

# **BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group Response to the “See Hear: A strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland” consultation**

## **BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group**

Between 2000 and 2011, the Scottish Government Equality Unit convened and chaired the British Sign Language (BSL) and Linguistic Access Working Group. This working group continues to meet and members are representatives from deaf organisations, education providers working in the field of deafness and Equality Unit staff. The purpose of the working group was and is to enable the Government to discuss issues at the heart of linguistic access for Deaf BSL users, Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing people. The Working Group continues to meet to take forward the priorities identified in *The Long and Winding Road: A Roadmap to British Sign Language and Linguistic Access in Scotland* which was published in 2009.

## **Response**

We, as the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group, welcome the opportunity to comment on the strategic framework for meeting the needs of people with a sensory impairment in Scotland.

We all work in the field of deafness apart from the Scottish Sensory Centre. Many of us were involved in the previous strategic action plans put together by the Scottish Government in 2004 and 2007.

While we agree with the principles of the strategic framework, there is a great concern that deaf people have not been consulted before this document was put together and recommendations made. The document itself appears confused as it seems to be trying to be all things to all people rather than taking a more holistic view of people with very different needs. The document tells us that

“this strategic framework covers cradle to grave sensory impairment and is set against a background of increasing demand...It has been developed in the context of a number of wider policy and practice expectations, and has been directly informed by the views of a wide range of stakeholders who have contributed their views on current service provision and made suggestions for future developments.”

Many of us have gathered the views of deaf people in Scotland and this joint approach does not reflect what they want in 2013. In fact, many deaf people have said that this joint approach is a step back in time rather than a plan for the future. This does not represent a change of attitude for deaf people in Scotland, as Deaf BSL users, Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing people have taken this stance for as long as their opinion has been sought.

The paper does not seem to follow other recent government strategies which are clear that service delivery should be carried out as a result of co-production and that monitoring and evaluation should be part of the co-production process. As many deaf people have multiple problems accessing services that are fully accessible to them and their families, it is especially important that deaf people are fully involved in the design, implementation, delivery and evaluation of any strategy for deaf services.

As a group we agree with the need for an audit of services and that there should be a national screening programme, and there is also a need for awareness training. But as our concerns

are based on the needs of Deaf BSL users, Deafblind, Deafened and Hard of Hearing People, we feel that there should be three distinctive strands to this framework –

1. Deaf people – including Deaf BSL users, Deafened and Hard of Hearing people;
2. People with a sight loss; and
3. Deafblind people – who have very specific needs that are greater than those people who are deaf and/or have a sight loss and are quite distinct. Their needs are greater than simply being a combination of a loss of hearing and a loss of sight. (Deafblind Scotland)

“Access for deafblind people cannot be adequately addressed by approaches designed for either deaf or for visually impaired people. Solutions for deafblind people have to be tailored to their distinct needs depending on their mode of communication and on the context.” The Long and Winding Road: A Roadmap to British Sign Language & Linguistic Access in Scotland. 2009

We recognise that some people will require services for both their lack of sight and lack of hearing as they grow older, but these people may also require additional services to address other significant disabilities or age related illnesses.

We would like to see this strategic framework put together using a co-production model where Deaf BSL users, Deafened and Hard of Hearing people, Deafblind people and people with a sight loss, and their carers/families are equal partners with the government, organisations and agencies involved; and can have real influence on the services and approaches to be governed by this strategy.

**Lilian Lawson OBE**

**Chair**

**BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group**

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