



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

29 December 2017

Dear ,

ATISN 11779 – Wales Interpreting and Translation Service

Thank you for your request which was received on 30 November about the Wales Interpreting and Translation Service (WITS). The information you requested is enclosed at Annex 1.

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: FreedomOfInformationOfficer@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

[Address]

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre
0300 0604400

Annex 1

To: 1. Carol Mooney [Ref]
2. Minister for Social Justice and Local Government CC:Gill Lambert
EDID Mailbox

From: Carol Godfrey
Inclusion Team
Merthyr Tydfil Office
Ext 01685 729657
Fax 01685 729622

Date: 8 June 2010

WALES INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION SERVICE (WITS)

Issue

1. Jonathan Evans MP has written to Theresa May MP, Home Secretary, over concerns expressed by one of his constituents, Mr Ewart Morgan, regarding the Wales Interpreting and Translation Service (WITS). The letter from Mr Morgan focuses on the service WITS is providing for public services that have deaf and hard of hearing clients.
2. Mr Morgan's main concerns appear to be that when a public service provider contacts WITS to provide a sign language interpreter, WITS allegedly refuse to discuss the assignment with the deaf/hard of hearing client. This means that the deaf and hard of hearing clients have little or no input into the process and WITS are not aware of the deaf and hard of hearing client's individual requirements. Mr Morgan states that this is the experience of his family and others.
3. His other concern is that prior to the advent of WITS this work was carried out by three charities, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the Wales Council for the Deaf and the British Deaf Association. Mr Morgan states that it is unclear if WITS provides the same standard of service as these charities. He also states that the advent of WITS has had the effect of taking away the income these charities received from charging an administration fee for providing this service.
4. Mr Morgan has also raised the following queries:
 - What statutory provision allows a Gwent Police Station to be used to provide WITS; and
 - Did the Welsh Assembly Government link up with the Home Office on the grant to Gwent Police to set up this service

Timing

5. In the normal course of business

Background

6. A feasibility study to establish the facts concerning the supply and demand of face- to-face interpreters and other language and communication services across Wales was undertaken with the support of the Making the Connections Improvement Fund in 2008. The final report on the study concluded that there was a need for a centralised service for Wales and recommended that a pilot service should be established to test this approach.

7. The WITS pilot was overseen by a project executive board made up of representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff Health Alliance, Gwent Police, Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust, Cardiff Local Health Board. Cardiff Council was the lead organisation on this pilot not Gwent Police. It is now intended to expand this to include representatives of those agencies/public services that have since joined the partnership. This expanded Steering Group will oversee all future financial and business issues relating to service delivery and management of the WITS service. The Welsh Assembly Government is not represented on this Steering Group.
8. As the WITS pilot regularly required a lone member of staff to be going off duty at midnight, seven days a week, it was preferable that it was located in a secure environment where there was other staff working at these times. Consequently a police station was the preferred choice and as Caerphilly Police Station had close proximity to the two organisations that had financially contributed to the project during 2008-2009, (Gwent Police and Cardiff Health Alliance) it was the one chosen. WITS are paying office rental costs based on current rates for rental of suitable police office space.
9. WITS is effectively a not for profit agency supplying linguistic services, mainly to the public sector and voluntary bodies etc. WITS handles the booking and financial arrangements in the process of interpreter provision, thereby freeing up operational staff in the public sector to concentrate on their role.
10. Officials have been in contact with Chief Inspector Tony Wilcox, Manager, WITS, who has confirmed that WITS has received 40 requests from service providers to provide sign language interpreters. These requests have been fulfilled through using local individual BSL interpreters or through local Deaf Charity organisations that assist to supply these services, (in the same manner that they would have been booked before the introduction of WITS).
11. WITS assists public services in Wales to provide their services in line with the Law of England and Wales and to follow Welsh Assembly Government guidance 'BSL - Advice for Public Services', e.g. by providing a 24/7 accessible service. WITS has not received any feedback regarding the sign language services they have provided. Given that they are using the same BSL interpreters that were being used previously, this is not surprising.
12. WITS has confirmed with officials that it continues to liaise with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People Cymru/Wales Council for Deaf People/Association of Sign Language Interpreters Wales/North Wales Deaf Association/British Deaf Association Wales in order to develop a co-operative approach to achieving the improvement of the quality of services to the deaf and hard of hearing.
13. However these organisations in recent correspondence with WITS have raised the following queries/concerns:
 - The right of the individual to arrange their own communication support.
 - That the Terms and Conditions offered by WITS will see a standard payment for all duties, they feel this will take away the current financial incentive for junior interpreters to develop their skill base and discourage interpreters from undertaking specialist training.
 - That WITS will have a detrimental effect on their ability to collaborate on projects such as BSL Futures.

They also state that without resolution of these key issues they do not feel that they can support the work of WITS in this field.

14. Officials feel that one of the main concerns is the alleged loss of income experienced by these charities (which was generated from charging an administrative fee) since WITS began to offer a competitive service. These financial implications could have the potential to become a major issue and could result in subsequent lobbying of the Welsh Assembly Government by these organisations and their supporters against WITS. The concerns of these organisations are valid, they are Third Sector organisations who operate on a not for profit basis. These charitable organisations cannot presume to have the monopoly on providing these services, particularly as WITS uses the same BSL interpreters and therefore meets the same standard of service delivery.
15. In October 2009 Enid Rowlands, Trustee, Royal National Institute for the Deaf wrote to your predecessor seeking assurances that it was the intention of WITS to develop and maintain the standards of service provided for people in Wales, in line with Welsh Assembly Government policy, British Sign Language – Advice for Public Services. Following contact with Chief Inspector Tony Wilcox, Project Manager, a response was issued confirming that this was the case (BG/05536/09).

Funding of WITS

16. In total £209,000 was required to run the WITS pilot, Cardiff Council contributed £50,000, Gwent Police £20,000 and the Welsh Assembly Government provided £120,000 of funding for 2009/2010. The remaining £39,000 was provided by income generated in the first year of the pilot. The Welsh Assembly Government funding was used in the financial year 2009/2010 on upfront costs (SF/BG/0227/09) and was paid to Cardiff Council not Gwent Police. The Welsh Assembly Government does not currently provide any funding for WITS.