

REPORT TO: RESOURCES, HOUSING AND GOVERNANCE
OVERVIEW GROUP

DATE: 18 MARCH 2014

TITLE: REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S TRANSLATION
SERVICES

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RECOMMENDED that the Overview Working Group recommends to Cabinet that:

- A** The Council's current service provider for translation services is maintained, with the same level of service.
- B** All staff in Harlow Council are reminded about the translation service, via the Council's Infonet, to ensure that it continues to be used effectively.
- C** The Council continues the current practice of not directly promoting a translation service for its leaflets and publications.

BACKGROUND

1. Harlow Council has provided access to translation services for customer for many years. Detailed records of all translation requests have been kept since 2005 and there has been a significant reduction in the amount of money spent on translation services since 2006/7 when £3,359 was spent compared to the average spend per year from 2010/11 to date which is £411. The current year spend from 1 April 2013 to 28 February 2014 is just £317. A full breakdown is provided in Appendix A.
2. The service is demand driven and therefore is either offered to customers by staff if they feel it is required to interact with them or if a customer requests it. All staff have access to the service. If customers need translation assistance on the phone or in person at the Civic Centre, staff dial a number, state which language they require and they are connected to an interpreter that speaks the relevant language. The interpreter then brokers a three way conversation. This works in the vast majority of cases, covers all languages and is instant.

3. The service is also used to translate letters and documents and face to face interpreters can be booked to attend if required. This is primarily used for interviews under caution where the Council has to give notice to the customer. The vast majority of translations, however, take place over the phone as this is the most cost effective method.
4. The reduction in cost was mainly due to a change of provider in 2008. This achieved significant efficiencies and market testing shows that the current provider continues to provide the most cost-effective service for the Council based on current usage. It is used on a pay-as-you-go system with billing by the second and no contractual obligations.
5. The Council has also significantly reduced the amount of printed literature such as leaflets and newsletters, which in turn has reduced requests to have them translated. For customers using the internet, companies such as Google provide translation tools that allow people to do this themselves. This is also built into the Council's website.
6. Since 2005 the Council has received 300 requests for translation services. The breakdown at Appendix B shows that the most popular languages since 2005 are Polish, Cantonese, Italian, Mandarin, Chinese, Bengali, Albanian and Lithuanian. Since 2010 there has been slightly more demand for Spanish and Latvian.
7. The service is advertised in Contact Harlow, and all staff are aware of it and promote it as required. There are also posters by the leaflet racks in the Civic Centre in a variety of languages promoting the service. Contact Harlow works closely with other teams in the Council to ensure that they are aware of, and promote, the service.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

8. The Council used to have a panel printed in its leaflets that stated it would translate the document for customers on request. As fewer publications were printed and there was no demand for translation services for this purpose, a decision was taken in 2013 to completely remove this panel from leaflets, including Harlow Times. The last request to have anything written translated was in July 2010 for a letter from the Environmental Health Team to a local business. There is no evidence to suggest that there has been any request to have anything other than letters translated in the last 10 years.
9. Should a customer ever request that a publication be translated, there is a process to ensure that this would be done if absolutely necessary. This would include working with the customer to either translate parts on the phone, use a friend or relative of theirs to help or signpost them for further support. In all cases, the Customer Advisor in Contact Harlow would work

with the customer to get the best resolution and there have again not been any requests for this.

10. Any documentation of a legal nature that has to go to a customer would always be translated.
11. The Council's budget for translation services is held by Contact Harlow. It has reduced over recent years in line with a fall in demand and also budgetary savings, and is set at £2,000 per annum.
12. The Census of 2011 showed that there has been a significant increase since 2001 in residents categorising themselves as ~~White Other~~ for ethnicity purposes. Although detailed information is not available on specific languages, this does support the fact that Latvian, Russian, Lithuanian and Polish have been popular in recent years. The statistics do show that requests for translations do mirror the make-up of Harlow residents which would indicate that there are no significant issues in accessing the service.

IMPLICATIONS

Regeneration (includes Sustainability)

None Specific.

Author: **Graeme Bloomer, Head of Regeneration**

Finance (Includes ICT)

The costs of the current service are low as shown in the report and appendix and are contained within the Community Wellbeing annual budget.

Author: **Simon Freeman, Head of Finance**

Housing

The provision of an appropriate translation facility ensures the Council has processes in place to support and engage tenants with different first language speaking. The ability to have formal legal documentation translated, at the request of tenants where applicable, or as ordered by the Courts strengthens enforcement action where necessary.

Author: **Andrew Murray, Head of Housing**

Community Wellbeing (includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

Contained within report.

Author: **Lynn Seward, Head of Community Wellbeing**

Governance (includes HR)

None specific

Author: **Brian Keane, Interim Head of Governance**

Background Papers

Appendix A . Breakdown showing cost of translations

Appendix B . Breakdown showing all translations

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

None