



Item No: 10

Meeting Date: Wednesday 15th May 2024

Glasgow City Integration Joint Board

Report By: Jacqueline Kerr, Interim Chief Officer

Contact: Janet Hayes, Head of Planning and Strategy – Adult Services and North West Locality

Phone: 0141 314 6250

Sign Language and Interpreting Service (SLIS) Review

Purpose of Report:

To provide an update on the review of the Sign Language and Interpreting Service with proposals for the future delivery of the service.

Background/Engagement:

There has been extensive engagement with management, staff and Trade Unions in relation to the conclusion of the review and the future delivery of the service.

There has also been engagement with key stakeholders including people who access the current service.

Governance Route:

The matters contained within this paper have been previously considered by the following group(s) as part of its development.

- HSCP Senior Management Team
- Council Corporate Management Team
- Health Board Corporate Management Team
- Council Committee
- Update requested by IJB
- Other
- Not Applicable

Recommendations:

The Integration Joint Board is asked to:

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| | a) Note the outcome of the Review and accompanying report; and b) Approve the Progress of Option 3. |
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Relevance to Integration Joint Board Strategic Plan:

The proposals outlined in this report are fully in line with the IJB Strategic Plan's commitment to prevention and early intervention and supporting those who are most vulnerable in the city.

Implications for Health and Social Care Partnership:

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| Reference to National Health & Wellbeing Outcome(s): | The report has particular relevance to National Outcomes 1 and 4 |
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| Personnel: | There are minor implications in relation to the current staffing model of the service and these are covered in the main body of this report. |
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| Carers: | None |
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| Provider Organisations: | None |
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| Equalities: | EQIA has been completed and can be accessed here: https://glasgowcity.hscp.scot/publication/eqia-review-sign-language-glasgow-wide-interpreting-services-slis |
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| Fairer Scotland Compliance: | By implementing the proposals outlined in this paper, subject to IJB approval and ongoing discussions with Trades Union representatives, the HSCP will offer a more streamlined and effective service for people in the city who require to use the service. This will support service users to achieve their personal outcomes and contribute to offsetting the impact of socio-economic disadvantage they may be experiencing. |
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| Financial: | A saving of £100,000 from this service review was agreed as part of the IJBs 2023/24 budget. The service review has resulted in a saving of £167,565. We require to hold some of the additional savings to enable the service to have a small purchasing budget going forward |
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| Legal: | Implementation of the proposals outlined in this report will enable the Council to continue to deliver its statutory obligations in relation to those who require to access the services. |
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| Economic Impact: | None |
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| Sustainability: | By introducing the service model proposed the Sign Language and Interpreting and Sensory Impairment Services will continue to deliver crucial services for people in Glasgow, on a more sustainable footing for the future. |
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| Sustainable Procurement and Article 19: | None |
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| Risk Implications: | There is a risk that the reduction in the staffing model for the new service configuration does not support demand if demand does not drop as a result of no longer providing the service for non-statutory service delivery. |
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| Implications for Glasgow City Council: | Implementation of the proposals outlined in this report will enable the Council to continue to deliver its statutory obligations in relation to those who require to access the services. |
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| Implications for NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde: | None |
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| Direction Required to Council, Health Board or Both | |
| Direction to: | |
| 1 No Direction Required | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Glasgow City Council | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 Glasgow City Council and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde | <input type="checkbox"/> |

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an update on the review of the Sign Language and Interpreting Service (SLIS) with proposals for the future delivery of the service.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS) was established after a review of Social Work Services for deaf people in 1988. SLIS historically provided a citywide service for Social Work Services, other departments of Glasgow City Council and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. NHS GGC decided to withdraw from the service in 2017 and establish an in-house service for the Board area.
- 2.2 The 2022 census notes that one in six people in Glasgow are deaf or suffer from some form of hearing loss, which equates to approx. 24 per 10,000 of the population. British Sign Language (BSL) is the most common interpreting language, with 12,500 users in Scotland. Deaf clients have a right to have their communication needs met under various pieces of legislation, such as The BSL Act of 2015. This requires local authorities to provide accessible services for the deaf community.

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- 2.3 The current structure of the SLIS service is not fulfilling the interpreting needs for Deaf citizens and due to a range of personnel issues offers a very limited provision across the city.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 In 2022 an external review was commissioned in relation to the redesign of the service model (Appendix 1). The review highlighted three options:

1. To maintain the existing services model
2. To outsource the service
3. To develop a hybrid model with streamlining of the current service delivery.

After careful consideration of the external review, Option 3 is the preferred option.

- 3.2 The external review concluded that option 3 would:

- focus the service on Glasgow's deaf community
- allow the service to meet its statutory obligations
- give the Council the option to outsource some pieces of work that the current team are unable to provide (a small purchasing budget will be set aside from the overall savings)
- allow for a more cohesive and consistent approach to service delivery

4. Staffing Implications

- 4.1 Currently SLIS is a standalone service. A detailed piece of work has been concluded analysing the volume and type of activity over the last three years. This highlighted the underutilisation of the current service and the narrow role and function of the staff within the service.
- 4.2 As a result of this work and the recommendation of the external review, the proposal is to integrate this service with the Sensory Support Team to allow for a more holistic approach to service delivery for deaf service users.
- 4.3 The service will operate as an integrated Sensory Support Team and all tasks undertaken will be focused specifically on the sensory needs of Glasgow citizens. SLIS and Sensory Support staff will work as one team, sharing knowledge, resources and expertise that will allow for a more cohesive, productive and consistent approach to service delivery.

5 Staffing Structure

- 5.1 The current establishment within the service is 7.55 FTE. The current staffing consists of 4 Sign Language and Interpreters equating to 3.27 FTE.

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| Team | Designation | Grade | Establishment FTE | FTE in post | Establishment Salary Costs (including oncosts) |
|------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------------|--|
| SLIS | Sign Language Interpreter | 6 | 7.55 | 3.27 | £379,789 |

5.2 It is proposed that revised establishment within the service is 4.0 FTE.

| Team | Designation | Grade | Establishment FTE | FTE in post | Establishment Salary Costs (including oncosts) |
|------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------------|--|
| SLIS | Sign Language Interpreter | 6 | 4.0 | 3.27 | £212,224 |

5.3 The recommendation from the review is that the service establishment is reduced to 4 FTE to provide a service only to GCC and that the SLIS and Sensory Impairment Teams merge. As such, the demand for interpretation will reduce and it is proposed that the SLIS Team establishment reduces to 4 FTE. The current team has reduced to 3.27 FTE. Due to the current level of staffing there are no outstanding HR issues.

5.4 The SLIS team will then be amalgamated with the wider Sensory Impairment Team which consists of 9.41 FTE. This will allow employees to work as one team, sharing knowledge, resource and expertise that will allow for a more cohesive, productive, and consistent approach to service delivery for the deaf citizens of Glasgow. A revised job description will be developed in order that Sign Language Interpreters can undertake additional Social Care worker tasks.

5.5 A programme of induction, training and shadowing will be developed to support the implementation. A comprehensive training and development programme will be put in place for the staff in order that they can fulfil their expanded role. This will address the current under utilisation of staff within the team.

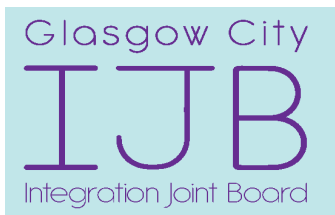
5.6 The service will concentrate on the statutory business of the Council and will not provide interpreting services to other stakeholders.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Integration Joint Board is asked to:

- a) Note the outcome of the Review and accompanying report; and
- b) Approve the Progress of Option 3.

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Direction from the Glasgow City Integration Joint Board

| | | |
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| 1 | Reference number | 150524-10 |
| 2 | Report Title | Review of Sign Language and Interpreting Service |
| 3 | Date direction issued by Integration Joint Board | 15 May 2024 |
| 4 | Date from which direction takes effect | 15 May 2024 |
| 5 | Direction to: | Glasgow City Council |
| 6 | Does this direction supersede, revise or revoke a previous direction – if yes, include the reference number(s) | No |
| 7 | Functions covered by direction | Sensory Impairment; Sign Language and Interpreting |
| 8 | Full text of direction | Glasgow City Council is Directed to implement the revised service model for Sign Language and Interpreting Services as outlined in this report. |
| 9 | Budget allocated by Integration Joint Board to carry out direction | The cost of delivering the staffing establishment under the revised service model is £212,224 |
| 10 | Performance monitoring arrangements | In line with the agreed Performance Management Framework of the Glasgow City Integration Joint Board and the Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership. |
| 11 | Date direction will be reviewed | 15 May 2025 |

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Ashbrook
RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

REPORT (SECOND DRAFT)

**REVIEW OF THE GLASGOW HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE
PARTNERSHIP SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER SERVICE**

May 2023

**PREPARED FOR: The Glasgow Health &
Social Care Partnership**

Draft Report

**Review of the Glasgow Health & Social Care
Partnership Sign Language Interpreter
Service**

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

May 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Positives and Negatives of SLIS

Positives

- The primary positives or strengths of SLIS are the ability of SLITs to build relationships and trust with clients, the extent to which SLITs are a conduit between service users and clients, service availability and the highly skilled and experienced nature of SLITs

Negatives

- There were a wide range of negatives associated with SLIS, including evidence that, at times, SLITs are underemployed, there are occasions when SLIS is under-resourced, beliefs that SLIS is poorly managed and can be difficult to manage, perceptions that the service has been run down for a number of years, the service being reviewed for a number of years, suggestions that SLITs have a tendency to overidentify with clients, evidence of significant absences amongst SLITs, evidence of a lack of training and development of SLITs, beliefs that SLITs will be resistant to training to allow them to undertake other roles, lack of awareness and understanding of SLIS within departments in Glasgow City Council which could make use of it, beliefs that SLIS is not sufficiently engaging with the deaf community in Glasgow, beliefs that SLIS is being viewed less positively by the deaf community in Glasgow through time, beliefs that SLITs are not sufficiently identifying themselves as being part of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership, beliefs that there is no significant financial gain from work undertaken outwith Glasgow City Council and loss of administrative support
- The primary suggestions made in terms of addressing negatives or weaknesses of SLIS focused around addressing issues relating to SLITs, at times being underemployed and, at other times, being under-resourced,

promoting SLIS more effectively to other departments within Glasgow City Council, addressing concerns that SLITs have a tendency to overidentify with clients, integrating SLITs more into the Sensory Support Team, reviewing the management of SLIS, having stronger management of SLITs, streamlining the system and taking steps to investigate/seek solutions to issues pertaining to long-term sickness

- The primary suggestions made with regard to improvements to SLIS – outwith addressing identified negatives and weaknesses – focused around management having a more positive attitude towards SLIS, improving the image of the SLIS team both internally and externally and increasing the extent to which SLIS tenders for external contracts

Positives and Negatives of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership Delivering SLIS Internally

- The primary positives which were identified in terms of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS internally rather than outsourcing it focused around the continuity of support for clients and SLITs working in conjunction with others in the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership
- The primary negatives identified in relation to internal delivery of SLIS by the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership focused around ongoing low morale amongst SLITs (if changes made to the service are not to their satisfaction and if current management arrangements and relationships continue), the current structure surrounding SLIS not being cost-effective, the potential for improvements in the service being limited by lack of funding and beliefs that SLITs will continue to be difficult to manage

Positives and Negatives of the Service Being Delivered Externally

- There was minimal evidence of positives relating to the service being delivered externally, with the primary positives identified relating to external organisations having a greater pool of interpreters
- The primary negatives noted as being associated with the service being delivered externally were a loss of continuity for clients, speed of response and there being a significant potential for a backlash from Glasgow's deaf community should the service be delivered externally

Support for the Service Being Delivered Externally

- The vast majority of those interviewed were unsupportive of sign language services being delivered externally, primarily due to concerns about loss of continuity for clients, concerns about the negative impact on the speed and quality of service delivered to clients, beliefs that the external delivery of the service would be opposed by the deaf community in Glasgow, concerns about job losses, concerns amongst SLITs regarding being redeployed within the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership, concerns amongst service users that external interpreters may not have sufficient understanding of their needs in order to fulfil them to a high standard, beliefs that processes will become longer and more complicated in terms of finding, booking and briefing interpreters and, thereafter, receiving informed feedback from them and concerns about external deliverers not having the same dedication to their duty of care to clients as is the case with SLITs
- Those who were supportive of the service being delivered externally primarily stated that they would be so if it could be demonstrated that external interpreters have the same knowledge and skills as SLITs or if the service could be streamlined, with some elements continuing to be delivered in-house and others being delivered externally

A Local Authority Perspective

- Those interviewed within Local Authorities as part of the review primarily stated that their Council outsourced the delivery of sign language interpreter services due to the fact there wasn't a business case for it
- For the Local Authorities interviewed, the primary positive of sign language interpreter services being delivered externally was that it was more cost-effective approach
- The primary negatives of external delivery focused around getting access to interpreters at times and having no control over the quality of interpreters
- Those interviewed in three Local Authorities stated that there could be two primary positives of their Local Authority delivering sign language interpreter services, namely direct access to in-house interpreters and in-house interpreters building relationships with clients
- Those interviewed believed that the key negatives for Local Authorities delivering sign language interpreter services themselves were cost, in-house interpreters being underemployed and the Council training and developing interpreters who may subsequently leave
- Those interviewed within the Local Authorities were very largely in favour of Council's delivering sign language interpreter services internally if there was a sufficient critical mass of clients and if demand could be identified for such services from other departments within a Local Authority
- There were a number of primary elements of advice and guidance that those interviewed within Local Authorities would give to the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership in its consideration of delivering sign language interpreter services externally, namely 'ensuring that they know what they are purchasing', the need to undertake an impact assessment

(both in terms of internal impacts and, more importantly, impacts for clients), ensuring that there is a business case for external delivery, considering working in partnership with other Local Authorities and organisations which deliver these services and taking into account the potential reaction of Glasgow's deaf community should the service no longer be delivered internally

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report details findings from a review of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership Sign Language Interpreter Service (SLIS) undertaken by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd.

The review is entirely based on primary research undertaken across a wide range of audiences, namely:

- Managers of SLIS
- Sensory Support Team staff
- SLIS Sign Language Interpreters (SLITs)
- Internal users of SLIS (referred to as 'service users' throughout the report)
- External users of SLIS (also referred to as 'service users' throughout the report)
- Local Authorities which outsource the delivery of sign language interpreter services
- Unison

A total of 25 in-depth interviews were undertaken via MS Teams or telephone during April 2023.

There were a small number of individuals who were unable to participate in an interview. However, the comprehensive coverage of those interviewed across all audiences is more than sufficient to provide a profile of accurate, representative and robust results.

It should be noted that end users of SLIS are referred to as 'clients' throughout the report.

The interview process sought to derive information in relation to:

- Positives and negatives of SLIS

- Positives and negatives of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS internally
- Positives and negatives of the service being delivered externally
- Support for the service being delivered externally
- A Local Authority perspective

Sections 2.0 to 6.0 provide a profile of the outcomes pertaining to each of these issues, whilst Section 7.0 considers options which the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership may wish to consider in relation to continuing to deliver the service internally or delivering it externally.

2.0 POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF SLIS

2.1 Positives

It was apparent that SLIS has a number of **primary positives or strengths**, namely:

- The ability of SLITs to build relationships and trust with clients, which is particularly important as they often have complex needs, are often vulnerable and may be facing a range of health, social, legal and other challenges, with this relationship-building allowing SLITs to build an understanding of broader issues facing those they are supporting and providing clients with reassurance regarding discussion of confidential and sensitive issues
- The extent to which SLITs are a conduit between service users and clients
- The service availability, particularly in terms of the ability of the service to react quickly to urgent or emergency requirements
- The highly skilled and experienced nature of SLITs, including that they are highly qualified and having specialisms or skills in particular areas

Thereafter, a number of **secondary positives or strengths** were evident, namely:

- SLIS allowing people access to services which they might not otherwise be able to access (and, as part of this, helping people to remain living independently)
- The ability of SLIS to enable other professionals 'to do their job', i.e. to fulfil their professional responsibilities to a greater extent – and more effectively – than they would otherwise be able to
- The extent to which SLITs provide a critical service for the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership and, as part of this, have built up

a detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of the functions which it delivers

- The ability of SLITs to assist in a range of geographical areas across Glasgow (together with the extent to which they have the ability to support functions outwith the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership)
- The flexibility of SLITs and, in particular, their ability – and willingness – to extend sessions when required
- The extent to which SLITs understand well Glasgow’s deafness and deafness culture/community and the issues they face (which is of critical importance in terms of interacting with clients and providing support to service users)
- The extent to which SLITs have empathy with clients (partly as a result of working with the deaf community in Glasgow for many years)
- The deaf community in Glasgow being aware of SLIS and SLITs

Finally, **more specific positives and strengths** of SLIS are apparent, namely:

- The fact that SLIS has the ability to generate income for the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership
- SLIS being a dedicated social work service within the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership
- SLITs focusing on face-to-face support of clients and avoiding video conferences where possible (on the basis of beliefs that, although less cost-effective, face-to-face interactions are more effective in terms of providing support to service users and clients)
- SLIS being more dependable than interpreters employed by external organisations and freelance interpreters (who, at times, may renege on a booking in order to take on a ‘more lucrative offer’)

- The extent to which SLITs are willing to have discussions with service users in order that they are well prepared before delivering support for themselves and clients
- The SLITs being a well-established team
- SLIS hourly rates being cheaper than external providers

In the context of the outcomes noted above, it is of interest to note that there was little evidence of SLIS being associated with **no** positives or strengths.

2.2 Negatives

In contrast to the range of positives and strengths detailed above, there were also a wide range of negatives and weaknesses identified that were associated with SLIS, with these **primarily** relating to:

- Evidence that, at times, SLITs are underemployed and, in particular, there can be days or longer periods where there is little or no call for their service
- Evidence that there are occasions when SLIS is under-resourced and, in particular, when it can be difficult for service users to book an interpreter (which was seen, in part, as being a function of levels of sickness and absence amongst SLITs and a recent decrease in the number of SLITs), that has also resulted in some requests for support being delayed or postponed (for example, including drop-in sessions being cancelled)
- Beliefs that SLIS is poorly managed (which is seen as being a function of management not having an understanding of the deaf community and its needs and not having sufficient skills pertaining to the deaf community and its needs)
- Suggestions that SLITs can be difficult to manage (with references to there being a number of 'strong characters' in the SLIT and the team being characterised by it having cliques)

- Perceptions that the service has been ‘run down’ for a number of years (including references to previous managers stating that their role was to “*close the service down*”)
- The service being reviewed for a number of years (which has had a negative impact on the morale of SLITs due to anxiety about their futures)
- Suggestions that SLITs have a tendency to overidentify with clients (resulting in them “*getting too involved in issues*” and, at times, not following protocols in terms of taking actions themselves which should be taken by the Sensory Support Team)
- Evidence of significant absences amongst SLITs which would appear to be sickness related (and, in part, stress related)
- Evidence of a lack of training and development of SLITs (either as a result of lack of funding or the service being under review)
- Beliefs that SLITs will be resistant to training to allow them to undertake other roles
- Lack of awareness – and understanding – of SLIS within departments in Glasgow City Council which could make use of it (and, indeed, organisations and individuals outwith the Council who could make use of the service)
- Beliefs that SLIS is not sufficiently engaging with the deaf community in Glasgow
- Beliefs that SLIS is being viewed less positively by the deaf community in Glasgow through time
- Beliefs that SLITs do not sufficiently identify themselves as being part of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership
- Beliefs that there is no significant financial gain from work undertaken outwith Glasgow City Council
- Loss of administrative support

Thereafter, a number of **secondary negatives or weaknesses** were apparent, namely:

- The loss of much of SLIS’s NHS work

- Evidence of difficulties associated with the booking process for interpreters (including time delays in arranging bookings)
- Beliefs that there is variability in terms of the dedication and commitment of individuals within the SLIT
- Concerns regarding the inflexibility of some SLITs (who “*tend to only take on what they want to take on*”)
- Beliefs that some SLITs ‘look down’ on other staff
- Evidence that some individuals within the Sensory Support Team resent SLITs (partly due to the number of hours at times they are actively employed and the attitude of some SLITs towards them)

Finally, a number of **more specific negatives or weaknesses** of SLIS were apparent, namely:

- Beliefs that a lot of what SLITs do “*goes unnoticed*”
- Concerns that SLIS is not a 24-hour service (which is the case for a number of social workers) and, therefore, occasions when it’s difficult to get immediate access to a SLIT
- SLITs being deployed for activities to which they are not suited (for example, theatre work)
- Concerns about potential conflicts relating to professional registration if SLITs are asked to take on alternative tasks when they aren’t busy
- Beliefs that space available for meetings is too small (and, in particular, not being suitable for four people)

2.3 Addressing Negatives or Weaknesses

The **primary** suggestions made in terms of addressing negatives or weaknesses of SLIS focused around:

- Addressing issues relating to SLITs, at times, being underemployed and, at other times, being under-resourced

- Promoting SLIS more effectively to other departments within Glasgow City Council
- Addressing concerns that SLITs have a tendency to overidentify with clients
- Integrating SLITs more into the Sensory Support Team
- Reviewing the management of SLIS (particularly in terms of ensuring that the Service Managers have a sufficient understanding of signing and Glasgow's deaf community)
- Having stronger management of SLITs (although it was recognised that they would respond poorly to this, there was the potential for more grievances to be aired and for these to be more likely to be formalised)
- Streamlining the system (including retaining interpreters who are *“committed and passionate about the service”*)
- Taking steps to investigate – and seek solutions to – issues pertaining to long-term sickness

Thereafter, there was a degree of **secondary demand** to address negatives and weaknesses through:

- Overhauling the booking process (in order to decrease delays in the booking of interpreters and avoid having to ‘turn away deaf clients’)
- Reinstating a dedicated administrative support function rather than SLIS being supported as part of a pooled service (which, it was believed, would reduce delays in referrals to the service)
- Increasing training and development of SLITs (including concerns with respect to overidentifying with clients)
- Increasing the number of SLITs (although a contrary view was expressed, namely that the number of SLITs should be reduced, albeit that it was recognised that this will be resisted by SLITs and Unison)

Thereafter, **more specific suggestions** related to:

- Increasing the budget for interpreters
- Increasing the focus on SLIS meeting the needs of the deaf community in Glasgow (and, thereafter, promoting how the revised service will meet these needs)
- Having a clear vision for the future of the service

2.4 Other Suggested Improvements for SLIS

Evidence was gathered regarding suggested improvements for SLIS – apart from the negatives and weaknesses referred to earlier – and, in this regard, **primary suggestions** were made in respect of:

- Improving the image of the SLIS team, both internally (i.e. within the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership) and externally (in terms of the deaf community in Glasgow)
- Management having a more positive attitude towards SLIS (and not promoting a perception that the service is to be run down or outsourced)
- Increasing the extent to which SLIS tenders for external contracts (with a particular emphasis being placed here on SLIS having the opportunity to tender for NHS work)

Thereafter, **secondary reference** was made here to:

- Making better use of technology available and replacing outdated technology
- SLITs doing ‘other things’ to support the deaf community in Glasgow

Finally, **more specific reference** was made here to improving SLIS through:

- Having more interpreters who themselves are deaf (which would demonstrate empowerment for deaf interpreters)
- Assessing the collective and individual skills of SLITs on an annual basis (in order to ensure that individually and collectively SLITs are seen as being fit for purpose and, in particular, have addressed their skills needs as required)
- Bringing in younger interpreters with updated skills and abilities (to be mentored by older, more experienced staff)

3.0 POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF THE GLASGOW HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP DELIVERING SLIS INTERNALLY

3.1 Positives

There was a widespread belief that the **primary positives** of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS internally rather than outsourcing it focused around:

- The continuity of support for clients through seeing the same SLIT or SLITs through time (which allows clients to build a relationship and trust in those they work with and allows SLITs to develop a better understanding of the broader needs and circumstances of clients, which was seen as being particularly important for clients who have mental health issues, have physical disabilities or learning difficulties)
- SLITs working in conjunction with others in the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership (and, in particular, the Sensory Support Team) which allows better understanding of their respective roles to be developed, helps to build relationships, allows ideas to be exchanged and provides the opportunity for SLITs to work with individuals in the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership outwith the Sensory Support Team)

Thereafter, the **secondary positives** of in-house delivery focused around:

- Having dedicated in-house support which can be directly accessed
- Allowing greater flexibility in the provision of interpreting services, in terms of:
 - Access to interpreter services at short notice (particularly in relation to emergency referrals)
 - SLITs being able to stay on with a client (for example, when waiting for a social worker or the police) due to the fact that they

are employed by the Council (with references being made here, again, to beliefs that interpreters employed by external agencies or freelancers being likely to have a time limit to sessions with a client)

- Interpreters being familiar with Glasgow vernacular (for example, slang terms)

Finally, a number of **more specific positives** were identified in terms of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS rather than outsourcing it, including beliefs that:

- The broader understanding that SLITs have of social work services adds value to the interpreting support they provide to clients
- In-house delivery would be less costly than outsourcing the service (particularly in terms of the hourly rates for SLITs versus those for external interpreters)
- Service users have confidence that staff have appropriate and sufficient high-level BSL qualifications
- The ethics and values of SLITs are ensured by the fact that they have to strictly apply Council protocols in these regards

3.2 Negatives

There were relatively few negatives identified in terms of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS internally rather than outsourcing it, with **primary reference** being made here to:

- Ongoing low morale amongst SLITs if changes made to the service are not to their satisfaction and if current management arrangements and relationships continue
- A belief that the current situation is not cost-effective (particularly with reference to the 'downtime' of SLITs)

- The potential for improvements in the service being limited by a lack of funding (in the current financial environment within Local Authorities)
- Beliefs that SLITs will continue to be difficult to manage

Thereafter, reference was made to a number of **other negatives** here, namely:

- A degree of resentment by others in the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership relating to the level of salaries for SLITs in respect of when they are inactive (i.e. not involved in the arrangement and delivery of an interpreting service)
- The potential for an ongoing poor atmosphere within SLIS
- The perceived likelihood of ongoing issues pertaining to service users getting sufficient access to interpreters
- A belief that the service will continue to not be sufficiently 'deaf lead' and 'deaf focused'

4.0 POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES OF THE SERVICE BEING DELIVERED EXTERNALLY

4.1 Positives

There was minimal evidence of positives relating to the service being delivered externally. However, a number of those interviewed – particularly SLITs and a number of those in the Sensory Support Team – stated that they could identify no benefits of the service being delivered externally (in other words, by an organisation outwith Glasgow City Council).

The **primary positive** identified related to external organisations having access to a greater pool of interpreters which would mean that there is the potential for:

- Quicker access to interpreters
- Fewer problems pertaining to interpreter holidays or absences due to sickness
- The potential to have 24-hour access to interpreters

Thereafter, a **secondary positive** was evident in terms of the potential for cost savings (particularly only paying for services when needed) on the basis that SLITs continue to be paid at times when there is low demand for their service.

4.2 Negatives

There was far greater evidence of perceived negatives associated with the service being delivered externally, with **primary reference** being made here to:

- A loss of continuity for clients (which, as noted on a number of occasions in this report, is seen as being of critical importance in

terms of building relationships and trust and interpreters developing a better understanding of the broader needs, difficulties and circumstances of clients)

- Speed of response (particularly to emergency referrals)
- There being a significant potential for “*a backlash from the deaf community in Glasgow*”, together with the opposition to outsourcing by Unison (both of which have the potential for significant reputational damage for the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership and Glasgow City Council more generally through, for example, negative media coverage)

Thereafter, a range of **secondary negatives** pertaining to external delivery were identified, namely concerns about and beliefs relating to:

- Concerns about the lack of a broader understanding of services delivered by the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership – and, indeed, other services – amongst outsourced interpreters
- Externally sourced interpreters being time-limited in their sessions, i.e. being booked for a particular ‘slot’ which they may not be able to extend should circumstances demand
- Interpreters employed by external agencies and freelancers taking a booking and, thereafter, cancelling it due to receiving “*a better offer*”, i.e. an alternative booking which pays more money or is more suitable to them (for example, in terms of geographical location)
- Externally delivered services being more costly (particularly in terms of hourly rates)
- External interpreters not being as accountable or having the same duty of care as SLITs
- External delivery lengthening the process – and making the process more complicated – to access interpreters
- Loss of the collective expertise of the SLIT

Finally, **more specific negatives** were noted as being associated with the external delivery of the service, namely:

- Beliefs that interpreters employed by external organisations are dealt with badly and are often on zero-hour contracts
- Beliefs that outsourcing may be out of step with Scottish Government legislation and requirements
- Concerns about the lack of a guarantee as to the quality and abilities of outsourced interpreters
- Beliefs that there may be potential issues regarding outsourcing statutory work
- Concerns about potentially disadvantaging deaf people due to beliefs that they may have less access to sign language interpreter services
- Concerns about interpreters not being from Glasgow and, therefore, not having a sufficient understanding of Glasgow vernacular and the broader culture of Glasgow (particularly in terms of its deaf community)
- Beliefs that externally sourced interpreters may not be fully trusted by the deaf community in Glasgow

5.0 SUPPORT FOR THE SERVICE BEING DELIVERED EXTERNALLY

The vast majority of those interviewed were unsupportive of sign language services being delivered externally. This was **primarily** due to:

- Concerns about loss of continuity for clients, on the basis of a likelihood that they would be dealing with different interpreters through time (with particular reference being made here to beliefs that *“clients will just become numbers for external providers”*)
- Concerns about the negative impact on the speed and quality of service delivered to clients
- Beliefs that the external delivery of the service would be opposed by the deaf community in Glasgow
- Concerns about job losses (which were particularly opposed by SLITs and Unison)
- Concerns amongst SLITs regarding being redeployed within Glasgow City Council, which they were very largely against and believed would be *“a waste of their skills and expertise”*
- Concerns amongst service users that external interpreters may not have sufficient understanding of their needs in order to fulfil them to a high standard (including internal clients making reference to concerns about the lack of knowledge of specific Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership services)

Thereafter, a number of **other reasons** were cited for lack of support for the service being delivered externally, namely:

- Concerns about potential issues regarding the Council fulfilling statutory and legal requirements
- Beliefs that external delivery would be opposed by existing clients, on the basis that they receive a good service from the SLITs

- Beliefs that processes will become longer and more complicated in terms of finding, booking and briefing interpreters and, thereafter, receiving informed feedback from them
- Concerns about external deliverers not having the same dedication to their duty of care to clients

Those who were supportive of the service being delivered externally **primarily** stated that they would be so if:

- It could be demonstrated that external interpreters had the same knowledge and skills of SLITs
- The service could be streamlined, with some elements continuing to be delivered in-house (particularly in terms of emergency/urgent needs and the delivery of services to the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership) and others being delivered externally (particularly those provided to external clients and, potentially, clients elsewhere in Glasgow City Council)

It should be stressed, however, that whilst a number of those interviewed were supportive of a streamlined hybrid approach, others believed that this would not be effective or feasible.

6.0 A LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVE

6.1 Reasons for Outsourcing the Delivery of Sign Language Interpreter Services

Those interviewed within Local Authorities as part of the review **primarily** stated that their Council outsourced the delivery of sign language interpreter services due to the fact that there wasn't a business case for it, i.e. that there was not sufficient demand to deliver the service internally (due to the small number of individuals in the deaf community in their Local Authority area who required interpreter support).

In addition, reference was made here to outsourcing the delivery of these services due to there being a lack of budget to provide them (allied to the demand issues noted above).

It is also of interest to note that two of those interviewed stated that they had three external providers who are asked to tender when there is a requirement for sign language interpreter services, all of which are required to demonstrate their ability and resources to do so.

In addition, it was noted by one of those interviewed that the freelance interpreters are employed on an ad hoc basis.

6.2 Positives of the Service Being Delivered Externally

For the Local Authorities interviewed, the **primary positive** of sign language interpreter services being delivered externally was that this was a more cost-effective approach and, in particular:

- Only having to access – and pay for – services when they are needed

- Avoiding costs to support interpreters (i.e. by reducing departmental fixed costs due to the lack of need for their management, supervision, etc.)

In addition, reference was made here to not having to deal with – and manage – the issue of variability in demand through time.

It should also be noted that a **further positive** identified by one of those interviewed was that he had the opportunity to observe interpreters at meetings and other events and, thereafter, approach them regarding the potential use to deliver sign language interpreter services to their Council – either directly on a freelance basis or through the companies for whom they worked.

Furthermore, it should be noted that one of those interviewed stated that external sourcing of interpreter services gave her Local Authority *“access to a suite of sign languages, including people who sign differently and those for whom English is not their first language”*.

6.3 Negatives of the Service Being Delivered Externally

The **primary negatives** identified by the Local Authorities interviewed pertaining to the external delivery of the service focused around:

- Getting access to interpreters at times (particularly for emergency referrals) and, accordingly, having to work within the time frames of external providers
- Having no control over the quality of interpreters (albeit, in the main, the quality they deliver tending to be good)

Thereafter, **more specific negatives** were noted here in terms of:

- The reliability of external interpreters (with experiences of interpreters cancelling bookings due to *“having a better offer”*)

- Not building in-house expertise
- The relatively high hourly rate of external interpreters (albeit in the context of a belief, as noted earlier, that this approach represents good value for money)
- External providers on their tender list, at times, not having sufficient capacity

6.4 The Positives of Local Authorities Delivering Services Themselves

Those interviewed in the three Local Authorities stated that there could be two **primary positives** of their Council delivering sign language interpreter services themselves, namely:

- Direct access to in-house interpreters (potentially reducing delays in allocating interpreters to clients)
- In-house interpreters building relationships with clients which will allow them to not only identify their short-term needs but also to identify their emerging needs through time

Thereafter, **secondary positives** were noted in terms of:

- In-house interpreters having familiarity with their Council and what it does (particularly from a social work perspective) and also having an understanding of the local area
- Being better able to control and manage the service (in terms of, for example, quality and reliability)

6.5 Negatives of Local Authorities Delivering Services Themselves

Those interviewed believed that there were **three key negatives** for Local Authorities delivering sign language interpreter services themselves, namely:

- Cost (particularly in the context of the resources required to satisfy a small demand for such services)
- In-house interpreters being underemployed and, as a result, requiring to undertake other roles and responsibilities within the Council (which could pose logistical and management difficulties)
- The Council training and developing interpreters (including experienced interpreters) who may subsequently leave the Local Authority (and, as such, representing a poor investment by their Local Authority)

6.6 Should Other Local Authorities be Delivering Sign Language Interpreter Services Internally or Externally?

Those interviewed within the Local Authorities were very largely in favour of Councils delivering sign language interpreter services internally if:

- There was a sufficient critical mass of clients
- Demand could be identified for sign language interpreter services from other departments within a Local Authority

Preference for internal delivery was also a function of a number of other factors, namely beliefs that:

- In-house interpreters “*get to know their clients better*” (which is better for the client experience)
- It would be more difficult to manage the performance of external interpreters
- Having in-house interpreters build them into the fabric of the Social Work Services Department

The only circumstance identified in terms of preference for external delivery was that “*poor interpreters can be dispensed of quickly and*

easily” (which is unlikely to be the case were they to be employed by a Council).

Finally, it should be noted that there was an extent to which those interviewed stated that it was difficult to say whether Local Authorities should be delivering sign language interpreter services internally or externally and that this would be subject to a number of factors being taken into account (including demand, best practice and ability to meet statutory responsibilities).

6.7 Advice and Guidance for the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership

There were a number of **primary elements** of advice and guidance that those interviewed within Local Authorities would give to the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership in its consideration of delivering sign language interpreter services externally in future, namely:

- “Ensuring they know what they are purchasing”, particularly in terms of having sufficient access to interpreters – including short-term access, when required – and in terms of the quality of the services being sourced externally
- The need to undertake an impact assessment, not only in terms of internal impacts of external delivery, but, more importantly, impacts on the quality of service provided to clients
- Ensuring that there is a business case for external delivery (including reviewing historical and anticipated demand and any potential for untapped demand for these services elsewhere within Glasgow City Council)
- Considering working in partnership with other Local Authorities and organisations to deliver these services (in the context of similar partnerships being in place for other services within Local Authorities)

- Taking into account the potential reaction of Glasgow's deaf community should the service no longer be delivered internally

Thereafter, a number of **more specific** elements of advice and guidance were provided, namely:

- Considering a hybrid approach to service delivery (i.e. maintaining some elements of service delivery in-house, particularly emergency needs and the needs of other parts of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership and other services in Glasgow City Council) and delivering other elements of services externally (including those which are less urgent or which are delivered to organisations outwith Glasgow City Council)
- Examining the potential for internal interpreters to undertake other roles and responsibilities within the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership and elsewhere
- Using contractors on the Scottish Government's Framework should the service be delivered externally

7.0 OPTION APPRAISAL

Based entirely on the primary evidence gathered during the review process, there are a number of options available to the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership, each of which have positives and negatives. These are:

- Maintaining the status quo
- Delivering sign language interpreter services entirely externally
- Adopting a hybrid – or streamlined – approach to service delivery
- Adopting a partnership approach to service delivery

7.1 Maintaining the Status Quo

Maintaining the status quo would have a number of positives and negatives.

Positives

- The ability of SLITs to build relationships and trust with clients
- The availability of the service, particularly in the context of urgent or emergency requirements
- The potential for SLITs to act as an effective conduit between service users and clients
- Having direct access to highly skilled and experienced SLITs
- The ability for SLITs to work in conjunction with others in the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership

Negatives

- SLITs continuing to have a tendency to overidentify with clients
- The potential for SLITs, at times, to be underemployed and, at other times, under-resourced

- The potential for ongoing significant absences amongst SLITs which are sickness related
- The potential for ongoing difficulties in managing SLITs

7.2 Delivering Sign Language Interpreter Services Entirely Externally

Delivering sign language interpreter services entirely externally is also associated with a number of positives and negatives.

Positives

- Fewer problems pertaining to interpreter holidays or absences due to sickness
- The potential to have 24-hour access to interpreters
- Removal of difficulties associated with managing SLITs

Negatives

- Loss of continuity for clients
- A potential backlash from Glasgow's deaf community
- Opposition from Unison
- Possible issues regarding outsourcing statutory work
- Loss of the collective expertise of SLITs
- The potential disadvantaging of deaf people in terms of access to sign language interpreter services
- Lack of broader understanding of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership and other services amongst externally sourced sign language interpreters
- The high hourly rates of externally sourced sign language interpreters

7.3 Adopting a Hybrid – or Streamlined – Approach to Service Delivery

Adopting a hybrid – or streamlined – approach to service delivery, as with the first two options, would be associated with a range of positives and negatives.

Positives

- More cost-effective
- Reducing the need for the current number of SLITs
- The ability for SLITs to focus on urgent referrals or needs
- Reduced potential for SLIS underemployment
- Ability to satisfy broader needs within Glasgow City Council and elsewhere in Glasgow
- The opportunity to seek external support at times of unusually high demand

Negatives

- Requirement to redeploy a number of SLITs or make them redundant
- Opposition from Unison
- Costs incurred for external delivery
- The need to manage external partners
- A potential backlash from Glasgow's deaf community
- Concerns regarding interpreters understanding the Glasgow vernacular and, in particular, Glasgow's deaf community
- The potential that outsourced interpreters may not be fully trusted by Glasgow's deaf community

7.4 Adopting a Partnership Approach to Service Delivery

Adopting a partnership approach to service delivery, once again, as with the first two options, would be associated with a range of positives and negatives.

Positives

- The continuing ability of SLITs to build relationships and trust with clients
- More cost-effective
- Reduces potential for SLIT underemployment

Negatives

- Management issues when working with other Local Authorities/ organisations
- Potential difficulties in prioritising service delivery between Local Authorities/organisations
- Travel time implications for SLITs
- The potential for ongoing difficulties in managing SLITs
- SLITs continuing to have a tendency to overidentify with clients
- The potential for ongoing significant absences amongst SLITs which are sickness related

7.5 Consideration of Options

In considering the option detailed above, it is of critical importance that consideration is given to the body of evidence gathered throughout the review process in relation to:

- The positives and negatives of SLIS (including addressing negatives or weaknesses and suggestions made for the improvement of SLIS)

- The positives and negatives of the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership delivering SLIS internally
- The positives and negatives of the service being delivered externally
- Support for the service being delivered externally

In addition to the evidence and options presented in this regard, the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership must also give consideration to:

- The operational, management and strategic implications of its decision
- The cost and other financial implications of the decision made
- The views of Local Authorities which deliver sign language interpreter services externally

Most importantly, however, the Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership must give careful consideration as to the impact of its decision on the quality of service delivered to clients.

Finally, in the context of the length of time that SLIS has been under review – and the consequent uncertainty amongst SLIS staff, SLIS service users and SLIS clients – a decision must be made as soon as reasonably possible.