

This report may be of interest to: Members of the Community Learning, Neighbourhood Services and Policy and Resources Committees

This report will also be submitted to the Economy and Lifelong Learning Committee.

TRANSLATION SERVICES: CORPORATE POLICY

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1. Purpose

1.1 To seek approval for a corporate position in relation to translation services.

2. Summary

2.1 The current Community Language Service was developed from a Joint Finance Bid submitted to Bucks Health Authority by the Milton Keynes Anti Racial Harassment Group in 1996.

2.2 There is a need to develop a corporate, co-ordinated and consistent approach to the use of interpreters, the role of advocates and consultation with minority ethnic communities.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Panel is recommended to:

- (a) note the role of the service and its development to date;
- (b) agree further work is carried out to develop a corporate policy in relation to the use of interpreters; and
- (c) agree further work is carried out to determine the Council's longer term needs of the Community Language Service.

4. **Background**

- 4.1 The Milton Keynes Community Language 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 Milton Keynes Community Language Service was set up with funding from Bucks Health Authority. The Service formally called the Translation Service was initiated in 1996 by Milton Keynes Anti Racial Harassment Group, an interagency 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 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.
- 4.5 The service has established itself as a respected service used by the police, solicitors, the Council, Community and Hospital NHS Trusts. There are now some 40 languages and 50 interpreters available within the service. The Council's current contract with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf is now accessed through the Language Service and provides interpreting for deaf people (British Sign Language) as well as spoken languages.
- 4.6 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):)”
- 4.7 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.
- 4.8 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”
- 4.9 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.

4.10 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”

5. **Issues and Choices**

The Need for a Policy to Provide a Service

5.1 The Race Relations Act 1976 Part X clause 71 (b) quoted in para. 4.6 makes it clear that appropriate provision is required by law to ensure equality of opportunity and good community relations. It is also part of making reasonable adjustments to ensure sign language users have access to services, a requirement of the Disabilities Discrimination Act 1996.

5.2 The provision of translation services is a means of overcoming a barrier to disadvantage and a very effective means of promoting equality. It therefore helps to meet essential parts of the Council’s Equalities Policy. The *Equality Standards – Measurements* from the Equalities Audit carried out state:

Area III Levels 1, 2 & 3 - Community Development

Level 1

(a) The local authority states that its goal is to support the development of strong, secure, self-reliant, self confident communities free from unlawful discrimination.

(b) Take account of the present and future needs of ethnic minority communities in making a Corporate assessment of community needs

Level 2

Translate advertisements, leaflets, videos, etc. giving information about services and democratic structures and participation, into appropriate community languages.

Level 3

Set standards across the authority for the provision of a consistent translation and interpreting service.

5.3 The Community Language Service provides translation services which are crucial elements of equality of opportunity, promotion of good relations and a means of fulfilling the Equality Standards set by the Council. The Service, therefore, aids the Council in meeting its obligations regarding social inclusion and participation.

5.4 There needs to be clear guidance from Council on the use of translators. It is recommended that officers undertake further work to identify the level of need that is likely to exist and the policy that would provide the basis for decisions about service levels.

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

None.

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

None.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The Community Language Service has developed into a respected and easy to access service. 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 to provide British Sign Language interpreting.

7.2 This service has a key role to play in securing success in achieving a number of points on the Council's Equalities Action Plan.

7.3 If Milton Keynes Council is genuine in its commitment to the equalities agenda, the issues presented in this report must be considered. The development of a corporate policy and internalisation of the Service will ensure that non-English speaking residents can access Council services and participate on an equal footing.

Background Papers: Race Relations Act 1976

Mental Health Act 1983

Disability Discrimination Act 1996

Commission for Racial Equality Standards