

Lost for words

POLICE FORCES in north-west England have been ordered to rethink their outsourcing of face-to-face interpreting following a legal challenge.

Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria police authorities had all entered into service agreements to use interpreters supplied by Applied Language Solutions (ALS). Previously they had simply hired individual freelance interpreters as needed. Many linguists were appalled by ALS's poor rates of pay and were concerned that interpreters who were not on the National Register of Public Service

Interpreters were being sent to interviews in breach of various national criminal justice guidelines. They decided to boycott the company (*Eye* 1280).



The Professional Interpreters Alliance, formed in response to the outsourcing, intended to challenge the agreements with ALS at a judicial review. But before the case was heard in court, police caved in and agreed to a settlement, signing a high court consent order admitting that their agreements with ALS were rotten.

"There was a risk that (even for a temporary period) the interested party [ALS] might not be able to supply interpreters for every assignment of the same quality and within the same time constraints as had been supplied under the previous arrangements," the order noted. "The defendants knew, or ought to have known of that risk."

The four police forces must now go back to the drawing board on the deal and pay the interpreters' £20,000 costs. The decision should also give pause to the Ministry of Justice, which is pushing ahead with plans to outsource all foreign language interpreting for police and courts, with big agencies bidding for the work.