Written evidence submitted by: Caroline Corrigan (ATW0180)

Executive Summary:

- Client 1: lack of interpreter support for first month in new job.
- Client 2: difficulties contacting ATW to review funding
- Client 3: Deaf client given the 30 hour rule
- Client 4: Deaf person has ATW budget severely cut and many interpreter invoices returned unpaid. ATW forced them to employ a permanent Communication Support Worker, which the department were unable to find. Eventually employer supplements the ATW rate, in order for Deaf person to remain in their role, using a qualified interpreter.
- Potential client: Deaf person gives up new professional job, unable to find an interpreter at the new ATW capped rate forced upon them.

Introduction:

I am a qualified British Sign Language/English Interpreter. I live in Hertfordshire and I work predominantly in Herts, Beds, Bucks and also across London. In my role as an Interpreter I have supported 3 clients regularly who use ATW. These 3 clients work within different County Council departments.

The AtW application and assessment process, from the perspective of employees and employers:

1. Client 1: I have little knowledge of the initial application and assessment process itself. However, once ATW funding has been agreed, I have supported Deaf clients, who have been left without any interpreter support for their first month in a new job. This is the crucial time when a new employee would need an interpreter to facilitate new information, inductions, meeting colleagues, attending workshops and building professional relationships within their role. These vital interactions have affected the way that one client was able to fulfil their role, as they missed out on the important information required to undertake their role effectively. This client left their job within weeks of funding being agreed. I believe the lack of interpreter support had an impact on their decision to leave, as they were unable to access key information and resources required for their role, due to having no interpreter support in the first month. My initial days interpreting for this client, were spent interpreting phone calls and meetings with other staff/managers which were fraught with issues, which had arisen due to the lack of access to information/training/induction etc during the first few weeks without interpreter support.
The adequacy of ongoing support, both in terms of the aids, adaptations and support workers provided through AtW, and the help and advice offered by DWP:

2. Client 2 had sufficient support from ATW to carry out her role. She had however overlooked the date that the ATW should be reviewed. On realizing this, she contacted ATW in order to have her claim reassessed. While I supported this client regularly, one day per week, there became a pattern of spending most of the morning trying to contact the relevant person at ATW for advice. I was aware, at this time, the impact that this was having on her and her colleagues and also how she was viewed in the department, given the amount of time that was being take up trying to resolve her issues with ATW. I interpreted several conversations that she had with ATW, many of which were simply aiming to gather the basic information of who she needed to talk to, or who her new adviser was. This seemed a complex task as no one was able to give her this information. After several phone calls, most of which an adviser would assure her they would call her back, but never did, she eventually made contact with a manager. They assured her that they would call her back, but again this did not happen. In all, it took several weeks, just to make contact with an ATW adviser, to discuss the next steps that needed to be taken. During this time, this Deaf client had to have several meetings with her manager to explain the difficulties that she was having making contact with ATW. I continued to support this client, which often meant supporting her during home visits within social services department. At the same time, one other interpreter took the decision not to support the Deaf client, as no one at ATW could assure the Deaf person that any support would be in place, and therefore no interpreter invoices would be paid. This Deaf person was at the mercy of the interpreter, because interpreters cannot continue to work for free, but want to support the Deaf person in their role, but take the risk that they may not get paid, if ATW amend the funding given or withdraw it. Usually, I have found in my experience that this can take so long to sort out that it directly affects the Deaf person to actually carry out their job role. This impacts negatively on them and how they are viewed by their managers and colleagues. On one occasion, when the Deaf client asked the ATW adviser whether or not the Interpreters would continue to get paid while her case was being reviewed, the adviser suggested that the interpreter continue to work and that “if their invoices get sent [posted] back to you, then you know that it has not been agreed”. I found this advice shocking and I know of other interpreters who avoid working for ATW clients, due to other interpreters having their invoices returned and not being paid.

3. Client 3: Had their funding reduced, and given the 30 hour rule, thereby leaving them with less interpreter support. I have been unable to continue to support this client and I am aware that they are looking for alternative employment.
4. Client 4: Had an ATW budget but there were many problems in contacting ATW and also many of his interpreters ‘pulled out’ of providing their interpreting support, due to long delays in payment of invoices or not knowing whether they will be paid or not. This client has a high level role in Social Services involving child protection and court. The client needed to have fully qualified interpreters, but was forced to advertise for a Communication Support Worker at a much lower rate, despite the role requiring an experienced interpreter who could work in these high risk settings. The department spent a lot of time and energy trying to recruit a communication support worker but were unable to find anyone at the new rate. I understand that this person now has their ATW rate supplemented by their employer in order to continue to fulfil their role. The alternative would have been that they could no longer carry out their role.

AtW’s effectiveness in terms of helping disabled people to: secure a job, stay in employment, and develop their careers:

5. As a recently qualified interpreter, I do not have lots of experience of supporting Deaf people in work in previous years. However, in my experience in the last 18 months, I have found the issues with ATW to have a huge impact on their ability to secure a job and certainly to develop their careers. I have witnessed the amount of time that has been required to resolve issues with ATW, such as phone calls, emails, letters and then meetings within their own departments to try to justify why the ATW funding has still not been agreed – often when the Deaf person has not even managed to find the correct person to speak to. Also, the Deaf person has to explain to the interpreter that they do not know if they will be paid as they have not managed to resolve the ATW funding issues. I feel this often makes the Deaf person seem incompetent, such is the disbelief that a few simple phone calls could possibly take weeks to sort out.

6. Potential client: I was contacted by a Deaf person via email, asking if I would interpret for them on a regular basis, one day per week. I felt that I had the skill base to undertake this booking, however, the Deaf person advised me that their ATW budget had been capped, therefore only allowing him to employ an interpreter at less than half of the daily rate an interpreter’s typical fee. I had to email the Deaf person and explain that for me to travel into London and work a 9-6pm day (therefore leaving at 8 and arriving home at 7) was not viable, given that my Travelcard cost £27.00, plus I had to consider my fees incurred in training to be an interpreter (£27,000 student loan for 3-year degree, £3,000 for Diploma, approx. £1,500 for language NVQ qualifications) as well as the requirement to undertake CPD as a professional interpreter. As a freelancer, my daily fee also takes account of the fact that I receive no sick or holiday pay, so the fee reflects the training and length of time it takes to qualify. The daily fee for this booking after my travel was deducted would have been less than £80 per day – less money than I had...
earned prior to spending 6 years training to be an interpreter. I understand that this Deaf person was forced to give up this job, as he could not find an interpreter to work at this rate.

The steps taken so far by DWP to extend AtW, including its marketing and funding of the scheme:

7. I am not aware of any marketing of ATW personally.

My Recommendations:

8. That the 30 hour rule be withdrawn.

9. That the hourly rate paid for professional interpreting support to Deaf clients remain between £35-£45 to enable Deaf people to be support by trained, qualified and experienced professionals, who are able to facilitate communication effectively to a high level, and therefore reflect the Deaf person effectively so that they may be viewed by their managers and colleagues in a professional way and not be discriminated against.

10. That ATW ensure that Deaf clients have an assigned Adviser, so that they may contact them without causing unnecessary stress and anxiety through weeks of delays, which discriminates against the Deaf person whom they are meant to be supporting.

11. That no Deaf person is forced to employ one person as their ‘support worker’ to undertake a role which they are not trained or qualified to do.

12. That the initial process to get interpreter support be speeded up.

13. That interpreter support, where there is a clear need within the Deaf person’s role, is provided over a longer period, before needing review.

14. That only NRCPD registered and qualified interpreters be used to support Deaf clients, where the Deaf client has identified the need to have a qualified interpreter.

20 June 2014