

TRANSLATION & INTERPRETATION POLICY

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1. Introduction / Purpose of this policy

Peterborough City Council is committed to meeting the needs of all of its residents, and ensuring that it meets its statutory obligations not to discriminate against any person. The city of Peterborough is home to a very diverse population, and it is officially recognised that there are now over 100 languages spoken in the city. There are also approximately 1000 people registered blind or partially sighted, and approximately 500 people registered as deaf or hard of hearing. To meet the needs of all residents, it may sometimes be necessary to translate communications, or provide an interpreter. This procedure is designed to ensure consistency in the use of translation and interpretation services, and to establish the criteria for their use.

The Council is aware of the opinions set out by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion¹ and supported by the Department of Communities & Local Government.² In summary these documents provide that the use of the English language is an important tool in encouraging communities to bind together, and that automatic translation of documents undermines the importance of English as a way of enabling citizens to communicate and relate to each other. With that in mind, the Council uses a more selective approach, targeting both translation and interpretation to particular needs.

Underpinning this procedure is the Council's expressed principle of being accessible.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the Council's customers who:

- have a sensory impairment
- have a learning difficulty
- do not have English as their first language

It applies to the main access channels, namely:

- electronic access to customer services
- telephone
- face to face
- written correspondence

3. Definitions

Translation: pieces of writing translated from one language to another

Interpretation: transfer of ideas expressed orally, or through use of gestures or signs

Customer: an inclusive term to include any stakeholder or group who interacts with council services

Access channels: routes through which a customer will interact with council services.

4. Sources of assistance

The Council has contracts in place to enable the provision of accessible services to the public. These are with Language Line for telephone interpreting, and with Cintra for face to face interpreting and translation.

The Customer Services team and the Children's Services Minority Ethnic New Arrivals (MENA) team include staff specifically recruited for their language skills,

¹ Our shared future: published June 2007.

² Guidance for Local Authorities on translation of Publications : published December 2007

reducing the need to involve third parties as interpreters. In addition, valuable assistance is provided by the New Link Service, which is not an interpretation and translation service for the Authority, but is a good resource for multilingual assistance to other teams and departments when appropriate.

The Council's website uses Google translate to enable its content to be translated without charge to the customer or the Council. This is to assist with general understanding of the information, but as Google translations are not always accurate, the service should not be used as a replacement for formal translation of documents in appropriate circumstances.

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to use informal interpreters such as a family or friend. However, problems may occur using family members, who may find it difficult to translate accurately and neutrally, particularly if a child is used as the interpreter. It may be necessary to use a family member as the initial interpreter for basic information in an emergency situation, but this should not be the first choice. If an assessment is being carried out by an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) under the Mental Health Act (MHA), family members should only be used in exceptional circumstances. Also, it is very important to use professional interpreters when the information gained may potentially be used in legal proceedings to avoid any issues around misunderstanding when the case reaches court.

If there is no-one suitable available immediately it may be preferable to arrange an alternative appointment when an interpreter can be available.

5. The legal duty

The Council is committed to eliminating discrimination in the provision of its services, and is under a statutory duty to ensure that no-one is discriminated against on the basis of race, disability, age, sex, religion or belief (including lack of religion or belief), gender reassignment, sexual orientation, or marriage or civil partnership.

The Council also has a duty under the Children Act 2004 to take all reasonable steps to promote and safeguard the well being of children and young people which include insuring appropriate translation and interpretation policies are provided.

There is no legal duty for all materials to be translated.

6. Pro-active reasons for translation & interpretation

The Commission on Integration & Cohesion³ found there were five main pro-active reasons to provide interpretation and translation services, and the Council follows these principles:

- ensure non English speaking residents are able to access essential services
- ensure people can take part in the democratic process (eg registering to vote)
- support local community groups or intermediaries working directly with new migrants or non English speaking communities
- enable people to function in society and understand rules such as parking controls, rubbish collection

³ "Our shared futures" : published June 2007

- ensure compliance with legislation and ensure that no-one is disadvantaged because of their inability to communicate.

7. Identifying the issue / need for an interpreter

If there is a communication problem the first staff member to meet the customer should attempt to identify the reason.

Cards provided by Language Line are available in Customer Services and other locations open to the public. These enable the member of staff to identify the customer's principal language if this is not English. Staff should also identify if a British Sign Language interpreter is necessary.

In any situation where the customer is unable to communicate using spoken English, the member of staff responding to that customer must determine whether the customer would be disadvantaged if an interpreter was not provided. If in the member of staff's judgement this would occur, appropriate arrangements for an interpreter should be made. If there is any doubt, the issue will be referred to the appropriate line manager for a decision to be made.

8. Preparation when an interpreter is to be used.

If using an interpreter who is not professionally trained and provided under the Council's contracts, they must be reminded of the following points:

- the information is confidential and must not be shared with anyone else
- the role is to transfer the meaning of what is said from one language to the other. The interpreter is not responsible for conducting the interview and should not add personal comments or opinions
- the interpreter may ask for clarity, particularly around expressions and jargon that may not easily translate
- they must be as accurate as possible, and honest if they have difficulty translating particular points.

In these circumstances the customer also needs to be briefed about the role of the interpreter.

Plain English should be used as far as possible.

If recording an interview, details of the interpreter being used should be included.

An appropriate environment should be provided for any interview, particularly one where an interpreter is to be used, with minimal background noise.

9. Deciding when to translate a document

The reasons set out in section 6 above should be considered, and then the following checklist should be used:

Is it essential to translate this document?

- Who is the target audience and is there evidence that they would otherwise be disadvantaged?
- Which languages / formats is it necessary to translate it into?

- Could the information be disseminated more effectively through community groups?
- Is there a statutory duty to provide written information in translated format?
- What would the impact be of not translating the document?

Does the whole document need to be translated?

- Could a summary of the main issues be translated?
- Could it include details of how to request a translation but not translate pro-actively?

Is the material already available elsewhere in translated form, for example other local authorities, partners such as the police?

If it is not necessary to translate the document itself, could it be useful to include a copy of the attached sheet, which draws attention to the importance of the document, and encourages the recipient to take steps to ensure that they understand it?

10. Costs

Translation and interpretation services, when needed, are provided without charge to the customer.

Budgetary responsibilities are devolved to service areas, and there is no specific budget for these services, rather they are part of the main cost of providing the particular service.