



**Belfast
City Council**

**Citizens' summary
of the
Language Strategy 2018-2023**

Access to information

As part of our commitment to promote equal opportunities and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. This document is available in different languages and formats and we can provide others on request, please contact:

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This is a summary of our Language Strategy. The complete document is available at:
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/languagestrategy or by contacting the Equality and Diversity Unit.

1. Introduction

Language, 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, work 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political and social circumstances can each impact on policy areas, meaning that the data collected can become quickly outdated.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're confident the strategic approach over the next five years, from April 2018 until March 2023, can bring positive change by working with all stakeholders.

The Language Strategy is a key document that will help achieve the aims of the Belfast Agenda, 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.

2. 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.

A substantial evidence base, including conversations with language communities and other key stakeholders and legislation have been used in developing the strategic aims, which 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; and
- 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.

3. Background

We first adopted a Language Policy in 2006, which was wide ranging and addressed the use of languages other than English in our work. In particular, reference was made to Irish, Ulster-Scots, other 'minority' languages and sign languages.

Legal opinion and engagement with language communities were incorporated into the Draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity, which was open to public consultation in 2017. The

consultation endorsed the general strategic approach adopted by us, but also illustrated the need to take into account each of the linguistic communities of Belfast and their diverse needs and priorities.

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

4. Corporate approach to promoting linguistic diversity

The development of this five year Language Strategy 2018-23 illustrates our commitment to developing and delivering a strategic approach to promoting linguistic diversity.

To support this corporate approach we will:

- Appoint two officers - one will be assigned responsibility for the promotion, protection and enhancement of Irish, while the second will have responsibility for increasing access and inclusion of other languages;
- increase awareness of linguistic diversity in screening for equality and good relations impacts;
- develop an internal network to mainstream linguistic diversity;
- better promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- actively increase the participation of disabled people in public life;
- 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;
- proactively seek opportunities to work with different language communities to promote linguistic traditions through different mechanisms including events, exhibitions and publications;
- 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;
- 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; and
- 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.

5. Increasing access, promoting diversity and 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 at least five work streams to be developed, representing different language forms other than our principal language of English. These include:

- Irish language;
- Ulster-Scots language;
- sign languages;
- new communities' languages; and
- languages and communications for disabled people

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

- documents,
- communications,
- translation and interpretation,
- signage and branding,
- council meetings,
- development of website and social media,
- media,
- support for the community,
- support for schools, and
- council staff.