

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove City Council British Deaf Association Charter for British Sign Language (BSL)</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>13<sup>th</sup> March 2017</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities &amp; Housing</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Emma McDermott</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 291577</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

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

1.1 As part of its work in 2016, the Brighton and Hove Fairness Commission received feedback from Deaf and British Sign Language (BSL) User Groups in the city that they were unable to access council services or take up opportunities to be consulted to the same extent as other groups in the city due to language barriers.

1.2 As a consequence, 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.'*

1.3 Following a review of current practice by the council against the five pledges of the BDA Charter, this report outlines how well the council is doing against some of the pledges, where improvement and action is required to meet other pledges and recommends the council sign up to the Charter and commit to the BDA's process for improvement.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

2.1 That Committee, on behalf of the council, sign up to the BSL Charter and work with the British Deaf Association and local Deaf and BSL groups towards fulfilling the requirements of one or more of the pledges under the charter as set out below.

2.2 That Committee instructs officers to bring a report back to committee in 12 months on progress against the pledges.

**3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 The BDA Charter is designed as a vehicle to remove direct and indirect discrimination, empower local Deaf communities and resolve conflicts between

service providers and Deaf people. Its aim is to increase awareness of Deaf and BSL issues and provide better educational opportunities for Deaf children.

3.2 The BDA asks local authorities and public services to – work with the BDA to sign the Charter; hold a signing ceremony; prepare a self-assessment in conjunction with the Deaf and BSL User community to identify which pledges it wishes to sign up to delivering against. This includes identifying areas that need development and creating a three year action plan. The council is not required to meet all the pledges to sign up to the charter.

3.3 Each pledge under the BSL Charter requires a commitment to recognise and value all its customers including those who use BSL, and overcome the disadvantages that Deaf people using BSL face. The five pledges are:

- 1) Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services – *Deaf people will get the same quality of provision, information and consultation as everyone else*
- 2) Promote learning and high quality teaching of BSL –*Family members, guardians and carers of deaf children and young people and local authority employees will have access to BSL lessons from suitably qualified teachers*
- 3) Support Deaf Children and families –*at the point of diagnosis of deafness, health and education providers will offer parents informed choices, including a bilingual/bicultural approach*
- 4) Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively in BSL – *customer facing staff will have basic BSL skills. Specialist staff will have higher-level BSL skills so they can deliver good services to Deaf people without needing interpreters.*
- 5) Consult with the local Deaf community on a regular basis – *Deaf people should have the right to be consulted on services or changes to services that affect them and to have input into consultations alongside other forums and user groups.*

#### 4. REVIEW OF CURRENT ACTIVITY

As an initial start to the process of signing the BSL Charter and identifying which pledges the council might considering adopting, we have carried out a review by considering:

- what the council is already doing to provide services and engage with local Deaf and BSL Users. We have done this by carrying out internal research across council departments. See appendix 1 for an analysis of current findings against each of the pledges.
- the experiences of other local authorities who have already signed the BSL Charter (appendix 2)

## **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. Given the council is not obliged to meet all the pledges to sign up to the charter when carrying out the self-assessment, resource implications and maximising improvement for Deaf and BSL users will be considered when deciding which pledge(s) to commit to work towards.

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

- 6.1 Following the Fairness Commission a meeting with Deaf and BSL User representative group, DeafCOG, was held. It was agreed that the council would complete a review of what Deaf and BSL User support exists across services and what work it was felt was already being done in line with the charter. Simultaneously the community group would carry out its own research into how the council works with members of the Deaf and BSL User community to jointly identify next steps and priorities. Due to restructuring DeafCOG has not concluded this feedback.
- 6.2 Full engagement is proposed between April – June 2017 in line with the Communities & Third Sector Commissioning Prospectus 2014-2017 which includes commissioning for engaging with the wider Deaf and BSL Users, hard of hearing, deafened and deafblind community

## **7. CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 This is an opportunity for the council to strengthen relations and explore options to improve the quality of engagement and service provision to Deaf and BSL Users, hard of hearing, deafened and deafblind community. The Brighton & Hove JSNA 2015 estimated in Brighton & Hove that there were -
- 6,086 people aged 18-64 with a moderate or severe hearing impairment, and 50 people aged 18-64 with a profound hearing impairment.
  - 16,069 people aged 65 or over with a moderate to severe hearing impairment and 462 aged 65 or over with a profound hearing impairment

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

### Financial Implications:

- 8.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from signing the BSL Charter. Any resource implications identified during the self-assessment and three year planning stage will be reported to relevant committee for decision. Liaising with the BDA, completing the self-assessment and developing the action plan will be delivered within the resources of the Communities, Equalities and Third Sector (CETS) service.

*Finance Officer Consulted: Name: Monica Brooks*

*Date: 15/02/17*

#### Legal Implications:

- 8.2 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. Any new corporate budgetary or policy commitments would need to be referred to PRG for approval.

*Lawyer Consulted: Name: Elizabeth Culbert*

*Date: 8<sup>th</sup> February 2017*

#### Equalities Implications:

- 8.3 The purpose of the report is to ensure the Deaf and BSL Users, hard of hearing, deafened and deafblind 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:

- 8.4 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:

- 8.5 There are no crime & disorder implications.

#### Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 8.6 Signing the BSL Charter provides the council with the opportunity to challenge current practice and explore options for improving engagement and service provision for Deaf and BSL Users.

#### Public Health Implications:

- 8.7 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:

- 8.8 Signing the BSL Charter provides the council with the opportunity to show leadership and shared learning in improving engagement and service provision for Deaf and BSL Users in Brighton & Hove.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Review of internal findings
2. Examples of external councils' involvement with the BSL Charter

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

1. None

### **Background Documents**

1. None

