



Irish Language Policy

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1. Preamble

1.1 Purpose

This policy sets out Council's commitments to facilitate and encourage the promotion and use of Irish. This policy builds on Council's commitments to celebrate linguistic diversity and to deliver equality of opportunity for all who avail of Council services. It also sets out Derry City and Strabane District Council's legislative obligations along with details of procedures to be implemented.

1.2 Background

According to the results of the 2011 Census, 11% (184,898) of the NI population have knowledge of Irish. In the Derry City and Strabane District Council area 13.92% (19,704) of the population has knowledge of Irish.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The rights of Irish speakers are protected in international legislation both in the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and The European Convention on Human Rights and in The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages requires Parties to base their policies on:

- The need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them; and
- The facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages in speech and writing in private and public life.

The British Government has signed the Charter up to Part 3 for the Irish language. Part 3, Article 10 outlines specific obligations for local Councils:

Article 10 – Administrative authorities and public services

1. Within the administrative districts of the State in which the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages justifies the measures specified below and according to the situation of each language, the Parties undertake, as far as this is reasonably possible:
 - a.
 - i. to ensure that the administrative authorities use the regional or minority languages; or
 - ii. to ensure that such of their officers as are in contact with the public use the regional or minority languages in their relations with persons applying to them in these languages; or
 - iii. to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications and receive a reply in these languages; or
 - iv. to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications in these languages; or

- v. to ensure that users of regional or minority languages may validly submit a document in these languages;
 - b. to make available widely used administrative texts and forms for the population in the regional or minority languages or in bilingual versions;
 - c. to allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in a regional or minority language.
- 2. In respect of the local and regional authorities on whose territory the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages is such as to justify the measures specified below, the Parties undertake to allow and/or encourage:
 - a. the use of regional or minority languages within the framework of the regional or local authority;
 - b. the possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages;
 - c. the publication by regional authorities of their official documents also in the relevant regional or minority languages;
 - d. the publication by local authorities of their official documents also in the relevant regional or minority languages;
 - e. the use by regional authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however, the use of the official language(s) of the State;
 - f. the use by local authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however, the use of the official language(s) of the State;
 - g. the use or adoption, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s), of traditional and correct forms of place-names in regional or minority languages.
- 3. With regard to public services provided by the administrative authorities or other persons acting on their behalf, the Parties undertake, within the territory in which regional or minority languages are used, in accordance with the situation of each language and as far as this is reasonably possible:
 - a. to ensure that the regional or minority languages are used in the provision of the service; or
 - b. to allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request and receive a reply in these languages; or

- c. to allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request in these languages.
4. With a view to putting into effect those provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 accepted by them, the Parties undertake to take one or more of the following measures:
 - a. translation or interpretation as may be required;
 - b. recruitment and, where necessary, training of the officials and other public service employees required;
 - c. compliance as far as possible with requests from public service employees having a knowledge of a regional or minority language to be appointed in the territory in which that language is used.
5. The Parties undertake to allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages, at the request of those concerned.

The European Charter is based on the premise of non-discrimination, i.e. the majority language group is not discriminated against by the implementation of actions designed to promote and protect the minority indigenous languages:

“The Parties undertake to eliminate, if they have not already done so, any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of it. The adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages”.

(Article 7, Section 2)

The Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement (Section marked Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity: Economic, Social and Cultural Issues) also gives particular recognition to the Irish language and sets out significant provisions for its public use in a new society. Specific pledges made by the British Government within the document state that:

- resolute action must be taken to promote the language;

- the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life must be facilitated and encouraged;
- restrictions which would discourage the maintenance and development of the language must be removed.

Northern Ireland Act (St Andrews Agreement) 2006

In 2006 additional provisions for Irish were made in the St. Andrew's Agreement - Annex B, an agreement which makes explicit reference to the need for an Irish Language Act for Northern Ireland.

Department of Culture Arts and Leisure – Draft Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language

DCAL published a consultative document in 2012 outlining a draft strategy for protecting and enhancing the development of the Irish language. The document outlines some key aims:

- to create a framework where Irish can flourish and can be shared by all who wish to use it;
- to protect and support the development and learning of Irish; and
- to promote wider understanding of the background of the Irish language.

The draft strategy includes the following objective:

- to increase the number of those that use public services in Irish

Under the heading marked 'Administration' the document refers specifically to local authorities, stating that they should:

- adopt Irish language policies and plans and appoint Irish Language Officers where needed;
- maximise the provision of services through Irish;
- expand/initiate facilities for the use of Irish in their council/committee meetings;
- guard against any diminution of services being merged under the Review of Public Administration (RPA);
- provide an Irish or bilingual version of all publications, official documents and forms in line with this strategy and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
- facilitate the proper preservation and signposting of Irish place-names;
- name new housing developments to reflect local or national heritage; and
- encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish.

The document also envisages that an Irish Language Bill will be prepared and presented to the Assembly at the earliest possible time.

Derry City and Strabane District Council is also required to meet equality commitments and legislative responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). This policy builds on Council's commitments to make information and services accessible to those who belong to minority language communities.

Derry City and Strabane District Council is also committed to promoting linguistic diversity, cultural inclusion and ensuring equality of opportunity.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council departments and to the services they provide to the public. This policy also applies to communications between Council and other bodies.

3. Definitions

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages : The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) is a European treaty (CETS 148) adopted in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe to protect and promote historical regional and minority languages in Europe.

The Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement): The Good Friday Agreement or Belfast Agreement was signed in Belfast on 10 April 1998 (Good Friday) by the British and Irish governments and endorsed by most Northern Ireland political parties. The concord was endorsed by the voters of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in separate referenda on 23 May 1998.

St Andrews Agreement: The St Andrews Agreement was an agreement between the British and Irish Governments and the political parties in relation to the devolution of power to Northern Ireland. The agreement resulted from multi-party talks held in St Andrews, Fife, Scotland from 11 October to 13 October 2006, between the two governments and all the major parties in Northern Ireland, including the DUP and Sinn Féin. It resulted in the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the formation (on 8 May 2007) of a new Northern Ireland Executive, a decision by Sinn

Féin to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland and an undertaking to introduce an Irish Language Act.

4. Policy Statement

Derry City and Strabane District Council is committed to promoting the use of Irish both within council and in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area. Council is committed to complying with the relevant legislation to ensure that the rights of Irish speakers are enshrined within the policy framework and to ensure that equality of opportunity is afforded to those who wish to access Council information and services in the medium of Irish.

4.1 Roles and Responsibilities

In order for this policy to have strategic effect it must be implemented throughout Council. As with all corporate policy, the Corporate Administration and Performance Improvement Directorate will act as the responsible department.

Irish Language Officer (ILO): The ILO will be responsible for providing guidance and support in relation to the policy. The ILO will assist Council in ensuring compliance with the policy and will specify procedures to be adopted in furtherance of the policy aims.

Heads of Department: Heads of Department are responsible for making staff aware of the policy, for implementing the policy within their own departments and for ensuring compliance with the policy.

Council Staff: All staff are required to be aware of the policy and will be encouraged to undergo Language Awareness Training. All staff must also follow the guidance provided within the Irish Language Courtesy Code and must implement policy within their service area as required.

4.2 General Principles

4.2.1. Cultural Identity

Derry City and Strabane District Council will respect the right of members of the public and of employees to use their name and address in Irish.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will respect the right of employees to use Irish within the workplace and that of members of the public to use Irish in their dealings with the Council and within Council buildings.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will work to remove restrictions on the right to use Irish in public life nor will oppressive practices towards speakers of Irish be allowed.

4.2.2 Corporate Identity

Derry City and Strabane District Council will adopt an official corporate identity which includes the Council name in English, Irish and Ulster-Scots. The trilingual version of the logo will supersede all previous versions of the logo and will be reinforced through use on all Council correspondence and publications.

This will be reflected in a revised Corporate Identity policy and guidelines.

4.2.3 Correspondence

Derry City and Strabane District Council will accept written correspondence in Irish and reply in Irish. This applies to letters, electronic mail, website enquiries, forms and applications.

When initiating correspondence, Derry City and Strabane District Council will write in the chosen language of the recipient, where this choice is explicitly known.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will answer all correspondence in Irish in line with timeframes outlined in the Council's Customer Charter.

Correspondence received in Irish should be forwarded to the Irish Language Officer for translation in a timely manner and within the Customer Charter's recommended timeframes.

4.2.4. Telephone Communications

Arrangements will be put in place at all Council customer interface points to ensure that telephone conversations can be conducted in the medium of Irish, when requested. Such arrangements may include the availability of telephone translation services such as Language Line, staff competent in Irish, etc. Members of the public will be invited to use the dedicated Irish language telephone number 028 71376 579 to contact the Irish language

officer directly or to leave a message in Irish on the Council's Irish language voicemail service.

Employees working in frontline positions will be encouraged to attend Language Awareness training to ensure that staff members are familiar with procedures in relation to dealing with enquiries from members of the public in Irish.

4.2.5 Producing Information in Irish

Irish language versions of Council information will be translated upon request.

Translations of 250 words or less will be translated free-of-charge in-house by the Irish Language Officer. Larger-scale translations will be issued to the Select List of Translators and Interpreters and these translations will incur a charge. The section/service/department/directorate which requests the translation is liable to pay for the service.

All service literature and Council publications will contain the strap line "This document is available in alternative formats including minority languages upon request".

Documents translated into Irish will be made available on the website.

In the case of publications prepared separately in English and Irish, both versions will be produced to the same design and presentational standard.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will translate and publish at least four publications and publish four newsletters in Irish each financial year.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will increase the range, volume and accessibility of information in Irish on the Council website.

All Council forms and applications for public use will be available in Irish. The onus for ensuring that a directorate's/department's/section's forms and applications are available in Irish will lie with that section. All translated forms and applications will be made available online and in hard copy upon request.

4.2.6 Media Relations

Derry City and Strabane District Council will produce a minimum of 24 press releases per annum in Irish for the Irish Language media and where possible the Irish Language Officer will provide spokesperson services to liaise with the Irish language media provided text and face-to-face briefings are

available on the subject matter. The Irish Language Officer will maintain an up to date list of Irish Language Media.

4.2.7 Presentations/ Public Speaking/ Events

All representatives from Derry City and Strabane District Council will be permitted to use Irish in their presentations, public speaking and events.

Use of Irish at formal occasions and public meetings will be encouraged.

Simultaneous Interpretation Services will be provided upon request.

4.2.8 Events

Derry City and Strabane District Council will ensure that in planning all festivals / civic celebrations consideration is given to the opportunity to promote the Irish language as a component part of these celebrations. Any decision not to include an element of Irish language promotion within an event must be justified and details included within the appropriate committee report.

Derry City and Strabane District Council will support Irish language and cultural activities by facilitating events within Council buildings and venues where practicable.

4.2.9 Signage and Visibility

Derry City and Strabane District Council will provide Irish language versions of street names and road names in line with Council's Streetnaming and Property Numbering Policy.

An index of dual-language street names will be maintained and updated. (N.B Please cross-refer to Derry City and Strabane District Council's Streetnaming and Property Numbering Policy – City Engineer's Department).

Upon scheduled replacement, internal and external signs on Derry City and Strabane District Council owned buildings, offices, internal directional signs and vehicles will include Irish (and Ulster-Scots). All of the abovementioned signs will be required to present all three languages in equal size, typesetting and format and will place English, Irish and Ulster-Scots in that order. Draft signage proposals must be approved by the Irish Language Officer and the Equality Officer to ensure compliance with this policy and the Code of Practice on Producing Information.

4.2.10 Grant Aid

Council will promote opportunities for the use of Irish by encouraging grant-aid applications for Irish language initiatives from the Irish Language Community.

Council will publicise the grant aid programme in Irish on the website and encourage applications in Irish.

5. Legal & Policy Framework

5.1 Linkage to Corporate Plan

The Irish language has a significant role to play in the marketing of the city of Derry as a signature destination and to the marketing of the wider Derry City and Strabane District Council area and the North West region. The Irish language is part of the intrinsic, unique character of Derry as a regional city on the border with Donegal. There is an obvious tourism dividend to be maximised through the use of and heightened visibility of the Irish language within the Council area and Council will support the language through the provision of cultural facilities, programmes and events. Promoting the language and its culture using this multi-faceted approach will help Council achieve its aim of enhancing the region.

As the Irish language is a significant cultural component part of the heritage of this city, its promotion and development will be important in the marketing of the city as a world-class heritage destination capable of achieving World Heritage Site status.

5.2 Linkage to wider policy and legislation

This policy relates directly to the following:

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages states that policies, legislation and practice are to be based on the following objectives and principles:

- the recognition of the Irish language as an expression of cultural wealth;
- the respect of the geographical area of the Irish language in order to ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the promotion of Irish;
- the need for resolute action to promote Irish in order to safeguard the language;

- the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of Irish, in speech and writing, in private and public life;
- the maintenance and development of links between groups using Irish and other groups in the State employing the Irish language in identical or similar form, as well as the establishment of cultural relations with other groups in the State using different languages;
- the provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of Irish at all appropriate stages;
- the provision of facilities enabling non-speakers of Irish living in the area where it is used to learn it if they so desire;
- the promotion of study on and research into Irish at universities or equivalent institutions;
- the promotion of appropriate types of transnational exchanges (i.e. cross border exchanges)

Article 10 of The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages refers specifically to Administrative Authorities and Public Services and the relevant principles designed to guide them:

- To ensure that users of Irish may submit oral or written applications to the administrative authority;
- To allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in Irish;
- To use Irish in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however, the use of the official language(s) of the State;
- To use or adopt, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s) of traditional and correct forms of place-names in Irish.

With regard to public services provided by the administrative authorities or other persons acting on their behalf, the Council must undertake to:

- To allow users to submit a request in Irish.
- To provide translation or interpretation as may be required;
- To allow the use or adoption of family names in Irish at the request of those concerned.

This policy also reflects a number of the obligations identified within:

- The Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities;
- The European Convention on Human Rights;
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act;
- The Good Friday Agreement, and
- The St Andrews Agreement.

6. Impact Assessment

6.1 Screening and Equality Impact Assessment

This draft policy has been screened out for equality impacts as only minimal changes have been applied to the previous version of this policy.

6.2 Impact on staff and financial resources

This policy will impact on all staff and will require Language Awareness Training and Language Skills Training particularly for those at the public customer care interface. Implementation of the policy will be phased into immediate, short-term and longer-term objectives. Immediate objectives will have few, if any, resource implications but short-term and longer-term implementation will require an, as yet unquantified resource allocation to cover translation, interpretation, publication, design and associated costs.

6.3 Sustainable development

This policy will have a neutral sustainability impact.

6.4 Other impacts

This policy will require that active consideration is given to the Irish language throughout all areas of Council business. This will require a cultural shift and increased awareness of the relevance of the language in the work and communications of all Council departments. There will be a requirement to update Council's website and aspects of corporate branding, stationery and signage to accommodate the language and these changes may impact upon public perception of Council and its civic identity.

7. Implementation

Overall responsibility for the implementation of the Irish Language Policy will lie with the assigned directorate. The Irish Language Officer will assist in the operational implementation of the policy.

7.1 Training

All Council staff will be offered language awareness and language skills training. All Heads of Department must ensure that they and their staff are aware of the obligations relating to their service areas under the policy.

New staff will be offered the opportunity to undergo language awareness training as part of their induction.

Council will provide Irish Language Skills Training to a range of staff to provide a competent service through Irish to the public.

Staff working at the customer care interface including reception areas staff will be trained to use simple greetings in Irish and be able to recognise the name of the local authority in Irish and be offered a “Meet and Greet”-style course.

7.2 Resources

Translation, correction and proof-reading services will be made available to all departments within the parameters outlined and select list translators’ services will be quality-assured.

Resources for support facilities for the use of Irish will be identified so that public-sector terminology guides, dictionaries, phrasebooks, signage etc will be provided for staff and so that these resources can be replenished and/or upgraded as and when required.

Reception staff will hold a staff-list of officers trained to handle calls and enquiries in Irish and these officers will be clearly identified on extension lists.

7.3 Advice

Further information on this policy and advice in relation to Irish language issues can be requested from the Irish Language Officer. Legal advice can be obtained from the City Secretary and Solicitor.

7.4 Guidelines and Forms

Please refer to Courtesy Code for Irish.

7.5 Communication Strategy

Responsibility for the communication of this policy lies with the Irish Language Officer. Training will be arranged in conjunction with the Training Officer.

7.6 Risk Management

Failure to implement this policy may lead to Council failing to meet its legislative obligations, customer-service obligations and equal opportunities obligations.

8. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

This policy will be subject to annual review or earlier as may be required by legislative changes, policy changes or good-practice adaptations.

A review of progress towards meeting the European Charter's objectives and the progress report will be made publicly available.

9. Acknowledgments

N/A