

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
STRATEGIC POLICY AND BUDGET**

4 March 2014

Report of the Chief Executive

Commitment to the Charter for British Sign Language

1. Purpose of Report

To seek approval for the Council to sign up to the British Deaf Association's Charter for British Sign Language.

2. Information and Analysis

British Sign Language (BSL) is the main language used by Deaf people in the UK. It is used by people who are profoundly deaf or born deaf, and is recognised by Government as a distinct community language in its own right. The exact number of people who use BSL in Derbyshire is uncertain. There are a range of estimates and some information is available in the Census 2011. Local and national Deaf organisations have suggested that the Census significantly under-recorded the number of BSL users, with many people indicating their first language as English instead. Derbyshire is believed to have a higher proportion of BSL speakers, in part, because of the existence of the Royal School for the Deaf in Derby.

The Charter for British Sign Language has been developed by the British Deaf Association (BDA) to help improve access for Deaf people to public services, access to education support for Deaf children, and to promote recognition of BSL by public service providers, employers and schools. Organisations signing up to the Charter are required over time to work towards a number of standard pledges to drive improvements in these areas. These are to:

1. Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services
2. Promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language
3. Support Deaf children and families
4. Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively in British Sign Language
5. Consult with our local Deaf community on a regular basis

Derbyshire County Council has a good record of supporting Deaf people to access its services, education support and of supporting its Deaf employees, but further improvements could be made in a number of areas which are covered by the Charter. Approximately 75% of expenditure by the Council each year on translation and interpretation is on BSL interpreters. Many of the Council's public buildings have been fitted with hearing loops to support people who are hard of hearing. Courses in BSL are widely available locally and a number of employees have already been supported to obtain level 1 or 2 qualifications by the Authority. Deaf employees are supported with a range of reasonable adjustments, including the provision of interpreters, so they can carry out their duties. In recent years a number of events have been held to celebrate Deaf Awareness Week which takes place each May.

Feedback from Deaf service users and organisations has highlighted a number of areas where BSL is not always available, thereby limiting choice and access to services, education and employee support. The local branch of the British Deaf Association (BDA) has recommended that the Council adopt its Charter as a means of identifying and implementing improvements over time. The BDA has indicated its willingness to support the Council to implement the pledges within the Charter. It has also said it would support the Council's inclusion of people who are 'hard of hearing' and permit some modification of the pledges.

If the Council were to adopt the Charter it would need to work with the BDA Officers and local Deaf organisations, and undergo a validation process carried out against the improvements made by the BDA. As one of the pledges relates directly to education, the Authority will need to gain the involvement of county schools supporting Deaf children in working towards the pledges.

Next steps

The Authority will need to publicly sign up to the Charter and develop a corporate action plan for fulfilling the pledges. The action plan will be co-ordinated by a working group of officers from across the Authority, with progress reported to the Council's Diversity and Inclusion Board and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Policy and Budget, in her capacity as champion for diversity and inclusion.

3. Financial Considerations

It is not envisaged that there will be any significant costs associated with committing to the Charter, and that progress can be achieved by altering the way in which the Council currently approaches a range of issues. The small costs associated with the validation process can be met from the existing budget for equalities which is managed by the Policy and Research Team.

Public

The Council's draft new Policy and planned procurement of translation and interpretation services will assist in ensuring the availability of BSL interpreters when these are needed by Deaf people accessing Council services.

4. Legal and Human Rights Implications

The Council is under a public duty to advance equality of opportunity for disabled people, which includes people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Signing up to the Charter should assist the Council to meet its public sector equality duties.

5. Equality and Diversity and Human Resources Considerations

Signing up to the Charter for BSL and working to improve access to information, services, and consultation will help ensure fair treatment and equality for the county's Deaf and hard of hearing communities. Further increasing the number of employees with BSL skills would require support through budgets available in departments for learning and development.

6. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors have been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

7. Key Decision

No.

8. Call-In

Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decision in the report?

No.

9. Officers' Recommendation

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member approves the proposal that the Council sign up to the Charter for British Sign Language.

Ian Stephenson
Chief Executive