

Language Strategy – Draft Action Plan 2024-2027

This is a draft action plan across the all the language strands in the Council’s Language Strategy 2018-23.

The Council launched its Language Strategy in April 2018. The Strategy commits to establishing a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city. There are five language strands within the Strategy:

- Irish
- Ulster-Scots
- Minority Ethnic Communities
- Sign Languages (British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language)
- Disability Communications

This Strategy is organised on thematic work streams setting out how the Council will deliver its commitments in the Language Strategy. It identifies both immediate priorities and longer- term goals. Whilst the immediate priorities will be in the initial focus, it is the aspiration to deliver all of the priorities identified within the lifetime of this plan.

The Council’s Legal & Civic Services Department will have overall responsibility for monitoring progress of the priorities with the action plan. However, it is the responsibility of each Council Department to ensure that the Language Strategy and this action plan informs the delivery of their functions. This action plan will be subject to annual review with regular update reports brought to the Elected Member Language Strategy Working Group which reports to the Council’s Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

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1.0 Access to Council Services

	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
1.1	All Languages	Provision and promotion of interpretation and translation services across the Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
1.2	Minority Ethnic Communities	To explore the development of a signposting database, including identifying already available advice, on how to access public services in Belfast through different languages including an exploration of what may already be available and promoting this information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Good Relations • Marketing and Comms 	Quarter 4		
1.3	Minority Ethnic Communities	To continue to provide good quality of automated translation software on external website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
1.4	Disability Communications	To develop guidance to support departments in the accessibility to Council documents, services and facilities from a disability perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • All Departments 	Quarter 3		

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
1.5	Irish	Creation and promotion of a gaeilge@belfastcity.gov.uk email address and website page explaining how the public can contact us in Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 3		
1.6	Irish	Codify the arrangements for the use of Irish in Council meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 3		
1.7	All Languages	Ensure Council-run events and festivals have regard to the promotion of different languages and encourage the delivery of relevant events in City Hall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Place and Economy/Economic Development • City & Neighbourhood Services 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
1.8	Irish	Develop a list of key strategic Council documents and publications to proactively be made available in Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Lead department • Marketing and Comms 	Quarter 4		

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
1.09	All Languages	To provide information on the website (and City Matters) on how to use the translation function on the website, how to telephone the council using BigWord and requesting an interpreter or documents in an alternative language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Customer Focus • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Good Relations 	Quarter 4		
1.10	Irish	Develop a protocol for the provision of Irish press statements where the subject relates to Irish or is related to a key strategic Council initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 3		
1.11	All Languages	Develop a protocol for the provision of Language content across the Council's social media platforms on a regular basis where the subject relates to a service to the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 4		
1.12	All Languages	Requests for social media content in other languages where it relates to specific events or celebrations associated with the Council will be accommodated, where possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 4		
1.13	Sign Languages	To provide a clear description on website and City Matters of what	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms 	Quarter 3		

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		services are available in Sign Languages to members of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Customer Focus 			
1.14	All Languages	Develop an approach to provide regular content in other languages in City Matters. This will be developed in line with agreed parameters at Annex 1 .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Comms • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Good Relations 	Quarter 4		
1.15	Irish	Development of a recurring page in Irish in City Matters with information about the language and Council policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 		Quarter 1	
1.16	All Languages	Review protocols for staff to support non-English speaking customers to include a code of courtesy for indigenous languages and provision of cultural awareness training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Hub • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 4		
1.17	All Languages	Carry out an audit of Council staff to assess language capability and their willingness to provide services in another language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU • Corporate HR 	Quarter 2		

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
1.18	Irish	Develop a corporate Irish language policy, including an approach to signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Departments 	Ongoing		
1.19	Ulster-Scots	Develop a corporate Ulster-Scots language policy, including an approach to signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Departments 	Quarter 4		
1.20	All Languages	Include consideration of opportunities for development of language skills in staff development/ process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Hub Human Resources Legal & Civic Services/EDU 		Quarter 2	
1.21	Sign Languages	To expand the provision of Sign Language translation on popular pages on the website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Marketing & Comms 		Quarter 3	
1.22	All Languages	To ensure operating partners such as GLL provide appropriate language interpretation and translation services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 		Quarter 4	
1.23	Irish	Explore the provision of simultaneous interpreting for Members who wish to address the Council through the medium of Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services 		Quarter 3	

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2.0 Branding

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
2.1	Irish	Promote the availability of the Irish language Council logo, use of bilingual English/Irish corporate signatures and Irish language City brand for use in correspondence, documentation, literature etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
2.2	Irish	Carry out exploratory work on a bilingual corporate logo.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 		Quarter 4	
2.3	Ulster-Scots and Irish	Work with the stakeholders to develop an approach to raise awareness on Ulster-Scots and Irish place/street names.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Place and Economy/Economic Development • Good Relations • Marketing and Comms 	Quarter 4		
2.4	Ulster-Scots	Develop an Ulster-Scots Language Council logo, bilingual Ulster Scots/Irish corporate signatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU 		Quarter 3	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
		and explore the development of Ulster Scots City brand for use in correspondence, documentation, literature etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms 			
2.5	Sign Language	Develop an approach to translated Sign Language “welcome” information at identified council venues liaising with relevant departments on the installation and procurement of new screens where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Marketing and Communications Physical Programmes 			Quarter to be decided in 2025-26
2.6	Disability Communications	Develop an approach to signage across Council facilities liaising with relevant departments on the installation and procurement of new Disability signage e.g., braille, tactile maps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical Programmes Legal and Civic Services/EDU Marketing and Communications 			Quarter to be decided in 2025-26

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3.0 Community, Education and Business

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
3.1	All Languages	Explore the development of a Language Strategy development fund for internal and external events and continue to host internal and external events promoting all strands of the Language Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Finance • Place and Economy/Economic Development 			Quarter to be decided in 2025-26
3.2	All Languages	Support the implementation of language-related actions in the Belfast Stories Programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and Economy/Belfast Destination Hub • Physical Programmes • Legal and Civic Services 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
3.3	Irish	Development of a range of workshops/information sessions and events on council related issues such as recycling biodiversity etc aimed at Irish Medium Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • City and Neighbourhood 			Quarter to be decided in 2025-26
3.4	Irish	Delivery of Employment/Upskilling Academies for Irish-medium classroom assistants and others working in the Irish medium education sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and Economy/Economic Development • Legal and Civic Services 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
3.5	Irish	Production of Irish language booklet of basic Irish phrases, sayings and facts about the benefits of bilingualism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU 		Quarter 3	
3.6	Ulster-Scots	Distribution and promotion of Ulster-Scots Place Name of Belfast booklet at City Hall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
3.7	All Languages	Explore how the benefits of linguistic diversity can be promoted to the business and tourism community in Belfast, including the promotion of cultural initiatives to increase the visibility of other languages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Place and Economy/Economic Development 			Quarter to be decided in 2025-26
3.8	Minority Ethnic Communities	Promote ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) courses provided by Belfast Metropolitan College and other local providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Marketing and Communications 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
3.9	Irish	Explore the development of a Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme which will support students of Irish in Belfast to attend Gaeltacht Summer Courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Finance 		Quarter 1	
3.10	Irish	Explore the provision of annual recurring funding for the delivery of a Seachtain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 3		

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
		na Gaeilge event, to include a communications plan for the promotion of events and Irish language by the Council during the festival.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place and Economy/Economic Development 			

4.0 Key Area of Work: Staff Awareness and Training

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
4.1	Sign Languages	To provide a range of Sign Language courses to staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Human Resources 	Quarter 1	Ongoing	Ongoing
4.2	Disability Communications	To promote awareness to the public through the website and City Matters of how to access Council documents, services and facilities, such as, how to request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Communications Legal and Civic Services/EDU Customer Focus 	Quarter 3		

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
		documents/forms in an alternative format.				
4.3	Disability Communication	To explore introducing Makaton training to staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Human Resources 		Quarter 1	
4.4	All Languages	Development and roll-out of Making Communications Accessible Guide to staff and develop guidance for staff on providing accessible options (e.g., subtitles, dubbing) for remote meetings and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Corporate HR • Marketing & Communications • Digital Services 	Quarter 3		
4.5	Irish	Establish an informal discussion group for Irish speaking staff and staff who wish to learn Irish and encourage the use of Irish amongst staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Quarter 2		
4.6	All languages	To support recruitment the Council will aim to extend our reach by, for example, by ensuring that job advertisements are distributed widely and specifically to employability and support organisations associated with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
		particularly under-represented groups.				

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5.0 Key Area of Work: Engagement

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
5.1	Minority Ethnic Communities	Establishment of an Minority Ethnic Communities stakeholder forum to give input into action plans and policy development. This forum would be a sub-group from the Migrant Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Good Relations 		Quarter 4	
5.2	All Languages	Inclusion of young people in the Council's external Language Strategy Engagement Fora. Any engagement with the Irish-medium youth sector will be conducted through Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

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Annex 1 – interim approach for selected languages for Minority Ethnic Communities

Information has been gathered from various sources to identify the most in demand language for Minority Ethnic Communities.

The number of language translation/interpreting requests to Council since April 2018 are set out below:

Language	Number of requests
Arabic	15
Russian	4
Polish	4
Somalian	2
Chinese (Mandarin Traditional)	1
Chinese (Mandarin Simplified)	1
Romanian	1
Spanish	1

The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust have provided latest statistics on their most requested languages for interpreting health matters:

Language	Requests
1. Arabic	9235
2. Polish	4697
3. Romanian	3032
4. Somali	2708
5. Slovak	2138

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A collection of Language statistics from Census 2021 were published in September 2022, however more details on Languages will be published during Winter/Spring 2023. Below we have a list of languages spoken at home.

	Main Language		
		Population	%
1	English	310,386	93.000944
2	Polish	3843	1.1514779
3	Irish*	2659	0.7967161
4	Chinese (Mandarin)	2272	0.6807593
5	Arabic	2046	0.6130429
6	Romanian	1460	0.4374597
7	Spanish	960	0.2876448
8	Portuguese	669	0.2004524
9	Slovak	649	0.1944598
10	Malayalam	527	0.157905
11	Tagalog/Filipino	462	0.138429
12	Hungarian	433	0.1297398
13	Chinese (Cantonese)	415	0.1243464
14	Lithuanian	397	0.1189531
15	Russian	228	0.0683156
16	Bulgarian	179	0.0536338
17	Latvian	123	0.0368545
18	Tetan	20	0.0059926
19	Other languages*	6017	1.8028735
	TOTAL	333,745	100

Please note that Census 2021 asked follow up questions on Irish and Ulster-Scots language ability:

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17,986 people in Belfast indicated that they can speak, write, and read Irish Language

2,553 people in Belfast indicated that they can speak, write, and read Ulster-Scots

Recommendation – top 5 Ethnic Minority Communities languages for translating Council material

Based on the Census 2021 statistics and from language requests issued to the Council and the Belfast Trust in recent years, we are recommending that the following languages to be listed as the top five for translating Council material:

1. Polish
2. Chinese (Mandarin & Simplified)
3. Arabic
4. Romanian
5. Somali