

Local Government Management Agency

**Language Scheme 2014 - 2017
Under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003**

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1 CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction & Background

In February 2014, the Chief Executive of The Local Government Management Agency (“the Agency”) was requested to prepare a scheme by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (“the Act”). Section 11 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 Irish and English

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.

1.2 Consultation Process

The Agency published a bilingual notice under Section 13 of the Act on 21st May 2014 in the Irish Independent , inviting representations in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme under Section 11 from any interested parties.

In accordance with the Guidelines issued by the Dept. of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under Section 12 of the Act, the Agency carried out a consultation process with our customers, who are those who are directly or indirectly recipients of our services. The Agency has no direct interaction with the public as, in the main, it is a service provider to Local Authorities and Government agencies. Its customers are therefore other public bodies. The Agency invited the Heads of Information Systems and the Irish Language Officers in Local Authorities to make submissions on behalf of their Local Authority, for consideration by the Agency in the preparation of the draft scheme. A meeting was also held with Heads of Information systems.

An internal staff survey was also carried out to ascertain the level of competency in the Irish language in the Agency

1.3 Content of the Language Scheme

Personnel from each functional area of the Agency have assisted in drafting the scheme.

Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the scheme will rest with the senior management within the Agency. 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 this Agency are identified in the body of the scheme. The scheme also includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish by its customers and to ensure that the Agency continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way. The Agency will continue to gauge the level of demand for its services in the Irish language.

1.4 Commencement Date of the Language Scheme

This scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The scheme is commenced with effect from 7th July 2014 and will 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 Act, whichever is the earlier.

2 Overview of the Local Government Management Agency

2.1 Introduction

The LGMA is an agency under the aegis of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG). The Minister appoints four (4) members of the LGMA board with the balance of eight (8) members being nominated by the Council of the Agency.

The LGMA is a national shared service and centre of excellence providing, procuring and coordinating a range of products and service supports, required by the local government sector, which are most appropriately and efficiently co-ordinated and at times delivered at national level. The focus of the Agency is to ensure that the local government sector can deliver a range of services on an effective and efficient basis and to the overall benefit of the public.

This shared services approach has delivered benefits to the sector for more than thirty years. The benefits include significant cost savings and improved quality of service through the adoption of international best practice, and effectiveness through the adoption of local, regional or national approaches as appropriate to ensure that citizen's needs are met optimally.

2.2 Customers & Clients

Local Government in Ireland consists of 34 counties/cities with an overall total of 114 independent organisations, operating within a legal framework defined primarily by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The technology and infrastructure within the sector where LGMA operates has changed hugely in the last 35 years.

The external forces of the broader e-Government agenda both in Ireland and at EU level are pushing change at an unprecedented rate. This new era challenges us to rethink how a substantially improved public sector can positively enhance all our lives. This includes service delivery to citizens and business, efficiency and effectiveness measures in the use of public resources, and participation by citizens in the democratic process of government to ensure their inclusion and empowerment.

Continuing implementation of LGMA's Strategic Plan will depend on the unique partnership between LGMA and Local Authorities on all aspects of strategies building on the in-depth and shared understanding which ensures that LGMA remains fully aware and focused on issues of strategic importance to Local Authorities.

2.3 Agency Structure

The organisation is structured along the lines of a set of interlocking and complementary elements, divided into five broad areas of strategic activity:

- *Assist Local Authorities in the set-up an establishment of defined shared services for the Sector*
- *Provide Leadership, support and advice in HR Strategy & Policy, training and development, health & safety, change management, child safeguarding, equality, workplace partnership and libraries development*
- *Provide support and advice in national HR negotiations, professional representation and advisory services*
- *Provide ICT consultancy in the programme group lines of business and corporate services of local authorities, the infrastructure and applications support required and Research & Development activities to sustain the sector's services.*
- *The Office of Local Authority Management (OLAM) to co-ordinate between central, local government and other third parties and to represent the LA sector in a wide variety of policy areas that impact on local authorities.*

2.4 Functions of the Agency

The LGMA is a national centre of excellence providing, procuring and co-ordinating a range of service supports required in the local government sector to help them develop appropriate strategies to underpin their business needs and implement appropriate solutions. The main functions of LGMA are:

- Provision and co-ordination of best solutions to meet local authority needs in information and communications technologies
- Provision of management services, human resources and industrial relations support and advice;
- Through the Office for Local Authority Management (OLAM), represent management in local authorities and provide an advisory, research and policy support service to the County and City Managers' Association (CCMA).

2.5 *Assessment of extent to which services are already available through Irish*

The LGMA, given the nature of its functions and work, does not have a high level of direct contact with, or provide schemes and services, directly or indirectly, to individual members of the general public.

It does however provide schemes and services to local authorities. These schemes and systems may be public facing but it is the local authority which is responsible for providing the service, either directly or indirectly, to individual members of the general public. Some of the public facing systems currently supported and maintained by the LGMA are available through Irish.

Services are provided by the Agency primarily through English except for the documents published in both Irish and English under Section 10 of the Act. Documents such as Annual Report, Financial Accounts and Strategy Documents are published in both Irish and English.

2.6 *Documentation/services not available through Irish*

Because of the nature of the Agency, a large proportion of documentation produced is outside the scope of a scheme under the Official Languages Act. This is because documentation is for internal purposes or is of technical services nature and not made available to the general public or classes of the general public. As such, these documents will continue to be available in English only.

Documents of a specialist or technical nature produced by the Agency not designed for the general public include requests for tender documentation and technical instruction manuals. It also includes details of internal documents prepared by the Agency.

3 Enhancement of Services to be Provided Bilingually

3.1 Correspondence

Action	Timescale
3.1.1 The Agency will initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer to correspond in Irish. Staff will be instructed to maintain a record of such persons with a view to fulfilling this commitment.	ongoing

3.2 Website and E-Mail

Action	Timescale
3.2.1 The Board's website will be navigable in both the Irish and English Language. An Irish version of all static content of the website will be provided.	When the existing website is being significantly upgraded or within the lifetime of this scheme whichever is the earliest
3.2.2 The Agency will provide bilingual standard headings and disclaimers on the Agency's email system	By end of 2014

3.3 Publications

Action	Timescale
3.3.1 In addition to documents coming within the scope of section 10 of the Act, the Customer Service Action Plan will be published bilingually. All Agency bilingual publications will be within the same cover in accordance with best practice.	Ongoing
3.3.2 Where a publication is to be produced bilingually, it will be assumed that the document is not ready for publication unless both language versions are available.	Ongoing
3.3.3 The Agency will establish a planned structure for the translation needs of the Agency including the use of external translators.	By end of 2014
3.3.4 Any press releases, information leaflets and brochures (aimed at ordinary members of the public) issued by the Agency will be issued in both English and Irish simultaneously.	Within the lifetime of this scheme.

3.4 IT Systems

Action	Timescale
<p>3.4.1 Provision of functions in Irish will be facilitated at the request of local authorities and other customers, when major upgrades to public facing systems, including interactive systems, are being implemented subject to compatibility issues. As some systems are very complex relational systems developed in-house over many years, and retro-fitting is difficult, costly and resource-intensive, impact analyses will be required for each upgrade.</p>	<p>Within lifetime of scheme</p>
<p>3.4.2 The Agency will facilitate local authorities and other customers who require that any new public facing systems, including interactive systems, developed by the Agency will allow for any public facing communications (such as letter, application forms, etc.) to be made available from the system in both Irish and English.</p>	<p>Within lifetime of scheme</p>
<p>3.4.3 The Agency will facilitate local authorities and other customers who require that new public facing systems developed by the Agency will be bilingual.</p>	<p>Within lifetime of scheme</p>
<p>3.4.4 The Agency will ensure that any new public facing systems procured from 3rd parties will be specified as bilingual as requested by our customers where it is available and within timescales for delivery of the systems.</p>	<p>Within lifetime of scheme</p>
<p>3.4.5 The Agency will ensure that all new PCs and printers purchased will be fully capable of handling the Irish language</p>	<p>By end of 2014</p>

3.5 Telephones

Action	Timescale
3.5.1 At present, switchboard services are through English only. The LGMA will ensure within the lifetime of the Scheme, that switchboard staff operating the switchboard will answer with the name of the LGMA in Irish and English; that they are familiar with the basic greetings in Irish, and that arrangements will be in place to transfer callers to the appropriate service through Irish. We will continue to up skill switchboard staff over a number of schemes.	During the lifetime of the scheme.
3.5.2 Staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the public.	By end of 2014

3.6 Recruitment and Staffing

Action	Timescale
3.6.1 Where bilingual communication skills through the medium of Irish and English are considered essential or desirable for any post, this will be specified in the job specification	By end of 2014
3.6.2 All new members of staff will be given an introduction to the Irish Language Scheme and its implications for the way they execute their job as part of their induction training.	By end Q1 2014
3.6.3 Publicity will be given to the fact, that in accordance with equal opportunities practice, Irish-speakers, those who are able to communicate bilingually and English-speakers, are welcome to join the workforce.	By end of 2014
3.6.4 Access to Irish language classes will be made available to all staff	By end of 2014
3.6.5 Consideration will be given to identifying existing staff or recruiting new staff who are willing and able to work on the technical aspects of bilingual system development	By end of 2014

3.7 Implementation

Action	Timescale
3.7.1 To facilitate the development of any new services or systems through the Irish language, the LGMA will set up a working group to examine the issues which will arise during the development or upgrade of any system to include bilingual functionality.	By end of 2014
3.7.2 The function of the working group will be to agree and make available to staff and customers a set of standards to be applied in the development of bilingual functionality.	By end of 2014
3.7.3 The LGMA will assign responsibility to a manager to oversee the implementation of the commitments given in this draft scheme.	Ongoing
3.7.4 The LGMA will include reference to Official Languages Act in any new strategy documents.	Ongoing

4 Monitoring & Review

4.1 Responsibility

This Scheme has the full approval of the Agency's Senior Management Team. The Agency's Board Secretary will be responsible for the overall implementation, monitoring and review of this Scheme. Managers will be responsible for implementing the Scheme within their own Sections and for reporting progress on implementation at least annually. Each Manager will be required to - include in their annual action plans, details of the actions required to ensure implementation of the requirements of this Scheme, together with target dates which correspond to the target dates set out in this Scheme.

The day to day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the sections who are responsible for the implementation of the scheme within their own areas.

Information will be collected annually on:

- Description of materials published in whole or in part in Irish.
- Achievements against the timetable in the scheme.
- The incidence and nature of any complaints and suggestions relating to the provision of services in Irish by the Department.

A report of the measures implemented under the Scheme will be included in the Agency's Annual Report.

4.2 Improving the Agency's Irish language capability

The Agency is committed to building on the existing levels of knowledge and competency in relation to Irish language skills currently available within the Agency. In order to ascertain the level of expertise in Irish among staff a survey has been carried out of staff asking them to rate their ability to write, read and speak Irish. While a large response to the survey was received, it clearly indicated that the existing level of competence to deal with administrative and technical issues through Irish is rather limited.

There will be a need for significant effort over a long number of years to raise the level of knowledge and competency in relation to the Irish language. The principal mechanism to deepen the capacity of the Agency to transact more of its business through the medium of Irish is the training and development of the Agency's staff.

In this context, and as part of an ongoing commitment to provide appropriate training and development for staff to meet the evolving needs of the Agency's customers and to develop the potential of staff, it is planned to take the following steps throughout the duration of the current scheme:

- The Agency will facilitate staff, who wish to attend Irish language classes

- Advice will be provided to staff in relation to the range of high-quality Irish language classes available outside office hours (i.e. third-level Diploma in Irish) and financial support will be provided to staff pursuing such courses under the Educational Assistance Programme.

With a view to improving both the level and standard of its services provided bilingually to the public the Agency will implement the following general and specific measures by the end of this scheme:

4.2.1 Receptionist/switchboard operators, who are the first points of contact with the public, will be offered training to enable them to be able to provide the name of the Agency in Irish and English and to be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.	On-Going
4.2.2 Staff who are willing to deal with telephone queries in Irish will be identified by a 'G' on phone lists provided to receptionist and switchboard operators.	By end of 2014
4.2.3 The Agency will include language awareness as part of both induction and Customer Service training courses so as to ensure that staff understand why the Agency is aiming to increase the level of services provided bilingually, the context and background to the policy and how the policy will affect their work.	On-going
4.2.4 LGMA will examine the potential for staff to have easy access to information and language resources, e.g. dictionaries, both hard copies and in electronic format, advice on written Irish and lists of common phrases in usage.	Within lifetime of scheme

4.3 Publicising Agreed Scheme

Staff are aware of the Agency's requirement to prepare this scheme under the Official Languages Act. Detailed guidance and instructions will be made available to those who may need to implement Irish Language measures. Staff will be made aware of their responsibilities under the scheme through a variety of means. This scheme will be publicised both internally and externally, through a press release initially. A bilingual version of the scheme will be made available on our website and circulated to all staff and appropriate agencies. Other means to publicise the scheme may also be used, for example:

- **Official Launch**
- **Advertising of provisions**

A copy of the agreed scheme will be forwarded to Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga.

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