Council Direction:

As part of the 2013 budget deliberations, the Customer Service, Access and Equity Division submitted a Budget Enhancement Request for $15,000 to cover the costs associated with the use of an over-the-phone translation service. At that time, Council directed staff to proceed with a pilot whereby the Customer Contact Centre would use their budget to pay for any City use of the service (provided by Language Line) for a period of review (6 months). Previously the departments using the service were charged the per minute fee for the call. Some areas had expressed a reluctance to use the service because of the cost.

Information:

The Customer Contact Centre subscribes to an over-the-phone translation service, offering service in over 200 different languages. In an attempt to ensure that all members of our diverse community have equal access to city services, the Contact Centre has been conducting a 6-month pilot (August 2013-February 2014), during which all costs city-wide have been paid for out of the Contact Centre budget.

Although the full pilot period has not been completed, we are able to report back on the period from August 2013-December 2013. During this period, there were 46 uses of the service, compared to 24 uses during the same time in 2012. Total costs were $2965.60 for 2013 compared to $691.35 for the same period in 2012. This represents a
$2274.25 increase in total costs. Keep in mind this is only for the 4 month period reported on thus far.

We are pleased that, not only have we seen increased use of the translation service, but have noted at least 5 areas of the organization that had not previously used the service, who now do. This shows success in our marketing of the initiative using an advertisement on Enet, as well as a cross-departmental email communication offering information, and training should it be required. To-date, 7 different workgroups have contacted the Contact Centre for further information relating to the pilot and/or requests for training in using the service.

Primary languages requested during the pilot period were Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Spanish and French, with a total of over 30 different languages accessed.

As a result of the pilot we can conclude that, without the concern over chargebacks to individual departments, staff are more likely to use the service, and thus provide an improved access to service for resident who otherwise may have had to rely on a relative or friend to call on their behalf, or who might have been left with incomplete information about City services. We feel very strongly that all members of our community should have equal access to all City services, and this enhancement would go a long way to ensuring we achieve that.

The original Budget Enhancement Request was for $15,000, but a review of the current expenditures during the pilot period indicates that a request of $10,000 should be sufficient to cover the additional usage going forward.

The Contact Centre will continue to monitor the expenditures on this account throughout through 2014.