

**KILKENNY COUNTY
AND BOROUGH
COUNCILS
JOINT IRISH LANGUAGE SCHEME
2013 – 2016**

Under Section 15 of the

Official Languages Act 2003

***Dúchas
agus
Dóchas***

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Foreword – An Ghaeilge Bheo

Irish is now a fully fledged European language. Its status is constitutionally defined as our first language in Section 8 of Bunreacht na hÉireann. The Irish language has statutory effect by virtue of the Official Languages Act 2003 and subsequent Regulations. At a more local level the language is in daily use as part of our educational curriculum. There have been advances in terms of Gaelscoileanna and Naíonraí. The language is alive.

With these firm foundations in mind Kilkenny Local Authorities are committed to the preservation of our National language. We continue to facilitate public demand in the transactions of business and daily life through the medium of Irish.

This scheme seeks to build on the provisions of its predecessor and reflects a firm foundation for further progress in terms of the Irish language. The supports and services which the Council provides enable ready access for customers to directions, guidance and information in a bilingual format. The Council is committed to the training of front line staff while support in terms of electronic media enables the process to meet demand with confidence and competence.

Joe Crockett,
County Manager.

Joint Foreword - Ag Obair Le Chéile

The Irish Language is the bedrock of our culture and heritage. It comes from the people, connects the people and evolves with the people. Historical events have conspired to erode and undermine the position of our native tongue in daily use, be it in the place of work or at home.

The Irish Constitution and Statute recognise the importance of the Irish Language. Our educational system has sustained the language over many generations. Knowledge of the language, the ability to speak and write it, allied to a willingness to use it, all exist in abundance.

Now we have an opportunity to reconnect all of these threads and do our part to recreate the rich tapestry that is our living language. This revised Irish Scheme represents a programme of action which Kilkenny Borough and County Councils have put in place to encourage the greater use of Irish. Where information is provided on an equal basis in both Irish and English, customers are more likely to exercise their choice in favour of Irish.

Many of the measures outlined in this Scheme are embedded in the structure, process and technology of our organisations. It is our intention that these facilities are put at the disposal of persons who contact us wishing to avail of our various services. These are readily accessible by our customers and are ready to use. From the perspective of front line verbal communication, our organisations are prepared to assist in the daily usage and growth of the Irish language.

From the perspective of the elected member, it is most welcome that we now have a direct role in this process. The existence of the Council's Irish Language Subcommittee gives us an opportunity to monitor, plan and develop Kilkenny's path to progress in the development of our native language.

We commit to supporting and sustaining all of the measures outlined in this Scheme. While the currency of the document extends over a three year period our vision extends far beyond this timeframe. The Twenty Year Strategy for the Irish Language commenced in 2010. Definite targets have been set. Kilkenny will play its part in achieving these goals.

Councillor Pat Dunphy and Councillor Martin Brett,
Cathaoirleach and Mayor of Kilkenny

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

Kilkenny County and Borough Councils are prominent public service bodies located in the Province of Leinster, in the South Eastern part of the island of Ireland. With a combined population of 95,419 (2011 census) these bodies are tasked with the delivery of a wide range of public services. There is a significant volume of customer interface. Requests for various forms of assistance, applications for schemes and funding, and customer comments flow inward while replies and other information emanates out into the public domain. The bodies are also charged with the assembly, co-relation and distribution of information in the form of various plans, policies, reports and briefing documents.

Other diverse services, such as the County Library Service, provide recreational and amenity opportunities, while the Council's Roads function performs roadway improvement and maintenance, part of which involves the installation and repair of route-way signage. We recognise that we must pursue the delivery of all of our customer services, entitlements and rights in a way that is wholly consistent with the constitutional position regarding the Irish Language, its primacy as the first language and the linguistic and cultural rights of all of our customers.

This particular scheme was prepared in accordance with Section 15 of the Official Languages Act. Section 15 provides for the review by a public body of a statutory scheme specifying the services it proposes to provide:

- through the medium of Irish,
- through the medium of English,
- through the medium of both Irish and English, and
- the measures the body proposes to adopt to ensure that any services that are not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided.

Kilkenny County and Borough Councils' first language scheme was confirmed on 10 August 2009 and has been actively implemented since then. This scheme builds on the Council's first scheme and complements the principles of Quality Customer Service and our Customer Charter.

Content of the Language Scheme

This scheme was drafted having regard to the contents of the statutory guidelines issued by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003.

This scheme is predicated on all of the commitments in any previous scheme being implemented. In the event of commitments in earlier schemes having not being fully implemented to date, this matter will be/or has been the subject of discussion with the Office of an Coimisinéir Teanga.

Responsibility for ensuring implementation of the scheme as well as monitoring and reviewing the scheme will rest with senior management within each section of Kilkenny County and Borough Councils.

Commencement Date of Scheme

This scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The scheme will commence with effect from **18 November 2013** and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Official Languages Act, whichever is later.

Chapter 2

Overview of Kilkenny County and Borough Councils

Kilkenny County and City Councils are the statutory authority for the provision of local services to the people of Kilkenny County and Borough. Our mission statement states as follows:

"Kilkenny Local Authorities aim to work in partnership with all of the people of Kilkenny and relevant agencies to deliver quality services and to promote sustainable economic, social and cultural development for current and future generations."

Kilkenny County and Borough Councils provide a multiplicity of services, which touch the lives of every citizen in the County and Borough. The principal functions and services are as follows:

- Housing management and provision
- Roads including traffic management and safety
- Water Services including sewerage
- Development Incentives and Control
- Environmental Protection and Education
- Recreation and Amenity including libraries, arts, parks and playgrounds
- Miscellaneous services.

The main functions and activities of the County and Borough Council are underpinned by a number of core corporate objectives that include:

"supporting the democratic process and the mandate of the Elected Representatives as well as recognising the need for a safe, healthy, and a supportive environment for staff".

Kilkenny Local Authorities subscribe to the following core values:-

- Participation and Equality.
- A high quality of service delivery.
- Ongoing service improvement (including value for money and use of indicators).
- High standards of conduct and probity.
- Openness and accountability.
- Mutual respect and support for Members, Staff and the general public
- An effective and caring focus on people.
- Ongoing development of Staff.

Customers and Clients

Kilkenny County and Borough Councils' customer base includes the residents of Kilkenny County and Borough, the business community and the thousands of visitors to the County and City on a daily basis. In addition the County and City Council has a working relationship with a variety of statutory and non-statutory groups.

Chapter 3

Services/Activities provided by Sections

Introduction

This Chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision/activities by individual Sections within the County and City Council and the official language regime operated in each case.

Section Profile of Kilkenny Local Authorities

Currently no department is capable of delivering its services comprehensively through the medium of Irish. English is the operating language across the following Council services listed as follows:

- Housing Provision and Management
- Roads and Traffic Management
- Water Services
- Planning
- Accounts payable and receivable
- Environment Regulation, Education and Enforcement
- The offices of Kilkenny Borough Council
- Library branches throughout the County
- The Arts Office
- All Area Offices
- Swimming Pool
- Fire Service
- Civil Defence
- Corporate Services and Information Systems

Departments operating with limited Irish Language capability.

In the following departments there is a number of front desk staff capable of providing a limited bilingual service to customers;

- County Hall
- County and City Library head-quarters

However, the provision of services is dependent on these individuals being present and available to do so in addition to their normal assigned duties. These staff have been extremely accommodating in the past and remain so in the present.

Ongoing training is provided to ensure that this service is maintained. The Council has implemented a training programme to enable contact persons to deal with enquiries in Irish with a view to extending this service to other departments.

The aim is to create and foster an atmosphere of bilingualism in the sections listed above so that Irish speaking customers feel welcome and are encouraged to do their business in Irish so that both customers and staff feel comfortable in conducting their business through the Irish language.

Chapter 4

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

The County and City Council currently publishes its statutory documents and other policy statements simultaneously in Irish and English in accordance with the provisions of section 10 of the Official Languages Act 2003. Public signage generally in the County and Borough and at Council offices is also bilingual. The Council's website navigational interface is available in both Irish and English. The home-page illustrates this. The main static content is provided in both Irish and English.

The Council has the capacity to communicate through Irish where requested by a member of the public. Nominated persons have been assigned facilitator roles in order to ensure competent referral and responses to customer requirements through Irish.

Customer Numbers

In order to properly assess the extent and nature of demand and to assess the extent of the specific client base, Kilkenny Local Authorities has undertaken to log all communications and representations made through the medium of the Irish Language. This is done as part of the Customer Service function and a register of callers and visitors requesting services through Irish is retained as part of the overall Corporate Services Brief. Details of other electronic communiqués and written requests are entered in the same log.

Provision of General Council Services/Activities Methodology and Research Undertaken

In the preparation of this Scheme, Kilkenny County and Borough Councils undertook a consultation process, which involved:

- seeking submissions from the public on the preparation of a draft scheme
- seeking submissions from senior staff

Means of Communication with the Public

The Council uses the following methods to communicate with the public

- Brochures & Information Leaflets
- Application Forms
- Publications
- Press releases
- A fortnightly page in one of the local newspapers
- Website
- Public Advertisement
- The local radio

Written Documentation

The following policies in relation to the various categories of written documentation produced by Kilkenny County and Borough Councils shall be kept in place during the lifetime of this scheme;

(i) Brochures, Information Leaflets & Application Forms

All new public Application Forms and associated documentation produced by the County and City Council are available in Irish and English from the beginning of the scheme.

New brochures and information leaflets are made available in both Irish and English either electronically or by way of hard copy.

The Council has made available all existing public application forms in both Irish and English. Brochures and information leaflets are made available in both Irish and English either electronically or by way of hard copy. Both official languages will be treated equally to ensure that the same quality of customer service is provided in both languages.

The Council will ensure that the above documents are made available bilingually within the same cover except where it is not feasible because of the nature, size or layout of the material.

(ii) Publications

Kilkenny Local Authorities are committed to ensuring that during the lifetime of the scheme, policy documents approved by Council for publication are made available in Irish and English within the same cover except where it is not feasible because of the nature, size or layout of the material.

(iii) Press releases

One in ten press releases and advertisements are currently published bilingually.

(iv) Website

Subject to the provisions of the last scheme, Kilkenny Local Authorities have ensured the availability of bilingual internet access to all static content. The Council's website interface continues to be available in both official languages. A dedicated e-mail gaeilge@kilkennycoco.ie address has been established for persons wishing to communicate directly in Irish with Kilkenny Local Authorities.

Gaeilge Log is an intranet based means of recording and tracking all communications, inbound and outbound, in Irish.

Is Féidir Linn is an intranet based phrasebook and learning resource which supports staff in their efforts to deliver an effective Irish Language service.

Oral Communication

Staff on the customer services desk / switchboard operators are the first points of contact with the public. Further to the commitments given in the last scheme front desk / switchboard staff are;

- able to greet the public and give the name of the Local Authority in Irish;
- are capable of referring customers to the desired section or location;
- are capable of directing customers without delay , to the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

High profile public events and regular meetings of the Councils routinely incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings as part of the Council's efforts to positively promote Irish in the community.

Chapter 5

Further Initiatives Improving Irish Language Capabilities

Ciorcal Comhrá

In recognition of its role as a facilitator for Staff and the Public and in promotion of greater use of the Irish language, Kilkenny Local Authorities have established a Ciorcal Comhrá. This measure extends the opportunity for employees to expand their level of knowledge and use of Irish as a spoken language. The Ciorcal operates on a regular weekly basis, in order to broaden the learning opportunity and enable a community wide measure. The meetings are hosted by Kilkenny County Libraries at Loughboy Library and all are welcome. A second venue has been provided at the Council's new Ferrybank Library in the south of the County. The venues offer the participants access to the Irish Language Resource offered by our Library Service.

Participants reflect a broad spectrum of interest groups, initially invited from amongst the library's general customer base, parent groups drawn from local schools and respondents to advertisements regarding the initiative. The meetings currently take place during normal working hours when all Staff-members are free to attend, in order to initially foster an increased Irish language awareness and capability within this group.

Training and Development

The Training Department provides support to Staff and Elected Members, in order to obtain Irish Language tuition. This support takes the form of securing placements on convenient training courses run within the region, running internal training and awareness sessions and providing full financial support for trainees undertaking approved training to upgrade their Irish Language capacity, in pursuit of the Council's goals and in order to serve the Public better. The County Library Service provides a significant Irish Language learning and readership resource accessible by Staff, Elected Members and the Public.

Signage

Kilkenny Local Authorities recognise the importance of appropriate and accurate portrayal of placenames and directions bilingually. This initiative has a dual aspect as it has both an internal and external perspective.

In general, signage has been designed to comply with the legislative requirements.

Externally, there is a renewed focus on the correct implementation of provisions regarding placenames as outlined in the Placenames Order and the correct representation of such placenames in terms of spelling and appropriate text format. It is intended that the initiative will place the Irish language in an appropriate context where a placename reflects location and is clearly understood to derive from both the history and geography of County Kilkenny. The provision in the County Development Plan that due consideration be given to the naming of new estates in Irish is a further extension of this initiative.

Irish Language Subcommittee of the Council

The Irish Language Sub-Committee of the Council has been reconstituted. The Committee consists of three Elected Representatives and meets on a quarterly basis. The purpose is to lend a dynamic perspective to Irish Language provisions within Kilkenny Local Authorities. It is understood that the goal of being able to meet the requirements of the Public, through the medium of the Irish language, must be underpinned by a concerted and directed drive from within local democracy itself as led by our Elected Members. This measure supports the other revised measures and draws on these as a means of reinvigorating Irish as an integral part of the culture of the County of Kilkenny. Approval of new placenames will be a function of this Sub-Committee. Local monitoring of signage and local promotion of the use of Irish will feature on the agenda of the Committee, as will ongoing review of implementation of this Scheme.

Recruitment and Selection of Staff

Kilkenny Local Authorities in the pursuit of the growth, development and sustainability of an enhanced capacity to deal with Customers through Irish has undertaken to include an Irish language component within the personnel interview process during the staff selection exercise. Our recruitment policy, which is subject to the framework of national agreed recruitment procedure, will contribute to the employment of persons with a quantifiable basic capacity in the language. It will also serve to provide a solution to ensuring a viable basis for customer response in Irish, while serving to foster the language.

Translations

Kilkenny Local Authorities currently engage the services of Accredited Translation services. This ensures the highest standards in translation and guarantees adherence to acceptable and pre-set norms in the use of the Irish language. The quality of the Organisation / Customer interface is therefore guaranteed.

Printed Materials

An upgrade of text, font and format has been undertaken by Kilkenny Local Authorities across its range of headed paper and compliments slips. This brings the materials in question up to date and within the ambit of legislative compliance in terms of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

Chapter 6

Monitoring, Revision & Publicising of Agreed Scheme

Monitoring & Revision

The Corporate Services Department regularly reviews the operation of the scheme. This takes place on a quarterly basis in order to ensure that implementation of policy and initiatives as outlined in this Scheme are maintained and progress is sustained. These reviews are put on the agenda of the Council's Irish Language subcommittee. Outcomes are referred to the Council's Senior Management Team for information and action where required.

Line managers in each of the departments will be responsible for the day to day operation of the scheme. Details of progress in regard to implementation will be published in the Council's Annual Report.

Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The public are able to view the scheme on the Council's website and at its offices. It is circulated to statutory and non-statutory groups working in the County and City. The existence and availability of the scheme is publicised on the Local Authorities page in the Kilkenny People. Staff of Kilkenny County and Borough Councils are made aware of the scheme through an enclosure with the wages/salaries and on the intranet.

In addition, we will take every opportunity in our day to day interaction with customers to promote and publicise the services we provide in Irish through the following means:

- directly informing customers on a pro-active basis of the option of dealing with us through Irish, for example by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available;
- prominently listing these services on our website;
- signifying on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms that these documents are also available in Irish, unless presented bilingually;
- giving equal prominence to Irish and English language materials.

The English language version of this scheme is the original version.

A copy of this scheme will be forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.