

**From:** Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care  
Penny Southern, Interim Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health

**To:** Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee – 18 May 2018

**Subject:** **BRITISH DEAF ASSOCIATION CHARTER FOR BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of Paper:** Adult Social Care and Health Core Directorate Management Team Meeting – 18 April 2018

**Future Pathway of Paper:** None

**Electoral Division:** All

**Summary:** This report has been written in response to a time limited debate on the British Deaf Association Charter for British Sign Language at a KCC County Council meeting in December 2016. It presents evidence of how the Council is currently meeting the five pledges within the Charter and identifies areas for ongoing and further improvement to improve Deaf people’s access to services. Whilst the Council is doing much to deliver on the pledges it concludes that elements remain aspirational at this time.

Recommendation: The Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- a) **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the progress made on implementing the British Deaf Association pledges;
- b) **NOTE** the recommendations for improvement and the plan for them to be included within the work of the Sensory Collaborative and Sensory Strategy Implementation Plan; and
- c) **NOTE** an update report on progress against the British Deaf Association pledges will be presented to the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee by July 2019.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Deaf community is recognised as a cultural and linguistic minority group with its own language, British Sign Language (BSL). In 2003 the Government officially recognised BSL as a language in its own right and as an indigenous language used in the UK.
- 1.2 The British Deaf Association (BDA) is asking local and national services across the UK, in the public, private and voluntary sectors to sign up to their Charter for British Sign Language. The Charter sets out several key pledges which aim to promote better access to public services for Deaf communities.

- 1.3 In Kent a motion was put forward for a time limited debate at the County Council meeting on 8 December 2016:

*“This Council fully supports the aspirations behind the British Deaf Association’s Charter of British Sign Language (BSL) and agrees to sign up to the Charter and to implement their five pledges to improve access and rights for the Deaf BSL users. ”The following was resolved: “That this Council fully supports the aspirations behind the British Deaf Association’s Charter of British Sign Language (BSL) and agrees to investigate the implications of both signing up to the Charter and to implementing their five pledges to improve access and rights for Deaf BSL users. Further, the appropriate Cabinet Member is requested to submit a report to Adult Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee within 12 months on progress made with implementing the pledges.”*

- 1.4 This report presents the evidence of how the Council currently meets the standards and the work being undertaken to improve access and rights for Deaf BSL users. It also makes recommendations where appropriate for further ongoing or further improvements to meet the pledges.
- 1.5 A meeting was held with the Chief Executive of the BDA and an agreement made to set up a Partnership Working Group to look at the pledges and work with the local Deaf community. The BDA were subsequently unable to provide a member of staff to assist with this work. The local Sensory Services social care team has consulted with the local Deaf community and their feedback has been included in Appendix One.

## **2. The Pledges**

### **2.1 Consult with the local Deaf Community on a regular basis**

**Pledge 1: 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 groups.**

- 2.1.2 When public consultations are held organisers are able to access the Council’s BSL interpreting service and can seek advice on the best way to support Deaf people who may be attending events.
- 2.1.3 The Council has undertaken a number of consultation events over the years with local Deaf people including for example a “We Share You Share” event to enable Deaf people to raise issues with local public services and engagement with local Deaf people in the development of the Sensory Strategy.
- 2.1.4 The Education Department’s Specialist Teaching and Learning Service (STLS) Sensory Service sends service users an annual questionnaire to gain service user views and has recently been holding consultation events for families.
- 2.1.5 A new pilot project the Deaf Well Being and Access project was established in April 2017 and this has resulted in the establishment of a Deaf forum and

significant engagement with local Deaf people in Thanet, including in partnership with Health. As part of this work a Sensory Services Facebook page has been developed which has promoted two-way communication and given a platform to advertise consultations.

2.1.6A Deaf Community Worker has been employed part time to work with the Deaf community in Thanet where there is a high number of Deaf people. This role has been to work to empower the local Deaf community and to work alongside them to improve their access to services. The Deaf Community Worker supported by a Deaf forum and has run a number of workshops in conjunction with other public services. The project has been running for a year and has recently been evaluated and found to be successfully delivering change.

*“The Deaf Community Worker has helped us to be stronger and more confident.”* (service user comment)

2.1.7 It has recently been agreed that this project will be extended to cover the whole of Kent, with the employment of a full-time post.

2.1.8 **Recommendation One** To continue to build on the work of the Deaf Community Worker on a county wide basis in terms of involving Deaf people meaningfully in improving and developing services.

2.2 Ensure access for Deaf People to information and services

**Pledge 2: Deaf people will get the same quality of provision, information and standards, on a par with others in the wider community.**

2.2.1 Deaf people can face significant barriers when trying to access information or services such as language barriers and lack of awareness. Many Deaf people are often unable to access written information.

2.2.2 The Council has developed clear policy and guidance for staff to ensure it meets the new Accessible Information Standard which requires health and social care to provide information in a range of formats to meet the needs of disabled people, including BSL.

2.2.3 The Council's Sensory and Autism Services Unit manage a public partnership contract for sign language interpreting for Deaf and deafblind people on behalf of other public bodies in Kent including Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, Kent Community Health Foundation Trust and Dover District Council. The interpreting service is provided by the Royal Association of Deaf People (RAD) and only qualified and registered interpreters are used. This contract is held up nationally as an example of Best Practice. All council services have access to this contract including Kent schools so that Deaf people can have equal access to services.

2.2.4 New technologies are being explored as a way to meet the information and access needs of Deaf people including video interpreting and the use of Skype.

The Sensory Services Facebook page provides information for Deaf people in BSL.

- 2.2.5 Gateway “drop ins” are run across the county by Sensory Services where Deaf people can be assisted to understand information or gain access to services with the help of practitioners skilled in BSL. These are highly valued by the Deaf community. A specialist advocacy service provided by RAD has also been commissioned which provides Deaf people with independent access to services.
- 2.2.6 Deaf people do still experience limited access to general KCC public information which is not provided in BSL. Videos produced by the Council generally do not have subtitles or have BSL interpretation. There is a need to improve in this area.
- 2.2.7 Another area for further development is ensuring staff receive BSL Awareness /Deaf Equality training, including information about how to communicate with Deaf people. Some training is provided by the Council. For example, the STLS Sensory Service provides Deaf Awareness training in schools with deaf children and the Social Care Sensory Services teams provide some awareness training but this is limited.
- 2.2.8 **Recommendation Two:** To continue to work with the Council’s Marketing and Digital team to improve access to information and services for Deaf people including sign video, use of sub titles on videos, and BSL video clips. Earlier this year, Sensory Services met with the Communications Team to discuss the BDA Charter and look at how the Council can continue to improve its Digital Accessibility. Several work streams were identified, and it was agreed that work on compiling a library of BSL clips for the KCC website would be undertaken. Sensory Services will identify some priority areas to start with and will work with the Communications and Marketing Team to produce the videos. Work on commissioning Video Interpreting is also underway, and we will work closely with the Communications Team to ensure there is a suitable platform for this, and it doesn’t breach the Council’s firewalls or regulations. Various ways of how this could work have been discussed and details of how other Local Authorities are managing this have been sent to the Communications Manager. In addition, the Communications Team will continue to use subtitles on all films which are produced by the Council and uploaded onto our platforms.
- 2.2.9 **Recommendation Three:** To continue to develop the Council’s Interpreting Service and raise awareness across services of their responsibility to ensure meetings and contact with Deaf people is accessible.
- 2.2.10 **Recommendation Four:** To ensure all contracts involving the provision of Information and services ensure equality of access for Deaf people who use BSL.

## 2.3 Support for Deaf Children and Families

**Pledge 3: At the point of diagnosis of deafness, health and education providers will offer parents genuinely informed choices, including a bilingual/bicultural approach.**

2.3.1 Deaf children and their families require good communication from when the diagnosis of deafness is made. The BDA believes that the majority of Deaf children will realise their potential through a bilingual/bicultural approach to using BSL and English.

2.3.2 The STLS Sensory Service works closely with health colleagues in responding to New-born Hearing Screening referrals. Interventions, advice, support and information is provided in line with the level of hearing impairment and information is provided on the complete range of communication options including BSL. The STLS support families in learning to sign and provide a course called Let's Communicate for families of very young deaf children which explores communication options including BSL. The team also runs National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) "Family Sign Language" groups.

2.3.3 Teachers of hearing impaired children hold BSL qualifications, as do other staff working with deaf children and young people in schools such as Communication Support Workers and Teaching Assistants. Deaf children and young people are encouraged and supported to develop their skills in BSL on a daily basis and signing groups are held in some primary and secondary schools.

2.3.4 Opportunities are provided for deaf children to meet together and to meet with older deaf role models such as after school activities, Think Right Feel Good/Healthy Minds sessions, "Deaf Expo", the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) and Kent Deaf Children Society (KDCS) activities.

2.3.5 Kent is one of the few Local Authorities in the country who have a specific Sensory Children and Families team who are skilled in working with Deaf families and are qualified in BSL. The team is held up nationally as a Best Practice example. Qualified Social Workers work closely in partnership with Education and Health colleagues and the voluntary sector to address the needs of deaf children and their families, including addressing safeguarding concerns.

2.3.6 **Recommendation Five:** STLS to build further opportunities for BSL training in their programme of Continuing Professional Development and consider wider roll out of the Think Right Feel Good or Healthy Minds approach.

## 2.4 Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively in BSL.

**Pledge 4: Customer facing staff will have basic BSL skills. Specialist staff will have higher level BSL skill so that they can deliver good services to Deaf people without the need for interpreters.**

- 2.4.1 The Council has two well established specialist Sensory Services teams in social care for both children and adults who comprise staff skilled in BSL and with a good understanding of the Deaf community and Deaf culture. Practitioners have a minimum of BSL level 2 and several have higher levels. Staff are given regular opportunities to further develop their skills. The team has a long history of proactively recruiting d/Deaf staff and assisting them to qualify as Social Workers.
- 2.4.2 d/Deaf refers to someone who is Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. The term d/Deaf will be used throughout to include people who are Deaf (British Sign Language users), who were either born deaf or became deaf in early childhood and use BSL as their first or preferred language. The focus of this term is on the 'D' in Deaf to indicate that they have their own language and culture.
- 2.4.3 Hi Kent, provides a specialist assessment service for equipment for deaf older people and several of their staff are also qualified in BSL.
- 2.4.4 BSL interpreters are available through the Council's contract for other staff needing to communicate with Deaf people.
- 2.4.4 There is a need to improve the communication skills and Deaf awareness of frontline staff and as stated above improve access at the point of contact for Deaf people through Skype, Facetime or video relay service.
- 2.4.6 As stated above under Pledge 3 relevant staff within Education have BSL skills and there are opportunities for preschool, school and STLS staff to access the Council's BSL courses level 1 and 2.

## **2.5 Promote learning and high-quality teaching of British Sign Language**

**Pledge 5: Family members, guardians and carers of deaf children and Deaf young people and local authority/public service employees will have access to BSL lessons from suitable qualified teachers.**

- 2.5.1 There is a need for more BSL courses in order that more people have the opportunity to learn BSL.
- 2.5.2 The Council fund BSL training courses each year for parents of and professionals working with pupils who use BSL to access the curriculum. These are organised by the STLS Sensory Service. The BSL tutors are all Signature qualified and are fluent in BSL, two of whom are native users.
- 2.5.3 Adult Education commission BSL courses and parents/families and relatives are entitled to a 50% reduction fee on BSL courses.
- 2.5.4 Hi Kent, provide both Deaf Awareness courses and BSL Level 1 and 2 courses. These are provided on a regular and ongoing basis.

**2.5.5 Recommendation Six:** To further develop Deaf Awareness courses for council staff and ensure ongoing access to BSL skills training.

### 3. Conclusion

3.1 This report evidences good progress being made in implementing the BDA Charter's pledges. The Council can evidence some Best Practice examples including the Kent Public Partnership Interpreting contract for Deaf and Deafblind people, the provision of a specialist Children's Sensory Services team and the Deaf Well Being and Access project. The new Deaf Community Worker role, shortly to become a county wide post will be key in empowering the local Deaf community and continuing to improve their access to services.

3.2 However, there are a number of areas that require ongoing improvement which have been outlined within the six recommendations above. It is proposed that these recommendations for action are considered by the newly established Sensory Collaborative and built into the Sensory Strategy Implementation plan. Whilst the Council is fully supportive of the Charter and doing much to deliver on the pledges, elements remain aspirational at this time, particularly in a time of financial constraints.

### 4. Recommendations

4.1 Recommendation: The Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee is asked to:

- a) **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the progress made on implementing the British Deaf Association pledges;
- b) **NOTE** the recommendations for improvement and the plan for them to be included within the work of the Sensory Collaborative and Sensory Strategy Implementation Plan; and
- c) **NOTE** that an update report on progress against the British Deaf Association pledges will be presented to the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee by July 2019.

### 5. Background Documents

None

### 6. Lead Officer

Beryl Palmer  
Sensory and Autism Services Manager  
03000 415440  
[beryl.palmer@kent.gov.uk](mailto:beryl.palmer@kent.gov.uk)

Lead Director

Anne Tidmarsh  
Director Older People and Physical Disability  
03000 415521  
[Anne.tidmarsh@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Anne.tidmarsh@kent.gov.uk)