

Local Government and Communities Committee

Draft Budget 2018-19

Submission from the Scottish Council on Deafness

The Scottish Council on Deafness (SCoD) is a membership based, umbrella body specialising on the thematic topic “deafness”. Working to a human rights based, person centred approach, SCoD identifies a spectrum of deafness with four key pillars: Deaf/British Sign Language users; Deafened; Deafblind and Hard of Hearing. Within the broad pillars there are different barriers experienced by people which require different solutions. See www.scod.org.uk.

Our members are drawn from the public, third and private sectors.

We note at 2011 census:

12,533 people using British Sign Language at home
355,000 described themselves as Deaf or Deafened

Other evidence suggests around 4,000 Deafblind people and around 600,000 hard of hearing. 20% of the population has some sort of hearing loss and there is an age related bias to the figures. It is a significant minority group.

The Call for Views – general comment

Thank you for opening the budget to scrutiny and comment. We are grateful for the opportunity to be involved.

We wish to flag up a number of basic points:

Communication is central to the Scottish Government fulfilling its duties and helping citizens enjoy their rights. These duties are shared by public bodies and more can be done by local and national government though their purchasing power to provoke change.

We believe that communication is generally undervalued in current Scottish society and there is insufficient recognition of the impact of age related aspects of deafness in future years. There is also the need to do more to **prevent some** types of deafness and promote and support the visual language know as British Sign Language (BSL).

Our membership recognises it is a time of huge financial concern however **we must support transformational change** so that deaf people and others with communication needs are able to integrate in society as active citizens.

We do not seek to comment on all the points raised in the guidance and are happy to underpin our views with rights based arguments if required.

Specific Comment

We do not think service redesign is going nearly far enough or at any reasonable pace to effectively improve access, inclusion and integration of over a million deaf people.

1. We advise more could be achieved by widening the position on BSL to ensure progress is made in the wider context of deafness, not simply the narrower focus on language. Research indicates that BSL language development must include broader communication skills.
2. We advise building stronger bridges between Inclusive Communication, deafness and disability to realise communication for all.
3. Giving sensory issues more weight through planning and review of integrated health and social care would also lead to better outcomes for people (rather than conditions).

Specific “Ask”

We are aware of the potential impact inclusion and improved communication will have on local government and seek consideration of the creation of 32 local communication “pots” to promote and support change which recognises the additional costs to level the playing field around engagement, volunteering and employment.

Janis McDonald
Chief Officer