

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL MEETING OF 27th September 2021

PUBLIC REPORT: Y

EXEMPT REPORT: N

Report Title	Support for accessing council meetings
KEY DECISION	Not Applicable
Report Author	Verina Wenham Director, Law and Governance
Purpose of Report	To update members on the use of British Sign Language for the Deaf community as resolved by Council at its meeting on 16 th November 2020.
Reason for Decision	To look at the options available to improve accessibility to the live streamed council meetings for those who are Deaf or have hearing loss.
Portfolio (holder)	Councillor Dann
Corporate Priorities	CO9: Responsive and accessible services
Financial Implications	The proposal for the use of subtitles set out in the recommendation below is cost neutral to the Council.
Risk Management Implications	None as far as this report is concerned
Environmental Implications	None as far as this report is concerned.
Legal Implications	Whilst there is no direct legal requirement to make subtitles or sign language available for council meetings, the Council has duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Act states that providers of public services have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that people with disabilities are able to access their services.
Equality Implications	The provision of subtitles for council meetings will improve accessibility for those with hearing loss and allow a fuller engagement with the democratic process. An Equality Analysis has been completed as attached at Appendix A.
Data Protection Implications	None as far as this report is concerned
Consultation	The portfolio holder and the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer have been consulted on this report.
Options	The Council does not have to provide the support set out in this report, however, as the council is enabling its residents to access its meetings remotely, this support will greatly assist those people with hearing loss to fully engage in meetings.
Background Papers	None as far as this report is concerned.
Recommendation	That subtitles are made available for all meetings of the Cabinet, Council and its committee meetings with immediate effect.

1. Key Facts

- 1.1 At the Council meeting on 16 November 2020, it was resolved that officers investigate the opportunity to provide a British Sign Language feed, or other suitable options, for all council committee and full council meetings to enable those with hearing loss to access the meetings. This report to be delivered as soon as possible to Cabinet, or appropriate council body, for consideration and with regard to implementation.
- 1.2 Subsequently officers have considered the options for supporting people with hearing loss to enable them to access council meetings, particularly now that all the council formal meetings are live streamed and accessible via remote access to members of the public.
- 1.3 As part of this review, the Councils' Equality and Diversity Officer has been consulted on the use of British Sign Language ("BSL") for these purposes. There are some concerns about the practicality of having live BSL interpretation for all council meetings. BSL interpretation is quite expensive and realistically could potentially have limited impact.
- 1.4 Census 2011 figures showed that 26 Harborough District residents, aged 3 and over, used sign language as their main language. Of these 26, 17 used BSL as their preferred language and therefore BSL interpretation would be beneficial for them.
- 1.5 National statistics show that 1 in 5 adults in the UK have some form of hearing loss (RNID) which, looking at 2011 figures again, would equate to 13,347 adult residents in our District in 2011. The vast majority of these would not be able to understand BSL however having high quality subtitles for Council meetings would definitely be beneficial. This indicates that investing in high quality subtitles would have a greater impact on more people. Subtitles would also potentially help those residents who use BSL, as some, although not all people who are profoundly Deaf are able to read English.
- 1.6 The Council's meetings are held using Microsoft Teams software. The use of subtitles has always been possible for internal meetings but not for external meetings. However, the feature that allows external live streamed viewers the ability to use the captions tool during a live broadcast has now been enabled, meaning that those viewers who want to use subtitles during the meeting are now able to do so. Subject to members approval of the use of subtitles this can be implemented for all meetings of the Cabinet and Council and its committee meetings.
- 1.7 Subject to members agreeing to this approach, instructions on how to access subtitles will be provided to members of the public via the website and there will also be an option for subtitles in different languages.

Appendix A – Due Regard (Equality Analysis)