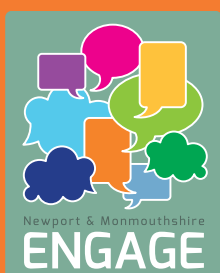


Deaf people's Access to Local Service providers

Has there been progress?



James Barnes-Miller

Access & Inclusion Officer for Newport and Monmouthshire

Email: participation.wales@bda.org.uk

SMS/Facetime: 07814 675639

Skype/ooVoo: jamesbm.bda

BDA Wales

GAVO Offices, Ty Derwen, Church Road, Newport NP19 7EJ

www.bda.org.uk

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Introduction

This report is part of the Community Voice Project which engages with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals living within the Newport City and Monmouthshire County boundaries. In autumn 2014, a report (Access to Local Services providers for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Newport and Monmouthshire) was produced to assess how Deaf and hard of hearing people access their local service provision and to identify any gaps in accessing provision. This follow-up report aims to explore whether or not access to provision has improved for Deaf and hard of hearing people in Newport and Monmouthshire in the intervening two years.

The Project Officer who carried out the survey is employed by the British Deaf Association (BDA). This is part of 'The Community Voice Project', one of the nine Community Voice projects in the ENGAGE boundaries of Newport and Monmouthshire. The ENGAGE projects are part of the successful Big Lottery application by Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) that aims to engage with people from all backgrounds to empower them to work with local service providers to ensure services are fully accessible to the local communities.

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Survey in Newport and Monmouthshire

In 2014, a survey questionnaire was used to ask Deaf and hard of hearing people about their opinions about local service provision including Social Services, emergency, health and housing provisions.

For this survey, a questionnaire for organisations was developed separately from the questionnaire for Deaf and hard of hearing people. This was to assess how organisations responded to the recommendations in the 2014 report and whether or not they carried out any work needed to engage with Deaf and hard of hearing people in Newport and Monmouthshire. In the questionnaire for the Deaf and hard of hearing people, the question is simple: "is your access to [service provider] better, still the same or worse?"

Over the summer period of 2016, the questionnaire specifically for organisations was sent out to staff who were already engaged with the project. Seven responded via email. 3 organisations did not respond.

In September 2016, two different meetings were arranged with two groups based in the ENGAGE boundaries:

Deaf Church based in All-Saints Church, Brynglas Road, Newport

Deaf Club based in Chepstow Road, Newport

48 Deaf and hard of hearing people were approached to participate in the survey. 34 agreed to participate. Some participants live in Gwent but not in the delineated project areas however, they were included because they use the same services as their Newport and Monmouthshire counterparts and they regularly attend both clubs in Newport. 14 people declined to be part of the survey.

Newport

As in 2014, the Deaf community continue to meet in a social club every Wednesday, run by an all-Deaf committee. The club attracts Deaf people from all Gwent not just Newport. The 2014 report noted that on every Thursday morning a non-deaf vicar provides an Anglican service in All-Saints Church in Brynglas Road for Deaf people. The Church club provides an opportunity to meet socially for those who do not feel socialising in evenings is suitable for them. A high percentage of the club members also attend the church service. However it is understood that the current vicar is due to retire at the end of 2016 and it remains to be seen whether or not this Church club continues in 2017. These two clubs are the central meeting points for Deaf individuals from Gwent seeking information and signposting to appropriate organisations and/or individuals with relevant information.

Monmouthshire

A preliminary survey carried out in 2013 prior to the main survey in 2014 confirmed that there is no Deaf community in this mainly rural and large county; there are isolated Deaf and hard of hearing individuals spread out all over the county. The survey findings in 2014 do not really support the County Council's claim that there are over 800 people with "hearing difficulties." One noteworthy fact is that these individuals apparently do not really interact with each other socially within the county. Deaf individuals living in Monmouthshire, as mentioned in the 2014 report, usually have to travel externally to participate in social activities in Deaf clubs based in other council areas such as Cardiff, Bargoed, Ebbw Vale, and Newport and even had to travel to England to interact with other Deaf people.

In the Project Officer's visits, 22 respondents attended the Deaf club and 12 respondents attended the Church Club.

All respondents answered in BSL. None of the respondents requested a Welsh Language version of the survey.

From the organisations contacted, responses were received from eight individuals representing those organisations.

All respondents answered in English. None of the respondents requested for a Welsh Language version of the survey.

The findings will be presented in the same order as in the 2014 report.

Social Services

Newport City Council Social Services team responded to the survey, Monmouthshire did not. The responses from Newport Social Services will be recorded here.

The Social Services in Newport reported that prior to the publication of the 2014 report, they had dedicated email and mobile phone contact points established and that they knew how to contact and book BSL interpreters for Deaf people.

However, they admitted that they *"has gone through a period of re-organisation and this is an opportunity now to re-engage with the community."* This is in line of the 2015 Welsh Government legislation, Social Services and Wellbeing Act. Newport Social Services also reported some internal changes to policies concerning how they commission third party providers *"which should have a positive impact on providing Information, Advice & Assistance."*

Newport Social Services would like Deaf people to contact them *"so we could look at what is available to offer support."* They are working with Customer Services that have interacted with Deaf people to provide a more accessible service for Deaf people. Both departments will continue to look at improving the accessibility to their services.

Deaf respondents provided a more negative perspective of Social Services in Gwent; 38% felt that the services have got worse in their view. However the comments indicated that the services have not actually got worse but that the respondents do not feel that they are accessing the services at all. An example of these comments is when a respondent said that they and their peers are *"losing support and help. [We] are feeling more isolated and depressed."* It is clear from some of the comments that as the social services are not physically visible to

them, leading them to think that the social services is not available to support them, e.g. *“There is no social worker, where are they?”*

44% of the respondents felt that their accessibility to the social services provision has not really changed in their view. One commented that the Social Services still are not really meeting Deaf people’s needs and that they need to engage with Deaf people more. Another respondent felt they are struggling to access the services as they *“need help with access with [BSL/English] interpreter.”*

3% felt that the services are better because a social worker visits Deaf church once monthly. However the visits are not really drop-in sessions; they are more of a supporting role for the Reverend and the members in the running of the Church Club and ensuring smooth management of the members’ transport.

Emergency Services

Welsh Ambulance, Gwent Police and South Wales Fire Services all responded to the survey.

Welsh Ambulance have a long-standing working relationship with both the BDA and the Deaf community all over South Wales, including Newport and Monmouthshire. They still are *“very keen to listen to people’s concerns and experiences and work with them”* to improve the accessibility to their services.

Through their work with Deaf people, Welsh Ambulance provided Deaf people with a series of resources that assist the Deaf people access their services such as a red medical information card which contains the medical information (which Deaf people fill in themselves) so the paramedics can read the information they require to ensure the quickest response to the emergency as possible. Another example is a Deaf and hard of hearing section in the Welsh Ambulance website which contains important information in BSL.

However, Welsh Ambulance *“are continually striving to improve access to our services for Deaf and hard of hearing people”* and they recognise that more is still needed to be done to achieve full access to the services for Deaf and hard of hearing people. Welsh Ambulance want to continue to maintain the working relationship with the Deaf community and other organisations to *“improve access to our service, our training opportunities for staff, and the information we develop.”* Some examples of this (as suggested by Welsh Ambulance) are training their staff in BSL, Deaf Equality and more BSL translation of the information available.

As with Welsh Ambulance, Gwent Police have a long-standing working relationship with both the BDA and the Deaf community in Gwent, including members of Newport Deaf Club.

Prior to the 2014 report, Gwent police regularly engaged with the members of the Deaf clubs across Gwent and collated feedback from the Deaf members which leads to Gwent Police setting up a non-emergency SMS text service. Gwent Police also launched a ‘Police Sign, Be

Safe' DVD "which focused on ensuring important crime prevention messages were accessible to Deaf people." Deaf Equality training were also provided to new Police Officers in their introduction programme and a number of staff were trained in BSL up to Level 3.

Gwent Police took the recommendation in the 2014 report on board and continued to engage with Deaf people in Newport and Monmouthshire. Their work include their 'our Voice' survey which helped them to set up their Strategic Plan which includes "a specific objective around ensuring our services are accessible to anyone that may face barriers when trying to communicate with us." An example of a joint engagement between Gwent Police and BDA include a visit by a group of Newport residents to their Control Room for them to have an understanding on how the Control Room works and an opportunity to give feedback about how to access the services provided by the Control Room. Two Deaf Equality/BSL Taster training sessions were also provided as part of Deaf Awareness Week. A member of the Deaf community is now on the Independent Advisory group that works with Gwent Police to improve access to their services.

However, Gwent Police recognise that gaps for Deaf people remain to be addressed, "most notably the range of reporting mechanisms that we currently offer and the efficiency of these services." A suggested solution for Deaf BSL users to report to the police using their first language is currently being looked at. Gwent Police would like the Deaf people to "take opportunities when offered to be involved" in working with them to improve their access to their services and to "challenge [the] Forces where necessary and ensure that any suggestions for improvement are fed back into the service."

South Wales Fire Services did not engage with the Deaf community in Newport and Monmouthshire prior to the 2014 report, although they do offer a free Home Safety Checks and fire safety equipment provision to Deaf and hard of hearing people. After the publication of the 2014 report, South Wales Fire Services developed a working relationship with the Project Officer which includes providing BSL Taster and Deaf Equality training to the Fire Services staff and Fire Safety training for the members of Newport Deaf Club. To maintain the working relationship with the Deaf community they felt that they need to "engage further with specific groups" e.g. the BDA and for Deaf people to "continue to feed into our consultation processes and provide feedback through groups."

56% of the Deaf respondents felt that accessibility to the emergency services has not changed in the two years since the publication of the 2014 report; a number of the respondents wrote that "nothing change[d], [the emergency services] need [to] improve." Another respondent felt that there is a need for more Deaf awareness among the emergency staff and improved understanding of their communication needs e.g. BSL/English interpreter.

12% felt the emergency services have improved as one respondent commented that now there are "text message [service] for emergency. I think it is good for all Deaf people."

However, 15% of the respondents felt that the emergency services have got worse because of the inability to access services due to "no [BSL/English] interpreters provided" and that there is a "need [for] more Deafblind aware[ness]."

Health Services

Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB) Services which covers the whole of the Gwent region responded to the survey.

When the 2014 report was published, it was not clear what engagement, if any, that ABHB had with the Deaf community in Newport and Monmouthshire. However, ABHB became more aware of Deaf and hard of hearing people's needs as the result of the 2014 report and began to engage with Deaf people after the 2014 report. ABHB reports that *"there have been several specific training events, dissemination of information and initiatives to respond to the needs of these groups over the two years."*

ABHB recognises that there is a need for more training for the ABHB staff such as Deaf Equality, BSL Taster etc. All the ABHB settings need more equipment to enable Deaf/hard of hearing people to access their services. ABHB have stated they would like to continue their engagement with the Deaf community to improve their access to the services and that they would like members of the Deaf community to get involved with the patient forums at different levels of the services. They would also like Deaf people to use the complaints process and feedback opportunities offered by ABHB with the caveat: *"judge and report service provision on recent experience, not on experiences that are more than one year old, as we are trying to improve our response."*

56% of the Deaf respondents felt that their access to the ABHB services has not changed since the 2014 report. Many respondents felt that the services needed more Deaf awareness and improvement in the interpreting support provision. However a respondent provided a more positive review; they *"have no problem about [their access]...[they] do go to hospital for check up and finds it's good so far."*

29% of the respondents felt that the services have got worse, with one respondent asking whether ABHB *"really help the Deaf when they need help?"* and quite a few felt that the communication barriers are still present. One respondent felt that ABHB needed to provide more interpreter support and to inform them in advance. Deaf Awareness also was brought up; They felt that ABHB settings still *"call names out when [we were] arriving at the hospital [and we tell them that we are Deaf. [They] still call names and we miss[ed] our turn."*

6% of the respondents felt that the services have improved with one saying that they *"contact[ed] the reception and ask[ed] to book BSL interpreter...no problem at all."* Another respondent commented that their local *"hospital and GP now provided [BSL/English] interpreter when I ask for one."*

Housing Services

Charter Housing responded to the survey, the other 2 housing organisations based in both Newport and Monmouthshire did not respond.

At the point when the 2014 report was published, Charter Housing was not engaging with the Deaf community until the Project Officer met with their contact person (as she, like the Project Officer, was in one of the ENGAGE projects). This was after Project Officer had been informed by some members of the Deaf community that they used Charter Housing services.

From this, a consultation meeting was arranged with the Deaf tenants. This focused on the accessibility to Charter Housing services. The outcome was that amendments to practice were made from the Deaf tenants' recommendations. Those included creating an app for Deaf and hard of hearing tenants to be able to report any maintenance issues, antisocial behaviour issues etc. without having to require a hearing person to phone on their behalf. The Deaf tenants are using this at the time of writing. They are now *"waiting for [their] new app to be ready for testing and [the Deaf tenants] are looking forward to testing it."*

The Project Officer also delivered Deaf Equality and BSL Taster training to Charter Housing staff; *"[Their] reception staff continue to establish how deaf customers would like to communicate with [them]."*

The Deaf respondents gave us differing views of the housing services. 12% of the respondents felt that the services had improved, one commented that *"they knew I am deaf and [how to] contact"* them by SMS text service. Another respondent supported the Charter Housing's response about accessing via their app, commenting that Charter Housing provided *"very good service."*

35% of the respondents felt that their access to the housing services remained the same with responses varying between praise and critical. One respondent praised his local Monmouth housing association as *"Good, [very] Helpful."* Another felt that their local housing association were *"not really doing their job when [the respondent] ring them about problems, [they] always say [that they] will ring back [but they] never did."* Some respondents who circled *"still the same"* also commented that they never used the services.

24% of the respondents felt that their access had got worse in the two years since the original report; one commented that they have *"been waiting [to] hear [from the housing association by] email [for] over a year [to] confirm when they come over"* to deal with maintenance issues. Most of the 23% commented that they still face communication barriers when they deal with their local housing association.

29% of the respondents did not use housing services, therefore they chose not to answer the housing section of the survey.

Council and other Services

Both Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council responded to the survey.

Prior to the report being published in 2014, Newport City Council provided hearing loops equipment in the Information Station and all the Customer Service staff received basic BSL

training. Newport City Council had textphone, email and SMS services in place for Deaf people to contact the council via the Contact Centre.

Following the report's publication, a member of the Newport City Council's staff met with Deaf people in Newport Deaf Club to hear their views and gave a presentation about Universal Credit. Both the member of the staff and the Project Officer organised a visit to the Information Station to "*demonstrate what we already had in place to support them to engage with services, and to get feedback on Council interactions and services.*" The Project Officer also provided Deaf Equality and BSL taster training to all the Customer Service staff as well as other Council employees. However the member of the staff felt that the Deaf and hard of hearing people could "*help Customer Services staff to practice basic sign language when they visit the Information Station.*"

In the member of the staff's view, there is a "*generally improved relationships and interactions between the Customer services and the deaf community*" as a result of the Project Officer's work with Newport City Council and the Deaf Community.

Monmouthshire County Council "*have an officer who deals with [Deaf and hard of hearing people's] needs*" in place before the publication of the 2014 report and this remains the case in 2016. However, the member of the staff who responded to the survey commented that he was "*not aware of any response*" to the 2014 report by Monmouthshire County Council. He admitted that despite the low number of "*profoundly deaf people in the County... we have not got enough staff with BSL skills to deal with people face to face*" and that Monmouthshire County Council need to provide a better method of "*contact [with Deaf/hard of hearing people] to understand their requirements.*"

44% of the Deaf respondents felt that the council services are still the same as 2014 with one Newport-based respondent commenting that "*Still slow, but still improve... council services [and] shopping centre is good.*" A Monmouthshire-based respondent said that he "*always [attend the local] library for internet*" and that the staff "*ring for sometimes booking [appointments for the respondent and that the staff are] good [with] helping me.*"

24% of the respondents felt that their access had got worse in the last two years with one respondent feeling that their local council have not done enough to support that person to find a new job and that the cuts to the public transport affected their access to their local facilities. One felt that their local council "*won't listen to me if I report [any] issue.*" Another issue brought up in the survey was transport support provision for elderly people especially when a Deaf resident wants to ask for support.

9% felt that their access have improved with "*more seats [available which] make life easier when [they are] shopping*" and using the council facilities. However one felt that their local council can be very inconsistent with their performance "*some days are better [then] some other day... no good.*"

Project Officer's Perspective

The decision to conduct a follow up survey was made to measure any changes that have happened in the intervening years since the publication of the 2014 report. That report identified gaps in the services that the Deaf and hard of hearing people attempt to access. Despite the responses from the organisations highlighting the work that was done to improve Deaf and hard of hearing people's access to their services, there is a low number of respondents saying that the access is better than what it was in 2014. The majority of respondents felt there is either not much improvement or that their access is poorer than 2014.

The results from the Deaf community's perspective is not entirely surprising, because the general feeling in the Deaf Community was and is that the service providers visit them to consult and failed to report on any changes that have been implemented as a result from the consultation. An example of this disenchantment with services was a member of Deaf club (with the support of their fellow members) who stood up at their recent Annual General meeting to request that I to stop bringing the service providers to the Deaf Club as they felt that the visits were *"a waste of [our] time and we do not know what they are doing with the information that we give them."* This brings up an underlying issue that Deaf people have: the lack of direct communication from the service providers which deny the Deaf and hard of hearing people the opportunity to be aware about the actions done as a result of the information provided.

This demonstrates a key gap in the work by the service providers in showing the work done by the organisations to improve access for the Deaf community. It is clear that some organisations made an effort to improve Deaf people's access, but respondents made it clear that they are either unaware of their work or that this is not what they want. There is a need for a continued direct working relationship between both parties to enable Deaf people to see the work that has been carried out as a result of the consultations. There is also a need to maintain the working relationship to improve access for Deaf people with the development of available technologies.

As noted in the 2014 report, many members of the Deaf community prefer to communicate in BSL rather than in written English because of their lack of confidence in their understanding of the English language. This has not changed with similar responses to the 2014 survey: respondents circling answers and skipping the opportunity to elucidate their view of access to services.

Following this report, it is hoped that all the parties will act on how to implement the recommendations because the project will end in autumn 2017. This means there is a need for direct working relationships between the Deaf community and the service providers to be established with a view of continuing beyond 2018. The BDA will continue its efforts in this final year to ensure a smooth transition.

- All service providers to establish a direct working relationship with the Deaf community to address the Deaf respondents' concerns.
- All local services providers to meet with members of the Deaf community to agree an action plan to implement direct communication with the Deaf community so there is the opportunity to access up-to-date information on a regular basis.
- All service providers (with the support of BDA) to explore setting up training for Deaf people on how to access their services and how to use technology to achieve this.
- All service providers to look into setting up an online system where Deaf people could communicate their views about services using British Sign Language rather than in a written format, i.e. film themselves and then sending the video in a confidential method via an agreed app.
- All parties to work together to look at the work already done by some of the organisations to improve Deaf people's access to the services and how to develop this work to fit with their service users' needs.

It is quite clear from the surveys in both 2014 and 2016 that gaps in access provision for Deaf and hard of hearing people remain despite the work of some of the organisations.

Therefore the BDA considers this is as an opportunity for all parties involved to learn from both surveys and to identify the priorities. The first step for this would be for a direct working relationship to be established, with BDA's support, with the local Deaf community. This would create an opportunity for the Deaf community to take the lead on how to improve access to service provision.

The Project Officer would like to thank all the people who took the time to respond to the survey and enabling the Project Officer to be clear about the work required to achieve improved access to services provision.

The British Deaf Association's Charter for British Sign Language

The purpose of the Charter for British Sign Language (BSL Charter) is to promote better access to public services for Deaf people who use BSL and in doing so; enable public agencies meet their legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010.

The UK Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2009. Local authorities, public services and agencies should follow the intentions of the UNCRPD. One way this can be achieved is by adopting the BSL Charter.

Under the Equality Act 2010, Deaf people have the right to equal access to services through a variety of access provision including BSL/English interpreters when required. The Deaf community is a linguistic community with a rich history, identity, language and culture. The BDA believes equal opportunities can be achieved by working with the Deaf community, rather than by taking decisions and designing services decided on their behalf.

The BSL Charter sets out five pledges:

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

The expectation is that by adopting these pledges, public services can achieve the following objectives:

- Remove direct and indirect discrimination against Deaf people
- Resolve conflicts between service providers and Deaf people
- Increase awareness of Deaf issues and BSL issues
- Empower local Deaf people to be more participative in the wider community
- Provide better educational options for Deaf children.

The BDA recognises that public services will have different priorities for the areas they serve and it is expected that each public agency will consider the number of pledges that it can sign up to. For some, this may be a minimum of one pledge towards achieving equality for Deaf people in their areas while others will sign up for all five pledges.

For more information: www.bda.org.uk/bsl-charter

What is British Sign Language (BSL)?

British Sign Language (BSL) is the first or preferred language of many Deaf people in the UK. It is a language of space and movement using the hands, body, face and head.

BSL is the sign language of the Deaf community in the UK (in Northern Ireland, Irish Sign Language (ISL) is also used). BSL is a real, full and living language that is part of a rich cultural heritage. It is one of the UK's indigenous languages; other includes English, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Cornish. Many hearing people also use BSL; it has more users than other indigenous languages such as Welsh or Gaelic.

It is a language that has evolved in the UK's Deaf community over hundreds of years. There is considerable research evidence that shows Deaf children who are exposed to BSL early can develop linguistically at the same rate and to the same linguistics levels as hearing children with spoken language. This kind of early access to language ensures the ability for learning throughout life, leading to improved life opportunities.

BSL is not just a language; it is also a gateway to learning, a path towards a sense of Deaf identity, and the means whereby Deaf people survive and flourish in a hearing world.

The British Deaf Association

The BDA stands for **D**eaf **E**quality, **A**ccess and **F**reedom of choice

Vision

Our vision is Deaf people fully participating and contributing as equal and valued citizens in wider society.

Mission

Our Mission is to ensure a world in which the language, culture, community, diversity and heritage of Deaf people in the UK is respected and fully protected, ensuring that Deaf people can participate and contribute as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. This will be achieved through:

- Improving the quality of life by empowering Deaf individuals and groups;
- Enhancing freedom, equality and diversity;
- Protecting and promoting BSL.

Values

The BDA is a Deaf people's organisation representing a diverse, vibrant and ever-changing community of Deaf people. Our activities, promotions, and partnerships with other organisations aim to empower our community towards full participation and contribution as equal and valued citizens in the wider society. We also aim to act as guardians of BSL.

- 1. Protecting our Deaf culture and Identity** – we value Deaf peoples' sense of Deaf culture and identity derived from belonging to a cultural and linguistic group, sharing similar beliefs and experiences with a sense of belonging.
- 2. Asserting our linguistic rights** – we value the use of BSL as a human right. As such, BSL must be preserved, protected and promoted because we also value the right of Deaf people to use their first or preferred language.
- 3. Fostering our community** – we value Deaf people with diverse perspectives, experiences and abilities. We are committed to equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination with a special focus on those affecting Deaf people and their language.
- 4. Achieving equality in legal, civil and human rights** – we value universal human rights such as the right to receive education and access to information in sign language, and freedom from political restrictions on our opportunities to become full citizens.
- 5. Developing our alliance** – we value those who support us and are our allies because they share our vision and mission, and support our BSL community.



   020 7697 4140 | www.bda.org.uk | bda@bda.org.uk

The BDA stands for **D**eaf **E**quality, **A**ccess and **F**reedom of Choice

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