

The Physical Disabilities Reference Group Haringey *made an online submission to the Haringey Fairness Commission in January 2019, which is available below.*

To Haringey Fairness Commission

From: Physical Disabilities Reference Group Haringey

We wish to draw your attention to the lack of British Sign Language services within Haringey and in particular at council buildings.

Evidence:

We wish to raise the issues of inequality faced on a daily basis by people in Haringey who live with a hearing impairment. This group of people feel excluded from going into council buildings due to a lack of British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreters. Any visit to the council's customer services offices or libraries can cause people with a hearing impairment a great deal of stress, anxiety, worry and nervousness. More often than not they will avoid going into these buildings alone as there is no provision of BSL Interpreter services.

What this group of people are seeking is to have BSL Interpreter services readily available in all council buildings the public have access to. This can come in many forms, whether it is trained council staff in BSL, online technology or the provision of BSL Interpreters at council or voluntary sector events.

What we have done:

This matter first came to the attention of the Physical Disabilities Reference Group during one of their meetings in early 2017. A member of the group, Debbie, who uses the services of BSL Interpreter's raised the issue. A meeting was subsequently arranged with Head of Operations within Haringey's Adult Social Care. At the meeting Debbie spoke about the difficulty she or anyone with a hearing impairments experience's when having to use services within council buildings. She highlighted her experience of visiting the customer services building in Station Road. Despite signs being displayed within the building stating interpreters being available, this does not include BSL Interpreters.

Debbie referred to the council websites and the fact that unlike Enfield Council websites, Haringey do not offer any in-vision interpreters.

Debbie expressed an interest to attend council meetings and consultations but had been prevented from doing so due to a lack of BSL Interpreters being present.

Debbie also highlighted the fact there are a number of deaf children at schools within Haringey and they will soon be going out into the community and will be expecting to be part of the community by accessing services which will make them feel inclusive.

The council officer thanked Debbie for raising these issues and apologised at the lack of facilities for hearing impaired residents in Haringey. The council officer informed Debbie each point she had raised would be brought to the attention of the relevant departments/officers in Haringey. Where possible improvement to services for hearing impaired people will be undertaken.

Following the meeting in August 2017 I had not heard from the council officer. I again emailed her in October 2018 and received a response a few weeks later. I was informed she had asked another council officer to look into the issues raised by Debbie to see what improvements could be made to the services. The council officer was surprised I had not heard from the second council officer. I have since emailed the second council officer for an update on this matter. I have also asked him to attend the next meeting of the Physical Disabilities Reference Group meeting on Tuesday 8 January. Unfortunately I still have yet to hear from this officer.

What we are seeking:

1. An improvement in the provision of BSL services for people with a hearing impairment who have to use council services within customer services, including libraries.
2. Some form of in-vision services on the council's website.
3. BSL Interpreters readily available at consultations and meetings organised by Haringey Council.

Graham Day

Chair, Physical Disabilities Reference Group Haringey