



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Community Safety Committee

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE CHARTER PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 09 June 2023

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with an update on the progress the Service has made as part of its commitments under the British Sign Language (BSL) Charter and its plans to progress this work further.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the content of the report
- Support the Service's commitment and approach to make its services more accessible to the deaf community.

CONTACT OFFICER

Name :	Damien West Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Tel :	0115 8388100
Email :	damien.west@notts-fire.gov.uk
Media Enquiries Contact :	Corporate Communications Team 0115 8388100 corporatecomms@notts-fire.gov.uk

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) signed up to the British Deaf Association's (BDA) British Sign Language (BSL) Charter in 2018, which aims to promote better access to public services for deaf communities. This has helped the Service focus its efforts to advance equality for its deaf communities. The five pledges are:
- **Pledge One:** consult formally and informally with the local deaf community on a regular basis;
 - **Pledge Two:** ensure access for deaf people to information and services;
 - **Pledge Three:** support deaf children and families;
 - **Pledge Four:** ensure staff working with deaf people can communicate effectively using British Sign Language;
 - **Pledge Five:** promote learning and high-quality teaching of British Sign Language.
- 1.2 In addition to this, the BSL Act, passed in April 2022, made BSL an official language in England, Wales and Scotland requiring public bodies to be accessible to BSL users.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The Service's commitment to the Charter has helped drive performance in this area over the last few years, enabling the organisation to review the way in which it communicates key messages and delivers essential services to the public.
- 2.2 The Service continues to promote equal access to services for all and has taken a range of measures to help keep its deaf communities safe. For example, in the last two years, the Service has fitted 637 accessible alarms for deaf residents.
- 2.3 The Service has also improved BSL access across its communication channels. Social media films have been produced with BSL interpretation and a dedicated webpage detailing information for deaf communities has been published by the Service.
- 2.4 In terms of emergency response, a communication guide has been developed in collaboration with Derbyshire and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Services to aid communication with deaf community members during emergencies and fire prevention activities.
- 2.5 The Service has also promoted the national 999 BSL Service via a partnership event with Nottinghamshire Police at Joint Headquarters. As part of the

Service's broader commitment to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into its activities, the 999 BSL Service was used as part of an operational exercise and will continue to be developed at other exercises throughout the year.

- 2.6 The deaf community was also a specific focus as part of the consultation process for the development of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan 2022-25.
- 2.7 Moving forwards, the Service will continue to advance equality for deaf service users. This will include:
- Exploration of technology to access on-demand interpretation services. There are several app and web-based BSL Services which would assist communication by crews and staff within the Service;
 - A focus on working with schools for deaf students to increase awareness of fire safety;
 - Broadening involvement and consultation with the deaf community to improve training for staff, improve the accessibility of existing communications channels and ensure more inclusive services for deaf residents.
- 2.8 Members of the Community Safety Committee will be updated on the progress the Service makes against the requirements of legislation and the Charter.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no human resources implications arising within this report.
- 4.2 In relation to learning and development, the Service is working hard to ensure that deaf equality becomes embedded into training and guidance for staff, in particular for customer facing roles and scenarios.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

An equality impact assessment has been completed for the adoption of the BSL Charter and indicates a positive impact for people with disability in relation to accessing the services of NFRS.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The BSL Act requires public bodies to make their communications more accessible to BSL users. The Service will continue to review the way in which it communicates, both internally and externally to ensure compliance with the legislation, but also to ensure that deaf residents are getting access to the key messages they need when they need it.
- 7.2 The advancement of equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it is a key element of the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010).

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

A failure to provide accessible services to the community being served can impact upon trust and confidence in public services. Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is cognisant of this as a risk to its reputation and ability to engage with its communities and service users.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 NFRS has worked with other fire and rescue services in the East and West Midlands regions on the production of its Communication Guide with Deaf Communities, there may be advantages in working collaboratively on some areas highlighted within this report such as embedding learning of responding to emergency incidents involving deaf community members.
- 9.2 NFRS works closely with partners locally and nationally to share, develop and implement best practice.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Note the content of the report.
- 10.2 Support the Service's commitment to continue to improve its services for the deaf community.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER