

## The Highland Council

### Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities 12 June 2014

Agenda Item	3
Report No	CPE 14/14

#### **New arrangements in the Council for communication support for people who are D/deaf, deaf-blind, deafened and hard of hearing<sup>1</sup>.**

#### **Report by Head of Policy and Reform**

##### **Summary**

This report provides an update to members on the provision of Communication Support arrangements for deaf people to access Council and NHS services.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Finance, Housing and Resources (FHR) Committee on 29 November 2013 agreed a proposal for new arrangements to be established for the provision of Communication Support to ensure that deaf people have access to Council, NHS Highland and associated services.
- 1.2 Previously (2002 – 2012) the Council in partnership with NHS Highland had a joint Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Deaf Action, an Edinburgh-based charity for the provision of communication support. Social Work Services managed the agreement on behalf of the Council.
- 1.3 After the integration of health and social care in 2012, the management of the Council element of the SLA moved to the Chief Executive's Service alongside other contracts for interpretation services for people who do not have English as a first language. Arrangements were put in place to move from the SLA to a one year contract (2013-14) which resulted in savings to partners without reductions in service provision. During this period options for future provision of the service were reviewed in line with the Council's approach to funding third sector organisations and procurement requirements.
- 1.4 The review included discussions with members of the Deaf community who used the service, primarily British Sign Language (BSL) users, who expressed a preference for a locally based service. Additionally, NHS Highland was keen to continue joint arrangements with the Council and both partners remained committed to supporting communication needs and taking account of future potential to adapt to changing requirements.

## **2. New arrangements**

- 2.1 Following agreement at FHR, and with appropriate HR and procurement advice, communication support services for the Council and NHS Highland have been

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this report 'deaf' is used to describe people who are Deaf Sign Language users, deafblind, deafened or hard of hearing. Deaf Sign Language users have British Sign Language (BSL) as a first or preferred language and who usually see themselves as part of a linguistic/cultural minority known as the Deaf (with a capital 'D') Community (Scottish Council on Deafness).

re-provisioned as follows from 01 April 2014:

- A BSL/English interpreter is employed in-house by the Council through employment protection regulations
- Booking services for communication support are also taken in-house by the Council and are provided by Service Centre staff at Alness. Staff involved have undertaken Deaf Awareness training and administrative systems established
- Further communication support has been procured from local freelance interpreters through a framework agreement
- The Council is providing services on behalf of the NHS through contractual arrangements
- The arrangements also cover communication support for related organisations: High Life Highland, Citizen's Advice Bureaux and Highland Hospice.

2.2 The Deaf community have been kept informed of the changes throughout the process both through attendance by partners at Deaf Forum meetings, and information disseminated through the local Community Advocacy and Development Officer working for the British Deaf Association (BDA). The BDA officer was also involved in the procurement process.

2.3 An extensive communication exercise has been undertaken to inform staff in the Council and NHS of the changes, and remind them of their responsibility to book services where appropriate. Information has also been sent to members of the Deaf community and organisations involved in sensory issues.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 The new approach has enabled the Council to mainstream this service into its activities. The new arrangements have been in place since 01 April and generally feedback is positive with any issues being addressed and resolved as they occur. There is good communication between Customer Services staff and the equalities team, and constructive feedback has been welcomed from deaf service users and interpreters. Monitoring arrangements of the service are in place and dates will be set for formal reviews with NHS and engagement with deaf people. Initial impressions show an increase in demand since April; however, this may be as a result of the recent promotion of the new service.

3.2 Looking to the future, the Council and NHS need to be able to adapt to changing needs. The need for communication support will continue and may increase in the future, and the types of communication support are likely to be more varied. For example, there has previously been no demand for lip-speaking and note-taking, but anecdotally we are told there is an appetite for these services. New methods of communication support may be developed or become more favoured, e.g. on-line interpretation.

### **4. Implications**

4.1

- Resources: Resource allocations were agreed at FHR in November 2013.

- Legal: There are no legal implications in the provision of the arrangements now in place, other than meeting requirements of the Equality Act referred to below.
- Equalities: The provision of communication support contributes towards the Council's equality outcome that "People benefit from public services in a fairer way and are able to have their say about them". It reflects the Public Sector Duty of the Equality Act 2010 to advance equality of opportunity and the requirement to take "steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities".
- Climate Change/Carbon Clever: there are no immediate carbon implications. On-line options for future provision may impact on travel.
- Risk: Risks associated with this service are limited to the potential for fluctuating demand for services, the potential for increases in demand, and maintaining a pool of local qualified interpreters.
- Gaelic: there are no Gaelic implications associated with this report.

**Recommendations:**

Members are asked to:

- note the new arrangements, and
- raise awareness of the service among constituents.

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