

# News Release

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## Three East Midlands Fire and Rescue Services jointly sign up to British Sign Language Charter

Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Services have jointly signed up to the British Sign Language (BSL) Charter.

Signing the Charter together is a show of commitment by all three Services to promote better access to public services for members of the Deaf community.

The British Deaf Association are asking local and national organisations from across the public, private and voluntary sector to sign up to the Charter and work to improve access and rights for Deaf people who use sign language.

The Charter contains five key pledges that will help support the Deaf community.

They are:

1. Consult formally and informally with the local Deaf community on a regular basis
2. Ensure access for Deaf people to information and services
3. Support Deaf children and families
4. Ensure staff working with deaf people can communicate effectively using British Sign Language
5. Promote learning and high quality teaching of British Sign Language.

All three Services are committed to ensuring their Deaf users have the same quality of provision, information, standards and right to be informed on a par with others in the wider community.

Agnes Dyab, Chair of British Deaf Association, said: "The commitment from the three fire services has been magnificent, we have been able to hit three birds with one stone. Those three signatures will positively impact Deaf

communities in three large regions across the East Midlands. We hope it provides inspiration for other fire and rescue services to follow."

Wayne Bowcock, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: "We are proud to be signing the Charter in conjunction with Derbyshire and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Services.

"We are all committed to working in collaboration to ensure members of the deaf community can access services when they are required and offer their views during our consultation processes.

"By signing this Charter, we reaffirm our commitment to all our communities. We respect, recognise and value all who use the fire service, including those who use BSL."

Andrew Brodie, Assistant Chief Fire and Rescue Officer, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service, said: "It's important we support the Charter for British Sign Language. We pledge to further develop our relations with the Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing communities in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and improve their access to our services.

"We are already committed to overcoming the disadvantages often faced by deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people. We provide subtitles on videos and have a dedicated Community Safety Educator, who uses British Sign Language, when working with people from these communities. We will improve these services wherever we can".

Gavin Tomlinson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Derbyshire Fire and Rescue, said: "Like our colleagues from Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, we are extremely proud to sign the Charter for British Sign Language.

"A major part of a modern fire and rescue service is developing the relations we have with all people within the communities that we serve.

"By signing this Charter, we are pledging to improve access to our services to those who use BSL whilst reaffirming our commitment to help make Derbyshire safer."

Anne Darby, Nottingham Deaf Forum, said: "This signing is brilliant, the engagement and collaboration from the fire service is so important to ensuring full participation from the Deaf Community."

Robert Foulkes, Derby Deaf Forum, said: "As a community we have faced direct and indirect discrimination in the past but today I feel very pleased that the door is open.

"I know have the confidence to engage with fire service and equally it's heart-warming to see they feel confident to communicate directly with our community.

“This commitment shows an improvement in access and it means we don’t have to use other agencies to source information.”

Anne Lawrence, Leicestershire Deaf Forum, said: “Today feels like the opening of curtains for a theatre show, it is the start of collaboration and positivity. The Deaf experience is being genuinely included in shaping how access to the community is delivered.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

Interviews can be arranged through prior arrangement with Corporate Communications on the details below.

**About the Service**

Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service provides emergency response, prevention and protection services from 20 stations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Its headquarters is based in Birstall, Leicester.

The Service’s prevention, education, enforcement and inspection programmes have resulted in significant reductions in the number of incidents. In the last ten years, fire-related incidents have reduced by 43 percent.

During 2016/17, the Service attended 694 road traffic collisions, of which 148 were extrications from vehicles, in addition to 2,259 fires. 272 schools were visited as part of the Service’s schools programme, delivering fire and road safety education to pupils. Staff organised or took part in 1,613 community safety events, promoting fire and road safety and arson prevention, and 145 Virtual Fatal Four (VF4) events as part of the Service’s young drivers’ road safety project.

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