



Access to Council Services for Deaf People in Birmingham

Commissioned by



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1 Introduction

Since the British Deaf Association was founded in 1890, its primary purpose has been the status and recognition of the Deaf Community and British Sign Language (BSL) in the United Kingdom. The cornerstones of the BDA are:

- Language
- Community
- Identity
- Heritage
- Representation of Deaf¹ people's needs, aspirations, rights and responsibilities.

The BDA is a high profile national "Deaf People's Organisation" with a strong presence throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

As a member led organisation, work is focused on achieving equality for Deaf people through community empowerment, membership and campaigning. Working with local Deaf and BSL communities is crucial to the success of the BDA campaigns and creates for opportunities for Deaf people to develop, participate and contribute in wider society.

The Community Empowerment Team was established in April 2012. They are the public face of the BDA working at a local operational level and an all-important link between local Deaf communities and the national campaign work of the BDA.

The team's objectives are to research, identify and meet local Deaf communities to establish and in some cases re-establish links between local communities and Public Services.

Positive progress has been made by increasing the number of contacts and building upon existing known links with the many varied Deaf communities across the regions. This was achieved by instigating a series of successful visits and presentations during the first two years of CET work.

A notable feature of this work has been the promotion of the BDA's BSL Charter. This Charter sets out five pledges to ensure Local Authorities meet their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

As part of this process, Birmingham Deaf Community Group asked the BDA to undertake face-to-face research and survey approximately 80 deaf people living in Birmingham and who attend Birmingham Deaf Community Group's monthly social gatherings. Request for the research was instigated following Birmingham City Council's decision not to sign up to the BDA's BSL Charter.

¹ The BDA uses a capitalised 'D' to denote those who use British Sign Language and consider themselves as part of a Deaf Community with its own language and culture. A lowercase 'd' is used to describe those who have a hearing loss and don't see themselves as members of the Deaf Community.

The aim of the research project was to ascertain views and experiences of Deaf BSL users in accessing Council services. Deaf people wanted to be able to express their views in a safe environment and contribute their own solutions in improving access to Council services.

This research report outlines the methodology used, findings and themes with recommendations based on the feedback from Deaf residents from Birmingham Deaf Community Group's monthly social events at Ladywood Social Club in 2013.

The Birmingham Deaf Community Group (BDCG)

This group was founded in 2008 by a group of interested volunteers. The aim of the group was to reduce isolation for Deaf people. This was carried out by offering support, organising and promoting fundraising and social activities/events at various venues.

The BDCG hold a variety of social gatherings and events, which everyone can participate in and enjoy using British Sign Language (BSL) to communicate. They also support other community members in arranging their own events thus promoting independence and empowerment.

2 Methodology

The aim of the research project was to highlight the experiences Deaf BSL users had when accessing Council services.

In 2013, the BDA's Empowerment and Campaigns Officer joined the Birmingham's Deaf Community Group monthly social events to build relations with this particular population. Information was shared with a view developing trust about what could and could not be done with the research.

It was also agreed that a few visits would be necessary prior to undertaking this research. The BDA's evidence is that Deaf BSL users have had less opportunity to access education leading to literacy skill levels being lower than the general population. Potential participants are therefore unlikely to respond in an open and frank way if they receive a paper form with a request to complete.

The Deaf population is also a widely dispersed community and it would have been almost impossible to source contact details.

For these reasons, research undertaken face-to-face using BSL within a monthly social event was deemed safe, culturally appropriate and guaranteed the opportunity to interview a significant number within a much shorter time scale.

2.1 Visiting Birmingham's Deaf Community social events

Potential interviewees were made aware that this research was to ascertain where they went for support to resolve issues, how they felt when trying to access their local Councils and services, and the overall impact on their lives.

At the social events, the BDA's Officer spent time talking to as many of the 80 attendees at different times of the day either in small groups of no more than six or on an individual basis.

To ensure consistency, they were asked:

- where were they from
- what was their local Council
- how did they access services
- how they felt about how they are treated
- what they felt could be done to improve this situation.

There have been some previous studies conducted on how people access Council services but very few studies have focused on how deaf people actually feel about their experiences. Issues have been raised regarding the isolation they feel, being treated as second class citizens and the belief that what they have to say is not important.

2.2 How do Deaf residents feel?

It is important to understand how the local Deaf Community perceive the Council and how they view Council services.

Do they understand letters they receive, voting literature, services such as refuse collections, education, public meetings, tenancy agreements etc?

If not, how do they access the information held within these documents?

Another aim was to ascertain how could the Council become more accessible for this group.

3 Findings

3.1 Interviewees

Out of the 80 participants attending the social events, 50 were successfully interviewed. The BDA Officer had to take into account that this was potentially their only social event for meeting up with their friends.

3.2 Transcripts

All of the interviewees were video-taped as they used British Sign Language to communicate. This was then transcribed into comparable English. As BSL is a different language with its own distinct grammar and syntax, it is inevitable that some of the English lacks a perceived coherence or adherence to strict grammatical rules but this is compensated for by its accuracy.

3.3 Experiences and Impact

Below are narratives Deaf people cited when asked how they felt about Council Services.

These have been grouped into the following categories:

- Living in Birmingham
- Access to Council
- Access to Communication
- Participation, Consultation, Independence.

3.3.1 Living in Birmingham

Different cultures, backgrounds and religions

I live in Birmingham and am very proud of Birmingham because it has a good presence in the world for example the Bull Ring and a lot of people from outside come to Birmingham to see this. There are a lot of people from different cultures, backgrounds and religions and it is a very open city to live in and I am very proud of Birmingham.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Strong Birmingham Identity

I live in Birmingham and am very happy to live here. I was born and brought up here. I have a very strong Birmingham identity. There are a lot of international spoken languages here in the city, a wide variety of cultures and religions. Each have their own lives and we all live our lives in a positive way. My view is there are good and bad points about living in Birmingham. We do have problems when it comes to services.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Didn't know where they had gone

I live in Birmingham, I am profoundly Deaf myself, I was born Deaf. The problems I have when I go on a train in Birmingham they are doing new building works, I looked at the number and saw it was platform 11. I waited and waited – I do have problems breathing and walking is difficult and I had to go down the steps. Everybody moved and I didn't know why and I was still looking at the screen and it stills said platform 11 but everyone else went up the steps and off again. I didn't know where they had gone. The train had gone and I was

saying what had happened and what about me! I missed the train because I was Deaf. I asked the porter what about me and he said oh wait for another one in 20 minutes.
(Lady – over 50)

3.3.2 Access to Council

How can I phone!!!

I live in Birmingham. The services at the Council are not that good as they are not Deaf aware! An example of this would be, I work full time, 5 days a week, so if I have an issue that I need to contact the Council about say my radiator is broken or whatever, I need to have time off work and tell them that I have to go in person to the Council as I cannot just ring them. So when I arrive I am told you must phone first to make it a fair system for everyone.... I say but I am Deaf how can I phone!!!
(Lady – under 50)

Council expect us to understand

There are a lot of Deaf people that have low levels of literacy and cannot read this type of information so how can the council expect us to understand this – it's not just me!
(Gentleman – under 50)

Nothing provided in BSL

On the other hand the Deaf community does not have access to services such as the Council. The Council provides access to information for other languages but there is nothing provided in BSL, it does not feel very Deaf friendly for the community! That is one thing that lets Birmingham down. If they had access in BSL then it would be excellent.
(Gentleman – under 50)

Don't want to be patronised

When I ask them to help me I feel like I am being patronised, I don't want to be patronised I want to deal direct with the Council. I don't want a Deaf organisation involved in any issues that I have. Really it's the Council's responsibility to sort out any missing information, not the third party and not to leave it to them to sort out! It is the Councils responsibility to sort out these problems not others!
(Gentleman – under 50)

My mother is getting old

If they post me a letter and I don't understand it I have to ask my mother to phone for me and explain that I am Deaf. They say we need proof and that they are not allowed to have someone else speak to them on my behalf. It makes me very frustrated so I have to write a letter and sign it then post it to give my permission for her to speak to them on my behalf. Why must it be a telephone number? I am profoundly Deaf! My mother is getting old now and is not fluent in BSL she can only fingerspell so we have to write notes backwards and forwards.
(Gentleman – under 50)

Pushed to the bottom of the pile

When I send a letter I get a response saying OK but what did the original letter mean. For example the rubbish bin. I put it out but if there is a problem with it they give you a phone number to ring, they don't think about Deaf people. We are pushed to the bottom of the pile.
(Gentleman – over 50)

Before it was very open

My wife and I went to the Council tax office and it had all changed, before it was very open and you could explain the situation, you could wait in a room but now it was all phone booths! We are Deaf, no access!
(Gentleman – over 50)

Without the bank of phones

The old Council Tax office was fine, without the bank of phones – it was fine. I used to say my name and they used to say wait here. The other day when I went it had all changed, all new, how do Deaf people access this? How?

We can't hear when they speak to us and as I said the man went to go through a door and I said I am Deaf how can I use the phones I can't hear.
(Gentleman – over 50)

We get nothing from them

The problem is it is done by phone lines and how can we do this as a Deaf community? No information, we have to find it out for ourselves. They don't give us anything, it is all phone numbers. We get nothing from them. They say lip-read and speak, but I am profoundly Deaf, I don't have any hearing aids. They think I am ok to lip-read but basic information I don't understand. When you go to reception and say you are Deaf they don't understand me. They send me off that way with a phone number it is stupid really. They should come here and I could tell them what I want if they came here. I think we need support! We need more than a phone number. All they do is give us a piece of paper with a phone number and say phone! That's the Council for you!.
(Lady – under 50)

How can I get anything from them?

If I went to the Council to get any information from them – how can I get anything from them because it is very difficult? I don't understand and it is hard for me, as I can't read letters when they send them through.
(Gentleman – under 50)

They are not aware

The Council never tell me any information; they never inform me of anything. Midland Heart are good, they have access there. But I got nothing from the Council, no services, nothing from the Council. They are not aware of Deaf issues.
(Lady – under 50)

They are wrong, we are not

I want to see the Council wake up a bit and see what the problems are. What problems we face in Birmingham at the moment and to have a new centre they're not helping the Deaf community. If the centre says we as the Deaf community are lying, they are wrong – we are not, we just want to know where to go pure and simply. Birmingham Council can't say no they have to say yes. That is what they are here for.
(Gentleman – over 50)

No confidence to access the Council

I live in a Council flat but never go to council offices, I always ask my sister to phone as I have no confidence to access the council as there is always a communication breakdown.
(Gentleman – over 50)

Access to most council buildings is through an intercom

I am frustrated as access to services is poor. Access to most council buildings is through an intercom and as my son is also deaf there is always a communication breakdown. They told me to lip read or use a loop or use a phone so I asked someone to phone for me and they refused to talk to that person as saying it was going through a 3rd party.

(Lady – over 50)

No response from the council

Went to neighbourhood office to explain that I needed home visit I waited and waited but got no visit so I went back and they said forgot to book the visit so I complained and reported this but I have had no response from the council.

(Gentleman – under 50)

I fear that my mental health will deteriorate

I am frustrated, I get letters I do not understand, I am lonely in my flat. It is a residential home and all the rest are hearing. I do get some volunteer's who visit but no one can use BSL so I do not understand what is happening and therefore cannot access social activities and I am becoming isolated. I fear that my mental health will deteriorate.

(Lady – over 50)

Very concerned about the future of services and support!

A lady I know moved from Wolverhampton to Reading and the provision for Deaf people is amazing. Also very concerned about the future of services and support! I don't feel that I have any communication with the council at all – not very good for Deaf people.

(Lady – over 50)

3.3.3 Access to Communication

Main barrier is Communication

To be fair I cannot access Council's services I just cannot do it, there are so many things that happen and the main barrier is communication. I cannot phone the Council and if I use typetalk then I am passed to different departments and then passed on again. If I email they never reply or it takes a very long time to get a reply but if it's a hearing person they can ring and get things sorted straight away. It adds to my frustrations and suffering and I feel discriminated against.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Rely on my Mother and Father

When anyone in the community receives a letter and I have seen this myself on the reverse it states that it can be provided in different languages. There is nothing on this side that says this can be provided in BSL. So I have to rely on my mother and father to translate letters for me and explain what they are about for me. I want to do this myself. I want to be independent now. I want to be able to read and understand the English, not with the jargon. I think now the services need to be looked at.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Communication instantly breaks down

If I go to the Council they speak to me and I don't understand what they are saying to me, so I ask them to write a note and they write it in full English and then I don't understand what they are trying to say or ask! It really makes me feel like they are not interested they just ignore us! If we can't speak and I can't lip-read and they ask us to write something down they don't understand and the communication instantly breaks down! We want to be equal but it doesn't happen.

(Gentleman – over 50)

How do I communicate with them?

I live in Birmingham. I do have problems with the Council. I have told them that I am Deaf and I can't communicate with them and that I am not very good with written English so how do I communicate with them? How do I get an interpreter? How do I get this information? They start to talk to me and I don't understand what they are saying.

(Gentleman – under 50)

There is no funding for an Interpreter

I am hearing myself and I have Deaf parents. When my parents or their Deaf friends go to the Council or their neighbourhood offices and meet the receptionist and ask to book an appointment and asked them to book an interpreter they are told there is no funding for an interpreter and they can't do that.

(Lady – under 50)

It's not fair to ask

I think it's not fair that I had to ask my daughter or my sister in law to make calls for me because I am Deaf – I don't know how to do this for myself.

(Lady – over 50)

Interpreter for Council Meeting

I have been born and bred in Birmingham. I do have problems and have had problems in the past when I have asked for an interpreter for a Council meeting.

(Lady – under 50)

They say sorry

They do have interpreters now and again but not all the time so we have to try to communicate via pen and paper and when I ask for an interpreter they say sorry too many on the waiting list.

(Lady – under 50)

Can he shout on the phone?

I support my father everyday with things like Councils, DLA, letters, benefit letters etc. and it's really quite terrible because when I phone for him they want to talk to my father and I have to say he is Deaf! How can you talk to him? They ask can he shout on the phone so they can hear him. I say no it's embarrassing for my father to have to do this!

(Lady – under 50)

I have to translate

The problem with my father is that he has difficulties reading English, as his first language is BSL not English. I have to translate letters into BSL for him to understand. He can't read properly and he can't phone because he is Deaf.

(Lady – under 50)

I have to wait for my daughter

There is problem when I get letters through the post, if it comes from the Council I have to wait for my daughter to come to go through them with me and explain it to me so I understand it. She explains it in BSL, which is easy for me to understand.

(Gentleman – over 50)

I will be lost

I am a very nervous person. I rely on my 2 sons who are both hearing so if the phone rings I rely on them. I am worried that when they get married and move out I will be lost.

(Lady – over 50)

Get someone else to call for you

If I need to contact anyone such as the council, electric, or the gas I need help. I asked the Council to phone for me and they said I have to telephone the people myself. I said to the woman 'how? How can I do this as I am profoundly Deaf, I cannot pick a telephone up and make the call and live alone in my own home. How can I make this phone call? Please can you do this for me?' They said get someone else to call for you!

(Gentleman – over 50)

If it says telephone, how can I?

I live in Birmingham and the Council services are not good. If they send a letter to me I do not understand what they are trying to say or what do they mean. If it says telephone, how can I phone as I am Deaf – the minicom number is very rarely on the letter?

(Gentleman – over 50)

Told to pay for it myself

I went to the counter and waited for about an hour there was people in front of me so I had to be patient. I asked for an interpreter and they said no and I had to pay for it myself, 2 weeks later I went again and they said the same thing again so I walked off.

(Gentleman – over 50)

Won't pay

CAB won't pay for interpreters.

(Gentleman – over 50)

No links with Council

I have no links with council. There are no interpreters provided even though I have asked before. I needed support as I had an issue with leak in my bathroom, the housing inspector came but there was a communication breakdown I didn't know what was happening. I asked for an interpreter even my social worker tried to help with an interpreter – they tried to find out what wrong with my bath they said it was a small thing but for me to explain became difficult. Never asked my views on services at all, they need interpreters so there is better access for deaf people.

(Lady – over 50)

Poor communication with the receptionist

I have mobility issues, I have tried to access council services and when I ask for an interpreter this is not provided. The receptionist said no interpreter as they don't know how to book an interpreter. I attended an appointment I was told no interpreter had arrived so I waited and found out later that the interpreter was in the room with man and the receptionist didn't know. I told the interpreter that they should have waited outside but the interpreter ignored me.

(Gentleman – over 50)

Still don't know what is happening

I live in council flat, the council came and installed a pipe in my bedroom – I had no explanation or communication with the man I did not know what the pipe was for. After a while it started leaking so I had to report to the warden. The warden reported it for me and I have had no reply and it is still leaking. I am on a water meter so my bill has increased. I have also reported it through my support worker and no one has ever been. I cannot go to the council myself as I cannot communicate with them as there are no interpreter's. It is making me stressed, I feel fed up. An inspector came made report and left no without any explanation so I still don't know what is happening.

(Lady – over 50)

Has no fax so can't contact or access

There are lots of issues with the ring and ride service – I can fax to inform them to pick me up as I have mobility issues but my other friend has no fax so can't contact or access the ring and ride service. She is becoming isolated and has to stay at home which affects her social interaction as she cannot get to the deaf club.

(Lady – over 50)

Communication with council staff difficult

Communication with council staff difficult as there are no interpreters – my sons have to help me with services and report problems e.g. with the bedroom tax I had to use my son to help me as I had to go interview. I asked for an interpreter but there was no interpreter so I panicked, my English is not good and my written English is poor. The council said they had cancelled interpreter.

(Lady – over 50)

3.3.4 Participation, Consultation, Independence

Things will get worse and risky

Has the Council ever visited us? No, never, not once! In my home area they have been and looked around here at the Deaf club? No, never. They have never visited the Deaf community. I am a little bit worried about the future say five to ten years time things will get worse and it is risky for us.

(Lady – under 50)

My Independence gone!

There are about six Deaf organisations in Birmingham that I could go to ask for help, if I go to them where has my independence gone! Hearing people are independent – they can go straight to the source why should I have to go through another source. I want to be able to go directly to the source and not have to use a third party involved. If I have to go through them and let them 'help' me it's taking away my independence!

(Gentleman – under 50)

Don't want to be patronised

When I ask them to help me I feel like I am being patronised, I don't want to be patronised I want to deal direct with the Council. I don't want a Deaf organisation involved in any issues that I have. Really it's the Council's responsibility to sort out any missing information, not the third party and not to leave it to them to sort out! It is the Councils responsibility to sort out these problems not others!

(Gentleman – under 50)

I want to be Independent

Sometimes I have to contact the council linked to my education. I can't do this and have to rely on my mother and father to do this for me. I don't want that, I don't want them to do it for me! I want to do it myself; I want to explain the situation or problem at college and talk to them directly. But I can't! I want to be independent now, it's time for me to be independent and not rely on my mother and father anymore.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Get passed to someone else

There are about six Deaf organisations in Birmingham, sometimes I have contacted them but there are times when I don't want to. When I do contact them for anything they tell me it's not us you need to talk to it is someone else so I contact them and get passed to someone else. I want to be able to do this without them I want to be able to contact the Council direct; I don't want to have to go to them to be passed to someone else.

(Gentleman – under 50)

Never ask what we think

They never let the Deaf community know if there is a meeting happening, they never do that. A lot of hearing people go to community meetings but where are the Deaf people – they are not there – why? Why don't they try and encourage us, to be positive, provide us with interpreters so we can go along and find out the information. This would save time. If there is no provision and they don't let us know the Council can say there are no problems in the Deaf community but we haven't heard!

(Gentleman – over 50)

Never asked me to participate

I have lived in Birmingham all my life. Things are mostly alright but on occasions for example a Council forum or a disability and diversity forum my manager will ask me to go to represent the Deaf community. I went but I had to ask to be part of this forum, they just kept meeting without letting me know and without me. That's one issue – they never asked me to participate. Another issue, online surveys – on a computer, so if I want to say something the forms ask me my name and address and then a phone number – landline number. It has a red star next to it.

I don't want to put my number there but I have to. Then people ring me, when I try to use the minicom I know that the calls are linked to the online form. I want to put 18001 or 18002 but that space won't accept this – it wants a traditional landline phone number. If I try to put my mobile number they ring that, I want something that you can add text message only. I think there should be a box where you can add minicom only or Deaf or SMS only. Or they take off the red star it could be a phone number or an email address. When it forces you to put a landline number this is not fair.

(Lady – over 50)

They ignored me

I have asked for information about different groups, I have asked and they have ignored me.

(Lady – over 50)

Someone to come here

I want to know more information about what the Council do. I would like someone to come here and meet the Deaf people.

(Lady – over 50)

Don't ask me to be a part

I have the right, Deaf people have the right, we are not daft, we are not stupid, and we do have intelligent minds and control our lives. People don't ask me to be part of their committees! When the chair arrives at a meeting, they acknowledge everybody but if I make a comment they object to what I say because I am Deaf.

(Gentleman – over 50)

Only have £61 million pounds

The Council has problems over budgets and funding and money. The government has told the public sector that they only have £61 million pounds to spread out to different areas. Why are we Deaf People, not involved in committee meetings?

(Gentleman – over 50)

Don't consider

Nobody tells me anything – I don't get any information because they don't consider Deaf people and I just can't understand why?

(Gentleman – over 50)

We never hear anything back

I went to a BVSC (Birmingham Voluntary Service Council) meeting at the Norman Power Centre with few other Deaf people, the Council was there, a lady called Viv Eden she is the local officer and 2 interpreters were there. In the meeting they explained to us the complaints procedures and the barriers etc. But it is a problem, when we say something or give them any information we never hear anything back from them. Now we have been told because of the cuts these meetings will stop.

(Lady – over 50)

I have no information about what is happening locally

I live in my own home and have no communication with the council – they never send me anything. I have no information about what is happening locally – sometimes I get a letter to say they are doing a repair on the roads but apart from that I get nothing really – I have no involvement at all.

(Lady – over 50)

No other communication with any other people or services

We live in a council warden controlled flat, we communicate with our warden fine, and she is good with communicating with deaf people. We have no other communication with any other people or services no access as there is no communication. We only feel that the warden gives us the information we need.

(Gentleman and Lady – over 50)

This format does not suit me

I have no relationship with Birmingham council at all. There is no relationship. I have had a letter about voting and I don't understand what it said this format does not suit me so I feel what is the point! It's just one of those things... Something that we just have to put up with!

(Lady – over 50)

4 Key Themes

Training

Very few, if any, frontline staff have any awareness of Deaf issues or are able to communicate even at a very basic level in British Sign Language. It is clearly evident that they were unaware of the need to book Sign Language Interpreters to comply with the Equality Act of 2010.

Access to Communication and Technology

Local Deaf residents clearly find it difficult to access and understand Council information as English is usually their second language. There are very few, if any, specialist advocacy services they can use to understand their rights in accessing Council services. In addition, the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future as organisations are under considerable strain to make financial cuts.

A BDA survey of service providers (Oct 2012) identified that 60% of 63 respondents had funding reduced during the financial year 2011/12 whilst 55 out of the 62 reported an overall drop in income. Of these, 38% lost local authority funding whilst 29% respondents reduced staffing and service provision as a result. Out of 30 respondents who answered a related question, 88% felt that the overall situation was getting worse for Deaf people.

Due to fewer numbers of specialist social workers with Deaf people and the reduction of local Deaf organisations providing information and support, local Deaf residents do not know where to go or what to do.

This is compounded by the fact that many Deaf people are reliant on the good will of hearing family and friends to make phone calls on their behalf on a daily basis. If Deaf people do use a computer, information is still inaccessible as English is required to navigate websites.

It appears that the Local Authority do not use up-to-date technology to enable Deaf people to access their services, for example, video relay services, emails, or a mobile text messaging service.

Citizenship

Birmingham Deaf residents do not feel they are treated as equal or full citizens by their local Council. They do not feel their views are heard or understood. As a result, they feel isolated and ignored. This, in turn, means they do not have the knowledge of what their local Council service can or cannot provide.

When they do have an understanding of Council services, they are unable to access the complaints procedure as this is not in British Sign Language. They are also not able to access any mainstream Council consultations that other residents can attend.

Due to inaccessibility of information and services, Deaf people become more dependent on goodwill rather than being independent.

BSL/English Interpreters

The biggest issue in terms of being able to access Council services and its staff is the lack of interpreting provision. Deaf people have, either experienced a lack of interpreter provision or their requests for Interpreters have been denied.

There have also been demands that family and friends are used. Family and friends have not been trained as Interpreters. This can lead to inaccurate information or poor data collection.

5 Recommendations

1. The Local Authority should sign up to the BDA's BSL Charter to begin to foster good relations as part of good practice on improving access to Council Services for local Deaf residents.
2. The Local Authority should ensure that frontline Council staff undertake bespoke basic BSL skills and Deaf Equality training.
3. The Local Authority should ensure that BSL/English Interpreters are registered with the National Register of Communication Professionals for Deaf People (NRCPD).
4. The Local Authority should ensure that communication preferences of local Deaf residents are recorded; list preferred registered BSL/English Interpreters who are then automatically booked when the local Deaf resident requests an appointment.
5. The Local Authority should engage with local Deaf Communities and consult with them regularly.
6. The Local Authority should review contracts to ensure that licences and grants to local services or organisations include obligations to meet the Equality Act 2010. Contract licences, for example, should include a stipulation that organisations providing services can be contacted in a variety of ways suitable for local deaf people.

6 Conclusion

We are grateful to the Birmingham Deaf Community Group for providing us with a wonderful and rare opportunity to interview a significant number of Deaf residents in a short space of time.

There is a remarkable similarity of experiences by Birmingham Deaf residents attempting to access Council services with others across the UK. The impact on individual lives is considerable and this at times is quite shocking and saddening.

It is our hope that Birmingham City Council consult and start to work closely with their local Deaf residents and groups such as the Birmingham Deaf Community Group and begin to conduct dialogue through the development of a local Deaf Forum. This will enable Deaf residents to articulate their views and for Council services to consider how they can begin to make their services accessible.

The Local Authority can achieve this more quickly by working with the British Deaf Association and Birmingham Deaf Forum.

Signing up to the BSL Charter would be a positive statement of intent as the Charter provides a framework and toolkit specifically designed for Local Authorities. Once the statement of intent has been declared, an action plan can then be developed by working alongside the local Deaf residents leading to the implementation of accessible services. This will empower Deaf people in becoming more informed of their rights and independence.

The British Deaf Association would like to express their thanks to the Birmingham Deaf Community Group and its members who gave their time and took part in the research. The BDCG allowed us to visit in advance and carry out the interviews during their social events.

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The British Deaf Association – BDA

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.

Campaigning for Equal Rights for Deaf people!

To contact the
British Deaf Association,
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OoVoo: **[bda.britdeafassoc](#)**
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