

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Progress update on British Sign Language (BSL) Charter</b>	
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> March 2018</b>	
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities &amp; Housing</b>	
<b>Contact Officer:</b>		
	<b>Name:</b> Emma McDermott	<b>Tel:</b> 291577
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>	

## **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Following feedback received during the 2016 Fairness Commission from Deaf and British Sign Language (BSL) User communities in the city, the Commission's recommendations included:

*'To improve access and rights for Deaf people who use British Sign Language, the council should sign up to the British Deaf Association's (BDA) Charter for British Sign Language and implement the five pledges set out within it.'*

- 1.2 Agreement to sign the BDA's British Sign Language (BSL) Charter was made at Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities & Equalities Committee in March 2017. This report provides an update over the last twelve months.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Committee note the progress that has taken place against the pledges contained within the BSL Charter during phase 1 of the project.
- 2.2 That committee approve the action plan (appendix 1) which has been drawn up from feedback received during phase 1 engagement with local D/deaf communities.
- 2.3 That committee instructs officers to bring a further progress report, on the delivery of the action plan.

### **3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The BSL Charter is designed as a vehicle to remove direct and indirect discrimination, empower local D/deaf communities and resolve conflicts between service providers and D/deaf people.
- 3.2 The BDA's process to comply with the Charter has several phases:

- official and public acknowledgement by the council to sign the BSL Charter
- self-assessment of what the council is currently doing to provide services to the D/deaf community (appendix 2)
- building relationships with local D/deaf communities to establish sustainable engagement pathways to gather views and experiences; identify gaps in service provision; explore solutions; look creatively at resources and partnership working
- action planning to identify improvements to service delivery
- implementation of actions (phase 2)
- review (phase 3)

3.3 The BSL Charter comprises five pledges and although the council initially undertook to sign up to three of the pledges within the first stage of the project:

- i) Consult with the local D/deaf community on a regular basis
- ii) Promote learning and high quality teaching of BSL from suitably qualified teachers
- iii) Support Deaf Children and families

The remaining two pledges below have also been included in phase 1 engagement work and progress has been made in these areas:

- iv) Ensure access for D/deaf people to information and services
- v) Ensure staff working with D/deaf people can communicate effectively in BSL.

#### **4. PROGRESS OVER THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS**

4.1 Agreement to sign the BDA's BSL Charter was made at Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities & Equalities Committee in March 2017 which was attended by D/deaf people.

4.2 The council officially signed the BSL Charter on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children during their community fete. Signatories were the Mayor, Cllr. Mo Marsh, Leader of the Council, Cllr. Warren Morgan, Mr Paul Redfern on behalf of the BDA and Miss Ayeshaa Denny, a student at Hamilton Lodge School, who signed on behalf of the D/deaf community.

4.3 The council's Communities Equality & Third Sector Team (CETS) and the CCG has jointly held two 'Working Together' engagement workshops with D/deaf representative groups, voluntary and community sector and service providers and commissioners from across the city. The focus of the workshops was on 'how the council and CCG can make sure people who are D/deaf have a good experience every time they use a service' and 'how can we work together to make this a reality'. The workshops have provided an excellent medium to build relationships, understand the barriers the community faces when trying to engage with the council and forge partnerships with providers to improve service delivery.

- 4.4 In October the CETS team also held a specific engagement event to look at the pledges within the BSL Charter, particularly focusing on learning and teaching of BSL and support for Deaf children and their families. The event was held at Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children and was hosted by DeafCOG, a local representative BSL user representative group. Approximately fifty people attended the event which also included parents of Deaf children, teachers and Deaf students.
- 4.5 At the engagement events we heard feedback that D/deaf people found it difficult to communicate with staff at the council's reception areas. In response the CETS team have organised to trial SignLive<sup>i</sup> in Bartholomew House Customer Service Centre for a period of six month starting in March 2018. Using the links made with D/deaf community, some individuals will 'mystery shop' the new provision.
- 4.6 To help improve communication in BSL for staff, the council's Workforce Development Team has commissioned basic BSL awareness courses. Fourteen members of staff attended the first one which took place in September/October 2017. The next course started in January/February 2018 has fifteen members of staff currently attending. Cllr. Warren Morgan will attend the basic BSL course starting in June 2018.
- 4.7 The council has developed an Accessible Information Guide for staff based on the Accessible Information Standard for Health and Adult Social Care Services. The guide was developed to improve our communications with service users and colleagues and defines a consistent approach to make sure people with a disability, impairment or sensory loss can access and understand the information they need. It includes suggestions to improve the way staff communicate face-to-face, on the phone and in writing, as well as advice on producing information in different formats such as large print, audio, easy read, translations or braille, or providing BSL interpreters and other communications support.
- 4.8 As a result of the engagement workshops – a Deaf Liaison Group, comprising local D/deaf representative groups, has been set up and held its first meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018 at which it was agreed to work collaboratively for the benefit of D/deaf communities in the city. The group will meet three times a year and at the first meeting it was agreed to take forward five specific projects:
- i. Social media mapping and management – to establish the best ways to communicate with the D/deaf community
  - ii. Complete place and contact map with individual contact details - this piece of work was originally started during the Deaf Engagement Workshops in 2017.
  - iii. Consultation on D/deaf individuals experience of NHS primary care services including GPs, referrals to hospital and pharmacies
  - iv. Consultation on D/deaf individuals needs for and access to advocacy
  - v. Mystery shopping during the six month trial of SignLive at Bartholomew House Customer Service Centre (see 4.5)
- 4.9 The council is carrying out an audit of all assistive hearing systems in their civic buildings to improve awareness, maintenance and general communication. BHCC Property & Design Team has recruited a technical officer who will carry

out an audit of hearing systems in the council's civic buildings, and be responsible for regular testing; identifying faults and suggesting alternatives to ensure civic buildings are fully accessible for D/deaf customers and colleagues. The council's Access Officer will also be publishing guidance outlining how to use portable loops, permanent induction loops, infra-red portable and permanent system etc.

- 4.10 As a result of feedback from the Hamilton Lodge School engagement event, the council's Sports Facilities Team has worked with our commissioned service provider, Freedom Leisure, to ensure that all city leisure centres and Mytime active golf courses have had either a counter hearing loop installed at reception or a portable loop is available. They have also booked Action for Hearing Loss to conduct Deaf Awareness training for sixteen Freedom Leisure staff in March 2018.
- 4.11 Revenues and Benefits are currently working with SURDI, a local D/deaf representative group, on a Digital Inclusion project to improve the digital service provided to D/deaf communities.
- 4.12 Next steps will be to move to phase 2; including agreement of the action plan and submitting this to the BDA for guidance; leading to delivery of the action plan.

## **5. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 5.1 The recommendation for the council to sign up to the BSL Charter was one of the fifteen Fairness Commission recommendations prioritised by the cross party working group in late 2016 and agreed at NCE committee in November 2016. Therefore no other options were considered.

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The council's Communities Equality & Third Sector Team (CETS) and the CCG has jointly held two 'Working Together' engagement workshops with D/deaf/BSL Users, representative groups, voluntary and community sector and service providers and commissioners from across the city. The focus of the workshops was on 'how the council and CCG can make sure people who are D/deaf have a good experience every time they use a service' and 'how can we work together to make this a reality'. The workshops have provided an excellent medium to build relationships, understand the barriers the community faces when trying to engage with the council and forge partnerships with providers to improve service delivery.
- 6.2 The setup of a Deaf Liaison Group will ensure D/deaf representation and feedback to the community as laid out in the terms of reference (appendix 3).

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Any resource implications arising from the action plan, will be met from within existing budgets or referred to Policy, Resources & Growth Committee for approval. The

costs of liaising with the BDA, completing the self-assessment and developing the action plan have been met from within the resources of the Communities, Equalities and Third Sector (CETS) service.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Michael Bentley:*

*Date: 07/02/18*

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 Signing the BSL charter is a commitment to undertake a self-assessment with the support of the BDA and with a view to creating an action plan to ultimately achieve one or more of the 5 pledges. The report indicates that this work will be undertaken within existing officer resources.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 280218*

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 The purpose of the report is to ensure the D/deaf and BSL Users community have an opportunity to be involved and engaged in council services/plans and that council services are not inadvertently or actively discriminating against these people.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 Communities in which different groups of individuals face inequality and exclusion and/or where relations between groups are not good are unsustainable socially and economically and present both an immediate and long term financial, legal and reputational risk to the local authority.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.5 There are no crime & disorder implications.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.6 Signing the BSL Charter provides the council with the opportunity to challenge current practice and explore options for improving engagement and service provision for D/deaf and BSL Users.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.7 The Brighton & Hove Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) includes a section on sensory impairments that notes the needs of the community. Signing the BSL Charter will support the priorities cited within the JSNA, including improving accessibility for hearing impaired users of social and health care services and increasing awareness amongst public and universal services with regard to communication and accessibility.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 Signing the BSL Charter provides the council with the opportunity to show leadership and shared learning in improving engagement and service provision for D/deaf community in Brighton & Hove.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. 2018-19 Action Plan
2. Self- Assessment review of internal findings 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 - March 2018
3. Terms of Reference Deaf Liaison Group

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

1. None

### **Background Documents**

1. None

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<sup>i</sup> SignLive is a deaf-owned organisation based in the UK providing online video interpreting services through its Video Relay Service (VRS) and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). This allows Deaf people anywhere in the world to communicate with anyone, at any time, using an app which connects them to a qualified British Sign Language Interpreter.