

Report to:	MSMTM
Report by:	Claire Stephen, Head of Policy and Information (HOPI)
Meeting Date:	2 June 2023
Subject/ Title: (and VC no)	British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2018-2023 – report and review for 2022-23 (VC187983)
Attached Papers (title and VC no)	British Sign Language (BSL) Plan 2018-2023 (VC 142122)

Purpose of report

- The purpose of this report is to provide the annual report and review of the [Scottish Information Commissioner's \(Commissioner\) British Sign Language Action Plan 2018-23](#) (BSL Plan) (as per the C1 Governance Reporting Arrangements – VC 110086).

Recommendation and actions

- I recommend that:
 - The Senior Management Team (SMT) note the contents of this report and that a revised BSL plan is required by 23 October 2023, requiring an addition to the Operational Plan 2023-24.
 - The SMT agree that no revisions are made to the BSL Plan at this time, but resources to focus on three outstanding commitments as set out in the report.
 - This Committee Report (CR) is published in full as set out in paragraph 20.

Executive summary

Summary

- In October 2018, the Commissioner's BSL Plan 2018-2023 (VC 107919) was published, in compliance with sections 2 and 3 of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, and following consultation with British Sign Language (BSL) users. The Plan sets out the actions which the Commissioner will take over the period 2018-2023 to improve access to information and services for BSL users.
- The Commissioner is committed to revising this BSL plan at least every five years, that is by 23 October 2023.
- As of end 2022-23, of the total 14 commitments in the Commissioner's BSL Plan:
 - delivery of six commitments are complete, but as a living plan we continue to monitor and identify opportunities for improvement/development wherever possible;
 - activity is underway with further action required on five commitments;
 - action is yet to be taken and still required for three commitments.

6. The three commitments requiring action in 2023, are:
- Ensure our policies of promoting diversity in the workplace are widely disseminated among BSL user communities (HOCS)
 - Make training available to staff who would like to learn BSL (HOPI)
 - Work with public authorities subject to the Freedom of Information legislation to consider the needs of BSL users in their Freedom of Information processes (HOPI)

Impact as result of the COVID-19 pandemic

7. As a result of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and team capacity changes, progress against each action point has not been as significant as hoped across 2022-23. Planned actions will be reviewed to take account of available resource and to ensure delivery against each commitment in the most efficient method possible.
8. As set out in the BSL Plan the Commissioner was due to contribute to the national progress review (interim report) on the National BSL Plan, originally scheduled for 2020 but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The review has now taken place, but conclusions derived from Local Authority feedback.

Commitment progress to date:

9. The status, progress and actions taken regarding each commitment in the BSL Plan to date are set out in the table below.

Commitment	Status	Action taken to date
i. Develop links with BSL user groups and adopt best practice guidelines. This will include advice on how to involve BSL users in the design and delivery of our services	Underway – further action required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSL community /user group landscape in Scotland and appropriate routes for engagement explored across 2019 • Action to develop partnership and communication/involvement channels required
ii. Make information about our functions, and how to access and use our service, accessible to BSL users, including producing new BSL materials.	Action complete – continually identify resources for translation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Your Right to Know” translation videos developed, published and promoted across website and Twitter in January/February 2020 • Use website analytics to identify most access resources suitable for translation. • Translation of ‘Beginner’s Guides to FOI’ to be considered
iii. Begin a programme of work to increase the accessibility of our website and social media channels.	Action complete, but continue to monitor and improve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial accessibility audit of website completed March 2020 • New website project delivered a number of accessibility improvements – new website launched on 7 April 2022, BSL translation videos of Your Right to Know much more prominent • Continued programme of general accessibility improvements across website to ensure compliance with Public Sector Accessibility Regulations conducted (non-BSL specific)
iv. Promote the use of the Scottish Government’s nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay services ‘contactSCOTLAND-BSL’, which allows BSL users to contact	Underway – further action required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured access to Scottish Government contactSCOTLAND-BSL relay service for BSL interpreting and made staff aware that they may receive enquiries through this service, in 2018. • Staff awareness to be refreshed in 2023. HOPI

<p>public and third sector services, and for these services to contact them</p>		<p>attended refresher seminar early 2023, as a consequence, BSL user groups reminded that SIC adopted and uses contactSCOTLAND.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contactSCOTLAND-BSL logo, links and information added to relevant pages across website. • Reference to contactSCOTLAND-BSL to printed guidance and resources for the public across 2022_23 • Action to further promote use of the service required
<p>v. Train our staff to use online interpreting video relay services (such as contactSCOTLAND-BSL), and explore the potential for greater use</p>	<p>Underway – further action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory deaf awareness training held for all staff BSL use, in October 2018. • Action to further train staff, as appropriate, on use of interpreting video relay services required. • Refresher training to be provided in 2023 by an external service provider. • contactScotland awareness to form part of induction template.
<p>vi. Raise awareness amongst all staff of the needs of BSL users through training and induction programmes</p>	<p>Underway – further action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory deaf awareness training held for all staff, including awareness of BSL use, in October 2018 • Refresher training to be delivered at next ASM. • Action to further embed appropriate training required
<p>vii. Put in place systems for the obtaining of BSL / English interpretation and translation services, including interpretation for deaf-blind BSL users</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured access in 2018-19 to Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body / Officeholder contracts for the provision of BSL / English interpreting and video services, meaning Commissioner can respond to enquiries and appeals from BSL users • Secured access in 2018-19 to the Scottish Government contactSCOTLAND-BSL telephone relay service for BSL interpreting and made staff aware that they may receive enquiries through this service • Translation service identified and used for “Your Right to Know” videos across 2019-20
<p>viii. Respond promptly to requests from BSL users to arrange BSL / English interpreting when required for access to our services.</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requests to date • Actions for (vii) above will support when required in future
<p>ix. Ensure our policies of promoting diversity in the workplace are widely disseminated among BSL user communities</p>	<p>Action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action to promote effectively required – dependent on commitment (i) above
<p>x. Make training available to staff who would like to learn BSL</p>	<p>Action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory BSL training sessions delivered by Deaf Action may be suitable to any staff that are interested: BSL taster course online Deaf Action
<p>xi. Develop and make available</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSL versions of “Your Right to Know” available

<p>online BSL versions of key guidance including “Your Right to Know”.</p>		<p>and published on website January/February 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action to identify needs and develop further information for BSL users required
<p>xii. Increase awareness of and invite applications from BSL users for our External Engagement events.</p>	<p>Underway – further action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FOI awareness training session held for Dunfermline Hard of Hearing group 2018/2019 Action to identify further opportunities required
<p>xiii. Consider the needs and requirements of BSL users in our planning for public engagement meetings and outreach events</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed and added detail on considering BSL requirements to organisational event planning checklist template in January 2019, ensuring all future events run by Commissioner comply No large events run directly by Commissioner since implementation of plan – but requested organisers of the two major FOI conferences that the Commissioner participates in each year do consider needs and requirements of BSL users. Commissioner has funded the provision of inclusive communication at three Scottish Public Information Forums (hosted by the Campaign for Freedom of Information Scotland– one of the Commissioner’s key external events with civil society and general public.
<p>xiv. Work with public authorities subject to the Freedom of Information legislation to consider the needs of BSL users in their Freedom of Information processes</p>	<p>Action required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of the BSL materials available on our website to network groups.

BSL Plan review

10. I recommended that no changes are made to the BSL plan at this time.

Risk impact

11. The risks associated with non-delivery of appropriate communication and equalities activity are recognised within our existing risk management frameworks. The Commissioner’s BSL Plan helps to mitigate these risks. There is also a risk that the Commissioner will not have sufficient and appropriate resources available to meet relevant commitments in the BSL Plan. Actions to mitigate these risks will be considered by the SMT when developing the Operational Plan 2023-24 to include appropriate actions and planning scoping to determine the resource required.

Equalities impact

12. The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 is to promote the use and understanding of BSL. In addition, our BSL action will help reduce inequality and barriers experienced by speakers of BSL in relation to public sector functions and services. The focus of the Commissioner’s BSL plan is therefore on ensuring equitable access to the Commissioner’s functions and services, through the use of BSL.

Privacy impact

13. No new direct privacy impacts are identified within this report. However, the SMT will consider whether a Data Protection Impact Assessment is required for any individual implementation activities as planning for them is undertaken.
14. As noted in previous reports on the Commissioner's BSL Plan, there are privacy implications in providing interpreting support to individuals to access the Commissioner's services and functions. These must be taken into account in the confidentiality provisions in the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB) (169332) and Scottish Government contracts for interpreting services.

Resources impact

15. Meeting commitments set out in the Commissioner's BSL Plan may require additional resources, depending on the final actions, as set out in the agreed implementation plan. Where this may be the case, these will be scoped and determined in advance by the SMT so any required projected future costs may be included in future budget submissions to the SPCB as necessary.

Operational/ strategic plan impact

16. Delivery of the commitments in the Commissioner's BSL Plan formed part of Operational Plan 2021-22 and will be reflected in the Operational Plan 2023-24.

Records management impact (including any key documents actions)

17. None identified.

Consultation and Communication

18. The BSL Plan was developed with input from the SPCB, other parliamentary Officeholders and from feedback gathered from BSL users. As many commitments in the plan depend on greater engagement with BSL users, we expect that consultation will be a regular feature of delivery of the BSL plan objectives.
19. The Head of Enforcement and Head of Corporate Services were consulted on the draft of this CR. Joint work across the SMT, as a whole, is required in order to progress the three actions across coming year, specifically via the agreed implementation plan for the remainder of plan timeline.

Publication

20. I recommend that this CR is published in full.