

Language Strategy Working Group

Friday, 30th January, 2026

MEETING OF THE LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson); and
Councillors R. Brooks, Groogan, Long and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
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.

Election of Chairperson

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte, and

Resolved – that Councillor Walsh be elected to serve as Chairperson to
the Language Strategy Working Group until the date of the Annual Meeting
in 2026.

(Councillor Walsh in the Chair).

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Rodgers.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th October, 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 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

3.1 Belfast City Council agreed a Language Strategy Action Plan in June 2024 (attached at Appendix 1). This Action Plan contained agreed actions to continue the implementation of the Council's Language Strategy from 2024 – 2027. Progress against these actions is detailed in the right-hand column in the table.

3.2 Since the agreement of the Action Plan, actions have been carried out in relation to all strands of the Language Strategy. There has, however, been some delay in relation to actions within the action plan and there may, therefore, be some slippage in timescales.

3.3 There has been notable progress in relation to a number of actions.

Irish Language Policy

Council approved the draft Irish Language Policy in October 2025. The decision to approve the policy was subsequently 'called-in' and this process is ongoing.

Email address

Gaeilge@belfastcity.gov.uk email address has been created and is now in use. Additional steps are planned to promote its existence to the public further.

Events

There have been a wide range of diverse events held in 2025 and there are further language-related events planned for 2026. (See supporting report on events).

Draft Ulster Scots Policy

A draft Ulster-Scots Policy has been co-designed with the Ulster-Scots stakeholder forum. The aim of the Policy is to set out how the Council will promote and protect the use of Ulster-Scots within its own work and throughout the wider Council area

Use of languages other than English on Council's social media

Languages other than English have been used on the Council's social media channels. Requests for this are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Sign Video

The Sign Video service is now available at all Council leisure centres, allowing Deaf and Sign Language-using customers better access to Council services here.

Communication Boards

Communication boards for residents with disabilities and sensory issues have been installed in some play parks. The council plans to roll this out to all play parks across the city.

3.4 Next steps

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and provide feedback as 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 and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment and these were made available during the public consultation.

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services outlined the principal aspects of the report and provided an update on the progress which had been achieved since the adoption of the Irish Language Policy.

A Member sought an update on the work the Council was undertaking in providing services to the deaf and disabled communities. This related particularly to the provision of

Makaton and sign language training for both staff and Elected Members, together with an overview of the Council's obligations associated with the implementation of the Sign Language Bill in February 2025. In response, the Language Officer undertook to provide an update to the Member in this regard.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Ulster-Scots Policy

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 made by officers in drafting the Ulster-Scots Policy.

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

Background

3.1 Officers have been working with the Ulster-Scots Stakeholders Forum to co-design a draft Ulster-Scots Policy. The aim of the Policy is to set out how the Council will promote and protect the use of Ulster-Scots within its own work and throughout the wider Council area.

The draft Policy will be focussed on the four guiding principles of respect, recognition, resources and representation. It sets out a proposed approach across a number of key areas including:

- Communications and visibility**
- Placenames and Signs**
- Cultural Celebrations and Events**
- Partnerships and Collaboration**
- Education and Awareness**

Ulster Scots is recognised by the UK under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages as a Part 2 language. This provides broad cultural and identity-based protection but does not create the detailed statutory obligations associated with Part 3, which applies to Irish. Part 2 focuses on promoting respect, visibility, cultural expression, and understanding, rather than mandating service provision or formal education structures.

3.2 Given its current Part 2 status, the policy approach for Ulster-Scots necessarily differs from that for Irish, with a focus on:

- **Supporting heritage, culture, arts, and community traditions**
- **Encouraging linguistic development and learning opportunities**
- **Promoting public understanding of Ulster-Scots identity and expression**
- **Strengthening institutional visibility in line with the 2022 Act**

A developmental focus on culture, heritage, and linguistic capacity will help create the conditions necessary should there be a future ambition to progress toward Part 3 recognition under the Charter.

Officers are working with stakeholders such as the Ulster Scots Agency and the Ulster Scots Community Network to identify opportunities to support and develop Ulster Scots in accordance with the Language Strategy and its associated Action Plan.

3.3 Next steps

A final draft of the Ulster-Scots Policy will be presented to the Ulster-Scots stakeholder forum in March 2026 for consideration.

Members are asked to agree to representatives from the Ulster-Scots Stakeholders Forum attending the next meeting of the Working Group.

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

A Section 75 Equality Screening and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment will be completed after the draft Ulster-Scots Policy has been finalised.

The Working Group noted the information provided within the report and it was agreed that an invitation be extended to the Ulster-Scots Commissioner, Mr. Lee Reynolds, to attend the group's next meeting to provide an overview of his role and remit.

Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that it would meet on Friday 17th April at 12:30 pm.

Chairperson