



Report to:	Joint Diversity Group of Party Group Leaders and Centenaries Working Group
Subject:	Language Policy – revised draft
Date:	Friday 18 October 2013
Reporting	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

Relevant Background Information	
1	The Group has agreed that the Council's language policy be refreshed and revised.
2	At its meeting on 16 April 2013 the Joint Group noted a report on progress, including the fact that Senior Counsel's opinion regarding the statutory obligations of Councils in Northern Ireland, in the context of both local and international law, would inform the revision of the language policy. The Joint Group also agreed that a consultant should be commissioned to revise the current language policy, taking recent developments into account.
3	At its meeting on 21 May 2013 the Joint Group noted a draft initial revised language policy, including the legal opinion, and agreed to consider the implications of the revised policy within political party groups; briefings were held with the party political groups over the summer period.
4	The legal opinion had recommended that the Council should have a "systematic record of what is being done" in relation to the policy and an audit of practices across the Council was carried out over the summer period. On 6 September 2013 the Joint Group noted that responses from Council Departments were still being received.
Key Issues and current position	
5	The report has now been re-ordered to provide the summary and proposed policy at the beginning of the document.
6	The initial draft policy has been revised and up-dated to incorporate the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some of the more detailed Census information that has now been published • a summary of the responses to the DCAL consultation • an up-dated reference in respect of Down District Council's policy.
7	A useful workshop was held recently with appropriate Council officers, who discussed the draft policy in detail and assisted in making suggestions to enable the policy to be clarified and more easily understood within Departments. An action plan is already being developed to ensure a co-ordinated implementation of the policy, following its formal approval (e.g. requests for alternative formats, translation procedures etc).
8	Audit of current position The audit has provided valuable accurate information on the demands made for translation and interpretation services across various Council Departments, i.e. how many requests are made, which languages are involved, what is the cost etc.
9	<u>Alternative formats</u>

Most Departments reported that only a handful of requests are received each year (on average) for documents in alternative formats. These have been in Polish, Cantonese, Braille and audio format for information leaflets.

10 *City Matters*, the Council's quarterly magazine, is now distributed in an alternative format to all registered blind and visually impaired residents living in Belfast. The magazine is used to inform residents of new policies and schemes which are being developed or implemented.

11 Brochures with information re the City Hall, Belfast Castle and Malone House are available in French, German and Irish but these are rarely requested; visitors from Asia, especially China, are now in the majority.

12 The overwhelming response from Departments was that there was no evidence of need or demand for all Council documents/application forms etc to be available in other languages. The text in the policy has therefore been amended to read "relevant documents".

13 Letters received in other languages

Formal letters in languages other than English are rarely received. The exception is Irish and five Departments report receiving 2-3 formal letters per year.

14 However Community Services report receiving substantial numbers of informal e-mails in Irish each week on a wide range of subjects. The Group may be aware that one of the Service's officers is a well known fluent Irish speaker who covers the West Belfast/Gaeltacht area; he communicates daily with representatives from the Irish language sector and with Irish-speaking elected Members and translates items in-house on a day-to-day basis.

15 Telephone calls

"Large numbers" of calls regarding City Hall tours from people with language difficulties, were reported, mainly Chinese. The Irish Voicemail service has not been used for 2-3 years.

16 Interpretation

This is rarely requested; a recent Chinese visit was quoted as an exception.

17 Correspondence with Irish Medium school sector

With the exception of Community Services who report "daily" communication and correspondence as outlined above, Departments reported that this was rarely requested.

18 Website analytical information

The "Google Translate" toolbar has been available on the Council's website for approximately a year now and since October 2012, our website has been translated a total of 5,670 times, into the following languages:

Language	% of total translations	Nos. of translations
Polish	22.84	1,295
Spanish	12.03	682
German	9.75	553
French	7.11	403
Russian	5.86	332
Chinese	4.83	274
Japanese	4.57	259
Italian	3.33	189
Irish	2.4	136

19 In the (sample) month of September 2013 our website was translated a total of 206 times,

into the following languages:

Language	% of total translations	Nos. of translations
Spanish	25.73	53
Polish	16.50	34
German	11.65	24
Czech	9.71	20
Irish	5.83	12
French	4.85	10
Lithuanian	4.37	9

20 Costs of translation and interpretation
The figures show that the Council as a whole spent less than £3,600 in the past financial year on both translation and interpretation.

21 Audit of signage
An audit of signage throughout Council properties has been completed and some inconsistency has been identified. If all signage were required to be replaced at one time there would be considerable potential resource implications for Departments.
The relevant wording in the revised language policy (3.5) has therefore been amended to read: "As opportunities arise to renew existing signage in Council properties, text will be supplemented by pictorial and tactile signage, where appropriate".

22 Logo and B brand
The Joint Group may wish to note that the current Council logo and B branding were developed in line with best practice guidelines. Unofficial Irish versions, which don't comply with Council-approved design guidelines and are not held by Corporate Communications, are sometimes used by individual Members on personal stationery and by Irish language organisations. The Group is requested to consider whether the current guidelines permitting use of the logo in English only should remain, be extended to incorporate Irish versions of the official logo, or whether a decision on this should be deferred in view of the imminent changes in the Belfast City Council area and the possible changes to the current corporate identity in the context of the Local Government Reform.

23 **Summary**
The Joint Group will note that throughout the draft policy, text such as "reasonable" and "proportionate" has been used, along with phrases such as "where there is sufficient demand". This is not to avoid addressing a difficult issue but to allow individual Committees and Departments to exercise some flexibility and discretion in local circumstances, within an overall policy framework. The views of Members on this are requested.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

24 This draft policy has been equality screened in line with Council procedure.

Recommendations

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- To note the revised language policy and consider its implications.
 - To decide on a preferred option re para 22, re logo and branding.

	Documents attached
	Report on Language Policy Appendix 1: Article 10 of the European Charter Appendix 2: Opinion of Mr Richard Gordon QC Equality Screening Template

	Officer to contact for more information
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