

Corporate Management Team

Charter for British Sign Language Progress

1. Purpose of report

To inform CMT on the Council's progress against the five pledges of the Charter for British Sign Language

2. Information and analysis

Background

On 23 September 2014 the Council signed the Charter for British Sign Language to show our commitment to advancing equality and reducing discrimination for deaf and hard of hearing people in Derbyshire.

The Charter was developed by the British Deaf Association (BDA) to support local authorities and other public sector organisations to identify and develop improvements in access to information and services for Deaf people. i.e. Users of British Sign Language. The Council agreed with the BDA that our Charter would be broader and include all groups of people with hearing loss.

The Charter sets out five key pledges to improve access and the rights of Deaf people, to eliminate unlawful discrimination (both direct and indirect), advance equality of opportunity and ensure good relations with Derbyshire's Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

The pledges commit the Council to:

- ensuring access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to information and services
- promoting learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language and other methods of communication used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing people
- supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and families
- ensuring staff working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people can communicate effectively in British Sign Language and other methods of communication
- consulting with our local Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities on a regular basis

Work towards the Charter has been overseen and monitored by the Deaf Charter Working Group, which includes officers from across all Departments,

Deaf and hard of hearing employees, an officer from the BDA and more recently, the Chair of the North Derbyshire Deaf Forum.

Progress against the pledges

The Council has made good progress in relation to the Charter, through new innovations, the commissioning process and on a business as usual basis.

Each year since signing the Charter we have provided a report on progress to local Deaf and hard of hearing people, via an event held at County Hall, Matlock. These events have also been used to consult with Deaf and hard of hearing people over service developments such as the trialing of SignLive, a video based BSL service which enables Deaf people to communicate over mobile phone, tablet and computer with the aid of a BSL interpreter.

A number of key actions have been undertaken against each pledge since 2014 to help deliver the Charter. These include:

Pledge 1: To ensure access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to information and services. The Council has

- Increased the amount of information on our website in British Sign Language including video
- Provided a team of officers to directly work to with and support deaf and hard of hearing people across Derbyshire, who also advise other colleagues and departments
- Ensured that there are officers in teams across the Council serving the public with BSL skills such as at Chesterfield Library
- Provided more information and reading materials at libraries in British Sign Language including on video
- Fitted hearing loops and other equipment in public areas to aid communication
- Delivered specialist training in relation to domestic abuse and related services using Deaf Hope, a national support agency for Deaf victims of domestic abuse
- Produced posters for reporting domestic abuse and hate crime with information for Deaf and hard of hearing people through the use of BSL, reporting via SMS text messaging
- Fitted flashing safety alarms fitted and regularly tested at all refuges commissioned by the Council to ensure the safety of Deaf and hard of

hearing residents in collaboration with Deaf Hope, who are also providing other advice in relation to safety and reasonable adjustments

- Refreshed our Policy for Equality and Diversity and in developing a new set of equality objectives via our new Strategy for Equality and Diversity, we have specifically confirmed our commitment to working for equality for Deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Recommissioned the deaf communication service that provides translation support is also asked to signpost users to other services or advocacy services as appropriate.
- Commissioned two services to support people who are deaf or hard of hearing covering the north and south of the county, providing rehabilitation support
- Provided Deaf and hard of hearing residents with equipment so they are aware of visitors to their home and can stay safe (flashing door bells etc)
- Made available a signed video advising people about staying safe from crime and anti-social behaviour
- Made it possible for residents and customers to do more online on our website such as renewing library books, report problems with the roads and street lighting, and contact us by SMS text messaging

Pledge 2: To promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language and other methods of communication used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. The Council has:

- Continued to train employees in British Sign Language and gain formal qualifications
- Trained staff to be able to use Makaton
- Developed online Deaf Awareness Training and training on communicating with Deaf customers for employees to help improve their awareness and understanding of the issues affecting deaf and hard of hearing people
- Ensured all tutors used by the Council to deliver BSL course are highly qualified and experienced in teaching BSL
- Offered people attending Council training the opportunity to have the support of interpreters and note takers as necessary – examples include corporate training courses and community safety courses

Pledge 3: To support Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and families. The Council has:

- Increased the amount and range of reading materials and other information in BSL for families, including for parents with their children, such as storybooks, BSL Flashcards and lets Sign dictionaries, information relevant to the school curriculum
- Ensured that children and family events at Lea Green are accessible to Deaf and hard of hearing children and their families
- Funded improvements to facilities at Aldecar schools to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing children

Pledge 4: To ensure staff working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people can communicate effectively in British Sign Language and other methods of communication. The Council has:

- New contract established with local provider to ensure communication support for our customers and people using our services, which includes BSL interpretation
- Arranged other services such as note taking to support employees and customers when needed, including when they take part in consultation, training and to help them access our services
- Continued to develop the role of our Deaf Team so that they work out in the community and promote access to our services
- Commissioned a BSL video translation service to enable the Deaf community to contact the council using BSL and obtain the information and advice about council services that they require

Pledge 5: To consult with our local Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities on a regular basis. The Council has:

- Supported the work taking place to establish the North Derbyshire Deaf Forum and to get more deaf people taking part in public life and to have their say on local services. This has included attendance at meetings by senior officers and Elected Members.
- Taken additional steps to include deaf and hard of hearing people in consultation taking place on changes to Council services resulting from budget efficiencies
- Consulted with the North Derbyshire Deaf Forum prior to the commissioning of domestic abuse services to ensure the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people would be met by providers and reflected in the service specification

- Consulted with the Forum and local service users over the introduction of a trial service for SignLive
- Held events for local Deaf people to report back on progress against the commitments within the charter
- Ensured that a representative of the BDA and North Derbyshire Deaf Forum sit on our Charter Working Group to an ongoing partnership approach to work for the Charter

Next Steps

A small survey is currently being carried out with members of the Deaf community, service users and partners to assess whether the Authority needs to extend its action plan. Their feedback will be used to identify further actions going forward.

An option exists under the Charter to undertake a validation process involving the BDA and costing around £1,500. At this time it is not suggested that the authority would benefit from undertaking the validation, especially if the feedback from our consultation identifies a high level of satisfaction with what has been done so far, and relatively few further actions are identified as needing to be done.

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that CMT:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. CMT receives a further update following the completion of consultation with proposals for how the work should be taken forward.

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