



“ALMOST everything that could go wrong did go wrong.” So said Margaret Hodge, chair of the Commons public accounts committee (PAC), in a scathing report on the Ministry of Justice’s disastrous decision to outsource court interpreting services (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

“The Ministry was not an intelligent customer in procuring language services, despite the risks posed to the administration of justice and to the Ministry’s reputation,” said the MPs’ report. “The Ministry failed to undertake proper due diligence on ALS’s winning bid. It did not heed financial and other advice that ALS was too small and would struggle to scale up to meet the Ministry’s requirements in time. The Ministry also ignored strong opposition from the interpreter community.”

What a pity the ministry didn’t read *Eye* 1281, which warned of all these risks in early 2011 while the contract was still out to tender, in light of problems experienced by four police forces in north-west England that had used the same firm, ALS (since bought up by Capita).

Despite the chaos, Capita has been fined just £2,200, said the PAC report, noting that “risible levels of penalties and low expectations of performance allow private companies to get away with over promising and under delivering”.

So have lessons been learned? Er, seems not. Interpreting services for Home Office bodies, including the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, now face being outsourced to another private firm. Highly trained freelance interpreters with rare language skills (often in demand in the private sector) remain reluctant to work for the ludicrous low pay offered by such agencies.