

**Date: 10/11/2025**

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# Briefing for parishes: deafness

## Key facts about those with hearing issues

- Around 18 million people in the UK have deafness, hearing loss or tinnitus. Over half of adults aged 55+ have some hearing loss; about 1.2 million adults have loss severe enough that conversational speech is usually not heard.
- An estimated 127,000 people in England use British Sign Language (BSL);
- About 900,000 people are severely or profoundly deaf; around 12,000 use cochlear implants.
- According to GOV.UK “65% of working-age deaf people are in employment, compared to 79% of the general population.” For those who use BSL the figure is much worse - only 37% are in work.
- On average, people with hearing loss earn £2,000 less per year than the general population. 1 in 4 deaf or hard-of-hearing people have reported leaving a job because of discrimination.

## Typical daily deaf problems deaf people face

- Difficulty understanding announcements and spoken information in noisy environments (supermarkets, cafés).
- Being talked to indirectly (people addressing friends rather than the deaf person).
- Social isolation and exclusion from informal conversation
- Poor access to appointments and services because of lack of interpreters or captioning — this affects health, benefits and social care.

## Checklist for welcoming deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors

### A. Before the service (prep)

- Check your sound system and **hearing/induction loop**: is it working? Label where users should sit to get the best loop signal.
- Publicise the availability of loop/BSL/large-print: on your website, service sheet and noticeboard. Include a contact name/phone/email for access needs.
- Ask quarterly (or more regularly if your church changes its AV levels frequently ) if there are any adjustments needed to the sound system. Don't just assume turning up the volume will help.
- Ask whether visitors need BSL interpretation, live captioning (CART) or a seat near the front — and record preferences confidentially.

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## **B. Arrival & welcome (first impressions)**

- Greet visually: make eye contact, smile, wave or use a clear gesture to show you're addressing someone. Avoid approaching from behind.
- Offer a printed sheet that summarises the order of service and announcements (helps people who rely on lipreading or text).

## **C. Sound & space (practical adjustments)**

- Keep background noise low before and after the service (mics, heating, music, chatter). Quiet spaces make a huge difference to hearing-aid users and lip-readers.
- Sit lip-readers where they can see the speaker's face clearly (avoid bright backlighting and masks).
- Use a microphone for every spoken part (readings, intercessions, notices); speak slowly and clearly, not louder. Use a lapel mic for roving speakers.
- If you have a hearing loop, mark it with the international blue ear symbol and check it regularly; tell people where the loop coverage is.

## **D. Visual supports during worship**

- Project or display all words (hymns, responses, readings) using a screen or large print. If you cannot display, give paper copies.
- Provide captions for any pre-recorded video content. Consider live captioning for sermons when possible.

## **E. Pastoral care & inclusion**

- Train pastoral visitors in basic communication: facing the person, not covering mouth, checking understanding, using paper/pen or phone text if needed.
- Offer home visits with a clear communication plan
- Ensure information about funerals, baptisms and pastoral events is available in accessible formats on request.

## **F. Staff & volunteer training**

- Run a short training session on deaf awareness: basic facts, simple phrases (e.g. "Can I help you?"), how to use the hearing loop, and respectful language.
- Encourage a culture of asking "How can I make this easier for you?" rather than assuming needs.
- Keep a small "access pack" at the welcome desk: large-print service, pen and paper, information about the loop, and a list of local interpreting services.

## **G. Events & occasional services**

- For weddings and funerals, proactively ask about access needs when booking.
- For special music or choral pieces, provide printed translations or summaries for those who rely on text.

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***BSL & interpreting: if you have a BSL user come to your church, contact Amanda Collinson (Diocesan Disability Advisor) who can help you obtain interpreters or welcome them to the Diocesan monthly BSL signed service (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month, 12pm at Holy Trinity Church, Fareham)***

## Practical quick phrase and behaviours (card for volunteers)

- Face the person; keep your mouth visible.
- Say the person's name before speaking.
- Keep sentences short; pause between sentences.
- If not understood, rephrase rather than shout.
- Offer pen-and-paper, text, or typed summary.
- Don't assume someone can lip-read — many cannot; ask "How would you prefer I communicate?"

## Low-cost/high-impact actions (start with these)

1. Print large-print orders and display all words.
2. Check and label your hearing loop; train one volunteer to test it monthly. Ask a deaf parishioner to tell you if it is working or not — they cost nothing!
3. Reserve a "front row" seating block for people who lip-read or rely on visual cues.
4. Run a 30-minute deaf awareness session for staff and volunteers.

## Longer-term options to consider

- Budget for regular professional loop maintenance and upgrades.
- Commission occasional BSL-interpreted services?

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