

Equality Impact Assessment: Proposed removal of Woking Interpreting and Translation Service (WITS)

Officer responsible for completing EIA: Volunteer Development Officer	Manager responsible for EIA: Julie Meme
Strategic Director responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm	Date last updated: 4 January 2024

1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to 'live within its means' in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the [Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

The Council is no longer able to support the Woking Interpreting and Translation Service, which is a discretionary service. Staff resources are being reviewed accordingly. This will make a saving of £24,455 through staff cost as WITS does not make a profit.

2. Impact on services

The Woking Interpreting and Translation Service (WITS) was established in 1996 and forms part of Volunteer Woking. It was initially started to provide the Woking community with interpreters in various languages, to ensure that everyone has access to the services they require. These jobs mainly take place in hospitals, mental health clinics, councils and educational settings. An interpreter will sit in an appointment with the client and translate there and then. Most jobs are face-to-face, however since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased demand for video and telephone interpreting. WITS is a paid service and interpreters are paid at a market rate and clients charged accordingly.

Most Woking residents speak English as their main language, but recorded figures from 2022, suggest 1.33% speak English 'not well', 0.24% 'cannot speak English'.

600 WITS jobs have been completed so far this year, but we are unable to show how many residents use this service as it is Surrey wide.

We are unable to clarify which appointments directly impact a Woking resident as the appointment is made by the clients, NHS, schools, doctors etc and due to GDPR are unable to give us any information regarding the user.

We use in total **20** active Interpreters with **5** residing in the Woking Borough.

Top five languages

Farsi
Portuguese
Arabic
Russian/Ukraine
Bengal

3. Engagement and consultation

The Council has carried out public engagement on all proposed savings to ensure a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.

The **first phase of the engagement** took place in summer 2023. Residents and businesses had the opportunity to have their say on how to tackle the budget shortfall. This is what they had to say about the economic impact. [Help shape the future of discretionary council services | Woking Community Forum](#)

Phase two consultation started 2nd October until 12 November. The outcome of this consultation will be reported to Council in January 2024 with full Council decision on the 8 February 2024. The report can be found [here](#).

Overall, there were 20 organisations emailed about the WITS service. 5 organisations e-mailed back with 15 responses received.

Woking Translation Service Users – emails sent	
Organisation	Replied
Runnymede CMHRS, Unither House Chertsey	Yes
Ashford Hospital Central Booking	
St. Peters Hospital/Maternity dept.	
Cygnets Hospital Knaphill	
The Jarvis Centre Guildford Paediatric speech & Language	Yes
First Community Health Redhill	
Farnham Road Hospital Guildford	
I-Access (remote interpreting only)	
Beaufort School Woking	
Children & Family Health Surrey Theta Building Frimley	Yes
Children & Family Health Surrey, Goldsworth Park Health Centre Woking	Yes
Guildford CMHRS	
Woking Community Hospital Bradley Unit	
Community Team for People with Learning Disabilities West Surrey	
Surrey Heath Borough Council	
Surrey Bowel Screening Service	Yes

Central Surrey Health/Whitehouse Addlestone	
Woking CMHRS	

Comments included:

- Removing this service will have a massive impact on our service (NHS) as we are already struggling with waiting times so to delay due to language barriers would be detrimental.

Ashford & St Peters Hospital - Not all departments use the WITS service. At present our main customer is Maternity unit at St Peters Hospital.

Different departments will use the Framework agreement as set out by the NHS Framework document.

[The NHS Framework document](#) will be published on Woking.gov website and can also be found on the NHS website.

- This would significantly impact our organisation as we use this service regularly and is vital in ensuring that children receive neurodevelopmental assessments and treatment in a timely manner. Without the support of translators, it will be impossible to help families understand the assessment and treatment options. WITS have always provided an exceptional service allowing children and families to get the vital support they need. The NHS is already massively strained and removing such services will only delay essential appointments further.
- We have many families that need the support of a translator during the appointments when discussing their child's health. Closure of this service will severely impact the ability of the parents to understand medical information and care plans.
- The translation service is very valuable to us. Catharine and team always provide us with the translation we required. If we need interpreter WITS is the first place we go to before anywhere else. It's local for us which means we save money for travel etc.
- We use the service regularly and this allows appointments to go ahead without causing any unnecessary delays. The team value the service along with our service users. Without WITS, appointments that require a translator will not be able to go ahead and this will have a negative impact on the people that use our services.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men				x		There will be an impact on anyone who needs an interpreter to access services. Circa 50% of service users are men. Real data cannot be collected due to GDPR and patient confidentiality. All appointments are made by the client i.e., NHS, schools, doctors who will not supply end user demographics. Mitigations: Translation can be provided via a number of existing agencies, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTI Services, London who can source least common languages. • Hospitals use Language line in some dept. • Use their own staff • Use own family members • Translation Bureau • NHS Framework document

	Women				x		<p>There will be an impact on anyone who needs an interpreter to access services.</p> <p>Circa 50% of service users are women. Real data cannot be collected due to GDPR and patient confidentiality. All appointments are made by the client ie NHS, schools, doctors who will not supply end user demographics.</p> <p>Mitigations: Translation can be provided via number of existing agencies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTI Services, London who can source least common languages. • Hospital currently use Language line in some dept. • Use their own staff. • Use own family members. • Translation Bureau • <u>The NHS Framework document</u> will be published on Woking.gov website and can also be found on the NHS website.
Gender Reassignment						x	<p>There is no data to how many appointments are made to the WITS service from this group although as above anyone requiring interpreters to access services will be impacted, although it is assumed there is no specific impact on this group.</p> <p>Mitigations as above.</p>
Race	White					x	<p>Groups in this section, if second language is English, will be affected.</p> <p>Mitigations: Translation can be provided via a number of existing agencies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GTI Services, London who can source least common languages. • Hospital use Language line in some dept. • Use their own staff. • Use own family members. • Translation Bureau • <u>The NHS Framework document</u> will be published on Woking.gov website and can also be found on the NHS website.

	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups				x		As above
	Asian/Asian British				x		As above
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				x		As above
	Gypsies / travellers				x		As above
	Other ethnic group				x		As above
Disability	Physical					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
	Sensory					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
	Learning Difficulties					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
	Mental Health					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
Age	Older people (50+)					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
	Younger people (16 - 25)					x	

	Children (0-15)						Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
Religion or Belief	Faith Groups					x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact. Mitigations as above.
Pregnancy & maternity					x		St Peters Hospital uses the WITS service for women whose first language is not English. Unfortunately, due to GDPR will cannot ascertain how many are residents of Woking and/or which are residents within the St Peter's catchment area. Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected. Mitigations as above.
Marriage & Civil Partnership						x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact.
Socio-economic Background						x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact.
Carers						x	Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected, although no specific impact.
Other identified groups	Refugees. Immigrants and asylum seekers.				x		The WITS service has been utilised to help and support this group. Other agencies and means will need be utilised.to provide a service. Groups in this section if second language is English will be affected. Mitigations as above

ACTION PLAN:

Actions identified from EIA	Target completion date	Responsible Officer	Comments
Compose and send letters to clients informing the service will be stopping. This will include signposting to other Interpreting organisations.	31 March 2024	Voluntary Sector Coordinator	See framework document put together by NHS. This shows different suppliers.
Compose and send letters to all interpreters informing the service will be stopping.	31 March 2024	Voluntary Sector Coordinator	All our interpreters are self-employed.
Prepare reference for interpreters. To leave with HR including dates work for WITS and number of jobs completed.	31 March 2024	Voluntary Sector Coordinator	
Chase outstanding purchase orders. Make sure all invoices are on the system and resolve any queries	1 March 2024	Voluntary Sector Coordinator	Chase outstanding purchase orders. Make sure all invoices are on the system and resolve any queries
Produce a list that will enable us to signpost our clients to an Interpreting and Translation service that will be able to assist. This list will be sent to all clients and added to Woking Borough Council website.	31 March 2024	Voluntary Sector Coordinator	Use the NHS Framework and also any third-party service we already use.

SIGNOFF

LEGAL SERVICES: Completed	DATE: 8 January 2024
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: Completed	DATE: 22 January 2024
REVIEW PANEL MEMBER: Completed	DATE: 4 January 2024