

Report on	Regional and Minority Languages
Date of Meeting	16 th November 2023
Reporting Officer	Claire Linney, Assistant Director of Development
Contact Officers	Catherine Fox Arts Development Manager

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	X

1	Purpose of Report
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to update Members on the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irish Language Policy Review • Irish Language Plan 2023 - 27 • Irish Language Signage Plan • Irish Language Working Group • Ulster Scots Language and Culture
2.0	Key Issues
2.1	<p>Irish Language Policy Review June 2023</p> <p>Council's obligations in respect of the Irish Language arise from commitments the UK Government made when the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (The Charter) was signed and ratified. It is designed to protect and promote regional and minority language as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage.</p> <p>The Council Irish Language Policy sets out and guides the Council's Irish language Plan. The plan also explains the relative and imperative legislative commitments underpinning its policies such as The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Belfast Agreement (1998).</p> <p>The main aim of the Policy is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To take resolute and positive actions that will aspire to promote, enhance and protect the Irish language within the Council and Mid Ulster District. <p>The following are the main objectives emanating from the legislation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To encourage the use of Irish in both speech and writing within the District and Council. • To promote a range of initiatives that will reduce intolerance and promote understanding of the Irish language across the District and within the Council. • To preserve townland names through the use of appropriate signage.

- To recognise and celebrate the Irish language within the broader context of linguistic and cultural diversity across the District and Council.
- To create a framework where Irish can flourish and be shared by all who wish to use it;
- To protect and support the development and learning of Irish;
- To promote wider understanding of the background to the Irish language
- To maintain and develop links between groups using Irish with other groups using Irish and/or Ulster Scots.
- To increase the number of those who can access Irish medium education;
- To increase the number of those that use public services through the Irish language; and,
- To increase access to Irish language media.

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for the Irish Language Policy

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the Policy, a four-year plan, has been developed and is reviewed, evaluated and updated accordingly. Please refer to 2.2 in the report.

As part of the Irish Language Policy, the following monitoring requirements were identified –

In the longer term, and further to the consultation responses, the Council commits to taking the following monitoring actions on an annual basis:

- *to assess demand for Irish language services elsewhere, eg DCAL, and to modify the policy as appropriate;*
- *to consider the impact of the policy on the profile of job applicants by community background;*
- *to monitor uptake of Irish language services and to obtain qualitative feedback on benefits that people perceive and/or complaints registered;*
- *to monitor any decrease in the usage of Council facilities by the Protestant / Unionist community in response to the introduction of the policy;*
- *to gather and analyse feedback from staff on the policy on an annual basis.*

A review carried out in June 2023 on each of the requirements is summarised in **Appendix 2**.

2.2 **Irish Language Plan 2023 – 2027**

As part of the Irish Language Policy, Council delivers an Irish Language Plan to promote the Policy, this is a four-year plan, which is accompanied by annual budget.

The first Plan was for the period 2016 - 20.

An updated Plan has been developed for 2023 – 2027, through consultation with key stakeholders and agencies, community partners, and members of the Irish Language Working Group in November 2022. A copy of the Plan is attached in **Appendix 3**.

2.3 Irish Language Signage

Mid Ulster District Council is currently rolling out a bilingual signage programme that includes road name signage. Council applies the policy when considering applications for dual language signage expressing the name of the street in a language other than English, to both existing and new streets.

As part of Council signage plan, bi-lingual information and directional signage is being provided across Council assets. To date, external bi-lingual information and directional signage has been installed across Councils facilities and locations. An updated procurement exercise is being undertaken to develop a complete bilingual signage roll out programme across assets, which is expected to be delivered by 2025.

2.4 Irish Language Working Group

Mid Ulster District Council previously resolved to establish a Language Working Group to assist with policy development and to support the implementation of Mid Ulster District Council’s Irish Language and Ulster Scots language policies and associated work.

The Regional and Minority Language Implementation Working Group provides oversight and guidance with regards to the stated Guiding Principles, which include;

- The development and implementation of relevant language plans for the Mid Ulster Council area and how it will promote the development and promotion of Regional and Minority languages.
- Publications
- Publicity
- Correspondence
- Presentations / Public Speaking / Events
- Staff, Administrative Practices and budget
- Visibility of Languages

Please see a copy of the minutes of the Working Group at **Appendix 4**.

2.5 Ulster Scots Language and Culture

Ulster Scots cultural activity continues to be embedded within The Hill of The O’Neill and Ranfurly House, and Burnavon Arts programmes in partnership with community development. Officers are meeting with the Ulster Scots Network and Ulster Scots to plan further partnership working. An update report will be brought to a further meeting of the Committee.

3.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

Financial:

As per annual budget.

Human:

	NA
	Risk Management: NA
3.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: As per EQIA
	Rural Needs Implications: NA
4	Recommendations
4.1	Members are recommended to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Note the update report (ii) Approve the Irish Language Plan 2023-2027.
5	List of Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Irish Language Policy</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Irish Language Policy Review</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Irish Language Plan 2023 - 2027</p> <p>Appendix 4– Irish Language Working Group Minutes</p>