

Language in Oldham and Interpretation

Oldham is proud to have one of the most diverse populations in the country, with around 150 different languages spoken by our communities. The growing Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities make up more than a fifth of Oldham's residents, while one of the fastest-growing demographics is in the 'white other' category, a group primarily made up of those of Polish and Romanian heritage. Oldham is a place where people from all cultures play, learn and work together. Interpretation is crucial in diverse communities for enabling equitable access to public services, fostering social cohesion, and ensuring effective, respectful communication across different languages and cultures. *Translation* refers to the converting of written text into another language, allowing time for research and editing to ensure accuracy, whereas *interpretation* is the real-time, oral, or sign language conversion of spoken communication from one language into another. This briefing focuses on interpretation.

Accessing Interpretation Support

Each agency is required to establish, maintain and regularly review its own formal guidelines governing the use of interpreters in practice including BSL interpreters. These guidelines must align with statutory duties and safeguarding arrangements. Agencies are encouraged to use services that provide assurances around safe recruitment and language-proficiency testing. If you are unsure about interpretation procedures within your agency, contact a manager for clarification.

Informal Interpretation

Some people may choose to bring family members, friends or advocates with them to interpret. It is not appropriate for children to provide interpretation, this should not take place. Interpreting for parents or other family members can cause worry, stress and anxiety. Children and young people can also lack the necessary vocabulary to translate complex terms, leading to potential misunderstanding. Professional interpreters are trained to handle sensitive and complex conversations with care and consideration. The use of friends or family to act as interpreters is discouraged due to risks associated with inaccuracy and the stress and strain this can cause for loved ones. In rare, specific cases where a person asks for their friend or family member to interpret, the request can only be considered if there are no conflicts of interest, or safeguarding or legal issues. Practitioners should also be satisfied that there are no attempts to manipulate and no controlling or coercive behaviour taking place. Some people may choose to use advocates to act on their behalf. Advocates provide an important role however interpretation by advocates is discouraged primarily to ensure accuracy, impartiality, confidentiality, and safety.

Supporting People who Speak Different Languages

When communicating with **people whose first language is not English** it is important to communicate clearly, speak slowly, using plain English and avoiding jargon and metaphors. Avoid complex instructions; break down large pieces of information and keep sentences short. Explain what will happen step by step and allow time for the person to listen and digest information. Show care and empathy. Treat the person as an individual. Actively listen and validate their feelings ("I understand this is confusing, I am here to help"). Interpretation ensures **people who speak different languages** can communicate with agencies. Making information easily accessible helps ensure people understand what details are required. It enables agencies to better understand individual needs and preferences, supporting a more positive and consistent experience. This is particularly important when decisions must be made based on the information shared and engagement.

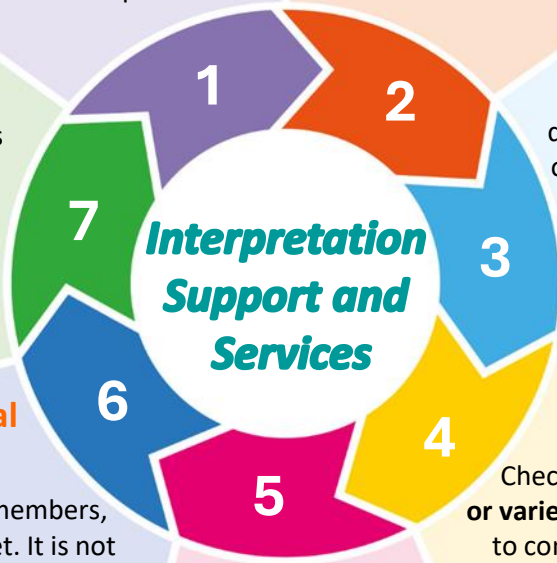
Interpretation Services

Interpretation services must be used when a person requests support in a language; it is recognised that they do not (or are struggling to) understand or respond to questions; or when legal, health and safety, or sensitive information needs to be clearly explained. Interpretation services can be provided by phone - this is quick and sufficient in most interactions; via remote video - this is useful for visual clues; and 'on-site' for complex cases.

Key Considerations

Check the person's preferred language dialect or variety: There may also be cultural differences to consider such as Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

Factor in sufficient time: This includes discussing seating arrangements, asking the interpreter to translate word-for-word, rather than paraphrasing, and allowing time for clarification from any party. **Use short, clear questions and instructions:** Try to speak in one or two sentences at a time and ask the person to do the same. When someone speaks for long periods, the interpreter is more likely to summarise rather than reflect the full meaning and emphasis of what was said. Be prepared to pause the person if needed. **Be prepared to terminate a session** if there are concerns that everything said is not being interpreted, the interpreter is significantly changing the emphasis; or if the person appears anxious or distressed by the interpreter's presence.



Supporting People who are Deaf or have Hearing Loss

The Equality Act states that all agencies must take steps to remove barriers people face due to disability. This includes those who are deaf or have hearing loss. People who are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus may experience challenges in understanding spoken communication especially in busy or noisy places. They may have different preferences, for example some prefer to lip read and others choose to use a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter. The British Sign Language Act 2022 recognises BSL as a language of the UK. For some deaf people, BSL is their first language. Therefore, they do not always understand written English. For more information including key considerations when supporting someone who is deaf or with hearing loss, take a look at a separate [7-Minute Briefing](#).

