

PRESS RELEASE

INQUIRIES INTO FLAWED INTERPRETERS CONTRACT REACH A HEAD AS COURT CHAOS CONTINUES

9th October 2012: A private contract awarded last year by the Ministry of Justice to company Applied Language Solutions (ALS), now owned by Capita, is the focus of two parliamentary inquiries which reach a head this month.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee has scheduled a public hearing for Monday 15th October to look into the findings of the National Audit Office (NAO) after its report uncovered "shocking failings" in the way in which the contract was awarded and implemented, whilst the House of Commons Justice Select Committee is also poised to publish its own findings after its hearing which takes place on Tuesday 23rd October.

Geoffrey Buckingham, Chairman, Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI), said: "The NAO report uncovered huge flaws not only in the award of the contract but in the evaluation of risks as well as unrealistic forecasts and miscalculations – errors that have been echoed in the recent debacle involving the West Coast Mainline contract which the Government back-tracked on last week."

Meanwhile, reports of chaos in courts continue and ALS has been summoned to Amersham Crown court this week (w/c 8 October) where Judge Francis Sheridan will pass judgement on the company in open court with a monetary order following shambolic hearings where their interpreters caused trials to be adjourned, wasting court time. One case related to 25 June when a Romanian interpreter failed to show and another concerning an interpreter booked for Monday 10 September who sent a message on the Saturday saying 'Busy that day, have a nice week-end.' The interpreter was fined £50.

Judge Francis Sheridan vented his anger at a hearing concerning ALS held on 5th October in open court saying: "Obviously ALS entered a contract knowing they cannot deliver the goods." He continued: "There are similar incidences and hearings like this going on in other courts and ALS comes up with a different story every time. Yet you (ALS) cheekily send a bill." Judge Sheridan went on to say "somebody has got to make a stand, this cannot continue – it is in the public's interest."

In another of the daily instances, this time at Boston Magistrates Court in Lincolnshire on 8th October, a Lithuanian defendant came to court and was sent home again for the fourth time in succession because there was no interpreter. A Polish defendant was sent home in another case on the same day due to lack of interpreter.

Interpreters' representative bodies had repeatedly warned the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) of the flaws in the Framework Agreement prior to its implementation and have this month written again to the new ministerial team suggesting a new consultation.

According to Guillermo Makin, Chairman of the Society for Public Service Interpreting, (SPSI): "Cambridgeshire Constabulary and the Welsh police forces, through the Wales Interpretation and Translation Service (WITS) have achieved 40% year-on-year cost savings following proper consultation with interpreters' representative bodies, yet the MoJ has scandalously failed to consider the alternative strategies that we, as a profession, have put forward."

Previous requests to meet and discuss how real savings and improved efficiency can be achieved whilst upholding high standards of Justice have so far been ignored by Ministers, who continue to deny that the decision to implement the contract was and continues to be a costly mistake.

Ends

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Notes to Editors

* Geoffrey Buckingham (APCI) will be giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 15 October, The hearing will be held in public, and will be live on parliament.uk at 3.15pm.

* Interpreters' organisations have been asked to give live evidence to the Justice Select Committee on 23 October by way of a panel of three. Those will be the National Register, in the form of the Chairman, Ted Sangster; Madeleine Lee, Director of the Professional Interpreters' Alliance (PIA) and Nick Rosenthal, Chairman of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI)

Interpreters for Justice

Interpreters for Justice is united against the MoJ's Framework Agreement for the provision of public service interpreting and was formed by the Association of Police and Court Interpreters (APCI) and the Society for Public Service Interpreting (SPSI) in order to represent the views of their members, all of whom are committed to upholding the quality and professionalism of public service interpreting in the UK.

Follow Interpreters for Justice on Twitter for updates on ALS / Capita and court cases affected:
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