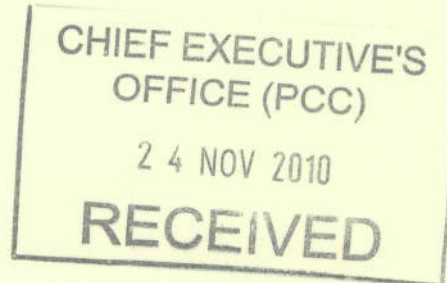




HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mrs Gillian Beasley
Chief Executive
Peterborough City Council
Town Hall
Bridge Street
Peterborough PE1 1HF



22 November 2010

Des Gillian,

Peterborough City Council Translation and Interpretation Costs

I am writing with regard to the Peterborough City Council's new Translation and Interpretation Policy (Agenda Item 6 of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee which met on 15th November 2010), particularly the in respect of the sub heading entitled "Legal Duty" and the statutory requirement in place to provide the translation and interpretation facilities as outlined in the Council's policy.

I recognise the Council's requirement to adhere to statutory obligations but despite seeking clarification last week via e-mail correspondence with Helen Edwards, City Solicitor, I was unable to obtain from her a definitive legal basis on which the City Council had decided to allocate the current and future funding of these services, which currently costs approximately £154,000 per annum. This is particularly apposite as Cllr Cereste specifically promised a "review" of this expenditure in the *Peterborough Evening Telegraph* some months ago and this seems not to have been fully expedited. For instance, as Cllr Goldspink has pointed out, there is no option in the committee report to charge for this service nor to reduce its coverage?

I was concerned at the contention Ms Edwards put forward that it was impossible to disaggregate the details of City Council expenditure that she herself pointed out was less than 0.1% of your revenue budget!

Representing Peterborough

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Whilst examining this issue, I have carefully considered the latest guidance from HM Government – a document entitled ‘*Guidance for Local Authorities on Translation of Publications*’ produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government and issued to Local Authorities in December 2007. Significantly, the document clearly states, that, ‘*there is no legal reason for all materials to be translated*’ (p11).

It goes on to make clear, *inter alia*, that: **“The Race Relations Act simply says that all parts of the community should have access to services, and although that might involve translation, it does not always have to. The Human Rights Act only requires translation if someone is arrested or charged with a criminal offence.”**

Therefore, given the ambiguity and disagreement surrounding this matter, I would be grateful if you could clarify the exact section of legislation (primary or secondary) which prohibits the Council from re-examining the provision of this service, and which the Council uses to justify this expenditure?

I hasten to add that I have defended the Council’s decision to restructure and reduce non-statutory and non-essential services where possible - and commend the difficult decisions the Council have taken in this regard thus far; however, with regard to translation services, the same commendable discretion does not appear to have been applied, and Councillor Cereste’s promise to have a review of this provision has not been forthcoming. It is rather galling to have to defend cuts in the budget for school transport for faith schools, for instance whilst the City Council refuses point blank to reconsider its blanket and open ended translation and interpretation policy.

There is clearly an issue of the need to improve community cohesion, which I recognise *may* in instances be facilitated by the translation of documents; however, I do also agree with the central premise of the document produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government: Having recourse to translators should not be an automatic first step in all cases and the translation of services can never be a substitute for learning English, which in itself serves to facilitate integration into the wider community.

I hope you will agree that we must encourage the learning of English, especially in a constituency which encompasses a large quantity of diverse cultures and nationalities. Additionally, given the current economic circumstances, I do believe there could not be a more opportune moment for the Council to reassess its provision of the translation and interpretation facilities it currently delivers.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly.

with best regards,

Yours sincerely,

Stewart Jackson

Stewart Jackson MP

Copies to Ms Helen Edwards; Paul Phillipson and all City Councillors

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