

## **Professional Interpreters for Justice submission to the House of Lords Public Services Committee inquiry into Interpreting and Translation Services in the Courts.**

Professional Interpreters for Justice (PI4J) are delighted the report, published in conjunction with the Association of Translation Companies, outlining recommendations for tackling the procurement and provision of language services for the public sector, was mentioned in the call for submissions. PI4J is committed to continued collaboration and consultation and has been pleased to liaise with the Ministry of Justice in recent months, exploring issues across the provision of interpreting and translation services (ITS) in the courts.

It was therefore a surprise to see a letter from Heidi Alexander, MP and Minister of State, addressed to Kerry McCarthy MP, dated 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024, stating the *“Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has decided to seek new outsourced services”* And 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”*.

PI4J members were under the impression that there would be continued collaborative reviews with the MoJ, especially given the changes made to the new proposed framework following many months of consultation. This proposed new framework is definitely an improvement on the current framework which still states 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. In the courts themselves, someone with a degree in philology can currently operate as a practicing public service interpreter, with no vocational qualifications at all.

The new framework due to come into operation in October 2025 will raise the bar on the level of qualifications and experience an interpreter will need to have to work in MoJ settings, albeit they still do not match the requirements to be a registered and regulated public service interpreter according to the National Register (NRPSI). This new framework does not yet deliver all of the improvements PI4J has called for and that we believe are necessary to uphold public service interpreting standards and protect the public.

This submission from the PI4J focuses on just one issue from the list of questions, as we know there are many submissions from stakeholder organisations and individuals. PI4J requests the opportunity to re-open the discussions regarding insourcing and fully explore the disastrous decision by the Tory government in 2012 to outsource ITS in the courts. This issue will help with answers to questions 1/ and 2/.

PI4J was formed in 2012 to pull stakeholders together and to make recommendations to try and halt the Tory government moving to outsourcing of language services in the courts. Unfortunately, the ITS has been outsourced from that year to three different main contract holders, two of which failed to handle the contract and are no longer going concerns. In 2016, The Big Word (tbw) won the contract and again, PI4J is sure you will be receiving many complaints about how inadequately tbw has handled ITS in the courts. PI4J feared outsourcing would fail; and the evidence is there

to be seen, especially with the way in which the new app launched on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 has been operating.

PI4J asks the House of Lords Public Service Committee to find out when the decision to continue with outsourcing was made, who was involved in making this decision and why the stakeholder group which has been liaising the MoJ (the Language Services External Stakeholder Forum) was not involved in the decision-making process.

PI4J asks the House of Lords Public Service Committee to insist on acceptance from the MoJ of the professional standards which are appropriate qualification and experience requirements for the level and difficulty of diverse assignments. This means focusing on the Level 6 vocational qualification default, with 400 hours evidenced experience. PI4J also submits the House of Lords Public Service Committee insists the MoJ only engages with independently regulated and registered qualified professionals.