

## Equalities Participation Network – 30 May 2024

**Present:** Myshele Haywood (GREC), Shola Ajide (Fountain of Love), Matt Carter (AHSCP), Maria Grazia Cascio (Aberdeen Uni), Roslynn Fowler (Aberdeen Action on Disability), Linzi Harrow (ACC), Ells Mchaffie (Guide Dogs), Baldeep McGarry (ACC), Mary Rasmussen (Guide Dogs), John Whitfield (Deafblind Scotland).

**Apologies:** Fay Morrison, Hussein Patwa, Carol Hannaford, Marion McLaughlin.

---

### **Speaker: Baldeep McGarry, ACC Equalities, on the council's BSL plan**

Baldeep gave an overview of the British Sign Language (BSL) Plan for Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (presentation attached), which is currently open for feedback.

#### Additional Points:

- Many BSL users consider themselves a linguistic minority, rather than being disabled. The Council is developing their plan in line with this.
- More information on the BSL plan, and other BSL services, can be found here: [aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/people-and-communities/british-sign-language](https://aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/people-and-communities/british-sign-language)  
This includes videos in BSL of key points and information, and ACC is continuing to add BSL materials to this section of the website.
- Myshele looked up newly-released data from the 2022 Census: 5404 people in Aberdeen City (2% of the population) can use BSL, and 126 use BSL as their main language (0.05% of the population).

#### Questions/Discussion

- Roslynn – there is an NHS project where two people are teaching nurses to use BSL.  
Baldeep – one of the people involved is Len, who is also working on a deaf history project, with a book coming out in October.
- Matt – were the videos created by the Equalities Team?  
Baldeep – they were created by a wider group of ACC staff, who are learning BSL. Volunteers each took on a different chapter.
- Matt – there are unpaid carers who would like to film their stories.  
Baldeep – will check with Grace about supporting this.
- John – in the Census data, what does 'being able to use BSL' actually mean?  
Myshele – will check on the question wording.
- **Update:** 2022 was the first time there was a question specifically about BSL: "Can you use BSL?" Because the question did not specify level of skill, this will include people who are

fluent, like interpreters, teachers in deaf schools, and children of deaf adults, and also people who have some BSL skills but are not fluent.

- Mary – has a neighbour who is 93 years old and just passed their Level 8 BSL exam – it's never too late to start.
- Ells – a person at NESS who uses two hearing aids was called for jury service, only to find out the court didn't have a hearing loop system. Everyone agreed this seems like a ridiculous oversight, given the number of people with hearing impairments, especially as they get older. NESS wrote a letter to the court about this.  
John – BSL users have been excluded from jury service, supposedly because court proceedings are confidential. Interpreters should be allowed, as they are bound by confidentiality and BSL users have a right to participate the same as everyone else.
- John – the BSL Act covers tactile communication for deafblind people, and Deafblind Scotland promotes tactile BSL learning for people who are blind or visually impaired and losing their hearing, and for BSL users who are losing their eyesight, so they can continue to communicate.
- Baldeep – during the BSL plan consultation, there were 6-7 hearing folk from the council in a room full of BSL users, and they got a sense of the kind of exclusion they experience – knowing that communication is happening all around and not being able to take part in it.

---

### What's New? (Equality Issues to highlight)

Mary – **issues with moving the bus stops on Union Street** – concern about consequences for people with visual impairments and other disabilities.

Baldeep – Disability Equity Partnership (and EPN) have met with folk from the City Centre Master Plan – might be useful to invite them to another meeting?

Roslynn – bus drivers need more training to know where the new bus stops are – AAD have had reports of folk being told the wrong information and being forced to walk long distances to where they need to go. Mary has heard similar.

Shola – **negative impacts of Low Emissions Zone (LEZ)** – buses and vans run by charities have been rejected for exceptions, so can no longer drive through the city centre. This causes increases in time and cost for regular activities. For example, Fountain of Love (beside Union Square) runs a job club in Tillydrone – it's now a very long route to get there. **Is there any funding available for charities to get new buses?**

Ells – **city centre changes exclude a lot of people** – each 'minority' group is seen as separate (disabled people, ethnic minorities, older people, poor people, etc), but taken as a whole, a large part of the population are excluded from their own city because of cost or practical difficulties.

Baldeep – suggested writing to First Bus about issues with drivers, also mentioned Save Union Street and the importance of participating in consultations.

Roslynn – multiple groups could write a joint letter to amplify their voices, or draft a standard letter that multiple people could use.

Mary – has seen a lot of defensiveness when people complain about access issues.

Baldeep – highlighted a NESS training session with elected members, to help them understand the experience of sight loss.

---

### **Fire Service Consultation**

Roslynn recently attended a meeting about restructuring the Fire and Rescue Service. With a lot less fires than there used to be, the service is considering how they need to change focus. The consultation is open until 30 June:

[firescotland.gov.uk/get-involved/consultations/shaping-our-future-service-your-say/](https://firescotland.gov.uk/get-involved/consultations/shaping-our-future-service-your-say/)

---

**Date of next meeting: Thursday 27 June, 4:00-5:00pm**

**Topic: new data from the Census, plus 'spotlight' on Guide Dogs (and assistance dogs)**