

Language Strategy Working Group

Friday, 18th October, 2024

LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson); and
Councillors Brooks and Groogan.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. E. McConville, Director Of External Affairs,
Communication and Marketing;
Mr. R. Connolly, Policy, Research And Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer;
Ms. M-T McGivern, Client Manager (Physical Programme);
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th August, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Update on Draft Irish Language Policy Public Consultation and Engagement Process

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the working group on the progress in the public consultation and Equality Impact Assessment on the Council’s Draft Irish Language Policy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Working Group is asked to:

- **Note the contents of this report.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Belfast City Council launched the public consultation and Equality Impact Assessment on the Draft Irish Language Policy on 22nd August 2024. The consultation will run for a 14-week period.

Members of the public are invited to respond to the consultation online in either English or Irish. The public are also free to make individual written submissions. The Council have also organised a range of in-person and online consultation sessions where the public can make their opinions known.

To date the Council have held the following public events:

- 5th September - St. Mary's University College
- 2nd October – Online event
- 8th October – Online event
- 9th October - An Droichead

There will be a further public event in 2 Royal Avenue on 30th October.

3.2 The policy has also been discussed at a meeting with the Irish Language Stakeholder Forum which was held in Irish with an interpreter. The Ulster Scots Stakeholder Forum and the Council's Equality Consultative Forum were also asked to give feedback on the draft policy.

3.3 The Council are also conducting a separate staff consultation. Staff can respond online in English or Irish or make written submissions. To date the Council have held the following consultation events for staff:

- 25th September – City Hall
- 10th October – Duncrue Industrial Estate

The draft policy has also been the subject of discussion with Trade Union representatives at JNCC.

3.4 Next steps

The consultation will run until 28th November.

Members will be provided with a consultation report and an Equality Impact Assessment Final Decision Report in early 2025.

4.0 Monitoring and Reporting

- 4.1 The working group will be provided with a further update at its next meeting.
- 5.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**
- 5.1 None associated with this report.
- 6.0 **Equality, good relations or rural needs implications**
- 6.1 The Draft Irish Language Policy is the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. These are out for public consultation.”

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services outlined the principal aspects of the report and provided feedback on the public and staff consultation events which had taken place, together with an overview of the submissions and responses received.

During discussion, it was suggested, given that the draft policy, if and when adopted, would be applied corporately on a city-wide basis, that a further public consultation event should be held specifically at a venue in east Belfast.

The Working Group agreed to note the information provided within the report and it was agreed also that a further public consultation event be held at a venue in east Belfast.

Update on Implementation of the Language Strategy Action Plan

The Working Group considered the following report:

- “1.0 **Purpose of report or summary of main issues**
- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the working group on the progress made by officers in implementing the Language Strategy Action plan.
- 2.0 **Recommendations**
- 2.1 The Working Group is asked to note the contents of this report and provide feedback as necessary.
- 3.0 **Main report**
- 3.1 **Background**
- Belfast City Council agreed a Language Strategy Action Plan in June 2024.
- This Action Plan contained agreed actions to continue the implementation of the Council’s Language Strategy from 2024 – 2027.
- 3.2 Since the agreement of the Action Plan, officers have completed the following actions:

- There will be Irish-language content relating to the ongoing consultation on the Draft Irish Language Policy in the next edition of City Matters;
- Officers have begun work to set up a gaeilge@BelfastCity.gov.uk email address and publicise its availability;
- Officers have developed an initial draft Ulster Scots Policy. The Ulster Scots Stakeholder Forum have been asked to provide comments on the contents of the Policy.
- Event arrangements are taking place to celebrate Ulster Scots Leid Week on 21st November 2024, International Day for People with Disabilities on 3rd December 2024 and Burns on 24th January 2025.
- The ‘Making Communications Accessible’ guide is currently being added to Interlink to support council officers on how to deal with language and communication requests. There will also be other content added to a Language section on Interlink, outlining information and links to the Language Strategy, the current Language Action Plan, and relevant policies.
- A 12-week British Sign Language Level 1 course was completed by Council officers in June 2024. The Council officers are keen to progress in their learning by completing a Level 2 course. We are currently looking at progression options.

Other actions from the Action Plan will be rolled out in Quarter 4 of this year and members will be kept updated on progress in relation to these.

3.3 Next steps

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and give any feedback they feel necessary.

4.0 Monitoring and Reporting

4.1 The working group will be provided with a further update on progress at its next meeting.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

None associated with this report.

6.0 Equality, good relations or rural needs implications

The Language Strategy Action Plan was the subject of a Section 75 Equality Screening, a Rural Needs Impact Assessment and these were made available during the public consultation. It is not envisioned that any of the actions will need separate screenings.”

A Member requested that further information be provided regarding the provision of visual communication tools on display boards at the Council playparks. In response, the City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services undertook to liaise with the Director of Property and Projects in this regard and provide an update at the next meeting of the Working Group.

The Working Group noted the information provided and the course of action outlined by the City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services.

Chairperson