

Language Strategy Working Group

Friday, 9th February, 2024

LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY

- Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson); and
Councillors Brooks, Groogan and Long.
- In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. J. Beck, Sign Language Interpreter; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Draft Irish Language Policy - Update on Feedback from Stakeholders Forum

The City Solicitor reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting on 26th January, 2024, it had considered an updated draft Irish Language Policy. The Working Group had agreed that the draft Policy should be presented to the Irish Language Stakeholders' Forum for discussion at its meeting on 1st February, 2024.

She reported that it had not yet been possible to meet with Foras na Gaeilge but that a meeting was scheduled to take place on 13th February, 2024.

The Irish Language Officer provided the Working Group with an overview of the feedback from the Stakeholders' Forum in relation to the draft Policy and outlined the changes which had been incorporated into it as a result. The Members were advised that the changes related to the removal of some ambiguous language, changes to the commitments in relation to media and communications to allow for Irish Language content to be issued in relation to events not solely relating to Irish, and changes in relation to the erection of bilingual signage at facilities outside the Gaeltacht Quarter in an agreed manner.

The City Solicitor advised the Working Group that the creation of Irish language forms on the Council website had been raised by stakeholders and that she had been advised that that would require significant back office work to be undertaken.

The Members' attention was drawn to a written submission which had been received which raised concerns regarding the issue of translation standards and how the development of standards would impact Irish language signage in Council facilities. A number of Members acknowledged that, as long as the translations were not wrong, and given that there were a number of ways of translating certain phrases from English into Irish, that the visibility of the language was key.

In response to a Member's question, the Irish Language Officer advised the Working Group that around 100 responses had been received in relation to the Action Plan, a number of which were incredibly detailed. He advised the Members that a report on the responses would be submitted to a future meeting of the Working Group.

The Member further stated that he felt that the Policy should be City-wide and, rather than using the Gaeltacht area, using the Census figures in relation to the percentage of "some ability in Irish" would be the fairest way to determine which areas would be prioritised for the Categorisation of Council Facilities Signage.

Contrary to the suggestion of Conradh na Gaeilge, the Member stated that, as English was the predominant language spoken in the City, it should be placed first in the proposed bilingual Council logo. A number of Members agreed that whether Irish was first or second was not an issue and that the visibility of the Irish language was what was important.

The Stakeholders were advised that any Irish Language Policy adopted by the Council would be subject to a review after two years but would also be subject to revision in light of any relevant legislation or guidance from an Irish Language Commissioner.

In response to a Member's suggestion, the Working Group agreed that a realistic timeframe for the proposed Action Plan would be welcomed, given the significant finance and resources which would be required to deliver certain aspects within it, as well as to manage expectations. The City Solicitor agreed to highlight that request to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

A Member stated that they had some concerns regarding the costs associated with some of the actions proposed within the draft Policy and Action Plan. She stated that Ulster-Scots was more widely spoken than Irish, within the Titanic DEA, for example. She added that she wanted to see progress in relation to the promotion and use of British Sign Language and Makaton throughout Council facilities.

After discussion, the Working Group was reminded that the Draft Irish Language Policy would be subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The Draft Policy would then be subject to a 12-week public consultation.

The Working Group noted the informal consultation responses which had been received and agreed that the draft Irish Language Policy be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for its consideration, in conjunction with the Working Group's comments.

Chairperson