



Subject:	Language Strategy - Update on Dual Language Street Sign Policy
Date:	24th September, 2021
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor / Director of Legal & Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Sarah Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Dual Language Street Sign Policy.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the report
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> By way of brief background and as reported previously to the Committee, the Council on 7th January ratified a decision taken by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd October, 2020 to adopt a new policy position in respect of the Dual Language Street Sign Policy.

3.2	<p>(Whilst the initial decision of 23rd October had been called-in, counsel opinion subsequently found that the grounds for call-in had not been satisfied).</p> <p>Following this decision, an officer working group was formed, comprising officers from Governance and Compliance Services, Equality and Diversity Unit, Building Control, Good Relations, Legal Services and Place and Economy Policy who developed a new proposed revised policy incorporating the changes agreed.</p>
3.3	<p>In April 2021, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved this proposed revised policy which incorporated the following key changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trigger for a consultation of the occupiers of a street will be an application to the Council by a resident / residents of the street or an Elected Member representing that District Electoral Area, as opposed to an application from anyone, supported by a petition of 1/3 of occupiers. In order for further consideration as to the erection of a second language street sign to take place, the threshold for the percentage of residents responding positively is 15% instead of 2/3; • People not returning a reply are no longer deemed not to be in favour of the application; • Each application will be equality, good relations and rural needs screened; • Members may want to consider whether they will exercise their residual discretion at the point when an application is received and decide as to whether to progress that application to the stage of surveying the street in question or not.
3.4	<p>The following key principles agreed previously were also incorporated into the new policy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the policy will be used for the promotion of language rights and for the benefit of linguistic communities. 2. That the principles of equality, promoting good relations and respect will underpin the application of the policy in addition to the rights promoted by the policy itself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on legal advice, each application will be subject to an equality, good relations and rural needs screening;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council retains an overriding residual discretion to take the particular circumstances of each application into account in deciding whether or not a second language street name plate should be erected. In summary, there may be circumstances when notwithstanding the consultation response it may be appropriate to depart from the policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. Guidance will be provided to Members on the factors which should be considered when using this discretion; and • And, as is the case at present, the Council will consider the best approach for any applications relating to long streets. <p>3. That, as with any statutory consultation which the Council is required to undertake, the City Solicitor may intervene if any complaint is made and a basis for that complaint established.</p> <p>4. That any decision relating to the erection of a second nameplate in the City centre (business core) will, in addition to the current policy considerations, be subject to a wider public consultation to reflect the community of users.</p> <p>5. That the policy will cover the corporately designated Gaeltacht Quarter, until such time as a policy which may contain specific proposals in respect of a bilingual strategy have been adopted.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Update</u></p> <p>This revised policy has been screened in for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and during the summer months, a quotation was developed and issued to procure specialist equality support for both the EQIA and the public consultation process. An equality consultant has now been appointed and an initial briefing meeting has taken place. The consultant is currently developing a detailed plan of action on the process required for carrying out the EQIA and aligning this with the public consultation process as well as helping to devise the process for equality-screening each individual application as per legal advice.</p>
3.6	<p>It is envisaged by the equality consultant that the public consultation will be issued in the next 4-6 weeks i.e. by the end of October. It has been recommended by the equality consultant that the consultation is issued for a 14/16-week period due to an overlap with the Christmas holiday period. The equality consultant is also providing advice on what further pre-consultation engagement is required in order to explain the proposed operation of this</p>

	<p>policy in practice. Advice will be also sought from Marketing & Communications for communications support due to the high level of interest when this decision was made at Committee.</p>
3.7	<p>Members will be aware that the Council is in the process of establishing an Elected Member Working Group as well as two external stakeholder engagement fora, for the Irish and Ulster Scots language communities. In preparation for this, an internal officer working group has also been convened. The officer working group is developing an approach to take forward the Language Strategy which can be discussed and agreed by Members. Depending on timings, it is hoped that the results of the public consultation on Dual Language Street Signs can be used to inform the development of these emerging structures.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>As agreed previously, given the potential for increased numbers of applications, the Council will deal with no more than 5 in any given month, Processing time could increase however, due to the potential changes to the procedure. If numbers are excessive they will be held in a queue and dealt with in the order in which they have been received. This will also be managed in the context of the existing staffing resource and the established annual budget for street signage. As requested by Members, a report will be submitted to a future meeting outlining the potential for increasing the number of applications which could be processed on a monthly basis, taking into account the new procedure emanating from the revised policy.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations are key principles within which the Language Strategy is delivered. The Language Strategy was subject to the Council's usual screening process.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None