Translation and Interpretation Policy

April 2013

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INTRODUCTION

1. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are committed to delivering services to people in a fair and equal way. Effective communication is an essential part of quality services. Where communication barriers exist, such as a need for language translation or information in alternative formats, we aim to provide access tailored to people's needs, to make sure we offer equal access to services and employment opportunities for all.

POLICY AIMS

2. The aims of this policy are:

- To enable service users, staff and councillors to have equal access to the council's services and information; and

- To assist the councils' to communicate with residents, staff and councillors with specific communication needs, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities (including learning disabilities).

3. The policy covers the provision of literature in alternative formats, including languages, the provision of interpreters and the accessibility of our websites.

WHAT FUNCTIONS DOES THE POLICY COVER

4. This policy covers all council functions and services. We will also make sure that our major contractors are aware and comply with this policy where current contract specifications include relevant clauses. Those that do not will be encouraged to comply. Any future specifications will include the requirements contained within this policy.

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OUR APPROACH

5. The councils' recognise the need for proportionality bearing in mind the ageing population, the small percentage of people in South Oxforshire and the Vale of White Horse who can not speak English well or at all, guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government on translation into alternative languages[1], the requirement of the Equality Act 2010 for meeting the needs of people with disabilities, and the resources available to the councils. Paragraph 11 expands on the demographics for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse.

6. This policy is accompanied by staff guidance called ' translation and interpretation guidelines' which sets out the steps staff will need to take when making sure council information is accessible and meeting requests from members of the public.

LINKS WITH OTHER POLICIES

7. This policy compliments our Corporate Equality Policy, Corporate Identity Guidelines and councils' Style Guide that aims to ensure documents are written in plain English.

DEFINITIONS

8. Translation – written communication in a second language which has the same meaning as the written communication in a first language.

   Interpreter – somebody who listens to a message in one language and verbally delivers exactly the same message in another language.

   The term 'language' refers to Braille, audio description, lip speakers, sign language and a language other than English.

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[1] In order to encourage integration of migrant communities, documents should be produced in plain English, easy read and include pictures instead of translation.

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OFFERING COUNCIL INFORMATION IN ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGES AND FORMATS

Why the need for alternative languages and formats?

9. Being from an ethnic minority group does not automatically mean that a person has a language need. However, they are more likely to experience language barriers when accessing services than the ethnic majority population.

10. People with visual and hearing impairments or learning disabilities may experience difficulties in accessing services if they are not provided in a way that meets their needs, such as large print, CD, easy read or through a signer or lip speaker.

Background statistics

11. The following statistics set the local context from the 2011 census regarding possible language and alternative format needs of South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse population:

- 1.7 per cent of households in South Oxfordshire and 2.2 per cent in the Vale have no people in the household that have English as their main language

- 0.41 per cent of South Oxfordshire resident and Vales residents, across all nationalities can not speak English well or at all

- 9 per cent of South Oxfordshire's residents and 10.3 per cent of Vales residents are from an ethnic minority group

- 3.9 per cent of South Oxfordshire's residents and 5.1 per cent of Vales residents are from a non-white ethnic minority. The largest non white ethnic group in South Oxfordshire is the Indian population and in the Vale is people who have classed themselves as 'other Asian'

- 13.8 per cent of residents in South Oxfordshire and 14.2 per cent of Vales residents have a long term health problem or disability

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- In Oxfordshire it is estimated that 12,982 people have a learning disability, 2 per cent[2]. In South Oxfordshire and the Vale, Oxfordshire County Council provide services for 800 people with learning disabilities

- Between 2001 and 2011 South Oxfordshire saw an increase of 27 per cent of people over the age of 60, 26 per cent in the Vale. By 2026, 30 per cent of residents in both districts will be 60 and over. As the population ages, sight and hearing impairments are likely to increase.

Written information

12. The councils' will meet any requests it receives to provide written information in an alternative language or format, where it perceives there to be a genuine need. For long documents, it may be more appropriate to provide a summary or extract. It may also be appropriate to talk through the document with the person. The suitability of these options will depend on the need of the person making the request.

13. Services may themselves recognise that they need to provide translated information or alternative formats if they are dealing with any members of the public who have no or only a limited understanding of English, visual impairments or learning disabilities. This is particularly important when staff are dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.

14. In addition, the councils' will pro-actively offer to provide certain written information through the inclusion of strap lines in other languages or alternative formats, upon request. **Services will not be expected to have documents already translated or in alternative formats in case somebody needs them, they will provide these only upon request**.

15. All services will also include the text phone telephone number on all letters to enable deaf or hard of hearing people to use a text phone to access services. All services that produce information leaflets will offer them in alternative formats, including easy read. Statements offering the provision are set out in the staff handbook 'translation and interpretation guidelines'.

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[2] http://www.improvinghealthandlives.org.uk/numbers/howmany/laestimates/

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Pro-active approach for offering information in alternative languages and formats
Services which have a higher proportion of service users from an ethnic minority group or are older/have disabilities, vulnerable people, services dealing with enforcement cases and initiatives that specifically target people from ethnic minorities or people with disabilities should **offer** key policy documents, letters, service information leaflets and applications for a service where relevant in alternative languages and formats. These services will include: **Benefits, housing services including private sector enforcement, community safety, planning enforcement, benefit fraud, council tax collection (including enforcement), environmental protection (enforcement) and specific initiatives to be determined on a case by case basis.**
Proactive approach for offering information in alternative languages only
Services which have a higher proportion of service users from an ethnic minority group should **offer** key policy documents, letters, service information leaflets and applications for a service where relevant in alternative languages. These services will include: **Licensing, commercial businesses (food), health and safety.**
Proactive approach for offering information in alternative formats only
Services which have a higher proportion of service users who are older or have disabilities should **offer**; key policy documents, letters and applications for a service where relevant in alternative formats. These services will include: **Disabled facilities grants, assisted waste collection**
The councils' website's state that council information is available in alternative languages and formats upon request, where there is a genuine need.

PROVISION OF INTERPRETERS, SIGNERS OR LIP SPEAKERS

16. The councils' will meet any requests received from service users, staff or councillors to provide an interpreter, signer or lip speaker in order to communicate council information, where it perceives there to be a genuine need.

17. Services may themselves recognise the need to provide interpreters if they are dealing with any service users who have no or limited understanding of English or who have hearing impairments (for interviews and meetings etc). This is particularly important when staff are dealing with an issue which has potential legal and/or financial implications for the service user.

18. As part of this policy, the council has a voluntary 'languages register'. This register includes staff that speak languages other than English or who can sign and are willing to provide an internal resource to help enable communications between the council and members of the public. Staff on the register would only be called upon by services to help assist them with any <u>initial</u> contact and would not be asked to translate documents.

19. Visitors to the council offices who do not speak English or are hearing impaired will be assisted initially by reception staff. Once it becomes clear which service they require (this may involve using the 'which language cards' or 'languages register' or a telephone interpreter), they will be referred to the relevant service which is then responsible for arranging interpreters. Details for this procedure are set out in the translation and interpretation guidelines.

ACCESSIBILITY OF WEBSITES

20. The councils' websites aim to meet accessibility standards at level AA. We also provide a service to convert text to speech and the ability to translate the text into alternative languages through Google translate. We will also encourage our partners and contractors providing services on our behalf to ensure their websites meet this standard, where it is not already included in contracts.

MEETING AND MONITORING ANY REQUESTS FOR ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGES AND FORMATS (WRITTEN TRANSLATIONS OR INTERPRETERS)

21. Requests for written translations, alternative formats, interpreters, signers or lip speakers will be met as soon as possible. Service teams themselves may be able to meet some requests for alternative formats (e.g. documents in large print, documents sent via email). The service will keep the person making the request informed of the arrangements made to meet their needs.

22. Services are responsible for covering any associated costs from their own budgets.

23. If a member of staff has to arrange for any council information/service to be provided in an alternative way, they will need to log this information using a designated spreadsheet on the intranet.

24. The shared equalities officer will review this data regularly to monitor demand for such services.

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