

**Divisions Affected – N/A**

**DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN,  
EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**10 APRIL 2024**

**Recommissioning of Interpretation and Translation Services for 1<sup>st</sup>  
August 2024**

**Report by Corporate Director of Childrens Services**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED**

1. To delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Deputy Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal, to award contract following the completion of the procurement process for the recommissioning of Interpretation and Translation Services, to enable a new contract to be in place for 1st August 2024.

**Executive Summary**

2. The Council has in place contracts to deliver interpretation and translation services to ensure that it meets its legal duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which requires organisations to provide information in the most appropriate ways so that people have access to the same quality of information and receive fair and appropriate services.
3. The Council currently uses interpreting and translation services in many areas. The highest users of translation, telephone and face to face interpreting are Children's teams. Whereas Adult services are the highest users of Deaf or Deaf Blind interpreting. However, all services are used by staff and teams across the Council.
4. Through the commissioning of Interpretation and Translation services, the council seeks to ensure the availability of services to meet the needs of people accessing Council services in Oxfordshire with language barriers which fall in to one or both of the following groups, they are deaf or have a hearing impairment and/or English is not their first language and they do not have sufficient English language skills. The current contracts for Interpretation and

Translation services will expire on the 31 July 2024. These contracts have been running for 5 years.

5. A review was carried out using current usage data, feedback from staff and engagement with providers providing these services.
6. As a result of the review a specification was developed to address the needs identified. This included the identification of key performance indicators, service model and qualification levels of interpreters and translators.
7. As part of the tender process 5 providers submitted bids to provide a Managed Service for Interpretation & Translation services. The preferred provider passed all checks.

## **Project Context**

8. The Council has in place contracts to deliver interpretation and translation services to ensure that it meets its legal duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which requires organisations to provide information in the most appropriate ways so that people have access to the same quality of information and receive fair and appropriate services. All interpretation services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year and are accessed by Council staff on behalf of the person. The translation service is accessed by Council staff in order to translate documents for people they work with or members of the public.
9. Language barriers in Council settings can lead to problems such as delay or denial of services, underutilisation, and identification of preventive services. Difficulty in communication may also limit the ability of professionals to understand and thoroughly assess peoples' needs and support them effectively. Language services, such as translation and interpretation, can facilitate communication and improve social care service quality, peoples' experience, adherence to recommended care and support, and reduce inequalities in access to services. Without appropriately understanding people are unable to give informed consent to support and the intervention offered to them.
10. In 2023, there were 1200 people in Oxfordshire who were registered as being Deaf or hard of hearing. Of those 850 are aged over 65. The SEN Deaf and Hearing Support team currently supports 716 children and young people, although not all these children and young people use BSL in order to communicate or access learning. The 2021 Census tells us that Polish is the most spoken main language for those who don't have English as a first language both in Oxfordshire and at a national level. This accounts for 1.1% of the total population of England and Wales, and 1.2% in Oxfordshire. In Oxfordshire, Portuguese was the second most spoken language (0.8%), and Romanian was the third (0.8%). Oxford has the largest population of residents whose main language is not English (18%).

11. In the last 3 years 210 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) have arrived in Oxfordshire. The three main countries arrivals have come from are Afghanistan, Sudan, and Iran. Currently Oxfordshire is responsible for 103 UASC who are under 18 and have looked after children (LAC) status, and 135 UASC care leavers aged 18-25 years. Under the National Transfer Scheme Oxfordshire is responsible for 106 young people. Social workers undertake a thorough assessment of their needs upon arrival and require interpreters to support them during this assessment as well as on an ongoing basis with orientation and integration whilst they are learning English.
12. Demand for the Interpretation and Translation Services have increased over the last three years across the Council. A number of factors have contributed to this – the Covid Pandemic; Afghanistan refugee evacuation; the Homes for Ukraine programme; the National Transfer Scheme and a general increase in people contacting the Council for services, where English is not their first language.

## **Review**

13. A full review of usage data over the last 3 years has been undertaken along with feedback from staff.
14. The review highlighted several issues with the existing interpretation services particularly face to face (in person) interpreting which was considered when developing the specification. Issues included -
  - a) Availability of interpreters for meetings, with cancellations occurring at short notice
  - b) Availability of interpreters for some languages, there are a number of languages which are difficult to fulfil for in person face to face interpreting.
  - c) High costs for translation materials
  - d) High level of internal staff resource to recharge costs to individual teams using the service.
  - e) High mileage claims and expenses from interpreters due to limited local interpreter pool.
  - f) Lack of local interpreters
  - g) Interpreters outside of Oxfordshire are not willing to travel a long distance for an hour booking.
  - h) Lack of qualified interpreters
  - i) Non-UK based linguists available to translate specific languages.
  - j) Other local statutory services such as Thames Valley Police pay higher rates.

## **Service**

15. The contract awarded will cover the following services -
  - a) Telephone Interpreting

- b) Face to Face Spoken
  - c) Video Spoken
  - d) Face to Face Non-Spoken
  - e) Video Non-Spoken
  - f) Translation
16. The tender invited potential providers to bid for a call-off agreement under Lot 1c – Managed Service – Local Gov and Wider Public Sector ESPO framework to submit an offer of provision. This has enabled us to ensure the most competitive price for good quality services. The framework call-off fits well with the service requirements as it affords the flexibility that is needed for a contract that can be considered as zero value.

## Strategic Outcomes

17. The services shall contribute to the following outcomes –
- a) Children, young people, and adult’s social workers complete assessments within statutory timescales.
  - b) Children, young people, and adults with language barriers are appropriately represented within assessment meetings, to ensure that accurate assessments are conducted to produce plans which meet the person’s needs.
  - c) Children, young people, and adults with language barriers can access appropriate mainstream and targeted services.
  - d) Targeted media campaigns with Public Health, Trading Standards and Coroners Service.

## Financial Implications

18. The preferred provider met all the evaluation criteria and provided costings for each service.
19. The contract awarded will be 3 years with the opportunity to extend for up to an additional 2 years (subject to further Key Decisions process).
20. The budget for these services sit with individual teams within the Council. There are not dedicated budgets for these services, as they are all pay as you use services, so it is not possible to give a full contract value. A rate comparison has been completed using the current rates and the preferred bidder rates, it is possible to ascertain that, had the new contract been in place during financial year 22/23, we could have expected savings of circa 30% overall.

<b>Service and Unit of charge</b>	<b>Current Rates</b>	<b>New Rates</b>
Telephone (per minute)	£0.50	£0.40
Face to Face – In Person (minimum 1 hour)	£28 - £32	£22 - £23
BSL – In Person (min 2 hrs)	£180	£110
Translation (per word)	£0.09	£0.05

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## Legal Implications

21. The basis of the Council's statutory duty to provide these services is set out at paragraph 1 above. The procurement of the new services has followed a competitive tendering process in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules which themselves ensure that the Council is compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended). Legal Services has assisted with the preparation of the terms and conditions of the proposed contract.

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## Staff Implications

22. There are no new or additional implications.

## Equality & Inclusion Implication

23. As there are existing services, the recommissioning process and award of tender do not negatively impact on people in Oxfordshire.

## Sustainability Implications

24. The tender evaluation process included mandatory disclosure from providers to answer questions regarding their environmental management as well as that of their sub-contractors. All providers self-certified that their organisation had no prior convictions of breaching environmental legislation, or had any notice served upon it within the last 3 years by any environmental regulator or authority.

## Risk Management

24. As part of the recommissioning process, see below a summary of the Risks and Mitigations in place.

Risk	Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
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Limited number of providers that can deliver the Councils requirements	4	Medium	Stakeholder event at tender stage
No bids received	5	Medium	Stakeholder event at tender stage
Only incumbent submit bid	5	Medium	Stakeholder engagement event to be used to attract a wide variety of suppliers. ITT questions and specification to be clear and objective in order to ensure that providers don't over-offer at tender stage just so award can be secured
Quality of bids are poor	4	Medium	Stakeholder engagement to clarify questions. Strong specification and SMART ITT questions

Report by Lisa Lyons  
Corporate Director of Children's Services

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil.

[Other Documents:] Nil

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