

T: 0131-244 2328
E: angela.bonometry@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

All Public Services in Scotland

Deaf Networks

Other Sensory Impairment Networks

SCVO/Scottish Government Third Sector Policy Division



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Dear Colleague

**CONTACTSCOTLAND BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE (BSL)
ONLINE VIDEO RELAY INTERPRETING SERVICE PILOT
FIRST ANNIVERSARY – ROLL OUT TO THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS**

[contactSCOTLAND](#), the online British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting service is celebrating its first anniversary. contactSCOTLAND uses video relay interpreting to enable Deaf BSL users to have increased access to public services in Scotland.

Until now, the service could only be used to contact public sector agencies, however, to mark the success of the pilot one year on, today the Minister for Sport, Health Improvement and Mental Health, Jamie Hepburn, MSP has announced a further service improvement by extending access to third sector organisations - comprising community groups, voluntary organisations, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives and individual volunteers. More details are set out in the attached [Press Release](#).

Progress

In the last year there has been a sustained increase in the uptake of the service and calls are now averaging 100 per week. The bulk of calls have been made to GP surgeries and local authority services. Calls have also been made to a range of other public authorities, including Police Scotland, the Scottish Court Service, NHS 24, Historic Scotland, Student Awards Agency Scotland, Scottish Legal Aid Board and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. In addition, Deaf BSL users have said that the service is allowing them to participate in civic society in the same way as everyone else and that they are starting to have increased independence, empowerment and choice over their lives.

In light of the successes the Minister has agreed that we now have a sustainable, cost effective and more widely accessible service which should move from the pilot phase to full implementation. A Scottish Government procurement exercise to select a suitable supplier is well underway and an Invitation to Tender is expected to be issued shortly.

The announcement made today to extend access to third sector organisations is as a direct result of listening and responding to service user feedback posted on the contactSCOTLAND website. This decision is supported by evidence from the recent review [available here](#) of the pilot service where BSL users have suggested that options for extending access to additional services be considered.

Marketing and Communications

As indicated in the review there is an ongoing need for awareness raising and outreach work to increase the use and understanding of contactSCOTLAND. With this in mind, it is important that we work collaboratively and use our respective national and local networks and other communication channels to raise awareness and promote this innovative service, among staff, stakeholders and service users. Ministers' expectations are that communication and marketing activities should be aligned to wider organisational communication plans to ensure effective delivery of outcomes for the people of Scotland. I would encourage you to work with communications/equality colleagues to agree and implement your communications approach.

At a national level, we have refreshed the contactSCOTLAND website to reflect feedback received throughout the pilot. The website will be a key communication channel to inform stakeholders about access to third sector organisations (also in BSL) and is designed to give service users a better understanding of what is on offer and how they can make the most of it. In addition, we have introduced social media to the website – twitter and facebook - to improve engagement with service users and stakeholders

As part of our drive to promote the roll out to the third sector we are working closely with colleagues in Scottish Government third sector policy area as well as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO), the umbrella body for the voluntary sector. Marketing activities to support the roll out include news in SCVO members e-bulletin which is received by 1,700 member charities, twitter, Third Force News and contacts associated with the Scottish Accessible Information Service.

Action/Enquiries

I would be grateful if you could please circulate this letter widely to staff, stakeholders and service users and encourage everyone to use every available communication channel to raise awareness of this innovative service. As a starting point, it may be an idea to add the contactSCOTLAND link to your own website and download and display, in relevant places, the contactSCOTLAND posters which are available on the website. These simple steps will ensure that our Deaf community get fair and equal access to public and voluntary services in the same way as others.

More information about how the BSL Video Relay Interpreting Service works can be found on the contactSCOTLAND website: www.contactscotland-bsl.org.

If you wish further information, in the first instance, please send an email via the contactSCOTLAND website which can be accessed by clicking on the [CONTACT](#) tab on the far right of the home page.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely



ANGELA BONOMOY
Specialist Adviser