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**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 21st August, 2026.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

3. Restricted Items

(n) Website Upgrade (Pages 1 - 6)

5. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

(f) Irish Language Policy - Final SPR 21 Aug 2026 (Pages 7 - 14)

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Irish Language Policy – Implementation Plan
Date:	21 st August 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal & Civic Services
Contact Officers:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal & Civic Services

Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐	No ☒
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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number ☐

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

Call-in		
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒	No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	The purpose of this report is to update Members on progress relating to the implementation of the Irish Language Policy and associated two-year implementation plan previously approved by the Council in October 2025. The report highlights the next steps required to support programme delivery, including consideration of governance arrangements and resourcing requirements.
2.0	Recommendations
	It is recommended that Members: Note the contents of this report;

	• Note that officers have continued to progress the planning and scoping phase of the Irish Language Policy implementation plan; • Note that implementation timelines have been impacted due to a number of factors, primarily by the call-in of the initial Council decision to adopt the Policy, which was reported to Council in June 2026, supporting delivery of the Fleadh over the summer and leave arrangements; • Note that officers are developing the programme governance and delivery arrangements required to support implementation of the policy; and • that a further update report will be brought back to Committee in September.
3.0	Main report <u>Background</u> Members will recall that the Council approved the Irish Language Policy and the associated high-level two-year implementation plan in October 2025. The implementation plan identified a number of priority areas including the development of a bilingual corporate identity, bilingual signage, enhanced Irish language visibility across Council communications and social media channels, and preparatory work for future website improvements. Members will note that the Plan envisages 5 key stages over a 2 year period and adopts a phased approach to the implementation of the policy. Phase 1 is “Planning and Scoping”. This is preparatory in nature and will take place in the first 3 months. Once this phase is complete, there will be a need for further decisions, on such matters as design or logo/materials, programme plan and governance model. Phase 2 is “Design and Procurement”. Phase 3 is “Build and Development”. Phase 4 continues the roll-out. Phase 5 is “Review and evaluation”. The Implementation Plan is subject to review and is likely to be amended throughout its lifespan in order to reflect developments throughout the phases. The initial phase of the Implementation Plan focused on planning and scoping activities, including the development of programme planning, communications protocols, developing design guidelines and stakeholder engagement. Alongside the Implementation Plan, officers continue to progress a range of commitments contained within the Language Strategy Action Plan, including actions relating to service provision, staff awareness, communications and language development initiatives
3.1	<u>Progress to date</u> Since approval of the policy, officers have continued preparatory work to enable implementation and have maintained engagement across relevant Council services regarding future delivery requirements. This has included planning in relation to communications, branding and service-delivery commitments arising from the policy and a preliminary assessment of resource and staffing requirements to support delivery of the Implementation Plan. A cross-departmental officer working group will oversee and coordinate the first phase of the Implementation Plan and will oversee the implementation of the Policy until such times as it has bedded in as business as usual.
3.2	<u>Governance and Resourcing Requirements</u> Given the cross-cutting nature of the Implementation Plan, which impacts on multiple Council services and workstreams, dedicated programme governance arrangements will be required to ensure effective coordination, oversight and delivery. The Implementation Plan contains a broad range of commitments spanning communications, branding, signage, website development, stakeholder engagement, procurement, monitoring and

	reporting. Delivery of these commitments will require coordinated oversight across a number of Council departments and external partners. This work will be aligned with the outcomes of the Equality and Diversity Unit review and any relevant workforce planning processes.
3.3	<u>Next Steps</u> In accordance with the Implementation Plan, the initial planning and scoping phase will take 3 months before we move into active delivery. Notwithstanding being in this initial phase, bilingual signage will be factored into design work and procurement arrangements for any new projects. The communications commitments in the Language Strategy Action Plan will continue in terms of the promotion of Irish language related matters bilingually etc. Key actions over the next 3 months will include: • Developing recommendations arising from the working group regarding governance, programme management and resource requirements; • Development of a detailed programme plan; • Development of design guidelines for signage, uniforms etc; • Development of communications guidelines; and • Continued stakeholder engagement. The cross-departmental working group will oversee delivery of the planning and scoping phase and regular updates will be brought to the Language Strategy Working Group and Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.
3.4	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> The Council has approved a financial commitment of £1.9 million to cover early-stage activation priorities aligned with the draft policy, including branding, staffing, signage, communications, ICT requirements. The Equality and Diversity Unit will be responsible for assisting the City Solicitor in monitoring compliance with this Policy, along with the other proposed language policies under the Language Strategy. The Unit is currently undergoing a service review and may require additional resources to deliver the Council's commitments in the Language Strategy to develop bespoke policies in respect of each of the 5 language strands.
3.5	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u> The development of the Irish Language Policy was carried out in line with the Council's Equality Scheme. A draft EQIA was prepared for the policy and was consulted upon alongside the draft policy. A Rural Needs Assessment was also prepared and included within the consultation documentation.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Implementation Plan

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Irish Language Policy

2 Year Implementation Plan – November 2025 to November 2027¹

Phase 1: Planning & Scoping (Months 1–3) (Nov – Jan 2026)

- Develop programme governance model for delivery
- Develop detailed programme plan
- Finalise design of new corporate logo and associated materials including brand guidelines and assets in a variety of formats.
- Audit current use of logo across Council estate
- Prioritisation for City Hall and the following category 1A assets: Waterfront Hall, Ulster Hall, 2 Royal Avenue, Falls Park and Willowbank Park. Consideration to be given to including St Georges Market as part of the initial 2-year implementation plan.
- Continue to engage with stakeholders to provide updates on progress
- Develop a communications strategy and action plan, linked to the programme plan
- Develop a clear protocol for identifying, translating and delivering bilingual content for the council's communications channels, including its social media platforms.
- Develop a protocol governing the use of bilingual branding and content in Council's programme of marketing campaigns.

Phase 2: Design & Procurement (Months 4–6) (Feb – Apr 2026)

- Design bilingual signage for City Hall and above category 1A assets.
- Procure signage contracts
- Gather new website requirements (needs assessment, customer research, user experience, functional requirements, content strategy, legislative accessibility requirements, security, etc.)
- Explore the market regarding website provision, research available solutions and suppliers including options for providing bilingual capability and new technologies.
- Consider options for interim Irish language visibility and service delivery on the Council website pending procurement of new website.
- Begin delivery of a clear calendar of bilingual content for council social media channels
- Update social media customer engagement process to facilitate the processing of requests or feedback received in Irish, in line with wider council processes adopted
- Continue to deliver information about key council initiatives and services to Irish language media outlets, where appropriate

¹ To be delivered in tandem to commitments already agreed in the Language Strategy Action Plan such as developing Irish language versions of most used forms, codes of courtesy for staff, training opportunities etc.

- Internal comms and awareness raising among staff on communications strategy and protocol for producing bilingual content (focusing on timescales, roles and responsibilities, and translation processes)
- Launch wider internal comms campaign to build awareness
- Begin public-facing promotion

Phase 3: Build & Development (Months 7–12) (May – Oct 2026)

- Begin installation of signage at City Hall
- Begin roll out of signage Category 1A assets identified above
- Start procurement process for new website, including pre-market engagement, tender process.
- Appoint research supplier to continue to gather customer feedback to determine the requirements (Includes workshops with identified personas; City Matters survey, public survey).

Phase 4: (Year 2, Months 13–18) (Nov – Apr 2027)

- Complete City Hall signage rollout
- Continue roll out of signage at other Category 1A assets identified above.
- Go to market for website developers (design and build); UX (user experience) experts and accessibility partner

Phase 5: Review and Evaluation (Months 19–24) (May – Oct 2027)

- Review impact and feedback from signage
- Develop an updated draft implementation for broader rollout including identifying additional category 1A assets.
- Committee Approval for Implementation Plan for next 3 years (2028 – 2031)
- Appointment of website suppliers (design and build; UX and accessibility)

Strategic Oversight – to sit alongside Implementation Plan

Monitoring Guidance from the Irish Language Commissioner

- Staying informed on official guidance and policy updates
- Ensuring compliance with evolving statutory requirements
- Integrating Commissioner feedback into planning and implementation
- Reporting alignment status to Committee and CMT

Assess Budget / Rate Setting Implications

- Track actual vs projected costs across signage, website, branding, and translation
- Align spending with the Council's rate-setting process and financial planning cycles

- Identify cost-saving opportunities through lifecycle alignment and phased rollouts
- Prepare financial impact reports for Committee and CMT review
- Recruitment of comms staff to support with implementation of actions (subject to approval of growth proposals as part of the rate setting process)

Monitor Technological Developments for language provision

- Stay informed on emerging AI tools for content generation, translation, and accessibility
- Evaluate opportunities to enhance bilingual services using automation and smart interfaces
- Engage with peer councils and technical partners to share best practices and pilot innovations

Customer usage and feedback

- Monitor customer comments and feedback in relation to bilingual content on council communication channels to further improve service and/or adapt as needed
- Monitor data and usage of bilingual content to further inform annual targets or areas for future expansion

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