

September 2024

Template letter to download and send to your MP

You can download and use the template letter/email on the next page to ask your MP to challenge the Ministry of Justice's decision to continue to outsource its language services.

To find the contact details of your MP, visit:

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/Commons>

Please feel free to amend and personalise the letter. You may wish to add some relevant personal experiences.

We would also be delighted to hear about any response you receive to your letter. If you are happy to share this, please email a copy to mike@nrpsi.org.uk.

Should you need further information or specific evidence to support your communications with your MP, NRPSI is committed to helping with any such enquiries. Please contact us using the same email address provided above.

Dear _____,

Re: Decision to continue with outsourcing the UK's court interpreting services without consulting key stakeholders

I am deeply concerned by the news that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has decided 'to seek new outsourced language services'.

In a letter seen by the regulator of my profession, the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), the Minister of State (MoJ), Heidi Alexander MP, has written to Kerry McCarthy MP, to inform her of this fact. In this communication, dated 12 September 2024, the Minister also states that *"the decision to seek new outsourced services has followed the required approvals process and the opportunity will be published on Contracts Finder and the Find a Tender service in due course"*.

I was under the impression that the MoJ would continue a collaborative review of its current language services procurement practices with the Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) members who participate in its Language Services External Stakeholder Forum before any such decision was taken. And yet, it seems a decision has been made under the new Labour administration to continue with the discredited outsourcing regime that was introduced by the then Conservative government in 2012. This is in spite of the fact that two of the three existing contracted language agencies are now failed businesses and the third agency, thebigword, has under-delivered against its performance targets since 2016.

As your constituent and in my capacity as a Registered Public Service Interpreter (RPSI), I am writing to ask you to raise the following question with the Secretary of State for Justice in the House of Commons:

- *Why has there been no discussion with relevant professional stakeholder organisations concerning the possible return to court language services being insourced?*

On behalf of the public, and all professional registered public service interpreters, please can you also find out when the decision to continue with this shameful outsourcing approach was made, who was involved in making this decision, and why the previously mentioned stakeholder group that has been liaising with the MoJ concerning its approach to language services procurement was not involved in the decision-making process?

Meetings between relevant professional stakeholder organisations and the MoJ concerning language services procurement are even more important at this time given the current chaos in the MoJ's language engagements booking system. The disruption, which has been caused by a new IT system that was introduced by thebigword that is profoundly unfit for service, has resulted in postponements to court hearings and delays in payments to interpreters, bringing about industrial action.

The value of these consultations is clearly evidenced by the revisions that the MoJ has made to the language qualification and experience requirements in its proposed new framework. This new framework, due to come into operation in October 2025, is a marked improvement on the existing one, which still states that someone who has enrolled on a level 1 vocational course (basic GCSE level) can act as an interpreter in bail hearings, first hearings and case management sessions. NRPSI has been advised that the MoJ will be removing this clause from the current framework as well. Nevertheless, the current framework still lists a number of other qualifications that are considered inadequate at best by relevant professional stakeholder organisations. For example, the MoJ considers a person who holds a degree in philology but no professional or vocational interpreting training or qualifications as equipped to work as an interpreter in the justice system.

The MoJ's new framework will raise the bar on the level of qualifications and experience an interpreter will need to work in MoJ settings, albeit these standards still do not match the requirements to be a regulated and Registered Public Service Interpreter according to NRPSI. Indeed, this new approach by the MoJ to qualifications does not yet deliver all of the improvements that PI4J has called for and which it believes are necessary to uphold public service interpreting standards and protect the public. However, it is a move in the right direction thanks to the MoJ's consultative discussions with the relevant professional stakeholder organisations.

I look forward to receiving your response. I also very much look forward to hearing that there will be a full and proper exploration of the possible reintroduction of language services insourcing that involves the relevant professional stakeholder organisations.

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Contact details: