

## **Language Support Services: An Update**

**To:** Buckinghamshire Partnership Forum

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### **A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to **inform** the Partnership Forum of the progress that has been made since September on developing a multi-agency language support service.

### **B PROPOSED ACTION**

2. The Partnership forum is invited to **consider** and **agree** the proposals set out in paragraph 14 of this report

### **C RESOURCES APPRAISAL**

3. The resource implications attached to this report are set out in **Section 3 of APPENDIX I**. These will be relevant for any Statutory Agency who wishes to become a contributing partner in developing expanded Language Support services in Buckinghamshire. It is assumed that any expansion of provision will be building on the existing County Council Social Services Interpreting and Translation Service, and that Social Services will be funding that service in line with current commitments to that service.
4. In brief, Social Services would maintain their current level of investment and other partner agencies would make a fixed contribution of £8,000 each. This would typically enable them to access 200 hours of interpreting services for no further cost. Additional service would be available at cost. Other organisations wishing to use the service could do so but would have to pay a management fee in addition to meeting the basic cost of employing the interpreter.

5. The current costs of the service are:

	<b>Current Costs to Social Services</b>
	<b>£</b>
Co-ordination, training and administration	<b>29,000</b>
Fees paid by Social Services for interpreting and translation procedures)*	<b>28,000</b>
Costs recovered from other agencies for use of Social Services interpreting and translation service**	<b>- 12,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,000</b>

\* In addition some agencies currently contract directly with some of the interpreters.

\*\* Includes contributions from other County Council departments.

The Interpreting Service receives an additional £12,000 in return for specific services.

## **D SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 6 As members will be aware, the Partnership Forum is committed to improving access to services for minority ethnic communities in Buckinghamshire, especially through greater availability of interpreting services.
7. In May last year, the Partnership Forum agreed that members would consider how improved access to professional interpreting and language support services could be achieved. A working group, comprising staff drawn from the organisations that constitute the Partnership Forum, undertook to carry out the work. A report containing proposals for a multi-agency countywide service was presented to the Partnership Forum in September 2000.
8. The Partnership Forum requested further work to be carried out, to re-affirm the need and provide more detail regarding proposed costs for each organisation. In addition, addition, Partnership Forum members agreed to ensure that the proposals for a multi-agency approach towards improved language support services would be discussed at the most senior levels in their respective organisations.
9. Consultation with potential partners following the Partnership Forum meeting resulted in the circulation of a revised model for a language support service, together with an outline of the evidence establishing the need for such a service (**See Appendix I**). The revised proposal has been seen and discussed at relevant board and senior management meetings.
10. The original and the revised model proposed that the County Council Social Services Department Interpreting and Translation Service would form the foundation of a multi-agency. This was because this service uses only trained interpreters and has an established reputation for good practice.

11. A suggestion was made at the September Partnership Forum meeting, that language support could be provided by the local community or by voluntary sector organisations. This has also been raised in other fora and meeting groups. There are some disadvantages to this approach to providing language support services which have been raised by others. These are:-
  - a) This route is unlikely to provide an effective service in the short-term as there is not an established interpreting service within the voluntary sector in Buckinghamshire able to offer extensive access to professional interpreters. Whilst individual voluntary organisations provide interpreting support services where they are able (e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureaux, Race Equality Council's, Carers' Organisations,) the resources for this are limited.
  - b) Nor should recourse to the voluntary sector be seen as a low or no cost option. Meeting service users' needs in the area of professional interpreting support has financial implications for statutory agencies whether they are providing the service themselves or purchasing from the voluntary sector.
  - c) The expectation that statutory agencies could look to local communities to provide interpreting support is in effect how many people from minority ethnic communities receive interpreting support at the moment.
  - d) This is generally accepted as providing a less equal service for people in contact with statutory agencies. Confidentiality is compromised if family members or neighbours accompany people to appointments with health, housing or social care agencies. In addition there may be complex situations that require the specialist language skills of a professional interpreter.
  - e) The experience of the current service is that there is an increasing demand for a range of different languages, especially Eastern European languages. As the local minority ethnic communities in Buckinghamshire, who do not have English as a first language, are mostly speakers of Asian Languages they would not be able to meet the needs of speakers of other languages.
12. However, any development of existing language support services must happen in partnership with the local minority ethnic communities who would be the principal users of such services. For this reason the proposals for developments have included creating an advisory group, comprising statutory partners and members co-opted from local communities.
13. It is acknowledged that all Partnership forum members are committed in principle to a multi-agency service. The proposal outlined in Appendix I requires a minimum of 6 partners able to contribute the proposed £8000. However, it is appreciated that committing resources, both financial and staff time, is difficult during this present period of extensive organisational change which is affecting all statutory agencies in Buckinghamshire.

14. The following proposals are therefore submitted to the Partnership Forum for consideration and agreement.
- a) The Partnership Forum is invited to encourage all members to give serious consideration to the proposal for developing a multi-agency service outlined in Appendix I.
  - b) Representatives present are asked to state if they are yet authorised by their own organisation to make a financial commitment to the proposed service.
  - c) All members able to financially commit to the proposal should now form their own working group to agree, develop and refine the proposal, or develop a revised joint working arrangement according to number of partners and resources available.
  - d) A Language Support Advisory Group should be established. The membership would include:-
    - representatives from Social Services Interpreting Service staff;
    - representatives from partners involved in the multi-agency project;
    - representatives from statutory agencies who are not partners in the multi-agency project but are committed to improved language support services
    - representatives from local communities;
    - representatives from local voluntary sector organisations.
  - e) This group would be in a position to act as an advisory resource to all statutory agencies on language support and access issues. It is suggested that the group present a Language Support Report twice a year to the Partnership Forum. The Language Support Advisory Group should project manage a bid to the European Social Fund for additional resources for training and skills development for local interpreters.
  - f) Other organisations, such as housing associations have expressed an interest in contributing to a county wide language support service. The Partnership Forum is asked to invite other organisations that it considers appropriate to become partners in developing services.

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