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**Press Release**

**Sadiq urges organisations across London to help tackle inequality as he signs the Charter for British Sign Language**

- 1. Mayor signs the British Deaf Association's Charter for British Sign Language to help eliminate barriers faced by London's Deaf communities**
- 2. The Charter sets out five key pledges to address discrimination, empower Deaf communities and build stronger relationships between City Hall and Deaf Londoners**
- 3. By signing the Charter, City Hall is committing to improve access for Deaf Londoners**

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has today encouraged organisations across the capital to help tackle inequalities as he signed the British Deaf Association's British Sign Language Charter for British Sign Language.

Sadiq and Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, welcomed members of London's Deaf communities and representatives from organisations and services that work with, or advocate for, Deaf Londoners to City Hall today to witness the signing of the Charter for British Sign Language.

The Charter, designed by the British Deaf Association, aims to promote better access to public services for Deaf Londoners, address discrimination and empower Deaf communities. BSL is the first language for many Londoners, and by implementing the Charter, the Mayor and City Hall are committing to meet the needs of Deaf Londoners, uphold their rights and ensure access to City Hall's information and services.

By signing the Charter, an organisation commits to a tailored set of actions aimed at improving accessibility and inclusion of Deaf people. The Charter is structured around five pledges, these are:

- 1. Consulting with local Deaf people on a regular basis.**
- 2. Ensuring Deaf Londoners have access to information and services.**
- 3. Supporting Deaf children and their families.**

4. **Ensuring City Hall staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively using BSL.**
5. **Promoting learning and high-quality teaching of BSL.**

**The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said:** “Deaf Londoners have a right to participate fully in society without having to face barriers and obstacles. Signing the Charter for British Sign Language is a significant step forward for our city. I want to encourage all employers in the capital to follow our lead and ensure that Deaf Londoners are empowered to reach their potential as we continue building a fairer London for everyone.”

**Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, said:** “It is vitally important that we support Deaf Londoners by addressing the inequalities that many face. City Hall’s commitment to the BDA’s Charter for British Sign Language means that more Deaf Londoners will be able to access information about vital services, while also ensuring they can communicate effectively with City Hall staff. I am delighted that we are taking this important step and helping City Hall become an even more accessible, inclusive and progressive organisation.”

**Chief Executive Officer of the British Deaf Association, Rebecca Mansell, said:** “The British Deaf Association (BDA) are incredibly proud of City Hall’s adoption of the Charter for British Sign Language (BSL). The signing of the Charter shows the Mayor’s commitment to improving access and rights for Deaf Londoners who use sign language.

“Last year, UK Parliament recognised British Sign Language as a language of Great Britain, passing into law as the BSL Act 2022. It was an historic day for the Deaf community in the UK. British Sign Language is Britain’s fourth indigenous language, after English, Welsh, and Scottish Gaelic. It is only right that BSL be accorded the same status and legal protection.

“We believe the key to the success of the Act will be the full inclusion and input of Deaf BSL signers from the start of all decision making, policy development, funding and support mechanism processes.

“City Hall is setting an example of how this can be achieved through the adoption of the Charter for British Sign Language. As the only national representative organisation of BSL in the UK, we are looking forward to supporting your BSL journey.”

The move comes as the Mayor takes further strides to ensure City Hall is a truly inclusive employer, leading the way and inspiring other organisations to proactively tackle structural inequalities and place accessibility at the heart of policy.

In 2021, City Hall was one of the first employers to publish disability pay gap data, alongside an action plan to address the disparity. The Mayor encourages other organisations to do the same through the Good Work Standard.

All Mayoral events in Trafalgar Square, including St Patrick's Day, Black On The Square, Eid, Pride and Diwali, have BSL interpretation. BSL interpreters at People's Question Time and the State of London Debate ensure Deaf people can participate in discussions about issues affecting them as Londoners.

Other measures include working with Deaf and Disabled people's Organisations (DDPOs) to ensure that City Hall involves disabled Londoners and considers their needs in all its work, and through the Adult Education Budget, providing funding for anyone who is Deaf to take a course in BSL up to level 2. This opportunity has recently been extended to anyone who is on a low income or unemployed.

Chaired by the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, City Hall's DDPO Forum brings together organisations to provide advocacy and advice on inclusive practices and issues faced by Deaf and disabled Londoners. The views and experiences shared during the forum are used to inform City Hall's policies and initiatives.

The Mayor has also opened up funding for higher level qualifications in BSL, including interpreting skills to support the professional growth of educators and interpreters.

**Ends**

## **MEDIA CONTACT**

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## **Notes to Editors:**

### **City Hall Deaf-friendly policies and initiatives:**

#### 1. Workplace adjustments policy

City Hall has in place a workplace adjustment policy and its purpose of is to prevent, remove or reduce the disability and health-related barriers people may face to getting and keeping a job, performing effectively, and progressing and flourishing in the workplace. Adjustments can involve changes to where, how and when work is carried out.

#### 2. Disability resource hub

The disability resource hub is an online space to bring together information, guidance and support from both City Hall and external organisations, to help colleagues work in a more inclusive way and remove barriers.

#### 3. 'Make it Accessible' toolkit

Earlier this year, City Hall launched its 'Make it Accessible' toolkit. The toolkit provides a tailored set of guidelines for staff on how best to develop communications, events, meetings, and consultations that are inclusive of Deaf people.

#### 4. SignLive at City Hall

City Hall's Facilities Management helpdesk can now be contacted via SignLive. SignLive is an on-demand service that connects Deaf people to a qualified online BSL interpreter. The interpreter will relay the conversation between the person and a member of staff.

#### 5. Adult Education Budget

The Mayor is already working to ensure Deaf Londoners can access learning and employment support to achieve the skills they need to get into good work. He is providing funding for anyone who is Deaf to take a course in BSL up to level 2, and anyone who is on a low income or unemployed. He also opened up funding for higher level qualifications in BSL, including interpreting skills. Londoners can find local BSL courses [here](#).

### **About the British Deaf Association**

The British Deaf Association (BDA) is the only national organisation that represents Deaf people whose first or preferred language is British Sign Language (BSL) – or Irish Sign Language (ISL) in Northern Ireland.

The BDA was established in 1890 to fight for the rights of Deaf children to use sign language in educational settings. This followed the seismic decision by the International Conference of the Education of the Deaf (ICED) ten years earlier to ban sign language at school and introduce an inaccessible form of communication known as “The Oral Method”.

Decisions made by those educators a century and a half ago still shape Deaf people’s lives in Britain today. It was this event which gave birth to the BDA, and we have been fighting for equal rights for Deaf people ever since.

Our mission today is to protect, preserve and promote BSL and to campaign for our equal rights as a linguistic and cultural minority.

The BDA are Ordinary Members of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), an International Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with ECOSOC, UNESCO, ILO, WHO and the Council of Europe, and the European Union of the Deaf (EUD). EUD is a full member of the European Disability Forum (EDF) and is a Regional Co-operating Member of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) to tackle issues of global importance, and also has participatory status with the Council of Europe (CoE). The WFD also has a consultative status in the United Nations and is the founding member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

BDA Youth is a special interest sub-committee of the BDA. They are members of the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) and European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY), representing young Deaf people across the UK.

### **About the BSL Act**

The British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022 aims to “recognise British Sign Language as a language of England, Wales and Scotland; to require the Secretary of State to report on the promotion and facilitation of the use of British Sign Language by ministerial government departments; and to require guidance to be issued in relation to British Sign Language.”

The Bill’s sponsors were Rosie Cooper MP (Labour) in the House of Commons and Lord Holmes of Richmond (Conservative) in the House of Lords. The Act received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022.

Find out more: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/34/contents/enacted>

### **About British Sign Language (BSL)**

British Sign Language is a signed, visual language that uses hand and body movements as well as facial expressions and eye gaze to express meaning. It is a language in its own right with its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax. BSL is not dependent upon or related to English and is used mainly by people who are Deaf, their families and friends, and interpreters, teachers and other professionals who work with Deaf people.

British Sign Language is not international – there are hundreds of different sign languages around the world. For example, the sign languages used in Ireland and the USA developed separately from BSL, while Australian, New Zealand and South African Sign Languages are historically related to BSL.

Just as with spoken languages, there are regional variations or ‘accents’ of BSL, although these are mutually intelligible. For example, the sign for ‘holiday’ has around 10 -12 sign variations depending upon the area of the UK you are in.

British Sign Language is a full, natural, living language that is part of a rich cultural heritage of the British Deaf community and was recognised by the BSL Act in 2022 in law as a language of Great Britain.

**Ends**