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| Report to: | EXECUTIVE |
| Relevant Officer: | Carmel McKeogh, Deputy Chief Executive |
| Relevant Cabinet Member: | Councillor John Jones, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Equalities and Diversity |
| Date of Meeting: | 26 th January 2015 |

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE CHARTER

1.0 Purpose of the report:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the benefits of signing up to the British Sign Language (BSL) Charter and to brief the Executive on recent consultation with the local Deaf community.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To sign up to all five pledges of the British Sign Language Charter.
- 2.2 To note the consultation outcomes and maintain the level of engagement between the Council and the Deaf community established by this consultation.
- 2.3 To request that the Boards of Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Operating Company and Blackpool Transport Ltd.
- a) consider the British Deaf Association British Sign Language charter, and
 - b) adopt each of the charter pledges relevant to their service.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 The British Deaf Association (BDA) promotes better access to public services for Deaf communities through their British Sign Language Charter. They approached Blackpool Council as a potential signatory along with the offer of free consultancy services. The service specific research associated with the British Sign Language Charter helps the Council to meet its Equality Objectives and general Public Sector Equality Duty as laid out in the Equality Act 2010. It also presents an opportunity to reduce current expenditure on ad hoc British Sign Language translation.

Signing the charter will illustrate that the Council believes equal opportunities can be achieved by working with the Deaf community, rather than taking decisions and designing services on their behalf.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options to be considered:

The British Deaf Association recognises that each local authority will have different priorities for the areas they serve, as will the local Deaf community in terms of their needs. The Council will have to consider the number of pledges it wishes to sign up to. This may be one pledge or all five. Consultations and feedback with the community and local authority recommend that signing up to all five pledges would be most beneficial.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is:
"Deliver quality services through a professional, well-rewarded and motivated workforce."

5.0 Background Information

5.1 Deaf people want to have equal access to services and access to British Sign Language /English Interpreters whenever they are needed. The Deaf community is a linguistic community with a rich history, identity, language and culture.

5.2 The British Deaf Association, in partnership with Deaf organisations and local authority officers, has written the British Sign Language Charter and toolkit to achieve equal access to services for Deaf people and their communities. It contains **five pledges**:

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.

5.3 The Charter aims to help the Council 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 opportunities for Deaf children.

5.4 The Charter also highlights good practice and will build Blackpool Council's capacity to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and build good relations with the Deaf community.

5.5 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

5.6 **List of Appendices:**

Appendix 3a- British Sign Language Charter Consultation Report
Appendix 3b- Equalities Impact Analysis

6.0 **Legal considerations:**

6.1 Signing the British Sign Language Charter will help the Council meet its general equality duty, which is set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This will be achieved by building Blackpool Council's capacity to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and build good relations with the local Deaf community.

7.0 **Human Resources considerations:**

7.1 None

8.0 **Equalities considerations:**

8.1 The Charter itself does not contain any adverse equality impacts. However, some may be identified when examining individual services. It is anticipated that dialogue with the Deaf community and the British Deaf Association and monitoring within the Charter action plan will allow the Council to remove these.

9.0 Financial considerations:

9.1 None

10.0 Risk management considerations:

10.1 None

11.0 Ethical considerations:

11.1 Signing the British Sign Language Charter will complement the following Council values:

- We are committed to being **fair** to people and treat everyone we meet with dignity and respect
- We take **pride** in delivering quality services that are community focused and are based on listening carefully to what people need
- We are **compassionate**, caring, hardworking and committed to delivering the best services we can with a positive and collaborative attitude

12.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

12.1 Under the guidance of the British Deaf Association, three community consultations were set up in different venues across Blackpool. They were promoted via local Deaf community, support and educational networks and the Council Communications team. Attendees for these consultations included members of the Deaf community, family and friends of the Deaf community and those that work with/ for the Deaf community.

12.2 Alongside these consultations an internal survey was devised by the British Deaf Association and Blackpool Council's Equality Officer and distributed to various departments across the Council.

Key issues identified

Charter

Pledge Summary of actions identified

- 1 Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services**
- Ensure staff receive British Sign Language Awareness/Deaf Equality training, including information about how to communicate with deaf people.
 - Use qualified and registered British Sign Language/English

interpreters.

- Adapt public information to be more British Sign Language accessible, for example on DVD or websites, and using technology such as SMS messaging, textphones, faxes and videophones/webcams.
- Ensure all public information is accessible to deaf British Sign Language users.

2 Promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language

- Ensure that the Council employs British Sign Language teachers who are native or fluent in British Sign Language and actively engaged with the Deaf community with a comprehensive knowledge of Deaf Culture.
- Provide opportunities for parents/guardians to learn British Sign Language with their children.
- Ensure young Deaf people are offered the opportunity to improve and accredit their British Sign Language learning.

3 Support Deaf children and families

- Ensure teachers, teaching assistants, communication support workers and other staff working closely with Deaf children have, or are working towards advanced British Sign Language signing skills.
- Provide opportunities for Deaf children to meet with Deaf peers and role models.
- Raise awareness of British Sign Language and Deaf culture within children's services and education.
- Ensure parents who are deaf are fully involved in our strategies for improving parenting skills.

4 Ensure staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively in British Sign Language

- Raise awareness amongst front-line staff of the existing British Sign Language interpreter booking procedure and Deaf awareness training.
- Explore using different technology such as British Sign Language information videos to assist with communication.

5 Consult with our local Deaf community on a regular basis

- Building upon links made during this consultation exercise, establish ways for local Deaf groups to feed issues into the Council.
- Commit to an annual/bi-annual open engagement event with the local deaf community.

As a result of the internal consultation, it was noted that a significant number of areas for action are already being addressed. Signing the Charter would help to highlight and promote the work already taking place in the Council (such as that of the Sensory Team) and educational settings. A more detailed examination of the actions can be found in the full report attached at Appendix 3a.

13.0 Background papers:

13.1 None

14.0 Key decision information:

14.1 Is this a key decision? No

14.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number:

14.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

14.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

15.0 Call-in information:

15.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

15.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

16.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: N/A Date approved: N/A

17.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

17.1

18.0 Executive decision:

18.1

18.2 Date of Decision:

19.0 Reason(s) for decision:

19.1 Date Decision published:

20.0 Executive Members in attendance:

20.1

21.0 Call-in:

21.1

22.0 Notes:

22.1