

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

CHARTER FOR BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE

Purpose of the Report

1. This report proposes that the County Council agree to sign the British Deaf Association British Sign Language (BSL) Charter.

Background

2. In 2003 BSL was recognised as a language in its own right in the UK having previously been perceived to be merely a “signed” representation of the spoken word.
3. British Sign Language is the first or preferred language of many Deaf people in the UK. In 2009/10 there were approximately 970 Deaf adults in Nottinghamshire and a further 760 in Nottingham City. From the 2011 census approximately 300 Nottinghamshire residents identified British Sign Language as their primary language.

Charter for British Sign Language

4. The County Council has received a request from the Nottinghamshire Deaf Society and the British Deaf Association, East Midlands for the Council to sign the British Sign Language Charter.
5. The purpose of the BSL Charter is to promote better access to public services for Deaf communities and to help public agencies meet their legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010.
6. The aims of the Charter are to help local and public authorities to:
 - § Remove direct and indirect discrimination against Deaf people;
 - § Empower local Deaf Communities;
 - § Resolve conflicts between service providers and Deaf people;
 - § Increase awareness of Deaf issues and BSL issues;
 - § Provide better educational options for Deaf children.
7. The Charter is made up of five pledges that have been reviewed by the Council’s Corporate Equality Group and considered consistent with the Council’s Strategic Plan Value of treating people fairly. These are:

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

8. Signing the Charter for British Sign Language is seen as an indication of an organisation's commitment to build on good practice and improve capacity to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and build good relations with the Deaf community. The County Council is committed to equality of opportunity and improving access and it is proposed that the Council sign the charter. A copy of the Charter is attached, appendix A.
9. The Charter is supported by a toolkit to achieve better life outcomes for Deaf people and their communities and a self-assessment process to assist Councils adopting the Charter as part of the public sector Equality Duty. The Corporate Equality Group will explore the use of these resources and oversee activity to implement the Charter commitments.
10. A formal signing of the charter and public endorsement will be organised in recognition of the Council's support and commitment.

Other Options Considered

11. Within the East Midlands Nottingham City Council, Nottingham University Hospitals, Leicestershire County Council and Derby City Council have all signed up to the Charter. The Council could opt to not sign the charter.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

12. Adopting the Charter is consistent with delivering the values established in the strategic Plan 2014 – 2018, specifically "Treating people fairly" and the Council's commitment to accessible services.

Statutory and Policy Implications

13. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below.
14. The actions to be carried out as a result of signing the Charter and working towards the recommended criteria will improve access by Deaf children and adults to Council services and are consistent with the public sector equality duty and the council's Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that

1. Policy Committee agree that the County Council sign the British Deaf Association British Sign Language (BSL) Charter.

Councillor Alan Rhodes
Leader of the Council

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Matthew Garrard, Policy, Performance and Research Team Manager

Constitutional Comments (LMcC 21/08/2014)

Policy Committee has authority to approve the recommendation set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (PM 21/08/2014)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

British Sign Language Charter, Toolkit and Self Assessment documents

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected: All