

Interpreting, translation and communication policy

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Interpreting, translation and communication policy and procedure

1.0 Policy statement

Sandwell Homes is committed to providing excellent services to all its customers through ensuring that services are delivered in a fair and equal way.

Sandwell Homes has developed this policy to ensure that where there are barriers to communication in relation to language, speech, visual or hearing impairment, literacy or any other communication need, a number of options are available to assist customers and officers in providing equal access to services.

2.0 Legal considerations

This policy supports our legal duties under the Equality Act 2010.

We will ensure that our interpreting and translation services comply with these legislative requirements.

3.0 Policy Aim

This policy aims to outline our commitments in relation to interpreting and translations; to assist customers who face barriers to communication and access to our services.

4.0 Policy commitments

- We will use plain English in all of our communications, clearly explaining any technical terms, and avoiding jargon.
- We will display a large version of a Language Identification Card at all Sandwell Homes' reception desks to make it easier for customers to identify their first language.
- We will provide Customer Care Kits to all Sandwell Homes reception areas to enable customers with sight difficulties use aids to help them read or write.
- We will collate and refresh data regularly on preferred communication needs through the Getting to Know You project.
- We will translate information when requested. However in order to make best use of resources the information requested may be provided in a different format such as verbally or in audio.
- All leaflet titles displayed in our offices are translated.
- We will put strap lines on the back of all key documents and correspondence offering to provide information in different formats. These will be translated in the top 7 languages read by our customers.
- We will provide an interpreter for deaf customers who use British Sign Language when required.
- When requested / necessary, we will arrange for key written information to be made available in Braille or audio format for our blind or visually impaired customers.
- We will make every effort to provide an interpreter who can speak a customer's language and dialect.
- When dealing with sensitive requests, we will consider personal

preferences and will try to provide female interpreters where possible.

- We will offer to provide a professional interpreter where necessary however, we accept that it is the customer’s choice to have a family member, friend or an advocate to interpret on their behalf.
- Once translated, we will place general information documents such as the Complaints leaflet or the Tenants’ Handbook on our internal and external websites for general use by our employees and customers.
- Our external website will provide information about our interpreting and translation service and direct viewers to key information leaflets which have been translated into the top 7 languages read by our tenants.
- We will support new tenants with any communication need they may have when signing their tenancy agreement.
- We will keep information regarding language/communication needs on our tenants’ personal records to help us provide information in the most appropriate language and format, and to avoid any unnecessary delays in arranging an interpreter.
- **Due to legal terminology, any correspondence containing reference to legal terms will not be translated.**
- We will review our translation and interpreting service on a regular basis, to ensure that it is reflective of our customers’ needs and delivers value for money.
- We will ensure that all front line services are aware of this policy and know how to book an interpreter or obtain Information in another language, Braille or audio format.

5.0 Overview

The main languages spoken and read amongst our tenants (after English) are:

	Language read	Language spoken
1	Punjabi	Punjabi
2	Polish	Polish
3	Urdu	Urdu
4	Bengali	Bengali
5	Kurdish Kurmanji	Kurdish Kurmanji
6	Kurdish Sorani	Kurdish Sorani
7	Arabic	Somalian

(As of September 2010)

The following number of tenants told us that they require documents in different formats:

Large print	1327
Translated documents	447
Audiotape or CD	198
Braille	51
Sign language interpreter	71

(As of September 2010)

- ✓ On average we process 50 translated documents a year.
- ✓ A 161 tenants have told us that they are unable to read or write
- ✓ In the financial year 2009/2010 there were 655 occasions where interpreting was used. The most common way of interpreting was using language line, followed by internal bi-lingual employees.

6.0 Translating documents

All our key documents contain straplines offering to translate information into our 7 most frequently read languages (Kurdish – Sorani and Kumanji, Arabic, Bengali, Polish, Punjabi and Urdu- 2010). However translation of written information is not restricted to these languages. We are also able to provide information in Braille, large print or audio formats.

Sandwell Homes aims to offer value for money whilst maintaining excellent services across the organisation, therefore the translation of documents not classified as key will be assessed before they can be translated. This may be offered in a different format rather than written translation in order to make best use of limited resources.

The 7 main languages are subject to regular review by the Equality Team, who will analyse customer profiles and translation usage to ensure that our main languages reflect those spoken and read by our customers.

Notes

- We have 10 of our core leaflets already translated into the seven languages. These are available on the Internet.
- These core leaflets are also available in 'Easy Read' versions via our website.

7.0 Interpreting

In order to ensure that our services are accessible for all our customers, we have a number of interpreting initiatives to enable customers who do not speak English as their first language or who require a British Sign Language Interpreter to communicate with us. These are: Language Line, Bilingual Employees and Professional Interpreters.

8.0 Communication tools

We have a number of tools to assist customers in accessing our services and communicating with us:

- **Browse aloud facility**
This will help people with visual impairments to access information on our website. Information can be converted to audio format through software which can be installed for free on your computer via our website.

- **Website developed in accordance with Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) guidelines**

We have consulted RNIB guidelines to ensure that our website is accessible for people with visual impairments.

- **Customer Care Kit at every reception area**

The Customer Care Kit is designed to help blind or visually impaired customers. It includes magnifiers, pen grips and templates.

- **Hearing loops at all training rooms and receptions**

We have the facility for hearing loops to be connected at all customer contact points such as reception areas and training rooms for people with hearing impairments. We also have portable hearing loops which can be taken and used in customers' homes or interview rooms without fixed loops.

- **All reception areas and training rooms are DDA compliant**

We have assessed all of our buildings which customers may need to access to ensure that they are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. This means that accessibility for wheelchair users and those with physical impairments is assisted by aids such as handrails, ramps, lowered kerbs and coloured signs.

- **A selection of our core leaflets have been converted to EasyRead format**

EasyRead makes information more accessible by using pictures and less words. This is particularly helpful for people who have difficulties reading and/or understanding a large amount of text

- **Text Relay (Formerly known as Type talk)**

Customers with hearing or speech impairments can communicate with us using this service if they have a textphone (also called a Minicom). Text Relay connects people using a textphone with people using a telephone or another text phone via a relay assistant. This service is accessed by using a BT prefix: 18001 from a text phone or 18002 + full telephone number from a telephone.

- **Texting**

All customers are able to contact us via text from their mobile phone on the following telephone numbers: Complaints / General Enquiries -07797885071

9.0 Implementation

The senior manager of each service area must ensure that all their employees are aware of and familiar with this policy.

The Equality Team will monitor usage of Interpreting and Translation corporately, and are also responsible for the co-ordination of the Bilingual Scheme.

Policy Review Due: September 2011

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If you have any comments, concerns or suggestions to improve this policy, please let us know.

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