

Louth Local Authorities Scheme under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 2007-2010

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Louth Local Authorities Scheme under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 2007-2010

Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Introduction

This Scheme has been prepared by Louth Local Authorities 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 Louth Local Authorities by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in December 2006.

Louth Local Authorities published a Notice in the local newspapers under Section 13 of the Official Languages Act 2003 in March 2007 inviting submissions in relation to the preparation of the Scheme from any interested parties. No submission was received.

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, through a specially-developed local Service Indicator. 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

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The Scheme is commenced with effect from November 20th, 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

Louth Local Authorities' Corporate Plan 2004-2009 states that the Mission of Louth Local Authorities is "to provide leadership and to deliver an efficient quality service to the people of Louth."

1.5 Strategic Objectives

The Council's Corporate Plan 2004-2009 states that the strategic objectives of Louth Local Authorities are:

- 1) To deliver the best possible service to our Customers and Clients
- 2) To facilitate economic development and maximise Louth's strategic border location mid-point between Dublin and Belfast
- 3) To improve the quality of life for residents, now and future generations
- 4) To harness community participation, provide civic leadership
- 5) To form alliances and working partnerships, both internally and with other organisations and service providers, to meet organisational goals and priorities.

1.6 Customers and Clients of Louth Local Authorities

Louth Local Authorities' customer base is primarily the population of County Louth, which, according to the 2006 Census of Population, is 111,267. 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 Louth
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
Local Authorities and development bodies in Northern Ireland

1.7 Functional Areas/Directorates of Louth Local Authorities

- 1 Planning, Environment and Emergency Services
- 2 Infrastructure
- 3 Corporate, Recreation and Amenity Services
- 4 Finance
- 5 Housing, Community, & Enterprise Development
- 6 Dundalk Town Council
- 7 Drogheda Borough Council

1.8 Location of Council Offices

There are four Local Authorities in Louth. These are –

- 1) Louth County Council
- 2) Dundalk Town Council
- 3) Drogheda Borough Council
- 4) Ardee Town Council

Louth Local Authorities have 49 elected Councillors representing the four electoral authorities in Louth. Louth County Council's main office, County Hall, is situated in Dundalk. Each of the other Local Authorities' has offices in their respective urban areas. The day-to-day management of Louth Local Authorities is the responsibility of the County Manager.

Our Branch Library Network extends to four locations - Ardee, Carlingford, Drogheda, and Dunleer

The Library Headquarters is located in Dundalk.

Fire Stations are strategically located in five locations throughout the county – Dundalk, Drogheda, Carlingford, Dunleer, and Ardee

1.9 Principal Means of Written Communication with the Public

Louth Local Authorities' 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

1.10 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. Louth Local Authorities has been active in promoting Seachtain na Gaeilge in recent years. Louth Local Authorities has provided Irish language classes for staff, as well as supporting staff who wish to pursue academic qualifications in Irish. Staff have also availed of the Gaeltacht Scholarship Scheme through Gaeleagras.

While Louth Local Authorities are compliant with all statutory requirements in relation to the provision of services and publications through Irish, we recognise that there are a range of services that are not currently available through Irish, and welcome the opportunity provided by this Scheme to further develop and enhance our services in this area. Whilst the demand currently for services through Irish is not significant, Louth Local Authorities are 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 Louth Local Authorities

This chapter provides an overview of the services provided by Louth Local Authorities.

HOUSING, COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Local Authority Housing
 - ⇒ Construction and maintenance
 - ⇒ Assessment of needs and allocation of houses Scheme;
 - ⇒ Mortgage 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
- Housing Supports
 - Improvement Works Scheme; Tenant Purchase

- Working with Louth County Development Board in the implementation of the County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development
- Facilitating and supporting Louth Community & Voluntary Forum
- Guiding, supporting and promoting local authority activity in community development and enterprise development
- access service
- Cross Border Development Programme
- Development and maintenance of recreational facilities - swimming pools; leisure centre; playgrounds etc
- Tourism Promotion
- Promotion of the Heritage of County Louth
- CLÁR Programme

- County Council Led Task Force (PEACE II)
- Economic Development Initiatives
- Promotion of Social Inclusion
- Comhairle Na nÓg/Comhairle Na bPáisti
- Community & Voluntary and Arts Grant Schemes
- Floral Pride & Pride of Place Initiatives
- Barcelona Declaration Implementation

CORPORATE , RECREATION AND AMENITY DIRECTORATE
Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Support to Elected Members
- Maintenance of Register of Electors
- Processing of Higher Education Grants
- Local Elections
- Administration of Freedom of Information Legislation
- Preparation of Annual Report
- Customer Services including Customer and Ombudsman Complaints
- Preparation of Corporate Plan and Customer Service Action Plan
- Co-ordination and monitoring of Service Indicators
- Recruitment
- Staff Training & Development
- Superannuation
- Information & Communications Technology
- Partnership
- Employment of Coroner and expenses associated with holding inquests/post- mortems
- Development and delivery of Arts Programme
- Community Warden Scheme
- Provision of Library Service including free public internet access
- Development of Recreation and Amenity facilities and services
- Ardee Town Council

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 licensing and registration particulars for court and other purposes

INFRASTRUCTURE 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 Licenses
- Services in Charge
- Dangerous Structures / places
- Protection of public rights-of-way
- Abnormal Loads permits
- Local Improvement Scheme
- Taking in charge (housing developments etc.)
- Broadband (MAN)
- 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.

PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & EMERGENCY SERVICES DIRECTORATE
Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Development Control (planning permissions, licenses etc.)
- Forward Planning (Development Plans etc.)
- Planning Enforcement
- Building Control
- Urban and Village Renewal
- Derelict Sites
- 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
 - ⇒ Licensing of effluent discharges to waters and public sewers; monitoring river quality; litter control; anti-litter campaigns
- 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 Abattoirs Act and the Public Health Acts
- Provision and upkeep of burial grounds
- Provision of assistance and advice to tidy towns committees
- Administration of Access to Information on the Environment Regulations
- Control, regulation and supervision of Casual Trading

DUNDALK TOWN COUNCIL DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Housing Authority for the town of Dundalk Town Council
- Roads Authority for the town
- Fire Authority
- Promotion of the town as a gateway as defined in the National Spatial Strategy
- Ensuring Dundalk is a quality place to live.

DROGHEDA BOROUGH COUNCIL DIRECTORATE

Main Roles/Responsibilities of Directorate:

- Housing Authority for the town of Drogheda
- Roads Authority for the town
- Fire Authority
- Promotion of the town as a hub as defined in the National Spatial Strategy
- Ensuring Drogheda is a quality place to live.

Chapter 3 Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually

3.1 Guiding Principles

- Louth Local Authorities recognise that people have the right to choose which of the two official languages to use in their dealings with us
- Louth Local Authorities accept that a person can express their needs and requirements most effectively in their chosen language
- Louth Local Authorities 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 Louth Local Authorities 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 within six months of 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.
- Louth Local Authorities 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;

Within two years of the commencement of this Scheme, a fully bilingual counter service will be available from the directorate of Corporate Services, including the Library Service. Staff will be

identified through whom services through Irish can be delivered in this directorate and appropriate training will be given to allow them to fulfil this role.

3.2 Written Communication

Louth Local Authorities 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 Louth Local Authorities 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, and monitored through the implementation of a new local Service Indicator.

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 Information Systems

Upon commencement of the scheme Louth Local Authorities shall establish a generic e-mail address for queries in the Irish Language. Louth Local Authorities will ensure that such queries are addressed as promptly as with English language queries.

Louth Local Authorities intranet system will 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.

The council will ensure that all new computer software and hardware purchased is capable of handling the Irish language. Existing systems will, where necessary, be made compatible in conjunction with the next suitable planned maintenance or upgrade work.

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

Louth Local Authorities 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 Louth Local Authorities, similar to most other local Authorities, are dependant on the Local Government Computer Services Board for the provision of many of its systems and Louth Local Authorities will request that the Board should provide new systems which can handle the Irish language.

3.4 Application Forms

All application forms and any associated information leaflets for services aimed at the general

public will be provided bilingually within eighteen months from the commencement of this Scheme.

Forms will be made available bilingually within the one cover, except where this is not feasible because of the size, layout or nature of the document.

These shall be available in all Council offices

3.5 Website

All bilingual forms (see 3.4) will be available to the public on our website within eighteen months from the commencement of this Scheme. E-payments may be carried out through Irish on our website, again within eighteen months of the commencement of this 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, by the end of the Scheme. Interactive services currently available in English only will be available on a bilingual basis as soon as resources and other pressures of work in the IT area allow, and at the latest, by the end of the lifetime of the Scheme

All static content of our Website, and other websites for which we are responsible, will be bilingual by the end of the Scheme.

3.6 Telephone Services

Receptionists /switchboards operators are the first points of contact with the public. At present this service is provided principally in English. Within twelve months from the commencement of this Scheme receptionists/switchboard operators will be able to give the name of the local authority in both English and Irish, they 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.

Louth Local Authorities operate a person-to-person, out-of-hours telephone answering service. We will ensure that basic competency in Irish will be extended to the operation of this service, by the end of the Scheme.

3.7 Public Meetings Policy

Louth Local Authorities 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.

Louth Local Authorities monthly meetings agenda shall be made available in English and Irish.

A review of Standing Orders will be implemented to ascertain where the use of Irish can be strengthened and extended.

3.8 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 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. 20% of all annual Council press releases will be made available, in Irish and English, by the end of the scheme.

By the end of this Scheme, 40% of all Louth Local Authorities' press advertising will be both in Irish and English. This will be in addition to statutory requirements.

3.9 Brochure and Information Leaflets

All brochures and information leaflets providing information to the public in relation to services will be available bilingually within the one cover, except in cases where this is not feasible because of the size, layout or nature of the particular document 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.

3.10 Placenames

A Coiste na Gaeilge / Logainmneacha will be established within Louth Local Authorities and, as part of its remit, will bring forward a policy in relation to the naming of all new Local Authority estates and privately-developed estates. This policy will fulfil and augment Section 34 (2) (o) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and will ensure that names chosen will reflect local history, culture and place-lore.

Omeath, on the north-eastern coast of Louth, retained Gaeltacht status until the 1950s. As a pilot project, and within the time span of this Scheme, signage for the eleven townlands of the parish of Omeath, as well as facilities signage in the village, will be produced bilingually, or in Irish only. Any final decision would be made in consultation with the local community.

3.11 Promotional Measures

The following are some further proposals which Louth Local Authorities 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).

Work with Conradh na Gaeilge at local level to promote and advance the use of the Irish Language both within the operations of the Council and in the wider community.

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

On the commencement of the Scheme, the Director of Service for Corporate Services 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.

Louth Local Authorities will carry out an inventory of supply and demand for Irish language services across all its Services.

Louth Local Authorities may initiate further development activities not covered in this Scheme.

Louth Local Authorities will develop a local service indicator for recording queries and/or communications in Irish, and which will measure Louth Local Authorities responses to same.

Training and Development

Louth Local Authorities 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.

Louth Local Authorities 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 (e.g. 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
- Louth Local Authorities 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.

Chapter 5 Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The contents of this Scheme, along with the commitments and provisions of the Scheme, will be publicised to the general public by means of –

- Press Release
- Official Launch of the Scheme
- Advertising of Provisions
- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies
- Website

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