 reflects the long-term goals of the National BSL Plan. Our proposed actions are outlined in this consultation document and they aim to:

- better promote the use and understanding of BSL in Highland
- improve access to information and services for BSL users in Highland

Engagement and Consultation

We worked together with our partners in Highland to find out what is important to BSL users. This includes Deaf and hearing BSL users, BSL/English Interpreters and parents or carers of Deaf people. Some partners (NHS Highland and University of the Highlands and Islands) also have to prepare BSL Plans. Other partners do not need to prepare plans but are interested in the views of BSL users.

Partners = Public bodies working together.

Public bodies = Highland Council, NHS Highland, University of the Highlands & Islands, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, High Life Highland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

We asked:

- What is important to you or your family as BSL users?
- What barriers do BSL users face?
- What do you think public bodies can do better to promote BSL?

We promoted engagement in press releases, Facebook and Twitter, through a BSL video clip, through the British Deaf Association (BDA) and local Deaf Club.

We gathered views in different ways:

- A drop-in event in Inverness and a focus group in Wick for BSL users
- An online survey
- Comments by email
- A focus group was held for young BSL users in school

What we were told by BSL users

BSL users shared a wide range of views and comments with us. Many people told us of their experiences when trying to access services and information. This included the barriers many faced to access information in a format they could understand. BSL is a language with its own structure and grammar. Some BSL users find it difficult to understand written information in English.

BSL users rely on a small number of local BSL/English interpreters to communicate with public bodies. Supporting BSL users to participate in community and leisure activities is even more challenging.

Not all BSL users are comfortable using technology to communicate with public bodies (for example via ContactSCOTLAND-BSL).

An important message is the need for staff in public bodies to have a better understanding of Deaf/BSL awareness, Deaf culture and the experiences of BSL users. It's also important for them to be aware of when to use BSL/English interpreters and how to do this.

This information has helped to develop the Highland Council's first BSL Plan.

Key messages – BSL users told us:

What is important?

To be provided with
enough
Communication
Support

Individual BSL users
have different needs

Deaf/BSL awareness

Access to accessible
information

Barriers for BSL users?

Lack of understanding
about BSL, culture and
experiences

Not enough
interpreters

Few BSL role
models

Lack of information
in BSL

What can public bodies do better?

Train staff in BSL
and D/deaf
awareness

Raise awareness of
communication
support to staff and
BSL users

Capture individual
experiences of BSL
users

Provide
information in
different formats



Action Plan section 1

Public Services: Across all our services

The BSL National Plan says; *“Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users.”*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 1.1 Continue to review and use information we have in our organisation about BSL users to support access to services.
- 1.2 Consider how to capture communication needs at first contact and share (with permission) across Council services as needed.
- 1.3 Work with BSL users and partners to improve access to information about services, e.g. information in BSL
- 1.4 Work with Council Services and partners to promote the use of ContactScotland-BSL
 - Work together to train staff how and when to use ContactSCOTLAND-BSL
 - Work with partners and ContactSCOTLAND-BSL to improve awareness of the service with BSL users.
- 1.5 Work with partners to train staff who work with BSL users.
 - Set up online Deaf and BSL Awareness training for all staff.
 - Promote BSL classes to staff
- 1.6 Continue to provide Communication Support Services for Deaf people to provide access to Highland Council services and information.
- 1.7 Continue to promote and review the Communication Support Service.
- 1.8 Work with partners to engage with BSL users to give updates on BSL Plans (at least once a year).
- 1.9 Positively promote BSL as a language and aim to remove any stigma associated with BSL.



Action Plan section 2

Family Support, Early learning and Childcare

The BSL National Plan says: “*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*”

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 2.1 Provide Deaf/BSL Awareness to “early years” staff who work with BSL users.
- 2.2 Provide information about resources available in BSL so that staff can meet the needs of families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child, including Grandparents and other siblings.
- 2.3 Make sure families of D/deaf or Deafblind children have access to locally and nationally developed BSL resources and advice.
- 2.4 Provide specialist services to families with a D/deaf or Deafblind child to support the move into nursery and also into school.
- 2.5 Deaf parents/carers may avoid parents’ information evenings and so advice on appropriate supports to include them more will be created.
- 2.6 Make sure that BSL users who are parents/carers have access to communication support services for access to information and advice. Key information should also be available online so that parents can revisit this as required.
- 2.7 Make sure that families of D/deaf or Deafblind children have access to communication support services for access to information and advice at the earliest possible stage.
- 2.8 If needed, a Child Plan will be developed and actions will be recorded which will include where reasonable adjustments are required to meet the needs of the child. A summary could be made available in BSL if the parent/child also had a literacy difficulty.



Action Plan section 3

School Education

The BSL National Plan says: “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”

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 3.1 Continue to lobby for Deaf people to be allowed to access teacher training and become positive role models.
- 3.2 Continue to contribute to CRIDE (Consortium for Research into Deaf Education) and highlight the recognised examples of good practice in Highland. CRIDE collect information on the level of BSL held by teachers and support staff working with D/deaf and Deafblind pupils in schools.
- 3.3 Continue to promote and raise awareness of the importance of BSL through the work of Highland Council’s Deaf Education Service.
- 3.4 Where appropriate, raise awareness in schools to ensure a BSL friendly school for parents and pupils through a whole school approach.
- 3.5 The Highland Council will contribute to any future BSL initiatives from SQA. This comes from having previous involvement of delivering SQA units.
- 3.6 To support parents and young people who use BSL:
 - Highland Council will continue to publicise the use of their Communication Support Service.
 - Highland Council will provide training and awareness to schools on how they can make sure parents who use BSL know how they can be involved in their child’s education
- 3.7 Build on good practice in Highland and continue to include and promote BSL as part of the 1+2 languages initiative.
- 3.8 Roll out a programme of training for schools to use Highland’s 1+2 BSL Introductory pack. This started in September 2018 and will continue until summer 2020).
- 3.9 From August 2018 we will *pilot new National Qualifications in BSL as they become available from SQA.*
- 3.10 Ensure robust transitions planning and signing support for deaf/Deaf young people and BSL users in line with Additional Support for Learning legislation.



Action Plan section 4

Training and Work

The BSL National Plan says: *“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”.*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 4.1 Make sure pupils and carers know where they can find information in BSL for:
 - Advice and guidance about their career and learning choices
 - Information on transition process.
- 4.2 Work with partners who deliver skills and employment services
 - Work with employer groups already supporting employability
 - Let people know where they can get advice on the needs of BSL users
- 4.3 Work with partners to prepare, deliver and monitor transition plans for BSL users.
- 4.4 Raise awareness of the UK Government’s ‘Access to Work’ (AtW) scheme with;
 - Managers, and
 - staff who use BSL (including those on Modern Apprenticeships) so that they can benefit from the support it provides.
- 4.5 Ensure Highland Council’s information on reasonable adjustments in the workplace and recruitment includes reference to AtW and BSL.



Action Plan section 5

Health (including social care), Mental Health and Wellbeing

The BSL National Plan says: “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 agree with this long-term goal.

The Lead Agency model means that NHS Highland is commissioned to deliver adult social care in Highland. By 2024 we will:

- 5.1 Make sure that ‘Looked After and Accommodated’ children and young people have access to BSL support and are supported to take part in the planning process.
- 5.2 Work with partners to set up BSL and Deaf awareness training for staff who work with young BSL users. Ensure a good level of deaf awareness and where possible and appropriate, basic BSL for staff who work with people who are deaf/Deaf.
- 5.3 Utilise and promote the use of BSL services within NHS Highland and consult with NHS Highland Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to make sure that:
 - children and young people who use BSL and who need Psychological Therapies have their communication needs met including access to specialist mental health using BSL.
- 5.4 Work with partners to make sure that any local work to deal with social isolation explicitly considers the needs of BSL users. Ensure key messages available online are available in BSL.
- 5.5 With partners, review public protection information. Provide key messages from this in BSL.



Action Plan section 6

Transport

Transport: The BSL National Plan says: 'BSL users will have safe, fair and inclusive access to public transport and the systems that support all transport use in Scotland'

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

6.1 Engage with the BSL community in Highland to inform and develop prioritised transport and travel information. This will be provided in accessible formats e.g. easy to read materials.

6.2 Promote and encourage the use of ContactSCOTLAND-BSL to enable access to transport information.

6.3 Think about the needs of BSL users when developing the transport pages of our website.

6.4 Promote the use of booking systems for our community transport operators and other demand-responsive transport contracts which are appropriate for BSL users

6.5 Encourage and support transport operators in driver awareness training to assist BSL users.

6.6 Encourage BSL users to use the HITRANS Thistle Assistance Card. This card lets drivers know that support is needed by users of public transport. The aim is to improve communication between bus drivers and passengers.

6.7 Make sure that school transport providers are given awareness training if any pupils on their routes are BSL users, and that school transport/ bus escorts also receive training.



Action Plan section 7

Culture, Leisure, sports and the Arts

The BSL National Plan says: *“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”*

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

7.1 Improve access to BSL information where possible on:

- Culture, arts, leisure, local sports facilities and sporting opportunities.

7.2 Think how the use of technology could improve the experiences of BSL users.
For example, in new developments such the Castle Hill Development in Inverness.

7.3 Work with partners to set up BSL and Deaf awareness training for High Life Highland staff who work in culture, leisure, arts and sport.



Action Plan section 8

Justice

The BSL National Plan says: 'BSL users will have fair and equal access to the civil, criminal and juvenile justice systems in Scotland'

We agree with this long-term goal.

By 2024 we will:

- 8.1 Continue to ensure BSL provision is available for Criminal Justice service users.
- 8.2 Raise awareness amongst partners supporting the work of the Highland Community Justice Partnership and the Children's Hearing system in Highland of BSL support services.



Action Plan section 9

Democracy

Democracy: We share the long-term goal for democracy 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”

By 2024 we will:

- 9.1 Promote the Access to Elected Office Fund locally. This can meet the additional costs of BSL users who want to stand for selection or election in local or Scottish Parliament elections.
- 9.2 Review the format of information about elections and the election process.
- 9.3 Work with partners to develop and promote accessible guidelines for activities and events.
- 9.4 Capacity building –
 - work with partners and Deaf BSL users to develop and encourage independence
 - make sure partners on the nine local Community Planning Partnerships work with each other and Deaf BSL users so they can actively contribute to the local plans. Raise awareness of how to book BSL/English interpreters and the need to book early.
- 9.5 Raise awareness about ContactSCOTLAND-BSL with elected members

Next steps

- The final version of the Highland Council's BSL Plan is published in BSL and English on the Council website.
- A detailed timetable for actions will be developed with identified lead officers. The plan will be monitored annually and progress reports made every two years.
- We will consider comments we receive about the Highland Council BSL Plan at any time.
- We will continue to engage with BSL users as we carry out actions in the Plan.
- We will keep people up to date with our progress.

Contact for comments and further information

We welcome comments on Council's BSL Plan at any time. The Plan is published in BSL (video clips) and English. Both versions are on the Highland Council website at www.highland.gov.uk/BSLplan.

To comment or find out further information about the Highland Council BSL Plan, contact: Rosemary Mackinnon, Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX, tel 01463 702094, email rosemary.mackinnon@highland.gov.uk

BSL users can use ContactSCOTLAND-BSL <https://contactscotland-bsl.org>