

Good Practice Visits – Irish Medium Initiatives

Background Notes

There is a vibrant Irish Language Community in Belfast which is part of the economic, educational and cultural fabric of the city. It is a growth sector which also plays its part in reaching out to other traditions not normally associated with the promotion of the Irish language.

I feel that a series of best practice visits for Members will reveal the vibrancy in a sector of this city, which many Members from all the parties are unaware of. This will be a positive eye-opening experience which will allow Members to gain a better understanding of the Irish Medium sector. The visits will also help Members to understand the important role of the sector in the regeneration and change agenda which Belfast is currently going through.

Irish Medium Education

There are 8 Irish Medium Primary Schools across the city - (many of these schools have greater numbers than some of the longer established English medium primary schools in certain areas).

There are 10 Nursery and Pres school establishments feeding in to these primary schools indicating a strong future growth in the numbers of parents wishing their children to be taught through the medium of the Irish Language.

All of these primary schools will feed in to one major Secondary school, Colaiste Feirste... This school in West Belfast is a vibrant educational hub in the heart of the recognised Gaeltacht Quarter and has grown from strength to strength over the years. Behind the numbers of children attending this school are families who have chosen to have their children educated through the medium of Irish. The school has a vision and plan which will encourage full integration into the community of West Belfast

Economic Development

There has been a £1.9m investment in the Cultúrlann building. This, in many ways, will act as the catalyst for the regeneration of the Gaeltacht Quarter and already serves to attract many people from other parts of the city and farther afield to the area. This is the Cultural hub of the Gaeltacht Quarter, serving as the home of many Irish Language projects and has contributed greatly to the Gaeltacht Quarter concept. As in other 'quarters' of Belfast, the vision for the future revolves around an iconic and vibrant building.

This multi-funded initiative, in many people's minds, will act as the flagship for many other complimentary community based projects which will, in turn, attract private sector businesses back in to an area normally associated with disadvantage.

There many other projects around the city which provide language and cultural activities for citizens of Belfast and beyond. The Irish language sector is confident that the new DCAL initiative, Líofo 2015, which seeks to increase by 1,000 the

number of people fluent in the Irish language by 2015, will attract people from across all traditions not normally associated with growth of the Irish Language. This initiative is a genuine effort to reach out and already, whilst in its infancy, has attracted people from different political parties and a range of cultural and employment backgrounds. Many of the centres across the city have been involved in teaching Irish without political boundaries in a normal way for many years. An Droichead has major plans that will regenerate the lower Ormeau area in the same way that Cultúrlann in Gaeltacht Quarter will act as a catalyst.

Suggested Visits

The proposal which I would wish the Committee to consider is for a series of Best Practice Visits to be arranged for the month of October. These visits would be open to all Members of Council and would, hopefully, serve to provide accurate and factual information about the Irish Language and its place in the future economic and cultural regeneration of the City. Visits are suggested to the following locations but this should not be seen as a definitive list and can be added to if other projects can be identified.

- Colaiste Feirste Secondary School, 59 Beechview Park
- Cultúrlann building, 216 Falls Road
- An Droichead, 20 Cooke Street
- 174 Trust, 174 Antrim Road- Pres Rev Bill Shaw

Councillor Caoimhín Mac Giolla Mhín