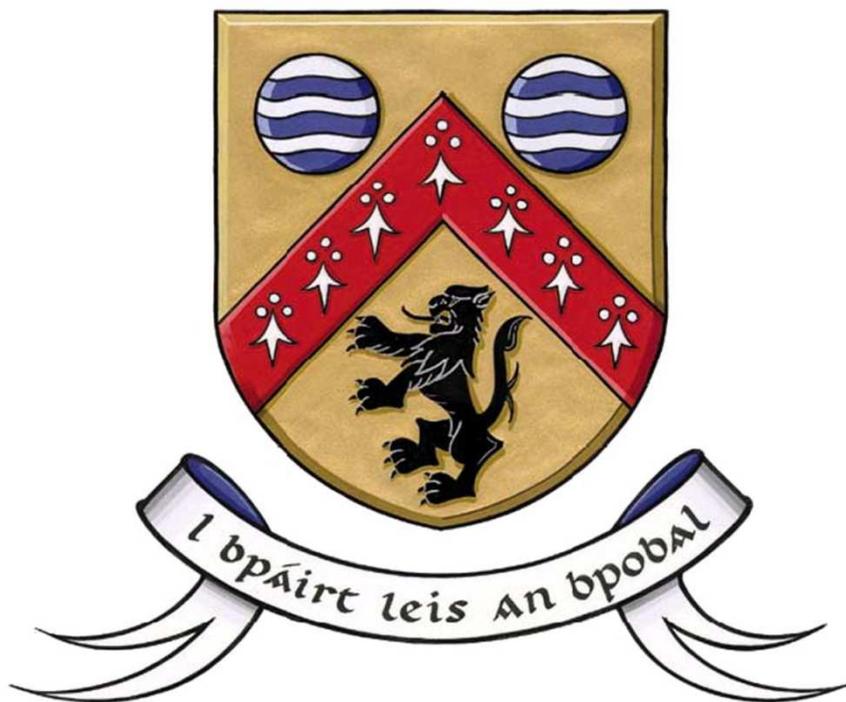


ÚDARÁIS ÁITIÚLA CHONTAE LAOISE

LAOIS LOCAL AUTHORITIES



**SCÉIM NA GAEILGE
2009- 2012**

**IRISH LANGUAGE SCHEME
2009 - 2012**

*Nollaig, 2009.
December, 2009.*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Background

For the purposes of this Scheme, Laois Local Authorities comprise, Laois County Council, Portlaoise Town Council and Mountmellick Town Council.

Laois Local Authorities have prepared an Irish Language Scheme in accordance with Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 and associated Guidelines issued by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A notice of intention to prepare a Scheme in accordance with Section 13 (1) (a) of the Act was published in local newspapers, and on www.laoiscoco.ie on the 14th March 2007.

Laois Local Authorities recognise that our customers have the right to choose to do business with us in their preferred language and they will be facilitated in their dealings with us as far as practicable, whether that is through Irish or through English. One of the main objectives of this Language Scheme is to ensure that higher standards of public services are available through the Irish Language as the national language and the first official language of the Country.

This Scheme includes a brief overview of the services provided by Laois Local Authorities and the level of services already available through Irish, English and bilingually.

There are certain services to which each customer is entitled to in accordance with the directly-applicable provisions of the Official Languages Act 2003, i.e. response to correspondence in Irish through Irish, publications available in Irish, i.e. the Annual Report.

These rights are protected in the above mentioned Act, and are not repeated in this Scheme. The Scheme sets out to improve other services in Irish, and the above are legally required of the Council irrespective of this Scheme.

Commencement Date of Scheme

The Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It will commence with effect from 1st December, 2009 and it shall remain in force for a period of three years from that date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Official Languages Act, whichever is earlier.

Overview of Laois

County Laois is 1,719 km² in area and the population of the county according to the last census is 67,059. The three principle units of local government within the county are:

Laois County Council
Portlaoise Town Council -

25 Elected Members
9 Elected Members

Corporate Strategy

The Corporate Strategy is set out in the Corporate Plan 2004-2009.

Mission Statement

"We will provide leadership, develop, promote, protect and regulate our County and deliver quality public services so as to enhance the quality of life for the community"

Core Values

Our core values are derived from the principles of good local government and are at the heart of all our activities. They underpin our mandate to provide leadership and an efficient, cost effective service to our customers. The following core values are of relevance to the promotion of the Irish language by Laois County Council:

- **Democratic Mandate/Accountability**

The Council is committed to conducting all its activities in the context of its democratic mandate in an impartial, transparent and accountable manner subject to legal, ethical and statutory requirements.

- **Community Participation/Local Democracy**

The Council is committed to promoting, fostering strong, effective, participative democracy through genuine public consultation and information dissemination in relation to all its decision making processes and through effective interaction with Laois Community Forum.

- **Customer Service**

The Council will continue to focus on the provision of a high quality, cost effective, inclusive and user-friendly service which will be responsive and accessible to the needs of our customers and citizens.

- **Social Inclusion**

The Council is committed to promoting social inclusion and quality of life for all its citizens and to delivering its services in a manner which has regard to the specific needs of those experiencing disadvantage or social exclusion.

- **Equality and respect for diversity**

The Council values equality and is committed to securing it, both as an employer and service provider. The Council respects diversity and will value and respect the different cultures and traditions of all who reside in County Laois.

Principal Points of Customer Contact

The primary service points for Laois Local Authorities are at Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise and the Area Offices in Portlaoise, Borris-in-Ossory, Stradbally, Portarlinton, Graiguecullen and Mountmellick. There is also a network of libraries around the County which have extensive customer contact. The staff based at Council depots also has contact with our customers.

The Council also interacts with a wide range of Government Departments, State Agencies, Social Partners, Local Development Organisations, Business and Community Groups, Residents Associations, etc. Extensive and growing use is made of the Internet in the Council's dealings with its customers. This will be an important medium in terms of our future promotion of the Irish Language in Laois.

Research Undertaken

In the preparation of this Scheme, a consultation process was undertaken, which involved:

1. Seeking submissions from the public on the preparation of a Scheme. No submission was received.
2. An internal audit of forms, leaflets, brochures, etc. available in Irish, English or bilingually from each department.
3. An internal survey of the staff of Laois Local Authorities on their proficiency in Irish and willingness to deal with customers through Irish.
4. Corporate Affairs Staff attended a seminar on the preparation of an Irish Language Scheme. The speakers at this seminar addressed different elements of the Language Scheme and included a representative from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, An Coimisinéir Teanga and the Irish language officer of a local authority which had already gone through the process of agreeing a scheme.

CHAPTER 2

Summary of Services provided by Council Departments and levels of Irish language proficiency

Introduction

This Chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision by individual departments within Laois Local Authorities and the level of Irish proficiency in each of these.

Currently, no department of the Council is capable of delivering its service comprehensively through the medium of Irish and English.

There is a minimum level of competence in the following departments to transact business through Irish:

Libraries	Corporate Affairs	Planning
Arts Section	Housing	Water Services

The availability of the service depends on individuals being present to provide this service.

Initiatives currently in place in Laois Local Authorities

- In our Corporate Plan 2004-2009, it is the Council's policy under Customer Services and Reception to "Promote the use of Irish Language".
- Our Customer Complaints Charter is widely displayed in both Irish and English.
- Our Arts Plan 2006-2011 has as an objective "To support as appropriate the use of Irish and the Irish language through all Art forms".
- There is a strong commitment to the support of the Irish language in our Library service. Irish language book stock continues to be maintained and was recently enhanced following the allocation of a one-off grant, to expand same. Our five-year Library Plan is available bilingually. *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is also actively supported each year by *Scéalaíocht* and Irish poetry readings in our local libraries. *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is also supported by the Arts and Corporate Affairs Departments.
- There is a bilingual element to our Civic Receptions and citations. All major corporate publications, e.g., Annual Report, are published bilingually.
- Our stationery, including notepaper, compliment slips, etc are bilingual.
- The Notice of Meeting is circulated to our elected members in Irish and English.
- A number of our application forms for services are bilingual.
- Involvement in *Dáil na nÓg* nationally, which conducts its business through Irish and English.
- All Council job application forms are produced bilingually.

CHAPTER 3

Commitments made under the Laois Local Authorities Irish Language Scheme

An implementation team will be established which will be representative of the functional areas of the Council. An implementation plan will be developed by the team together with a schedule of the actions necessary to realise the commitments contained in the Scheme.

1. Written Documentation

1. By the end of this Scheme (3 years), all new application forms and associated leaflets produced by the Laois Local Authorities will be available in both Irish and English, with the capability of being downloaded from our website. Existing application forms and associated leaflets will, when updated, be available bilingually.
2. All the above bilingual application forms and leaflets will be made available within the one cover except where this is not practicable due to the size and nature of the document. In such cases, separate Irish and English language versions will be provided. Documents of a technical nature will continue to be published in English only.
3. The following future major policy documents will be available on the web in both Irish and English and on CD-ROM
 - a. The Annual Report
 - b. The Corporate Plan
4. By end of 2009, all Dog Licence Renewal Notices will be bilingual.
5. By the end of this Scheme, all correspondence will contain an opening salutation and closing remarks in Irish.
6. From the commencement of the Scheme all future press releases and statements to the media, which relate to the Irish language, will be bilingual. At least two bilingual press releases / statements/advertisements in relation to other matters will be issued per annum by Laois Local Authorities.

2. Information Technology

1. From the commencement of this Scheme, a bilingual e-mail disclaimer will be inserted at the end of each email. A generic e-mail address will be established to which queries relating to the Irish language can be sent.
2. Laois County Council has responsibility for the www.laois.ie website which contains information in relation to both Portlaoise and Mountmellick Town Councils. By end of this Scheme (3 years), all static content on the home page of the website will be available bilingually. In addition, all static content on the home pages of the Planning, Housing, Roads, Environment & Water, Leisure &

- Culture, Community & Living, Business and Your Council sections of the website will be available bilingually.
3. Additional pages of the Your Council section of the website, including the Consultation & Feedback section, will be available bilingually by the end of this Scheme (3 years).
 4. In the event that any new website is introduced by the Laois Local Authorities during the course of the Scheme, it is agreed that the new site will be partly bilingual.
 5. Laois Local Authorities, similar to most other local authorities, are dependent on the *Local Government Computer Services Board* for the provision of many of its systems. We will request the Board to provide new systems that can cater for the Irish language. In addition, the Council will also request the Board to ensure that where upgrades are proposed for any existing computer system, that it will be ensured that the revised system will cater for the Irish language.
 6. Any new interactive service, which allows the general public to make applications or receive benefits on-line, introduced during the life of this Scheme, will be introduced simultaneously in both languages.
 - a. Existing interactive services will be upgraded as soon as resources and pressures on other work allow. At least one existing interactive service i.e. "Contact Us" page will be upgraded to bilingual status within the next 3 years.
 - b. An Irish Language section of the Intranet will be established as a support and resource for staff. The possibility of use of electronic Irish dictionaries within the organisation will be examined by the Implementation Team.

3. Communications

1. All headers and footers on our advertising to be in Irish.
2. Reception is the first point of contact with the public. In keeping with the high standard of customer service offered to the public by Laois Local Authorities, the following commitments will be in place after one year from the commencement of this Scheme:
 - Reception and switchboard staff will greet our phone customers in Irish, also giving the name of the organisation in Irish.
 - They will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish,
 - Suitable arrangements will be in place whereby a member of the public can be put in touch, without delay, with a staff member who will communicate with the customer through Irish. If the query cannot be dealt with immediately by that staff member, it will be referred to the relevant office for follow-up call/meeting.
3. The opening prayer and greeting at our Town Council and County Council Meetings will be in Irish.
4. Elected members who wish to speak in Irish at Council Meetings will be encouraged to do so.

5. By the end of the Scheme, the greeting and opening address at all Council public events and official openings will contain an element of Irish. Anyone wishing to speak in Irish at such events or public meetings will be facilitated.
6. The opening address at all future Comhairle na nÓg Meetings will contain an element of Irish.
7. All future Council initiated youth programme award ceremonies will have a welcoming address in Irish and English.
8. We will investigate the possibility of the recruitment of a full time Irish Officer in Laois County Council.
9. By the end of the Scheme, following training and the allocation of resources our Library Services in Mountrath, Portarlinton, Portlaoise, Timahoe and the Local Studies Section will be in a position to provide a one-to-one counter service through Irish, as required.
10. The 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. With their consent, staff will be identified for our customers on our website.

4 Training and Development

- Council staff and elected members will be generally encouraged and offered training to improve their skills, leading to increased usage of Irish throughout the organisation subject to the necessary resources being available.
- Irish language awareness will be included as part of both Induction and Customer Service training.
- The Council will continue to support the Gaeltacht Scholarship, facilitated by Gaeleagras, to improve Irish language conversational skills subject to the necessary resources being available.
- Local tutoring of officials and/or members who wish to improve their conversational Irish speaking at public events will be facilitated.
- Irish language phrases will be used in the Council's staff newsletter "*Imeachtaí*" and it is anticipated that the Implementation Team will update staff on progress by way of regular articles etc.

5 Placenames

- In conjunction with objectives of the Laois Heritage Plan and during its period 2007 - 2011, bilingual nameplates will be erected at a selection of Townland boundaries, to raise awareness of traditional names subject to the necessary funding being available.
- The Laois County Council Placenames Committee, in considering proposals for naming developments, e.g., housing estates, streets, shopping centres, etc will promote the use of the Irish language, culture and heritage.

CHAPTER 4

Publicising, Implementing and Reviewing the Scheme

Publicising the Scheme

The Scheme will be advertised by means of:

- Press release
- The Council's website and intranet
- Circulation to appropriate agencies, public bodies and individuals who express an interest in same.

A copy of the Scheme will be forwarded to An Coimisinéir Teanga.

Implementing and Reviewing the Scheme

Laois Local Authorities will prepare an implementation plan for the life of the Scheme and review progress annually. The Council's Management Team will be advised of progress on a quarterly basis and our Annual Report will also contain details of the year's performance. A progress report will also be submitted to our Council on an annual basis.

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