

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton
Lead Officer (Healthwatch Reading and
Healthwatch Wokingham Borough)
Oxford Road Community Centre,
344 Oxford Road
Reading RG30 1AF

Civic Offices,
Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU

☎ 0118 937 3787

Sent via email: Alice.Kunjappy-

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Date: 7 May 2025

Your contact is: [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

Dear Alice,

Recommendations for enhancing interpreter and translation services.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations to enhance the quality and accessibility of interpreter and translation service, and apologies for the delay in replying as we compiled information from across a wide range of services.

Reading Borough Council is committed to making sure that our services are inclusive and accessible to everyone, and our interpretation and translation offer is a crucial part of that.

Please see below our response to the recommendations made in your letter:

Accessibility, information and awareness

We will be providing training to all RBC staff on how to commission interpretation and translation services as part of introducing a new supplier in June this year. This will cover how these services work, how to proactively identify appropriate support, and how to access them for service users. The procurement specification for the new interpretation and translation contract set out ease of access and use as key requirements.

Reading Borough Council encourages staff to use interpreters and has a contract to supply those. At present, a range of providers are used in the contract. Guaranteeing timely provision can be challenging for some languages and depends on the availability of interpreters. However, urgent same day, 24 hours and 3-5 day services are available. We advise practitioners that they should aim to use telephone interpretation where appropriate, as this benefits from an international pool of interpreters which maximises the possibility of meeting a wide range of languages and dialects and is also more cost effective to meet the numbers who require support. A face-to-face interpreter can be prone to missed appointments, are higher cost, and more difficult to access rare languages. As we move to the new supplier, turnaround times and fulfilment will be quicker, as will the availability of instant video requests.

Information is available on translation on the council's website. Under the NHS Accessible Communications Standard, social care clients receive letters and documents in the language they have requested.

IT system coding

We agree that reviewing and standardising IT system coding is a good idea in principle, and we will explore this with the new supplier to see what is possible. There are a number of factors that will influence how deliverable this is in practice. Whether interpreter needs and language preferences can be recorded or trigger automatic bookings would depend on which systems are being used. System owners or support teams for each platform would need to identify what is already possible and what might need additional development. Automatically triggering interpreter bookings based on a recorded code would likely rely on integration between the case management or clinical system and the interpreter booking platform. Whether this is achievable may depend on what functionality the new supplier offers and how workflows are designed. Standardising codes across services would likely need coordination between partners and reference to nationally recognised data standards, such as those used by NHS England.

'Access to interpreters' services' card

We do not believe cards are the best way to achieve outcomes. They take away the fact that someone who speaks another language can make their need for an interpreter known. In practice we find that translation needs are known ahead of time for our existing clients. Where new customers present at reception, they are often using mobile technology to express any requirement for translation. However, we recognise that there will always be some customers that do not have this option. We will, therefore, be developing an improved process as part of mobilising our new interpretation and translation contract, for any customers to identify their translation needs.

Co-production: NHS, Local Authority, and Voluntary and Community sector

Reading Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children interpretation and translation services are commissioned centrally. Where RBC and the NHS previously partnered to deliver some interpretation and translation services, the NHS has now put in place a new contract for all NHS commissioned Interpretation and Translation services as of 1 April 2025. While we support a cross-sector approach, this requires sign-up and leadership as all contracts need to be aligned to achieve this. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you further to develop this approach, which we could consider as part of the annual refresh of our VCS Compact and VCS Action Plan.

Cultural sensitivity and people's rights:

All interpreters have some level of qualification, but the level of qualification varies depending on the task. For example, legal and court interpretation requires a higher qualification standard than other areas. For each type of interpretation and translation, our supplier provides assurance that their staff have the qualifications required and quality assurance measures are in place to ensure this is the case.

A fully inclusive service for our customers moves beyond translation and interpretation services.

Inclusive language to change the narrative:

We use the term 'global majority' internally and externally at the Council instead of 'ethnic minority'. Ensuring that we work with cultural humility and deliver inclusive services is a priority for the Council at all levels. We continue to develop and embed our equality, diversity, inclusion

and belonging strategy to ensure that all staff are supported to identify and deliver improvements in this area.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Wise". The script is fluid and cursive.

Melissa Wise
**Executive Director, Communities &
Adult Social Care**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lara Patel". The script is fluid and cursive.

Lara Patel
**Executive Director, Children's
Services, Education & Early Help**