



Belfast
City Council

Language Strategy 2018-2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In keeping with the Council's long term vision for the city, as set out in the Belfast Agenda, the Language Strategy 2018-2023 aspires to create a place where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected, and where those who live, work and visit Belfast can expect to access what Belfast has to offer, using forms of language with which they are familiar and comfortable.

The aims of the strategy are to:

- address language and communication challenges and opportunities within the Belfast Agenda outcomes;
- establish a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city;
- increase the profile of different languages along with awareness and understanding of associated cultures, heritage and traditions;
- engage with language communities to address language barriers and promote equality of opportunity through the development and integration of different languages into mainstream civic life;
- enhance good relations within the city through the promotion of linguistic diversity and to celebrate the significance of language in the history and culture of the city;
- address staff training and capacity building needs in relation to the role linguistic diversity has in the workplace and in the delivery of services.
- work in partnership to promote linguistic diversity across the city, to move toward our shared vision of inclusive growth, where no one is left behind.

The strategy builds on earlier initiatives including the draft Linguistic Diversity Policy and Language Framework, together with extensive consultation.

Bringing this Language Strategy to life over the next five years will require actions that are realistic and achievable. Five work strands will be delivered, representing different language forms other than the principal language of the Council, English. These work strands will address the needs and aspirations of the following language communities:

- **Irish Language;**
- **Ulster-Scots Language;**
- **Sign Languages;**
- **New Communities' Languages;**
- **Languages and communications for disabled people**

The Language Strategy is a corporate strategy, co-ordinated by the Equality and Diversity Unit. Work streams will be developed through stakeholder engagement and taken forward by two officers - one officer will be assigned responsibility for the promotion, protection and enhancement of Irish, while the second officer will have responsibility for increasing access and inclusion of the other languages.

1. VISION and STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1.1 Vision

Language¹, in its diverse forms, lies at the core of our business. This is primarily because genuine engagement with individuals and communities rests on the capacity to use language to communicate effectively with all those who live in, work in and visit Belfast.

Planning for the diversity of language usage is not a simple task. Economic, political and social circumstances can each impact on policy areas, meaning that the data collected can become quickly outdated. However, we are confident the strategic approach over the next five years, from April 2018 until March 2023 can bring positive change through working with all stakeholders.

The Language Strategy is a key document which will contribute to achieving the aims of the Belfast Agenda², which sets out a long term vision for the city as a place:

- where everyone benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy;
- that is welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive for all;
- that is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable
- where everyone experiences good health and wellbeing; and
- where everyone fulfils their potential.

In line with this agenda, the vision for our Language Strategy is to create a city where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected, and where those who live, work and visit the city can expect to access what Belfast has to offer, using forms of language within which they are familiar and comfortable.

Belfast City Council recognises and celebrates the linguistic diversity which characterises our city and duly acknowledges the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance of the different language forms used by residents, workers and visitors alike.

In turn we acknowledge that the creation of a climate of mutual respect of different language forms is necessary to enable cultural diversity to be a source not of division but of enrichment for the future of our city and our society.

We are committed to respecting the rights, traditions and cultures of users of different language forms, whether by choice or necessity, and to celebrate, promote and support the continued use of such languages, thereby increasing awareness and understanding of the heritage and culture of communities associated with linguistic diversity.

1.2 Strategic Aims

A series of strategic aims have been developed for our Language Strategy, which will underpin future objectives and actions, while building on the legacy of previous work.

The strategic aims outlined below have been developed from a substantial evidence base, including conversations with language communities and other key stakeholders, legislation and the broader background, which is laid out in more detail in Section 2.

¹ Defined as 'The method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.'

² <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/council/Communityplanning/BelfastAgenda.aspx>

- address language and communication challenges and opportunities within the Belfast Agenda outcomes;
- establish a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city;
- increase the profile of different languages along with awareness and understanding of associated cultures, heritage and traditions;
- engage with language communities to address language barriers and promote equality of opportunity through the development and integration of different languages into mainstream civic life;
- enhance good relations within the city through the promotion of linguistic diversity and to celebrate the significance of language in the history and culture of the city;
- address staff training and capacity building needs in relation to the role linguistic diversity has in the workplace and in the delivery of services.
- work in partnership to promote linguistic diversity across the city, to move toward our shared vision of inclusive growth, where no-one is left behind;

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 A Short History

We first adopted a Language Policy in 2006 (see Appendix 1), a policy that reflected on thinking at that time and including guidance from the Department of the Environment (Local Government Division) on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages ('the European Charter').

At that time we adopted a wide ranging policy that addressed the use of languages other than English in our business. In particular, reference was made to Irish, Ulster-Scots, other 'minority' languages and sign languages.

Further to legal opinion, and taking into account significant developments in the way that the needs of users of other languages had been accommodated over the years, in 2013 we decided to look again at the policy and to bring it up to date. Consultation was then undertaken with representatives of the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) sectors, and a revised draft policy was then brought forward for implementation – without being formally adopted.

Since then, and in particular during 2017, there followed extensive consultation on a Draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity together with a Proposed Language Framework³. The formal consultation on the policy and framework ran from 23 May 2017 to 18 July 2017 and ended with the production of a Consultation Feedback Report⁴. While the consultation endorsed the general strategic approach adopted there was also an evident need to take into account each of the linguistic communities of Belfast, and their diverse needs and priorities.

Taken collectively the recommendations arising from the Draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity (2017) and from the Consultation Feedback Report (2017) form the basis of the Language Strategy 2018-23.

Key recommendations which have been actioned include:

- Rebranding the draft Linguistic Diversity Policy as a Language Strategy, which will outline a strategic approach to the development of accessible and inclusive communications;
- Labels such as 'minority' have not been used wherever possible – instead we refer to 'other' languages, meaning other than English
- Separate strands of work have been established under the strategy: Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language, Sign Language, New Communities' Communications and Language, and Communications and Language Strand for those with a Disability;
- Two officers are being recruited - one officer will be assigned responsibility for the promotion, protection and enhancement of Irish, while the second officer will have responsibility for increasing access and inclusion for the other languages

Other recommendations will be taken forward, central to which is engaging with stakeholders to fine tune the aims and implementation sections of each strand so as to reflect needs and priorities, and in the process bringing the strategy to life through the staged implementation of short-term and long-term action plans for each strand.

³ All documents are available at:

<https://minutes3.belfastcity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=163&MID=8260#AI40369>

or by contacting the Equality and Diversity Unit

⁴ See above.

2.2 Legal Context

2.2.1 Counsel's opinion

In January 2013 we sought the opinion of Mr Richard Gordon QC, who is widely recognised as a leading counsel on constitutional, administrative, public and civil liberties law. Mr Gordon was asked to advise:

- whether the Council is in any legal conflict with the provisions of the European Charter and whether the current policies in relation to the use of Irish meet with the spirit and requirements of the Charter;
- whether the current language policies are open to legitimate criticism.

Mr Gordon advised that there would be potential for judicial review in relation to allegations of the Council's non-compliance with the European Charter and recommended that the Council should – as a minimum – have in place a clear strategy which can be shown to be implemented for facilitation of the Irish language so as to meet all the requirements of Article 10 of the European Charter. He suggested that the Council should reformulate the Language Policy in a comprehensive and easily accessible form and should attempt to itemise in the clearest terms what is being done to implement the policy.

2.2.2 High Court ruling

In December 2014, the High Court ruled on an application for judicial review by Eileen Reid of a decision taken by Belfast City Council to refuse to erect an additional street name plate in Irish at Ballymurphy Drive, Belfast. The application was made on five grounds, one of which was that our street naming policy was inconsistent with its commitment to act in accordance with the European Charter. The ruling stated that, as a general proposition, international treaties or agreements which have not been incorporated into national law are not enforceable and went on to say:

'a public authority ... cannot be obliged to treat itself as bound to act in compliance with international obligation. Even where it does so it is clear from the authorities that the courts will adopt a very light touch review which will not extend to ruling on the meaning or effect of the International Treaty.'

2.2.3 Judicial Review Application Conradh Na Gaeilge March 2017

The High Court found that the Executive Committee of the NI Assembly had failed to comply with obligations flowing from the NI Act 1998 requiring it to adopt a strategy in respect of the Irish language and that consideration was not sufficient to discharge the duty arising under the Act.

2.2.4 International and domestic legal obligations and standards

The sensitivities that can so often attach to the interplay between language, politics and identity, and many jurisdictions have wrestled with these issues over a considerable period of time.

Numerous international and domestic statutes and standards are potentially relevant to this strategy, including:

- The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992);
- The Belfast / Good Friday Agreement (1998);
- The Northern Ireland (St Andrew's Agreement) Act (2006);

- The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1994);
- The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000);
- The European Convention on Human Rights (1950);
- The Disability Discrimination Act (1995);
- The Race Relations (NI) Order (1997);
- The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order (2000);
- Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

2.2.5 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The Charter is the European convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities. It was adopted not only to maintain and develop the Europe's cultural traditions and heritage but also to respect an inalienable and commonly recognised right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life.

In Northern Ireland, Part II of the Charter applies to both Irish and Ulster-Scots while Part III applies to Irish only.

Part II places a general duty on the state to facilitate and/or encourage the use of regional or minority languages, in speech and writing, in public and private life, but does not place any obligations directly on district councils.

However, Part III of the European Charter extends to public services under public control. In this context, the European Charter states (in Article 10) that services need to be able to be provided in the specified language (in this case, Irish) and users of the language need to be able to submit requests for services in that language.

Article 10 makes it clear that public authorities should have a capacity for translation and interpretation, allow or encourage the use of traditional forms of place-names and family names, draft documents in the specified language, facilitate oral and written applications in the language, facilitate the use of the language in debates, and allow people to submit requests in the language.

2.2.6 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

Strand three of the Agreement contains a series of commitments in respect of economic, cultural and social issues, including a general provision relating to minority languages:

‘All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.’

The Agreement was concluded before the European Charter and it is clear that the commitments in strand three were focusing on the transitional period prior to the ratification of the European Charter by the UK.

2.2.7 Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act

This Act places a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt a strategy for the enhancement and protection of the Irish language.

2.2.8 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Unlike the European Charter (which focuses on languages) the Council of Europe's Framework Convention focuses on linguistic minority groups. It does not place any directly enforceable obligation on local councils but includes a number of provisions in relation to minority languages. In particular Article 11 requires the state to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to use his or her surname (patronym) and first names in the minority language. The article also requires the state to facilitate the display of traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications in the minority language, where there is a sufficient demand and in areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to a national minority.

2.2.9 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

The EU Charter provides simply that, 'the (European) Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.' The EU Charter has been incorporated into domestic law.

2.2.10 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

The ECHR and the general case law of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg place a general obligation on the state to respect linguistic pluralism and minority rights. The ECHR has also been incorporated into domestic law.

2.2.11 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

The DDA outlaws discrimination against those with a disability (i.e. a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities). The legislation extends to employment, education, management of property and access to goods, facilities and services. Those, such as councils, that provide goods, facilities and services to the public cannot discriminate against a disabled person, and this can extend to use of language.

Under the DDA, discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services occurs when a disabled person is treated less favourably than someone else and the treatment is for a reason relating to the person's disability, where this treatment cannot be justified.

2.2.12 Race Relations (NI) Order (RRO)

The RRO outlaws discrimination on racial grounds (including colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins). The law covers racial discrimination in employment, education, disposal or management of premises, or the provision of goods, facilities or services. The RRO outlaws discrimination on grounds of race in the provision of goods, facilities or services which are available to the public. This includes refusal of a service, or the provision of a lower standard of service.

2.2.13 Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order (FETO)

FETO outlaws discrimination on grounds of religious belief and/or political opinion, and, in common with the DDA and RRO, also includes a goods, facilities and services provision, and includes indirect as well as direct discrimination. Indirect discrimination occurs where a provision, criterion or practice is applied equally but which puts persons of a particular religious

belief etc. at a particular disadvantage and which cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

2.2.14 Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act (Section 75)

Section 75 requires us, in carrying out our functions, powers and duties, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- between men and women generally
- between persons with a disability and persons without
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to its obligations above, the Act requires that we have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

2.3 Regional Context

The interplay between language, politics and identity, in Northern Ireland has impacted significantly on the advancement or implementation of any regional language strategies since the formation of the Department for Communities (DfC) in May 2016. Prior to that date, a number of regional language strategies had been brought forward under the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

2.3.1 Irish Language Strategy

In January 2015, DCAL published a Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language, over the period 2015-2035 (Straitéis le Forbairt na Gaeilge a Fheabhsú agus a Chosaint). The key aims of the strategy were to:

- support quality and sustainable acquisition and learning of the Irish language;
- enhance and protect the status and visibility of the Irish language;
- deliver quality and sustainable Irish language networks and communities; and
- promote the Irish language in a way that will contribute towards building a strong and shared community.

In relation to the delivery of public services, the strategy envisaged that public authorities would facilitate the use of Irish both orally and in writing, and produce and adhere to a Code of Courtesy that meets the needs of those who wish to conduct their business through Irish. The strategy notes that language awareness and language training programmes need to be provided so that a higher proportion of public service staff can effectively deliver services in Irish to customers who seek them.

The strategy set out expectations that local councils would:

- adopt Irish language policies and plans and appoint Irish language officers;
- initiate or expand facilities for the use of Irish in their council and committee meetings;
- increase the visibility of the Irish language by publicising the availability of their Irish language services;
- provide an Irish or bilingual version of publications, official documents and forms in line with the approach of the Strategy and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

- facilitate the proper preservation and signposting of Irish place-names and the naming of new housing developments; and
- encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish.

In accordance with the Strategy, and working towards legislative protection of the Irish language, a consultation document was produced in February 2015.

2.3.2 Ulster-Scots Strategy

Also in January 2015, DCAL published a Strategy to Enhance and Develop the Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture over the period 2015-2035 (Roadin furtae Bríng Forrits an Graith tha Ulstèr-Scotch Leid, Heirskip an Cultùr), with four key aims, to:

- promote and safeguard the status of, and respect for, the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture;
- build up the sustainability, capacity and infrastructure of the Ulster-Scots community; and
- foster an inclusive, wider understanding of the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture in a way that will contribute towards building a strong and shared community.

In relation to public services, the strategy indicated that government departments, councils and public bodies generally need to:

- facilitate and encourage the use of Ulster-Scots in public life;
- increase awareness and visibility of the Ulster-Scots services they provide;
- encourage the promotion of Ulster-Scots cultural and heritage tourism initiatives;
- ensure that respect for Ulster-Scots within the context of cultural diversity is an element of their commitment to good relations;
- facilitate the proper preservation and signposting of Ulster-Scots place names.

The strategy also says that awareness training for relevant staff needs to be a good practice requirement.

2.3.3 Sign Language Framework

In 2005 DCAL set up a Sign Language Partnership Group to produce best practice guidance on providing public services to deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL). Speaking in the Assembly on 1st December 2015, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure said that the Partnership Group had contributed much to improving the lives of sign language users and their families but that she was convinced of the need to do much more. She indicated that the deaf community had made it clear that they want legislation to safeguard their rights as a cultural and linguistic minority. The Minister said that she would take initial steps to address this issue before responsibility transfers to the Department of Communities in 2016. A draft Sign Language Framework was opened for public consultation in 2016, including the following objectives:

- To increase positive attitudes, respect, understanding and tolerance for ISL/BSL by introducing a legislative framework by the end of the next Assembly mandate;
- To develop sustainable and quality Departmental ISL/BSL Plans in consultation with the deaf community;
- To provide a sustainable supply of sign language teachers, sign language interpreters and translators;
- To support the establishment of Deaf Cultural and Linguistic Centres in Belfast and Derry – ‘Deaf Hubs’;

- To ensure that all public information, Guidance and services are available in ISL/BSL at no additional expense to the deaf individual - in particular public health information to redress deaf people's poorer health and wellbeing compared to the general population;
- To promote the beneficial effects of ISL/BSL as a family-centred early intervention for deaf children, including in a bilingual environment with spoken language; including provision of free Family Sign Language ISL/BSL classes to deaf children, their parents/guardians, siblings and grandparents;
- To provide for the continuing education requirements of deaf children and young people from pre-school through to third level education through the medium of ISL/BSL;
- To provide a sustainable model of expertise, knowledge, research, innovation and teaching of ISL/BSL in the north of Ireland by partnering, developing and funding our local universities to access EU funding streams in partnership with sign language teaching universities in the south of Ireland, Scotland and England, where appropriate;
- To provide personal and social development programmes to redress the educational under-achievement of deaf people.

The intention was to bring forward an Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language Act for Northern Ireland in 2017.

2.4 Other Councils

Other councils in Northern Ireland have adopted formal language policies, including:

- Fermanagh & Omagh DC has adopted an overarching Linguistic Diversity Policy;
- Derry City & Strabane DC has introduced separate policies on Irish and Ulster-Scots;
- Newry, Mourne & Down DC has adopted a Bilingual Language Policy to facilitate and encourage the promotion and use of both the Irish language and English language in the Council area;
- Mid Ulster DC adopted an Irish Language Policy in December 2015 and has conducted an EQIA on a proposed Ulster-Scots policy.

2.5 Socio-economic context

The 2011 Census includes information on the main languages spoken by residents of Belfast and knowledge of Irish and Ulster-Scots, and the School Census 2014/15 provides information on the number of schools in the Belfast City Council area providing teaching through the medium of Irish. The figures (which relate to the Council's extended boundary) show that:

- 13.45% of the Belfast population (aged 3+) have some ability in Irish, compared with 10.65% of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole;
- over 16,000 people in Belfast speak, read, write and understand Irish;
- just under 3,000 pupils receive education through the medium of Irish in the Council area;
- 5.23% of the Belfast population (aged 3+) have some ability in Ulster-Scots, compared with 8.08% of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole;
- just over 2000 people in Belfast speak, read, write and understand Ulster-Scots;
- 5.47% of people in Belfast are deaf or have partial hearing loss – 18,261
- 4.94% of Belfast households contain at least one person who does not have English as a main language and in 2.71% of Belfast households, no-one has English as a main language;

- the most commonly spoken languages in Belfast (excluding English and Irish) are Polish, Chinese, Tagalog/Filipino and Slovak.⁵

One of the most interesting recommendations from the 2017 consultation was a need to emphasise the important role that bi-lingualism has - for employability, for trade and the economy, and for our cultural life.

Central to Belfast's ambitions, as outlined in the Belfast Agenda, will be the need to truly understand the opportunities a bi-lingual and multi-lingual population offers. A growing body of literature, based on a variety of economic, geopolitical, cultural and educational indicators, has identified the fundamental role that linguistic diversity can play, these include: export trade, diplomatic and security priorities and visitor destinations.

⁵ NISRA have indicated that all Chinese languages are grouped together for the purposes of the 2011 Census

3. MAKING IT HAPPEN

3.1 Increasing access and promoting inclusion

Bringing this Language Strategy to life over the next five years will require actions that are realistic and achievable. In response to feedback from consultees, the strategy will include five strands, representing different language forms other than the principal language of the Council, English:

- **Irish Language;**
- **Ulster-Scots Language;**
- **Sign Languages;**
- **New Communities' Languages;**
- **Languages and communications for disabled people**

Work streams in each of these areas will be developed and taken forward by two officers - one officer will be assigned responsibility for the promotion, protection and enhancement of Irish, while the second officer will have responsibility for increasing access and inclusion of the other languages.

3.2 Principal Language

The principal language of the Council is English and our approach to the use of other languages in Council business will continue to be based on a proportionate response to the needs and requests of users of those languages. The Council will take all reasonable steps to address these needs and to meet requests within available resources and mindful of statutory rights and obligations.

The Council considers that the protection and encouragement of languages other than written or spoken English should not be to the detriment of the English language but should complement its use wherever possible, at the same time recognising the positive personal benefits attaching to bilingualism and multilingualism.

3.3 Other Languages

The term 'other languages' encompasses all other languages and communications spoken, written or used by people who live, work, or visit Belfast, whether this is their main language or their language of choice.

The Council recognises the number of people in Belfast whose first language is not English or who choose to express themselves in different languages. For example, use of Irish is prevalent in the west of the city where there is an established Gaeltacht area.

The Council is also mindful of the status of other language communities in the city including the Ulster-Scots language, along with its heritage and culture.

In addition a significant proportion of the population of Belfast now comprises new communities within which English may not be the first language.

The Council is mindful that the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right conforming to the principles embodied within international and domestic law.

We are committed to implementing the requirements of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the provision of public services to users of the Irish language, and in helping to develop and strengthen the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture.

We are also committed to respecting the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each person within Belfast belonging to a national minority in line with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and to increasing awareness and

tolerance of members of new communities at a time when the diversity of the city's residents and visitors is increasing.

We are also conscious that others may use different language forms to communicate with the council, either through need or choice, perhaps because of issues relating to disability. This could include the use of sign languages (either British or Irish Sign Language), or the availability of English in alternative formats (e.g. Braille). The Council recognises the needs of those who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as their principal means of communication.

The Council also recognises the particular needs of those with literacy barriers and those for whom the written word may not always be fully accessible.

The personal and social benefits attaching to bilingualism and multilingualism are also duly acknowledged within the strategy.

3.4 Corporate approach to promoting linguistic diversity

The development of this five year Language Strategy 2018-23 illustrates the Council's commitment to development and delivery of a strategic approach to promoting linguistic diversity.

Underpinning this corporate approach are the following:

- Two officers will be appointed - one officer will be assigned responsibility for the promotion, protection and enhancement of Irish, while the second officer will have responsibility for increasing access and inclusion of the other languages.
- Increasing awareness of linguistic diversity in screening for equality and good relations impacts
- Development of an internal network to mainstream linguistic diversity
- Better promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people
- Actively increasing the participation by disabled people in public life
- The Council will continue to encourage and provide practical support for a range of language traditions, cultural activities and communities, for example, by providing use of the City Hall and other venues, or by providing grant-aid for significant events and projects where they meet the funding criteria.
- The Council will proactively seek opportunities to work with different language communities to promote linguistic traditions through different mechanisms including events, exhibitions and publications.
- The Council will respect the right of the public, Elected Members and staff to use their name in the language of their choice and to express their linguistic identity in accordance with the traditions of that language.
- The Council will give consideration to linguistic diversity when planning events and will promote the inclusion of and participation from members of different linguistic communities in these events.
- The Council will encourage tourism and cultural initiatives that reflect the linguistic diversity of the city.

The corporate approach will be further refined through the development and delivery of different strands of works attached to the different communities.

3.5 The Five Work Strands of the Language Strategy

The Strategy includes five distinct language work strands:

- Irish Language;
- Ulster-Scots Language;
- Sign Languages;
- New Communities' Languages;
- Languages and communications for disabled people

Further detail on the original three policy areas proposed in the draft Linguistic Diversity Policy presented for public consultation from 23 May 2017 until 18 July 2017 i.e. Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language and Other Languages, including sign language are included in Appendix 2. Following public consultation these specific areas were redefined into specific community needs, as outlined above.

The Council will have due regard to regional strategies (on Irish, Ulster-Scots and Sign Language) in developing these work strands and will also take account of best practice guidance including that published by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency.

The development of different policies under the strategy will accommodate the different aspirations and priorities of each language community, balanced through needs and constraints. Robust and meaningful stakeholder engagement is key to the work strands.

Each work stream will include consideration of the Council's approach to key Council services, including the following:

- Documents
- Communications
- Translation and interpretation
- Signage and Branding
- Council meetings
- Development of Website/social media
- Media
- Support for the community
- Support for schools
- Council staff

A set of draft aims will be further explored to better understand the needs and aspirations within each language community; these are listed below by specific community:

3.5.1 Meeting the needs of the Irish language community

The aims may include:

- to increase the visibility and use of the Irish language in Belfast as appropriate through Council services, facilities and events;
- to publicise the fact that that the Council will facilitate the use of the Irish language in the provision of its services as appropriate;
- to encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish;
- to normalise the visibility and use of Irish generally.

3.5.2 Meeting the needs of the Ulster-Scots language community

The aims may include:

- to increase the visibility and use of the Ulster-Scots language and cultural context in Belfast as appropriate;
- to publicise the fact that the Council will facilitate the use of the Ulster Scots language and cultural expressions as appropriate;
- to encourage the promotion of Ulster-Scots cultural and heritage, educational and tourism initiatives.

3.5.3 Meeting the needs of the Sign language community

The work streams will be developed in line with best practice advice from appropriate sources and will take into account the particular needs of the signing community (both Irish and British Sign Language).

The aims may include:

- to ensure that those who sign are not disadvantaged in accessing key Council services;
- to ensure good practice is observed in producing information for people who sign;
- to support community cohesion by removing barriers to positive relationships that may arise from differences in communication styles.

3.5.4 Meeting the needs of new communities' languages

The work streams will be developed in line with best practice advice from appropriate sources and will take into account the increasing ethnic diversity of the city, as well as the specific communication needs within these new communities. The aims may include:

- to ensure that residents and customers who have difficulty communicating in English can access key Council services;
- to ensure good practice is observed in producing information for people whose first language may not be English;
- to support community cohesion and good relations by seeking to remove the barriers to the development of positive relationships that arise from an inability to communicate in a common language;
- to publicise the fact that the Council will facilitate the use of other languages as appropriate to encourage the promotion of cultural and heritage tourism initiatives through new communities' other languages and traditions.

3.5.5 Meeting the language and communications needs for disabled people

The work stream will be developed in line with best practice advice from appropriate sources and will take into account the specific needs of those with a disability. The aims may include:

- to ensure that those with a disability can access key Council services;
- to ensure good practice is observed in producing information for people with sensory disabilities and make appropriate provision for those with learning disabilities;
- to remove the barriers to the development of positive relationships that may arise from communication barriers;

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL LANGUAGE POLICY

September 2006

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

All employees should understand the Council's obligations in relation to language and respond positively to all our customers or clients, who are entitled to be treated with courtesy and respect.

This is in line with the Council's stated commitments to:

- equality in the delivery of our services, as set out in our Equality Scheme
- compliance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
- customer focus, one of the key elements within our improvement agenda
- improving communication and access to Council services and
- our corporate objective of promoting good relations, which includes celebrating cultural diversity.

The principal language of the Council is English and its approach to the use of other languages in Council business is based on need and demand, balanced with consideration of the resources available to deliver services.

SIGN LANGUAGE

In line with official government policy, the Council recognises that sign language is a language in its own right. The Reception staff in the City Hall and Cecil Ward Building have been trained in sign language and other staff should make appropriate arrangements to provide sign language for customers if requested.

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

There are two primary sources of guidance on language.

The first of these is our **Equality Scheme**, approved by the Equality Commission in April 2001, which commits the Council to making information available on request in minority languages to meet the needs of those "who are not fluent in English". This is increasingly important as our city becomes more diverse.

The second relevant document is a circular from the Local Government Division, issued as guidance to all District Councils in NI in 2002, which relates to the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**.

The European Charter is an international agreement designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages; it places emphasis on the cultural dimension of the language in all aspects of the life of its speakers and in Northern Ireland relates to Irish and Ulster-Scots.

To ensure compliance with Part III of the European Charter, the Council agreed to adopt certain recommendations in relation to the use of Irish at its meeting in January 2003. This includes accepting requests/applications in Irish (oral and written) and providing translation or interpretation when required.

The Council is also committed to the active promotion of Ulster-Scots as an expression of cultural heritage and identity, as Ulster-Scots is recognised under Part II of the European Charter at this time.

The Council's procedures are set out below.

TRANSLATIONS – WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

The Council uses the translation service within the Linguistic Operations Branch of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), which co-ordinates translation services for all government departments for all other languages. All Council Departments have a designated person within Business Support to take responsibility for translations and the current system is operating well.

When someone chooses to write to the Council in Irish, the Council will reply in Irish.

INTERPRETATION

The Council will also provide interpreters for small meetings or in individual interview situations if required, provided advance notice is given. Please contact the Good Relations Unit for details.

TELEPHONE CALLS

A Language Line telephone interpreting service has been established to assist with telephone enquiries from those who are not fluent in English. Currently this service is available only within the Office of the Registrar of Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships; please contact the Good Relations Unit for details if required.

An Irish Voicemail service is available as an extension from the main switchboard; guidance has been issued to staff on its use.

NAMES and ADDRESSES

The Council will respect the wishes of anyone who wants to use the Irish form of their name or address and use those in correspondence or official business.

STREET NAMING

The Council provides dual language street names, if two-thirds of the residents of the street request this.

PERSONAL STATIONERY for ELECTED MEMBERS of COUNCIL

The Council has provided dual language personal headed notepaper, business cards and compliment slips in English/Irish and English/Ulster-Scots for elected Members of Council, as requested, for the past ten years.

SUPPORT for HERITAGE and TRADITIONS

The Council will continue to support a range of Irish and Ulster-Scots traditions, cultural activities and language in practical ways, for example, by providing use of the City Hall, or by providing grant-aid for significant events and projects as appropriate.

The Ulster-Scots bodies agree that this type of support for their work is more beneficial and cost-effective than simply translating written documents into Ulster-Scots.

IRISH MEDIUM SCHOOLS

The Council is aware that the Irish medium schools represent a fast growing sector and all correspondence to Irish medium schools will be in Irish. We will provide information in Irish on request for pupils who visit Council properties for educational/study purposes e.g. the Zoo, the City Hall etc. Information on major Council initiatives or policies may also be provided in Irish where schools are considered key target audiences.

SIGNAGE in COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Fixed signage at and in Council properties is either pictorial, tactile or in English. A 'Welcome' sign may be provided, at a reception area or other appropriate place, in a number of languages, including Irish, Ulster-Scots and other languages e.g. Filipino/Polish to reflect Belfast's growing diversity and multi-cultural composition.

RECRUITMENT

The Council is an equal opportunities employer and welcomes applications from all sections of the community. We currently offer a Careline telephone number (9027 0396) giving assistance to job applicants whose first language is not English.

WELCOME PACK

A Welcome Pack for newcomers and visitors to Belfast is being prepared. This will provide information on the Council's services in a user-friendly way and will be translated into other languages as requested.

COUNCIL WEBSITE

The Council website is designed to be as accessible as possible, with current on-line information in plain English (we aim to have the Plain English Internet Crystal Mark by April 2007). The Council will keep this under review and may provide information in other languages as requested.

ADVERTISEMENTS

Council advertisements will be in English.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Departments may choose to organise basic conversational level language classes for appropriate staff, where management decides it will be useful to improve service delivery and increase local customer response.

OTHER FORMATS

Major Council policies, strategies and publications (e.g. City Matters) may be made available in other formats on request, e.g. Braille, audio or large print.

CONSULTATION

This policy was circulated to the relevant Irish and Ulster-Scots language bodies in Belfast i.e. the official North-South Language Body, made up of Foras na Gaeilge, which promotes the Irish language and the Ulster-Scots Agency (tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch), which promotes the Ulster-Scots language and culture; also Pobal and the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council.

We have also consulted with the Council's Equality Consultative Forum and appropriate representatives of minority ethnic groups in the Belfast area.

Any comments received have been incorporated into this policy.

MONITORING and REVIEW

The policy will be monitored and reviewed in due course, in line with Council procedure.

GUIDANCE and ENQUIRIES

Comprehensive guidance on language issues and translation arrangements was circulated to all Departmental Business Support Managers in May 2005. This will be re-circulated along with this policy when adopted and training will be provided for appropriate Council staff.

If you have any queries regarding this policy or our arrangements with DCAL, please contact the Good Relations Unit, extension 6025.

Adopted by Policy & Resources Committee 22 September 2006

Extracts from draft Linguistic Diversity Policy

(This appendix is extracted from the draft Linguistic Diversity Policy presented for public consultation from 23 May 2017 until 18 July 2017 ie Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language and Other Languages, including sign language. Following public consultation these specific areas were redefined into five areas of specific language community needs.)

Irish Language Policy

1. The Irish Language Policy will be developed in line with the proposals in the Executive's Strategy and will take account of best practice guidelines published by Foras na Gaeilge.
2. The aims of the Irish Language Policy may include:
 - to increase the visibility and use of the Irish language in Belfast as appropriate through Council services, facilities and events;
 - to publicise the fact that that the Council will facilitate the use of the Irish language in the provision of its services as appropriate
 - to encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish.
3. The development of the policy will enable consideration of the Council's approach to the following services:

Documents –documents are provided in either bilingual (English and Irish) format on request or as a matter of course when likely to be used primarily by the Irish speaking community.

Communication – correspondence and telephone calls received in Irish are responded to in Irish.

Translation and interpretation – requests from the Irish speaking public to use Irish in face-to-face discussions are welcome if notice is given so that simultaneous interpretation services can be made available.

Signage and Branding – the use of Irish whenever the Council's title and emblem appear on stationery, publications, signs, buildings and other contexts in which it will be seen primarily by users of Irish.

Council meetings – recognise the practice of speaking Irish in the Council Chamber. Individual Members may speak in Irish and subsequently provide an English translation (within the allocated time), acknowledging the principal language of the Council is English. We will facilitate the use of Irish at Council and Committee meetings by public delegations, including the provision of interpreting services.

Development of Website/social media – in the first instance, the development of an Irish language microsite and material on Facebook as appropriate.

Irish language media – the provision of an Irish language or bilingual version of press statements to the Irish language media as appropriate.

Irish in the community – support for the use of the Irish language within communities in Belfast within appropriate resources, including the provision of information. The Council will support Irish cultural, educational heritage and tourism activities by facilitating events within Council buildings and venues where practicable and in line with Council policy.

Belfast City Council will promote opportunities for the promotion of Irish by encouraging grant-aid applications for Irish initiatives to current and future schemes as appropriate.

Support for Irish medium schools – the provision of Irish versions of information generally provided to schools in relation to all Council services and events.

Council staff – pending the outcome of the review by Foras na Gaeilge, appointment of an Irish Language Officer to promote Irish within the Council and in the Council area, with responsibility for the development of an action plan to ensure the promotion of Irish language can be effectively provided by Council, including awareness raising and language training.

Ulster-Scots Language Policy

1. The Ulster-Scots Language Policy will be developed in line with the proposals in the Executive's Strategy and will take account of advice from the Ulster-Scots Agency.
2. The aims of the Ulster-Scots Language Policy may include:
 - to increase the visibility and use of the Ulster-Scots language in Belfast as appropriate.
 - to publicise the fact that the Council will facilitate the use of the Ulster Scots language as appropriate
 - to encourage the promotion of Ulster-Scots cultural and heritage, educational and tourism initiatives;
3. The development of the policy will enable consideration of the Council's approach to the following services:

Documents – the provision of documents which are either bilingual (English and Ulster-Scots) or as a matter of course when likely to be used by the Ulster Scots speaking community.

Communication – Council will accept written correspondence in Ulster-Scots and where possible, will reply in Ulster-Scots.

Translation and interpretation – requests from the Ulster-Scots speaking public to use Ulster-Scots in face-to-face discussions are welcome if notice is given so that simultaneous interpretation services can be made available.

Signage and Branding – the use of Ulster-Scots whenever the Council's title and emblem appear on stationery, publications, signs, buildings and other contexts in which it will be seen primarily by users of Ulster-Scots.

Council meetings – recognise the practice of speaking Ulster-Scots in the Council Chamber. Individual Members may speak in Ulster-Scots and subsequently provide an English translation (within their allocated time), acknowledging the principal language of the Council is English. We will facilitate the use of Ulster-Scots at Council and Committee meetings by public delegations, including the provision of interpreting services.

Development of Website/social media – the development of an Ulster-Scots language microsite and material on Facebook as appropriate.

Ulster-Scots language media – the provision of an Ulster Scots language or bilingual version of press statements to the Ulster Scots language media as appropriate.

Ulster Scots in the community - The Council will support Ulster-Scots cultural, educational heritage and tourism activities by facilitating events within Council buildings and venues where practicable and in line with Council policy.

Belfast City Council will promote opportunities for the promotion of Ulster-Scots by encouraging grant-aid applications for Ulster-Scots initiatives to current and future schemes as appropriate.

Council staff – development of an action plan to ensure that Ulster-Scots language services can be effectively provided by the Council including awareness raising and language training.

Other Languages Policy (including sign language)

1. The Other Languages Policy will be developed in line with best practice advice from appropriate sources and will take into account the increasing ethnic diversity of the city, as well as the communication needs of some disabled people. However, it will also emphasise the importance of using plain English at all times in the delivery of goods, services and facilities.
2. The aims of the Other Languages Policy may include:
 - to ensure that residents and customers who have difficulty communicating in English are not disadvantaged in accessing key Council services;
 - to ensure good practice is observed in producing information for people with sensory disabilities and make appropriate provision for those with learning disabilities;
 - to support community cohesion and good relations by seeking to remove the barriers to the development of positive relationships that arise from inability to communicate in a common language;
 - to publicise the fact that the Council will facilitate the use of minority languages as appropriate to encourage the promotion of cultural and heritage tourism initiatives through minority languages and traditions.
3. The development of the policy will enable consideration of the Council's approach to the following services:

Documents – continue to publicise the commitment in the Council's Equality Scheme to provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable, by ensuring that appropriate information to this effect is included in all documents. All service providers to consider the need for translation of documents in relation to the specific nature of their service.

Translation and interpretation – requests from speakers of minority languages to use minority languages in face-to-face discussions are welcome if notice is given so that simultaneous interpretation services can be made available.

Council meetings – facilitation of the use of minority languages by public delegations at Council and Committee meetings, including the provision of interpreting services.

Website – ensuring that the Council's website is written in plain English, that the Google Translate tool is readily available and that the website contains information on the Council's minority language services, events and initiatives.

Welcome guides – provision of up-to-date information on Council services for newcomers/visitors in a range of languages.

Events – promotion of inclusion and participation from members of different linguistic communities in all Council events and the provision of interpretation where appropriate.

Council staff – development of an action plan to ensure that minority language services can be effectively provided by the Council where appropriate, including the development of linguistic diversity guidelines, awareness and language training and the provision of language identification cards and hearing loop induction at customer service reception desks.

Minority Languages Forum – establish a forum of organisations representing people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities.