

7th January 2013

Agenda Item: 14

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, PERSONAL CARE AND SUPPORT (YOUNGER ADULTS)

COMMISSIONING OF SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION SERVICE FOR NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval to procure a new contract for the Nottinghamshire Sign Language Interpretation Service (SLIS) by competitive tender. The current contract has expired and partner agencies are keen to work together to procure a cost effective service. Nottingham City Council are taking a lead commissioner role in tendering for this service which includes both NHS Nottinghamshire County and NHS Nottingham City and have invited the County Council to be part of this procurement process.

Information and Advice

Current contract and service

2. Nottinghamshire County Council's current Sign Language Interpretation Service is provided by Nottinghamshire Deaf Society (NDS). Service Level Agreements have been in place with the NDS for two decades, covering the provision of an accessible community-based sign language interpretation service for the deaf community of Nottinghamshire. Currently NDS has separate Service Level Agreements in place for SLIS with Nottingham City Council, NHS Nottinghamshire and NHS Nottingham City. NHS Bassetlaw spot purchase services from NDS as required.
3. The current contract provides an interpretation service that enables people from the deaf community to have equitable access to information, advice, and social care services, as well as low level universal and prevention services provided by the council, community and voluntary sector.
4. The service offers both planned and drop-in services including a SLIS to enable access to the County Council's Customer Service Centre. Contacts and communication may relate to any area of County Council services. The SLIS supports adults who are deaf and require a social care assessment to ensure they can participate in this process and are involved in making choices and informed decisions about the services they need whether via a personal budget or universal services.

5. This service is also available to deaf parents who need access to a sign language service to effectively engage in their child's education, such as parent evenings and consultations. It also offers deaf children a sign language service independently to ensure they can effectively access social care services provided by Children Families and Cultural Services.
6. The current County Council contract provides a total of 2,836 face-to-face hours per annum (including administration, travel and running costs). This service can be provided on a planned basis, or is available on an out of hours emergency basis for 46 hours of the week:
 - 6.00 pm – 11.00 pm weekdays
 - 9.00 am – 11.00 pm Saturdays
 - 9.00 am – 4.00 pm Sundays.

This would equate to availability out of hours for 2,392 hours per annum if required. Of the total volume of 2,836 face-to-face hours provided:

- 1,900 hours are available Monday to Friday
- 936 hours are available at weekends.

In 2011/12 this included 250 duty contacts to provide telephone, and correspondence interpretation services.

Budget

7. The value of the current County Council contract is £48,879 per annum. Within the current contract, NDS meets sign language interpretation requests from the County Council on a countywide basis including travelling to wherever it is needed.
8. Nottingham City Council is proposing to take a lead commissioner role and has started a process to tender for a SLIS in partnership with NHS Nottinghamshire and NHS Nottingham City Health. Nottinghamshire County Council has also been invited to join this tender, to engage in shaping the service specification, defining the outcomes and future market. The proposed time-scale is to have the new contract and revised service in place by 1st June 2013.
9. From the available information the number of people registered as deaf (184) and those registered as hard of hearing (327) are much greater than the number of individuals accessing the SLIS. During the life of the new contract it will be possible to negotiate some changes at the annual contract review to reflect any changing needs of the deaf community that may subsequently emerge. The new contract will be delivered at the same or reduced cost as we now pay. Sign language interpretation when required as part of social care responsibilities under the Deprivation of Liberty requirements and for people using Direct Payment Support Services is not part of the existing agreement, we currently pay extra on top of the £48,879 contract value for these. These will be included as standard in the new contract, which will achieve some savings.
10. In line with procurement legislation and advice from the County Council Procurement team there is a need to test the market and competitively tender the SLIS. This will provide an opportunity for NDS and other providers in the market to compete for the work.

Mapping demand for a Sign Language Interpretation Service

11. The services provided for children and schools need detailed evaluation during the first year of the contract. Coordinating such a small service across the schools in the County during a period of considerable change in the governance of schools has resulted in little formal monitoring of the quality of these services. The consultation undertaken suggests a high value is placed on these services. However, this will require more detailed confirmation. SLIS and lip reading is provided by many other sources such as schools, colleges, the NHS, as well as groups, organisations, families and individuals.
12. Whilst the demand for SLIS within children's services has declined in recent years, there has been an increased demand from deaf adults. Estimating the future impact of health care advances such as cochlea implants will be key to understanding the number of people needing a SLIS in the future.
13. The need for the service is changing and will continue to change in the coming years. The proposed contract will be offered for three years but will be subject to annual review and possible changes each year to ensure the SLIS meets local changing demand.
14. NDS also receives separate funding from Councils to deliver other services that provide support. Currently an annual average of £31,000 is paid in grant aid. It is split equally between providing social support for the deaf and hard of hearing older people; and providing general financial aid, including provision of premises, related costs; and staff to provide the service as well as training which includes lip reading and deaf awareness. This provides preventative services for people who are not eligible for social care, such as befriending, lunch clubs, men's and women's groups.
15. Their training increases the capacity of many other organisations, services, families and individuals who provide vital communication to support those who are deaf or hard of hearing. These services are separate to the SLIS and therefore should remain viable in the event of a different provider being awarded the tender.

Other options considered

16. Cease to fund at the end of the extended contract period: A statutory duty is placed upon the Council to communicate effectively with deaf citizens through providing interpretation services. Interpretation services could be individually spot purchased but this would incur significant transactional costs and would impede access for deaf citizens.
17. Tender the service solely as Nottinghamshire County Council and do not undertake a joint process: The economies of scale that present themselves through a joint procurement process are favourable to the Council to achieve best value and also to the successful applicant as the higher contract value leads to a more sustainable service than smaller value contracts delivering the same service. A separate service would also fail to deliver an integrated service for the deaf citizen and would lead to unnecessary duplication.
18. Deliver the service as part of the Corporate Communications Service: This option was explored by the City Council and discussed with their Language Solutions team. As well as the issues raised within Option 2, given the face-to-face requirements of deaf citizens in accessing provision, there are significant difficulties in this service providing an accessible route for deaf citizens.

19. Deliver the service via individuals Personal Budgets where eligible: This option requires individual service users to purchase a SLIS directly from providers or via Adult Social Services. This form of spot purchasing fails to deliver the cost benefits available from a volume contract. There would be no cap on spending in the same way as a volume contract provides.

Preferred Option

20. Tender the Interpretation Services for the deaf community through a joint commissioning process with Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City NHS and Nottinghamshire County NHS. This will ensure a fair and transparent process is undertaken, and will allow best value to be sought across all Interpretation Services for the deaf community due to the economies of scale presented by joint commissioning.

Implications for Service Users

21. The preferred option will ensure the Council obtains best value for the budget and mitigates possible increases for three years. Recently commissioned Advocacy Services already provide evidence of the benefits of commissioning partnerships where specialist services are required. The provision of an integrated service across health and local authority services will provide the best customer experience ensuring care pathways are supported by SLIS over time.
22. The outcomes of local consultation across the whole County strongly suggest spot purchasing can result in interpreters being used from outside the County area. There is national evidence that sign language interpreters include local dialect in the same way as the spoken language, therefore, interpreters from outside the local area are less effective. The consultation strongly suggested that local people using a local pool of interpreters have greater trust in them than one delivered by spot purchasing.
23. Deaf people who may be eligible for social care require access to a SLIS to ensure that social care outcomes are appropriately achieved. This new contract will ensure that service users are fully involved in the choice and control of their social care services; this will include assessment, support planning, brokerage and use of Direct Payments where appropriate.
24. The proposed suite of services promotes access to a quality service to meet the required standards where it is indicated the Council have a duty to provide it.
25. The provision of a SLIS promotes early intervention and prevention reducing the risk of avoidable long term social care or admission to residential care and hospital
26. The provision of a SLIS promotes independence, dignity and community engagement and reduces stigma, social exclusion and hate crime.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Equalities Implications

28. Nottinghamshire County Council has a statutory obligation under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that 'reasonable adjustments' are made to enable deaf people to use their services. Tendering the Interpretation services for the deaf community through a joint commissioning process will allow for the economies of scale to be favourable to the Council, its partners and also to the successful applicant. It will also provide an integrated service for deaf adults and their families.
29. The SLIS enables the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to ensure services are accessible to people from the deaf community, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- a) Members approve the procurement of a new contract for a Sign Language Interpretation Service by competitive tender in partnership with Nottingham City Council and NHS Nottinghamshire County and NHS Nottingham City.

JON WILSON

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Constitutional Comments (NAB 14/12/2012)

30. The Adult Social Care and Health Committee has authority to consider and approve the recommendation set out in this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (NDR 13/12/2012)

31. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 7 to 10 of the report.

Background Papers

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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