

## **Support for Sign Languages Act and sign languages added to school curricula**

“This Council notes that 15- 21 March was Sign Language Week, timed with the anniversary of the UK Government formally recognising British Sign Language (BSL) as a language in its own right on 18 March 2003. However, in 2021 neither BSL nor Irish Sign Language have legal status in Northern Ireland nor are sign languages part of school curricula.

This means at present, deaf people must rely on the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (NI) (1995) to secure reasonable adjustments via sign language provision. In order to do so, deaf people are required to identify as ‘disabled’; in sharp contrast to their right to recognition as a cultural and linguistic minority under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

This Council believes there is a need to create a more accessible and inclusive society in Northern Ireland through greater learning of sign languages and awareness of Deaf culture.

It further notes this Council’s previous support for the Belfast Statement on Mental Health and Deafness following the 6th World Congress which met in Belfast in September 2014 to address issues around equal rights for deaf people in mental health care under the CRPD and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Noting the rights of deaf people to recognition as a cultural and linguistic minority under the CRPD, this Council expresses its support for the introduction of a Sign Languages Act for Northern Ireland. Further noting Article 24(b) of the CRPD that requires the State to facilitate the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community, this Council expresses its support for sign languages to be added to school curricula to ensure all children learn from the earliest opportunity.

Therefore, this Council will write to the Minister for Communities to ask when the New Decade, New Approach commitment to a Sign Language Act will be brought forward and further asks that this legislation includes provision for sign languages to be added to the Key Stage 1 and 2 Curriculum, with schools equipped to deliver these courses, as well as the introduction of sign languages as a GCSE for secondary school pupils.”

Proposer: Councillor McMullan

Seconder: Councillor Heading

(To be debated by the Council)