

# Language Strategy Working Group

Monday, 8th June, 2026

## LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY

Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);  
Alderman Rodgers; and  
Councillor R. Brooks.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and  
Civic Services;  
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs,  
Communications and Marketing;  
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;  
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

### **Election of Chairperson**

The Working Group agreed that Councillor Walsh be elected Chairperson of the Language Strategy Working Group for 2026/27.

### **Apologies**

An apology were received on behalf of Councillor Groogan.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 27th April were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Irish Language Commissioner - An Coimisinéir Gaeilge**

In accordance with the decision of the Council of 1st June, the Working Group welcomed Dr. Pól Deeds, Irish Language Commissioner, who was in attendance to provide an overview of his role and remit.

Dr. Deeds explained that The Office of the Irish Language Commissioner had been established through the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 and that he had been appointed to his role in November, 2025. He indicated that initial work was ongoing on the development of standards, policies and procedures. The next stage of that process would include a consultation exercise on proposed operating standards, which would be presented to the Executive Office for approval and publication. Once those standards had been adopted and implemented, a complaints and longer-term review process would be put in place to oversee the operation of the Office.

Dr. Deeds answered several questions from Members and the Chairperson thanked him for attending.

Noted.

### **Draft Ulster-Scots Policy - Update**

The City Solicitor reported that work was ongoing in respect of the draft Ulster-Scots Policy and that the draft would be considered at the Ulster-Scots stakeholder forum, which was due to take place on 2nd July. The completed draft would be presented to the Working Group in due course.

Noted.

### **Irish Language Programming during Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026**

The City Solicitor and the Director of Communications presented the following report to the Working Group:

#### **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 developing a programme of Irish language events during Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.**

#### **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**

**Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann will be in Belfast between 2nd August and 9th August 2026. Over 800,000 visitors are expected to Belfast. The MAC building in the Cathedral Quarter will be serving as an Irish language hub during the week of the Fleadh. Officers have worked to develop a programme of Irish language events to be held in the MAC. Officers have been supported by an external curator with event management experience.**

- 3.2 The programme of events for the MAC will include contributions from local Irish language groups and national Irish language organisations. There will be a range of events aimed at children and families as well as adults and fluent speakers. Events will include:**

- cupan agus comhrá – a daily coffee and meet-up opportunity for Irish speakers**

- a lecture by the Irish department at the Queen's University of Belfast
- a lecture by Gael Linn on the history of Irish language filmmaking
- a song and story event by the Belfast rhymers
- a market of stalls of local Irish language small businesses
- a family yoga class in Irish
- a family singing class
- a sean-nós singing workshop
- film screenings
- a workshop by Ulster University focusing on the shared history of the Irish language

In addition to these planned events, a sub Committee of the Irish Language Stakeholders Forum has been convened to discuss potential additional programming in the MAC and the wider Fleadh.

**3.3** Officers will be on site at the MAC across the week to help with the delivery of this programme of events. Footfall through the MAC will be measured across the week.

**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

None associated with this report.

The Working Group noted the Contents of the report.

**Irish Language Policy – Implementation Plan**

The City Solicitor updated the Working Group on the outcome of recent legal proceedings regarding to the Council's Irish Language Policy. She pointed out that the Council, at its meeting on 1st June, had noted a Counsel's opinion in respect of the 'call-in' of the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 26th September, 2025, insofar as they related to the adoption of the draft Irish Language Policy. At the meeting on 1st June, the Council had noted the legal opinion which had found that the

'call-in' had no merit on community grounds and that the aforementioned decision would be implemented in accordance with Standing Order 48.

The Members were advised that further reports would be submitted to both the Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in respect of the proposed implementation plan.

Noted.

Chairperson