

<p>This report may be of interest to: Community Learning Committee, Policy and Resources Committee and Equalities Panel</p>
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## MANAGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SERVICE

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### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider a request from the Milton Keynes Community Language Service for Council management of the Community Language Service for the next year and agree a way forward for its future development.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1 The Community Language Service was developed from a Joint Finance Bid submitted to Bucks Health Authority by the Milton Keynes Anti Racial Harassment Group (MKARHG) in 1996. The Council agreed to host the service and support its development.
- 2.2 The Service has remained distinct from the Council, with oversight from a multi- agency steering group. The Council is the largest user of the service
- 2.3 When the original Joint Finance funding ceased in December 1998, the Economy and Learning Committee agreed short-term funding for three months (Minute EL36/99 refers). At this point the Service separated from MKARHG and continued with no formal status. In the financial year 1999/2000, the Neighbourhood Services and Learning and Development Directorates contributed £10,000 each to the core service and new Joint Finance has been providing funding to develop the Advocacy Service.
- 2.4 The Community Language Service now requires a formal status within the Council for the next year while further discussions are held about its longer-term management arrangements.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to:

- (a) note the role of the service and its development to date;
- (b) agree that for 2000/01 the service formally becomes part of the Council to provide it with a legal status, whilst its future is considered; and
- (c) request a further paper during 2000/01 with longer term plans for the service in the light of Council policies and other agencies.

#### 4. **Background**

- 4.1 The Milton Keynes Community Language Service (the Service), provides oral and written translation services for users of other languages. This includes people whose first language is sign language. The service is primarily for users of public services, but also caters for private users.
- 4.2 The Service was set up with funding from Bucks Health Authority. Formally called the Translation Service it was initiated in 1996 by Milton Keynes Anti Racial Harassment Group (MKARHG), an inter-agency forum which works in partnership to address issues relating to racial harassment.
- 4.3 Prior to 1996 individual agencies made their own arrangements. There was no guarantee of a professional service and frequently friends and family were used as an often inadequate substitute for impartial translators.
- 4.4 In January 1997, a Co-ordinator was appointed to set up the Service on a two year contract to coincide with the two year funding bid.
- 4.5 The Council employed the Co-ordinator and provided additional support through line management, and corporate support services, such as finance and IT. All the financial transactions of the Translation Service, such as invoicing clients and paying translators, are handled through Council systems. The Service is managed within the Economy and Learning Division.
- 4.6 The name of the Service was changed in the Autumn of 1998 to Milton Keynes Community Language Service. This was to reflect the broader nature of service more clearly.
- 4.7 The Service has established itself as a respected service used by the police, solicitors, the Magistrates Court, the Council, Community and Hospital NHS Trusts. There are now some 40 languages and 50 interpreters available within the Service. The Council's current RNID contract is now accessed through the Language Service and provides interpreting for deaf people (British Sign Language BSL) as well as spoken languages.
- 4.8 Since its introduction the CLS has provided an increasingly busy service. Attached as an **Annex** is a breakdown of usage over the last two years, showing usage by Council services and outside bodies. The Council is the largest user of the service.
- 4.9 The Service was supervised and monitored initially by a sub-group of MKARHG, but the sub-group evolved into an independent inter-agency Steering Group representing the Council, Thames Valley Police, NHS Community Trust and Milton Keynes Racial Equality Council. The inter-agency Steering Group has supported joint ownership of and commitment to the Service and the use of high quality interpreters.
- 4.10 The funding for the Community Language Service was initially routed through the MKARHG, which then transferred the money to this Council as host.

- 4.11 The external funding for the Community Language Service ceased in December 1998. The Service continued until the end of 1999/00 financial year by using its own reserves of generated income and through additional financial support provided by the Economy and Lifelong Learning Committee for the three months to March 1999. (Minute EL36/99 refers)
- 4.12 For the 1999/00 financial year, £10,000 was contributed from Neighbourhood Services, £10,000 from Learning and Development and £5,000 from the Police. There is similar funding available for 2000/01, though the Police are reviewing their contribution and it is hoped that this will increase. The NHS Community Trust does not contribute to cover costs but has agreed to pay a higher rate when the Service is used. There was a successful Joint Finance bid to support the development of the Advocacy Service. A Development Worker was appointed in June 1999.
- 4.13 The main legal requirement for the establishment of the Language Service is the Race Relations Act 1976 which states:

Without prejudice to their obligation to comply with any other provision of this Act, it shall be the duty of every local authority to make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that their various functions are carried out with due regard to the need – (b) to promote equality of opportunity, and good relations, between persons of different racial groups (Part X clause 71 (b):).

The Goods and Services section of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) came into force in October 1999. This requires that any organisation providing services should take reasonable steps to ensure that people receive an equal standard of service regardless of any disability. This responsibility applies to the Milton Keynes Council as a whole.

- 4.14 The provision of translating/interpreting services are considered fundamental to the fulfilment of the requirements of the law. The law is also strongly supported by all guidance issued to cover the interface between service providers and people who do not speak English. For example, the Mental Health Act 1983 Code of Practice states in paragraph 1:4 that

“Local and Health Authorities and Trusts should ensure that approved social workers, doctors, nurses and others receive sufficient guidance in the use of interpreters and should make arrangements for there to be an easily accessible pool of trained interpreters”.

- 4.15 The Council has resolved to adopt the Commission for Racial Equality Standard set out in the publication Racial Equality means Quality, a standard for Racial Equality for Local Government in England and Wales, (1995). This requires a language service to be provided and commits the Council to consult with minority ethnic communities. This has become even more important in the light of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry.
- 4.16 In its Equalities Policy, the Council states that

“.....its purpose is to provide services to meet the needs of the residents of Milton Keynes and to ensure that every resident has an equal chance to make use of those services.....”

.....one of the Council's strategic aims is to tackle disadvantage and promote equality through taking positive steps to remove barriers to participation and redress inequality, so giving those who experience disadvantage an equal opportunity to benefit from Council services”

4.17 At its meeting on 24 January 2000 (Minute EQ15/00 refers) the Equalities Panel resolved:

- (a) that the role of the Service and its development to date be noted;
- (b) that further work to develop a Corporate Policy in relation to the use of interpreters be supported; and
- (c) that further work to determine the Council's longer-term needs of the Community Language Service be supported.

The management of the Service needs to be seen in the light of the growing recognition that it is an essential part of Council work.

## 5. **Issues and Choices**

### **How Best to Manage and Provide the Service?**

- 5.1 There is considerable evidence that without the Council's support, the Community Language Service would fail. The Council provides line management, financial and other back up clerical support, as well as hosting the Service. If the Council removes its support from the Service it would jeopardise access to all public services from minority ethnic communities and from sign language users.
- 5.2 The Service provides an essential service for the Council. The extent of this is demonstrated by figures in the **Annex**. The Service is made more efficient and effective by serving a range of public bodies in Milton Keynes. Representatives of some of these bodies are members of the Steering Group.
- 5.3 There have been discussions with the other bodies that use the service, none of whom are in a position to run it for a number of reasons. The Police, for example, are required to use a separate organisation to demonstrate impartiality. The Health Service do not see it as part of their role to run secondary services.
- 5.4 The key issue now is whether the Service should be Council-run or provided by an independent body, probably including representation by the Council. There are clearly merits in both options. However, even if the option of setting up a separate body is chosen, it will take some time to implement this.
- 5.5 It is therefore considered that, at least for the next year, the Service is run from within the Council, while maintaining the input from the Steering Committee as an officer advisory group. During the year, officers and

members of the advisory group will carry out further work to identify the most appropriate role in the longer-term.

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

The link with the Community Alarm Service makes this a 24-hour service.

### 6.2 Equalities

These issues have been covered in sections 3 and 4. The Service has a key role to play in providing equal access to services by minority communities, and sign language users and this is crucial in progressing the equalities agenda.

### 6.3 Financial

No additional funding is being requested.

### 6.4 Legal

The legal aspects have been dealt with in section 4. The Race Relations Act (1976), the Disability Discrimination Act (1996) are the rationale for the need for services.

### 6.5 Staff and Accommodation

If the recommendations are agreed, there are no staffing and accommodation implications as the recommendation is for a continuation of current practice.

## 7. **Conclusions**

### 7.1 The Service has developed into one respected and easy to access. Interpreters have been tested for competency and have received training for their role. It has grown to include some 40 languages and 50 interpreters and has links with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) to provide British Sign Language interpreting.

This Service has a key role to play in securing success in achieving a number of points on the Council's Equalities Action Plan. The Service has never formally been a Council service. It currently has no formal or legal status which presents risks both to the Service and to its Council host. The Steering Group recommends that for future security, the Service should possibly move towards independent status. Whilst this may be appropriate in the longer-term, in the short-term, bringing the service into the Council will offer stability. It will also help to maintain the credibility of a young organisation.

Background Papers:           Race Relations Act  
  Mental Health Act  
  Disability Discrimination Act 1996  
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