

Leitrim County Council
Scheme under Section 11 of
the Official Languages Act 2003
2007-2009

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Leitrim County Council Scheme under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 2007-2009

Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This Scheme has been prepared by Leitrim County Council under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003.

The Official Languages Act 2003 was signed into law on 14 July 2003. The Act is the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of services through the Irish Language.

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure a better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

1.2 Preparation of the Scheme

Section 11 of the Official Languages Act provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide

- through the medium of Irish,
- through the medium of English,
- and through **the** medium of English and Irish and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

Section 13 of the Official Languages Act 2003 provides that public bodies have a duty to ensure that an adequate number of its staff are competent in the Irish language (Section 13(2)(c))

This Scheme has been drawn up in accordance with the Guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 issued to Leitrim County Council by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in September 2004.

Leitrim County Council published a Notice under Section 13 of the Official Languages Act 2003 in March 2006 inviting submissions by 25.4.2006 in relation to the preparation of the Scheme from any interested parties. The one submission received is available on the Council's website at www.leitrimcoco.ie

The Council's Coiste na Gaeilge whose membership consists of Elected Representatives, Staff across a range of Council services and a Representative of Voluntary groups dealing with the Council has assisted in drafting the Scheme. Coiste na Gaeilge's remit is to report to the Housing and Corporate Services Strategic Policy Committee in relation to services to be provided through

Irish. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing this Scheme will rest with the Leitrim County Manager or delegated nominee. The Scheme builds on the extent to which services are currently available through Irish as a starting base. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by Leitrim County Council are identified in the body of the Scheme.

No item in this Scheme shall contradict any Act or statutory instrument of the State or any regulations made under the Official Languages Act 2003.

The Scheme includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that the Council continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way. The Council will gauge the level of demand for its services in the Irish language by carrying out regular assessments of the levels of queries/requests for services through Irish. This will be monitored through the Council's Contact Management System. It is through publicising and illustrating the reliability of new services through Irish that the demand and usage of services through Irish will be encouraged.

1.3 Commencement Date of Scheme

Proposed Wording: This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The Scheme is commenced with effect from 1st January 2007 and shall remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the earlier.

1.4 Mission Statement

The Council's Corporate Plan 2004-2009 states that the Mission of Leitrim County Council is "to lead the continued development of Leitrim as a location of choice for people to live, work, invest and visit."

1.5 Strategic Objectives

The Council's Corporate Plan 2004-2009 states that the strategic objectives of Leitrim County Council are:

Population Growth and Economic Development:	To consolidate existing and facilitate, encourage and promote additional sustainable inward investment and job creation as a basis for population expansion and balanced economic growth throughout the County
Quality Environment:	To improve, protect, nurture and promote the natural and man-made environment in the interest of present and future generations
Infrastructural Delivery:	To maintain and further develop the physical, economic, social and cultural infrastructure of the County in a sustainable way

Quality Customer Service: To provide high quality services tailored to meet the needs of all our customers

Community Participation: To encourage and facilitate greater community participation in the formation, development and implementation of policies and programmes.

Communications: To pro-actively communicate a greater understanding for staff and customers of the functions and services provided by Leitrim County Council

1.6 Customer Service Action Plan

Using the Principles of Quality Customer Services the Council's Customer Action Plan 2004-2009 commits the Council to develop and expand services through Irish. Complaints and appeals regarding service in Irish can be dealt with through the complaint procedures laid out in the Customer Service Plan which is available in Irish and English under the one cover. Contact details for the Ombudsman's Office are also given for persons who are dissatisfied with the Council's response to their complaint.

1.7 Customers and Clients of Leitrim County Council

Leitrim County Council's customer base is primarily the population of County Leitrim which according to the 2002 Census of Population was 25799. However beyond our day-to-day contact with customers on an individual basis we also have dealings with a broader customer base including:

Communities throughout County Leitrim
Government Departments
State Agencies
Business
Other local authorities and regional authorities
County Development Board structures
Social Partners and sectoral interests
Local Development Agencies
Local and National Media
LEADER and Local Partnership Groups
Private Sector Service Providers

1.8 Functional Areas/Directorates of Leitrim County Council

1. Water, Environment and Emergency Services
2. Transportation and Planning
3. Corporate Services, Human Resources and Housing
4. Finance
5. Community, Cultural & Enterprise Development

1.9 Location of Council Offices

The Council's Main offices are located in Áras an Chontae Carrick-On-Shannon. The Council has four Area Offices in Carrick-On-Shannon, Dromahaire, Manorhamilton and Mohill.

Our Branch Library Network extends to eight locations including Carrick-On-Shannon, Carrigallen, Dromahaire, Drumshanbo, Kiltyclogher, Kinlough, Manorhamilton and Mohill.

The Library Headquarters are located in Ballinamore.

Fire Stations are strategically located in five locations throughout the county i.e Ballinamore, Carrick-On-Shannon, Drumshanbo, Manorhamilton and Mohill.

1.10 Principal Means of Written Communication with the Public

This Council's communications with its customers relating to its services are generally available in English only, and in certain cases in Irish and English including:-

- Brochures & information leaflets
- Application forms
- Publications
- Press releases
- Website
- Advertisements
- Minutes of Local Authority meetings
- Reports.
- Statutory Policies

1.11 Assessment of extent to which services are already available through Irish

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. The Coiste na Gaeilge has been active in promoting Seachtain na Gaeilge and the Glór na nGael competition in which the Council has had entries in recent years. Leitrim County Council has provided Irish language classes for staff, as well as supporting staff who wish to pursue academic qualifications in Irish. (Three members of staff are currently completing a two year Diploma in Irish ran by the National University of Ireland Galway). Staff have also availed of the Gaeltacht Scholarship Scheme through Gaeleagras.

Leitrim County Council recognises that there are a range of services that are not currently available through Irish, and welcomes the opportunity provided by this Scheme to further develop and enhance our service through Irish. Whilst the demand currently for services through Irish is not significant the Council is committed to improving the services it provides in Irish, and to developing a positive culture that encourages the use of Irish both by our staff and our customers.

Chapter 2 Summary of Services provided by Leitrim County Council

This chapter provides an overview of the services provided by Leitrim County Council.

COMMUNITY, CULTURAL & ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Working with Leitrim County Development Board in the implementation of the County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development
- Facilitating and supporting Leitrim Community & Voluntary Forum
- Guiding, supporting and promoting local authority activity in community development and enterprise development
- Provision of Library Service including free public internet access service
- Development and delivery of Arts Programme including Arts Centre development
- Community Warden Scheme
- Cross Border Development Programme
- Development and maintenance of recreational facilities – swimming pools; leisure centre; playgrounds etc
- Tourism Promotion
- Third Level Outreach Programme
- Control, regulation and supervision of Casual Trading
- CLÁR Programme
- County Council Led Task Force (PEACE II)
- Economic Development Initiatives
- Promotion of Social Inclusion
- Comhairle Na n'Óg/Comhairle Na bPaistí
- Community & Voluntary and Arts Grant Schemes
- Floral Pride & Pride of Place Initiatives
- Barcelona Declaration Implementation
- Broadband (MAN)
- Operation of the Mobile Cinema – Aisling Gheal Liatroma

CORPORATE SERVICES & HOUSING DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Support to Elected Members | • Staff Training & Development |
| • Maintenance of Register of Electors | • Superannuation |
| • Processing of Higher Education Grants | • Information & Communications Technology |
| • Local Elections | • Partnership |
| • Administration of Freedom of Information Legislation | • Town Twinning |
| • Preparation of Annual Report | • Employment of Coroner and expenses associated with holding inquests/post-mortems |
| • Customer Services including Customer and Ombudsman Complaints | • Local Authority Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Construction and maintenance• Assessment of needs and allocation of houses |
| • Preparation of Corporate Plan and Customer Service Action Plan | • Housing Supports <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improvement Works Scheme; Tenant Purchase Scheme; Mortgage |
| • Co-ordination and monitoring of Service Indicators | |
| • Recruitment | |

- Allowance Scheme; Affordable Housing Scheme; Remedial Works Scheme; Extensions Scheme (Local Authority houses)
- Essential Repairs Grants Scheme; Disabled Persons Grants Scheme
- Traveller Settlement
- Accommodation of Homeless
- Estate Management
- Development and implementation of Housing Strategy
- Enforcement of regulations in relation to rent books and standards for private rented accommodation

FINANCE DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Collection of commercial rates and service charges
- Loans for house purchase and improvements
- Rent and annuity collection
- Debtors Management
- Asset Management
- Risk Management
- Payroll
- Internal Audit
- Motor Taxation and Driving Licences
- Public Services Vehicle licences
- Certificates of Road Worthiness for commercial vehicles
- Trailer licences for commercial vehicles
- Trade licences for garages
- Change of ownership (vehicles registered prior to 1993)
- Duplicate driving licences, tax discs, licensing certificates, registration books, certificates of road worthiness
- Certification of licencing and registration particulars for court and other purposes

TRANSPORTATION & PLANNING DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Road maintenance and improvement (National and Non-National roads network)
- Road Design
- Traffic management and signposting
- Public Lighting – provision and maintenance
- Road Safety and Education
- Emergency Responses – flooding, fallen trees, snow and ice treatment
- Street cleaning, litter
- Road Closures
- Road Opening Licences
- Services in Charge
- Derelict Sites and Dangerous Structures / places
- Protection of public rights-of-way
- Abnormal Loads permits
- Local Improvement Scheme
- Development Control (planning permissions, licences etc)
- Forward Planning (Development Plans etc)
- Planning Enforcement
- Building Control
- Urban and Village Renewal
- Heritage & Conservation (landscape/architectural heritage)
- Taking in charge (housing developments etc)

WATER, ENVIRONMENT & EMERGENCY SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Waste Management
 - Preparation and implementation of Waste Management Strategy; management of landfill sites; promotion of recycling and provision of recycling facilities; preparation and implementation of Litter Management Plan
- Pollution Control
 - Licencing of effluent discharges to waters and public sewers; monitoring river quality; litter control; anti-litter campaigns

- Water Supply, Sewage and Surface Water Services
 - Provision of public water supplies and sewerage facilities; rural water programme; maintenance of drainage systems; Grant assistance to enable households with a private supply to provide or upgrade water supplies and sewerage schemes; Grant assistance for the provision of new or the refurbishment of existing group water schemes and sewerage schemes; payment of annual subsidy towards the operational costs of supplying domestic water to privately sourced and publicly sourced groups
- Fire, Civil Defence and Emergency Services
- Environmental Education
- Water Safety
- Implementation of Control of Dogs Act & Control of Horses Act
- Discharge of responsibilities under the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act, 1998, the Abbatoirs Act and the Public Health Acts
- Provision and maintenance of amenities
- Provision and upkeep of burial grounds
- Provision of assistance and advice to tidy towns committees
- Administration of Access to Information on the Environment Regulations

3 Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually

3.1 Guiding Principles

- Leitrim County Council recognise that people have the right to choose which of the two official languages to use in their dealings with the Council
- Leitrim County Council accept that a person can express their needs and requirements most effectively in their chosen language
- Leitrim County Council appreciate that giving people real choice regarding the use of language in local authority services is the essence of good practice and leads to better outcomes in terms of quality of service.

The following are the steps which Leitrim County Council propose to take over the lifetime of this Scheme to improve the level of services through Irish.

- An audit of the level of competency in the Irish language of all staff will be completed. The audit will identify various levels of competency. This audit will be completed by 30.6.2007 (six months from the commencement of the Scheme)
- Staff with reasonable or good skills in Irish, but who are not yet fluent, will be identified in each Directorate and offered training in the Irish language during office hours, over the duration of the scheme. This will be carried out with the consent of each member of staff.
- Leitrim County Council will continue to work with, and seek agreement with, staff competent in the Irish language to provide services in the Irish language across a range of services where a demand for services through Irish may arise. With their consent, such staff will be identified for our customers on our website, telephone directory etc;

By 1.1.08 (within one year of the commencement of this Scheme) two directorates will be chosen after consultation with staff which will be capable of providing services to the public through Irish. Staff will be identified through which services through Irish can be delivered in these two directorates and appropriate training will be given to allow them to fulfil this role.

3.2 Written Communication

The Council will welcome correspondence in either Irish or English. On renewal of existing stocks of stationery a statement to the effect that a reply in Irish would be welcome will be included on our headed paper, compliment slips etc.

Corresponding with the Council in Irish will not cause any undue delay. All correspondence will receive a reply within the target period set out in the Customer Action Plan.

All correspondence following a telephone or face-to-face conversation in Irish will be in Irish unless the member of the public has indicated otherwise. Correspondence ensuing from a meeting/telephone conversation where it has been established that the customers preferred language is Irish, will be in Irish, although the meeting/telephone conversation may not have been held through that medium.

3.3 Training and Development

Leitrim County Council will continue their ongoing commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, in both Official Languages, to meet the evolving needs of our customers and to develop the full potential of staff during their careers.

Leitrim County Council will:-

- Continue to support the provision of a range of high quality Irish language training courses to staff, both during and after normal working hours, as an integral part of the Authorities' overall training plan.
- Provide a range of courses through the medium of Irish for members of staff who are currently fluent in the language (eg simultaneous translation, media skills, use of Irish on computers, grammar and letter writing skills etc)
- Irish language materials and resources (dictionaries, computer software, publications etc) will be made available to staff to facilitate the development and delivery of services through Irish.
- Continue to assess all courses, including Irish language courses and courses delivered through Irish, on a regular basis to ascertain how effectively they meet the Council's goals.
- Include language awareness as part of both Induction and Customer Service training courses so as to ensure that staff:
 - a. understand why the Council implements a bilingual policy;
 - b. understand the context and background to the policy; and
 - c. are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work
 - d. gain an empathetic understanding of the needs and concerns of Irish-speaking customers
- Leitrim County Council will also examine other mechanisms (eg award schemes) to encourage and promote the development of services through Irish by staff, and to recognise the endeavours of staff.

3.4 Information Systems

Leitrim County Council shall establish a generic e-mail address for queries in the Irish Language. Leitrim County Council will ensure that such queries are addressed as promptly as with English language queries.

The Council's intranet system will to be developed as a staff resource for the promotion of bilingualism: proper spelling of placenames, help on writing letters, phrases for receptionists, names of posts and services within Council, formal speeches etc.

The potential for expanding the use of translation software within the organisation will be examined.

Any new computer systems being installed will be fully capable of handling the Irish language, subject to availability.

The standard disclaimer on e-mail correspondence will be bilingual from the commencement of the Scheme .

The Council will ensure that the ability of all above mentioned computer packages to handle the Irish language will be raised in all initial contacts and subsequent dealings with consultants, companies etc. In this regard it should be noted that the Council similar to most other County **Council's** is dependant on the Local Government Computer Services Board for the provision of many of its systems and the Council will request that the Board should provide new systems which can handle the Irish language .

3.5 Application Forms

All application forms and associated information leaflets will be provided bilingually by 30.6.2008 (eighteen months from the commencement of the Scheme) . Forms may be in single bilingual format or in separate Irish and English versions within the one cover. These shall be available in all Council offices.

3.6 Website

All application forms are to be available to the public in Irish on our website by 30.6.08 (eighteen months from the commencement of the Scheme.) All publications required to be published in Irish in accordance with Section 10 of the Official Languages Act will also be made available on our website in Irish. Any new interactive services which allow the general public to make applications or receive benefits on line will be introduced simultaneously in both languages, subject to availability by the end of the Scheme. The content of our Website will be reviewed on an ongoing basis with a view to expanding its Irish Language content

3.7 Telephone Services

Receptionists /switchboards operators are the first points of contact with the public. At present this service is provided principally in English. Before 31.12.07 (twelve months from the commencement of this Scheme) receptionists/switchboard operators will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and suitable arrangements will be put in place so that they can put members of the public in touch without delay with whatever office or officer is responsible for providing the service required through Irish.

3.8 Public Meetings Policy

The Council conducts the majority of its public meetings in the English language. Training opportunities will be provided for Elected Members who wish to learn and use Irish. Anyone who wishes to speak in Irish at a public meeting will be facilitated.

3.9 The Media/Press Releases

Members of staff will be identified, where available, to carry out interviews with the Irish language media, particularly Raidio na Gaeltachta and TG4.

A list of such staff, including their contact details, will be provided to the Irish language media by 31.12.07 (within one year of the commencement of this Scheme). This list will be updated and provided on an ongoing basis.

Press releases relating to initiatives being taken to promote the Irish Language will be published in both English and Irish.

3.10 Brochure and Information Leaflets

It is our intention that all brochures and information leaflets providing information to the public shall be fully bilingual by the end of this Scheme. Documents of a technical nature will continue to be published in English only, except where there is a wider interest to the public, or local significance, in which case a bilingual version or a summary in the Irish language will be made available. (by end of Scheme)

3.11 Placenames

It is the Council's policy that new local authority estates are given names in Irish which reflect local history and culture. This policy will be continued under the Scheme. Developers of private estates will be requested to continue to use Irish place names which reflect the local heritage of the area in which developments are proposed. This is an objective of our current County Development Plan and has led to a significant number of private estates being named in Irish. The Council will continue to actively promote the use of Irish and local knowledge, culture and heritage in the selection of place names for new developments both public and private.

3.12 Promotional Measures

The following are some further proposals which the Council shall continue to provide and /or seek to develop over the life of the Scheme:

Participation in Seachtain na Gaeilge (e.g. events/exhibitions in library services)

Continuation of the promotion of the Glór na nGael award for local community groups which advances the use of Irish language services among the public.

Introduction and promotion of voluntary Fáinne Scheme among staff so that Irish-speaking staff are readily identifiable to the public and each other.

Chapter 4 Implementation, Monitoring and Revision

Once the Scheme has been approved, the County Manager will lead the preparation of a 3 year implementation plan. The implementation plan for each Directorate will identify and set key milestones against which progress will be benchmarked, by way of an annual progress report from each Directorate to the County Manager. Overall progress for the organisation will be made available to the public and the Elected Members via the Annual Report.

The Management Team will keep the effective operation of the Scheme under review, principally through the mechanisms outlined above.

Leitrim County Council will carry out an inventory of supply and demand for Irish language services across all its Services.

Leitrim County Council may initiate further development activities not covered in this Scheme.