

Údaráis Áitiúla an Longfoirt LONGFORD LOCAL AUTHORITIES



IRISH LANGUAGE Scheme

2008-2011

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CONTENTS

	TITLE	PAGE
1	Background	3
1.1	Introduction	3
1.2	Preparation of the Scheme	3
1.3	Commencement Date of Scheme	4
1.4	Overview of Longford Local Authorities	4
1.5	Customer Care Plan	5
1.6	Operating Environment of Longford Local Authorities	5
1.7	Functional Areas/Directorates of Longford Local Authorities	6
1.8	Location of Local Authority Offices/Membership of Councils	6
1.9	Principal Means of Communication with the Public	6
1.10	Assessment of Level of Services currently available through Irish	7
1.11	Research Undertaken	7
2	Summary of Services Provided by Longford Local Authorities	8
3	Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually	10
3.1	General Policy	10
3.2	Competency Audit	10
3.3	Customer Survey	10
3.4	Written Communication	10
3.5	Information and Communications Technology	11
3.6	Training and Development	11
3.7	Customer Service Employees and Oral Communication	12
3.8	Information Leaflets and Application Forms	12
3.9	Public Meetings Policy	12
3.10	Street and Estate Names	13
4	Implementation, Monitoring and Review	13

Údaráís Áitiúla Longfoirt

Longford Local Authorities

Irish Language Scheme prepared under Section II of the Official Language Act, 2003.

Chapter 1 – Background

1.1 Introduction

Longford Local Authorities have prepared a Language Scheme in accordance with the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

The Official Languages Act, 2003 is the first piece of legislation to provide a statutory framework for the delivery of public services through the Irish language.

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

1.2 Preparation of the Scheme

The Official Languages Act provides for the preparation of a statutory Scheme by public bodies detailing the services they will provide:

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

This Scheme was prepared in accordance with the guidelines contained in Section 12 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 issued by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Longford Local Authorities published notice in March 2007 of its intention to prepare a Draft Scheme under Section 13 (1) (a) of the Official Languages Act in local newspapers circulating in the Area. No submissions were received in response to the advertisement.

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 brief overview of Longford Local Authorities and the services they provide. In addition, the Scheme outlines the level of services already available through English, Irish and bilingually. It includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that the Local Authorities meet identified demands in a planned way. The level of demand for services through Irish will be monitored by the Local Authority Customer Services Department.

1.3 Commencement Date of Scheme

This Scheme has been approved by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The Scheme will be commenced on the 1st July 2008 and will 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 Overview of Longford Local Authorities

For the purpose of this Scheme any reference to Longford Local Authorities shall be deemed to be a reference to Longford County Council, Longford Town Council and Granard Town Council.

The principles of good practice and delivery of modern local services as enunciated in the Scheme apply to Longford Local Authorities.

Longford County Council's corporate strategy is set out in its Corporate Plan 2005-2009 "Delivering Modern Local Services". Its principal elements are as follows:

Mission Statement

"Lead the sustainable development and promotion of County Longford and improve the quality of life through the efficient delivery of inclusive, customer focused, local services"

Core Values

- Democratic Renewal
- Community Leadership
- Continuous modernisation and improvement
- Delivering value for money services
- Consultation and partnership with the local community
- Outward looking, accountable, responsive services to customers and citizens
- Measuring progress through performance indicators
- Highest standards of conduct and probity by elected members and staff
- Socially inclusive policies to help the most vulnerable as well as targeting rural and urban disadvantaged areas
- The sustainable development of County Longford.

1.5 Customer Care Plan

A Customer Care Plan has been adopted that clearly sets out the level and standard of services that customers and stakeholders can expect to receive from Longford Local Authorities. Complaints and appeals regarding service in Irish can be dealt with through the complaints procedure laid out in the Customer Care Plan which is available in Irish and English. Contact details for the Ombudsman's Office are available for persons who are dissatisfied with the Council's response to their complaint.

1.6 Operating Environment of Longford Local Authorities

The capacity of Longford Local Authorities to achieve the corporate objectives as detailed in the Corporate Plan 2005-2009 and the objectives outlined in this Scheme will be dependant on the operating environment and the availability of resources.

The customer base of Longford Local Authorities is primarily the population of County Longford which according to the 2006 Census of Population Report was 34,391 persons. The broader customer base of the external environment also includes:

- State Agencies
- Local Development Agencies
- Community and Voluntary Organisations
- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Other Government Departments
- Regional Authorities
- County Development Board Structures
- Local and National Media
- Business
- Leader and Local Partnership Groups
- Private Sector Service Providers
- Tourists and Visitors

The Local Authorities services are provided in a spirit of partnership that involves the local elected representatives, Strategic Policy Committees, the County Manager and senior officials and the committed workforce. Together these groups form the key resource responsible for the delivery of modern local services.

1.7 Functional Areas/Directorates of Longford Local Authorities

For operational reasons the Local Authorities have grouped their activities as follows:

- Infrastructural Services – Roads and Water Services and Granard Town Council
- Housing, Planning and Longford Town Council
- Corporate, Environment, Emergency Services, Recreation and Amenity
- Human Resources, Community & Enterprise, Economic Development and Cultural Services
- Finance and Information Systems.

1.8 Location of Local Authority Offices/Memberships of Councils

The offices of Longford County Council are located in Aras an Chontae, Great Water Street, Longford. There are twenty one elected members on Longford County Council.

The offices of Longford Town Council are located at Market Square, Longford. There are nine Elected Members on Longford Town Council.

Granard Town Council holds its meetings in the Market House, Granard, Co. Longford. There are nine elected members on Granard Town Council.

1.9 Principal Means of Communication with the Public

Longford Local Authorities communicate with their customers in relation to services primarily in English and in certain limited cases in Irish and English. Communications in written formats generally fall into the following categories.

- Information Leaflets
- Publications
- Press Releases
- Website Updates
- Advertisements
- Reports
- Policy Documents
- Minutes of Local Authority Meetings

1.10 Assessment of level of services currently available through Irish

The primary objective of the Official Languages Act, 2003 is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. Currently, Longford County Council's Annual Report, Corporate Plan, Heritage Plan, Annual Financial Statement, County Development Plan and Accommodation Assessment Plan are published Irish and English. Registration forms for inclusion in the Register of Electors are available in both English and Irish. Local Authority newspaper advertisements include the name of the Local Authority in English and Irish. The "Guide to Library Services" is available in five languages including Irish. Library membership forms are published in bilingual format. Basic Irish conversation classes are held periodically in the Longford Branch Library for members of the public and staff of the authorities. The Library service is involved in the promotion of arts, cultural and educational events including Seachtain na Gaeilge. A small collection of Irish Language titles and Irish Language learning tapes are stocked in the Libraries throughout County Longford.

Longford Local Authorities recognise that there is a wide range of services currently not available through Irish. At present no department in either Local Authority is capable of delivering its service comprehensively through the medium of Irish. Longford Local Authorities welcome the opportunity provided by this Scheme to develop the delivery of its service to the public through the medium of Irish. At present Longford Local Authorities are not experiencing a high level of demand for services through Irish.

1.11 Research Undertaken

In the preparation of this Scheme, Longford Local Authorities undertook the following research:

- (i) Invited submissions from the public on the preparation of a Draft Scheme (See 1.2)
- (ii) Conducted an internal survey of the staff of Longford Local Authorities to obtain an overview of the standard of Irish within the organisation, and
- (iii) Held coffee breaks "as Gaeilge" for staff on a weekly basis.

Result of Staff Survey

No. of staff responded to survey	114	
No. of staff interested in Irish Classes	40	35%
No. of staff with "high" level of spoken Irish	4	3.5%
No. of staff with "average" level of spoken Irish	49	43%
No. of staff with "high" level of written Irish	3	3%
No. of staff with "average" level of written Irish	41	36%

Chapter 2 – Summary of Services provided by Longford Local Authorities

The principal services provided by the Longford Local Authorities are delivered under the following Directorates.

Directorate	Services
Housing, Planning, Building Control and Longford Town Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Authority Housing • Estate Management • Social & Voluntary Housing Initiatives • Affordable Housing • Loans and Grants • Traveller Accommodation • Building Control • Planning Control • Land Use Planning • Forward Planning • Urban and Village Renewal • Conservation of Buildings
Infrastructural Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads improvement and maintenance • General Transport issues • Road Safety • Public Lighting • Traffic Management and Car Parking • Local Improvement Schemes • Community Employment Schemes • Water Services incl. Waste Water
Economic Development, Community & Enterprise, Cultural Services and Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional, Town, Village and Rural Development • Tourism Development • Economic Development • Industrial Development • Facilitation of County Development Board • Facilitation of Community and Voluntary Forum • Community Development • Promotion of Social Inclusion • Libraries, Arts, Archives, Museums, Heritage • Town Twinning • Human Resources

<p>Corporate, Environment, Emergency Services, Recreation and Amenity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Servicing of Elected Members • Customer Care Service • Corporate Planning • Office Accommodation • Electoral Registration • Freedom of Information • Ombudsman • Official Languages Act • Annual Report • Waste Management • Burial Grounds • Litter Control • Fire & Emergency Services • Civil Defence • Environmental Protection • Animal Control/Health/Welfare • Food Safety/Veterinary • Land, Field and River Drainage • Derelict Sites/Dangerous Buildings • Water Safety • Open Spaces and Amenity Planning • Sports, Leisure, Recreation
<p>Finance and Information Systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Information/Management • Motor Taxation • Rate Collection/Valuations • Higher Education Grants • Payroll/Superannuation • Payments • Internal Audit • Information Services

The principal services provided by Longford Town Council in the area under its control are:

- Housing
- Roads and Transportation
- Planning and Development
- Environment
- Finance
- Recreation and Amenity
- Miscellaneous Services

Chapter 3 - Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually

3.1 General Policy

Longford Local Authorities are committed to developing staff competence over the lifetime of the agreed Scheme in the use of the Irish language.

Longford Local Authorities recognise that people have the right to choose which of the two official languages they wish to use in their dealings with the Local Authorities.

Longford Local Authorities accept that people can express their needs and requirements most effectively in their chosen language.

Longford Local Authorities recognise that delivery of service in a person's chosen language can lead to better outcomes in terms of quality of service.

Longford Local Authorities propose to take the following steps over the lifetime of this Scheme to improve the level of services offered through the medium of Irish.

The Council has assigned the duties of an Irish Language Officer to an existing staff member. The Irish Language Officer will continually assist in facilitating Irish language requirements within the Local Authorities. The role of the Irish Language Officer will be to develop Longford Local Authorities bilingual policy and to monitor the implementation of this Scheme and the provision of services through the medium of Irish.

3.2 Competency Audit

An audit of the level of competence of all staff in the Irish Language has been completed. See results at 1.11.

Within one year of the commencement of the Scheme at least one staff member in both the Library Service and the Corporate Services Section will be identified as employees capable of providing counter services to the public through Irish. This will be done in consultation with staff. Appropriate training will be given to allow employees to develop their competence in the use of Irish.

3.3 Customer Survey

A Customer Survey will be conducted seeking the views of members of the public in relation to the provision of services through Irish. This survey will be conducted and assessed within six months of the commencement of the Scheme.

3.4 Written Communication

Longford Local Authorities will welcome correspondence in either Irish or English. On renewal of stocks of the headed paper used by Longford Local Authorities a redesign will include a statement to the effect that a reply in Irish will be welcome. The redesign will include a bilingual version of the Directorate titles.

3.5 Information and Communications Technology

Longford Local Authorities will establish a generic e-mail address for queries “As Gaeilge”. The Local Authorities will ensure that queries which are received will be dealt with in a similar way to queries that are received in English and addressed in the same timely manner.

Any standard disclaimer or message on e-mail correspondence will be bilingual within six months of the commencement of the Scheme or earlier.

The Longford Local Authorities Intranet system will be developed as a staff resource for the promotion of bilingualism. A listing of relevant phrases for the Customer Service Desk, names of positions, place names and services will be compiled. Guidance on writing letters will be compiled and training will be provided for staff within six months of commencement of the Scheme or earlier if possible.

All publications required to be published in Irish in accordance with Section 10 of the Official Languages Act will be made available on the Local Authorities websites in Irish.

During the course of the Scheme at least 30% of the static content of Longford Local Authorities websites will be made available in Irish.

Longford Local Authorities shall ensure that any new computer software involving public accessibility which is being developed is fully capable of being accessed by the public through Irish and will, also, ensure (in so far as it is under our control) that any existing systems supplied by the Local Government Computer Services Board (LGCSB) are made compatible within the lifetime of the Scheme subject to the necessary amendments and enhancements being carried out by the LGCSB.

Longford Local Authorities currently do not have any interactive systems. Any new interactive systems shall be made available bilingually subject to the necessary amendments and enhancements being carried out by LGCSB.

3.6 Training and Development

Longford Local Authorities operate in an environment of continuing change and the Authorities acknowledge the importance of having a highly trained workforce to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services to the public.

The Authorities will ensure that all staff are given the encouragement and opportunity to improve their Irish language skills. Training and development courses will be provided for employees on an ongoing basis. Every member of staff will have an opportunity to avail of appropriate agreed training that will enable them to develop their competency in Irish. The Local Authorities will continue to promote learning in the Irish Language through the inclusion of Irish Courses such as the Diploma in Irish which is conducted by the National University of Ireland, Galway in the list of approved courses for employees as part of the Performance Management and Development System.

Awareness of the need to use Irish will be included as part of future Induction Training and Customer Service training that is provided to employees of the Local Authorities.

The Local Authorities will make Irish Language materials and resources available to staff from the commencement date of the Scheme.

3.7 Customer Services Employees and Oral Communication

Customer service staff are the first point of contact with the public. It shall be the policy of Longford Local Authorities to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice apply in this area, which is that within six months of the commencement of the Scheme:

- Customer Service Staff are able to give the name of the public body in Irish.
- They are at least familiar with the basic greeting in Irish.
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that they can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or employee responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

3.8 Information Leaflets and Application Forms

By the end of the Scheme arrangements will be in place to ensure that all new information leaflets and brochures produced by Longford Local Authorities will be available bilingually within one cover except where this is not practicable because of the size, layout or nature of the document. In such cases, the Irish version of the document will be as readily available as the English version. Documents of a technical nature will continue to be published in English only.

Existing brochures and information leaflets will become fully bilingual on renewal of stock. Again, these will be made available bilingually within one cover except where this is not practicable because of the size, layout or nature of the document. In such cases, the Irish version of the document will be as readily available as the English version.

By the end of the Scheme all application forms and associated documentation published by the Council will be produced in both English and Irish within the one cover except where this is not feasible due to the size, nature or layout of the document. In such cases, the Irish version of the document will be as readily available as the English version.

Press releases relating to matters of Irish language interest will be produced bilingually within six months of commencement of the Scheme.

3.9 Public Meetings Policy

Longford Local Authorities currently conduct all of their public meetings in the English language. Training opportunities will be provided for elected members who

wish to learn and use Irish. Efforts will be made to introduce an element of bilingualism at all meetings.

3.10 Street and Estate Names

Longford Town Council will endeavour to complete their programme of erecting new signage naming the streets and estates of the urban area in both English and Irish.

Longford Local Authorities will encourage developers to use Irish names when naming new estates and will require that permanent signage be provided in both Irish and English or Irish only.

Chapter 4 – Implementation, Monitoring and Review

The preparation of a three year implementation plan will be arranged for this agreed Scheme.

The effective operation of the Scheme and the implementation plan will be monitored and reviewed. Regular reports will be issued to the Management Team and an annual progress report will be presented to the elected members.

Details regarding the measures outlined in the Scheme to promote and use the Irish language will be published in the Annual Report of Longford County Council.

The agreed Scheme will be published on the Local Authorities Websites; public notice of the agreed scheme will be given in the local media and copies made available to the general public. The Scheme will, also, be circulated to the appropriate agencies and public bodies.

Nothing in this Scheme will preclude Longford Local Authorities from initiating other Irish language development activities which are not specifically provided for in the Scheme.