

Clare Local Authorities  
Language Scheme 2007 – 2010

Under section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003

“Dílís d’ár nOidhreacht”.

Clare County Council  
Ennis Town Council  
Shannon Town Council  
Kilrush Town Council  
Kilkee Town Council  
Clare County Library

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

This scheme is prepared under section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 by Clare Local Authorities. Section 11 provides for the preparation 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; and  
Through the medium of both Irish and English.

This scheme sets out the measures to be adopted to ensure that any services that are not provided through the medium of Irish will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

### 1.1 Guidelines for preparation of a scheme

1.1.1 Section 12 of the Official Languages Act, 2003 provides for the preparation of guidelines by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and their issue to public bodies to assist in the preparation of draft schemes. This scheme has been drawn up in conformity with these guidelines.

### 1.2 The content of the language scheme

1.2.1 This scheme builds on the “Irish Language Action Plan for Clare Local Authorities 2004- 2007”, which aims to increase and encourage the use of Irish in the Local Authority.

Current service provision is primarily in English and the objectives of the Clare Local Authorities scheme are to:

- Build on the commitment of the Local Authority to promote the Irish language as well as the principles of quality assurance and improvement in all its services.
- Increase and improve the number of services to customers and clients provided bilingually, and
- Enhance staff competency in Irish through the provisions of training and support.

1.2.2 Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing provisions of the scheme will rest primarily with the senior management of the Local Authority.

### 1.3 Commencement date of the scheme

1.3.1 This scheme had been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. This scheme will comment with effect from August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 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 Official Languages Act, whichever is earlier.

#### 1.4 Overview of Clare Local Authorities

County Clare has a population of approximately 112,000 people and is a largely rural county. Clare Local Authorities provide an extensive range of infrastructural services, and play an active role in the development of the county's industry, business, social, arts, heritage and cultural affairs. Local Authorities perform both a representation and an operational role because the Irish system of Local Government encompasses both democratic representation and public administration. Clare Local Authorities consists of Clare County Council, together with the four Town Councils of Ennis, Shannon, Kilrush and Kilkee. Each Town Council, within the county comes under the jurisdiction of the County Manager.

Clare County Library consists of sixteen branch libraries organised into five functional regions, a Local Studies Centre, and administrative headquarters with four library service departments. The Library Service itself is a department of Clare County Council. The following are the list of branch libraries throughout the County:

Corofin, Cranny, Ennis, Ennistymon, Kildysart, Killaloe, Kilkee, Kilmihil, Kilrush, Lisdoonvarna, Miltown Malbay, Newmarket on Fergus, Scarriff, Shannon, Sixmilebridge and Tulla.

Services are provided by Clare Local Authorities under the following eight programme groups which are standard to all Local Authorities”

- Housing and Building
- Road, Transportation and Safety
- Water Supply and Sewerage
- Development Incentives and Control
- Environmental Protection
- Recreation and Amenity
- Agriculture, Education, Health and Welfare
- Miscellaneous Services

The mission statement of Clare Local Authorities is as follows:

“Pursuing excellence through service delivery and inclusive partnership to advance the social, cultural, economic and environmental development of County Clare”.

This is translated into a series of ‘objectives’ which express what Clare Local Authorities hope to achieve:

1. Quality Service Delivery – To provide a quality service focused on the needs of our customers / citizens.
2. Social Inclusion – To promote social inclusion and combat marginalisation.
3. Enhanced Democracy – To work within a framework of democratic principles to facilitate optimum public participation and community involvement.
4. Preserving and Enhancing the Environment – To improve, protect and enhance the environment in the interests of the present and future generations.
5. Sustainable and Integrated Development – To achieve balanced, integrated sustainable development.
6. Human Resources - To develop a highly motivated, skilled and customer focused workforce.
7. Rural Development – To support the structurally weak rural parts of the county.

8. Community Participation – To support community and voluntary sector participation
9. Communications – To develop a strategy to promote and improve communications internally and externally.
10. Efficiency – Value for Money – To improve efficiency and effectiveness and to achieve value for money.

### Core Values

The following are the core values identified in our Corporate Plan, 2004-2009:

- Quality Customer Service
- Enhanced Democracy
- Supporting the Democratic Process
- Community Leadership
- Transparency
- Accessibility, Equity and Respect
- Recognition of Employees
- Consultation and Partnership
- Trust and Integrity
- Outward Looking and Facilitating
- Continuous Improvement and Responsiveness
- Efficiency and Accountability
- Compliant

## 1.5 Customers and Clients

Apart from the daily contact with our customers on an individual basis, we also have dealings with a broader customer / client base including:

- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Local Community and Voluntary Groups
- Various Irish Language Organizations and Groups
- State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other local and regional authorities
- Organizations of the European Union
- LEADER Groups
- Private sector service providers
- County Development Board
- Strategic Policy Committee Representatives
- Local and National Media
- Local private businesses

## 1.6 Current Extent of services 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. Clare Local Authorities are committed to the obligations of this Act, and to the aims listed in this scheme. Services, which are currently available through the medium of both Irish and English, are listed in chapter 3. A list of services which are partially available through the medium of both English and Irish is also included, and this is being made available at all reception areas.

## Chapter 2 : Provision of General Council Services / Activities

### 2.1 Preparatory research undertaken

- 2.1.1 Clare Local Authorities published notices, inviting representations in relation to the preparation of the Scheme under Section 11 from any interested parties, in the Clare Champion (February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006) and in Foinse (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006), and on the Clare County Council website on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006.
- 2.1.2 Notices were also published in the staff newsletter “Newsreel”, and on the internal Intranet site. A staff survey in relation to the current level of Irish in the organisation had been completed prior to the consultation for this scheme. This information was also used for the purposes of this Scheme.
- 2.1.3 Presentations were made to elected members of the five Councils comprising Clare Local Authorities as follows: Clare County Council; Ennis Town Council; Kilrush Town Council; Kilkee Town Council and Shannon Town Council, as well as the Management Team comprising the County Manager and Directors of Service.
- 2.1.4 Consultation also took place with the Community and Cultural Policy Strategic Policy Committee and the Tourism, Heritage and Cultural Implementation Group.
- 2.1.5 Public meetings (one per electoral area) the purpose of which was to invite representation from the general public and to ascertain which services were most required by the public to be provided through the medium of Irish, were held as follows: Shannon (April 4th); Killaloe (April 5th); Kilrush (April 6th); Scarriff (April 10th); Ennistymon (April 11th) and Ennis (April 12th). All of these meetings were advertised on Clare FM’s Community Diary, and advertising leaflets were available at reception areas and libraries.
- 2.1.6 An audit of all application forms currently in use in Clare Local Authorities was undertaken to ascertain the number that are available bilingually or in English only, so as to make provision for their translation.
- 2.1.7 Customer Comment cards were made available at reception areas in the various offices of Clare County Council, Area Offices Town Council and all branch libraries.
- 2.1.8 Questions regarding the provision of services through Irish were also asked in the Customer Survey which was sent out on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006.
- 2.1.9 Clare Local Authorities received a total number of seventy three submissions from the public and from various Irish language organizations during the consultation process. The majority of the public meetings were well attended with a variety of ways for improvement of service delivery through Irish being suggested. Resultantly, three principal service areas, the Library Service, Information Technology - i.e. website content and motor taxation were identified as being priorities to be provided through the medium of Irish, and thus addressed under this Scheme.

## 2.2 Communication with the Public

Regarding methods of communication with the general public, Clare Local Authorities endeavor to communicate bilingually in so far as is possible. These methods include:

- Brochures and information leaflets
- Application forms
- Publications
- Press Releases
- Website

## 2.2 Written Communication

During the lifetime of this scheme, Clare Local Authorities will apply the following Principles to the various classes of written documentation it produces:

### 2.2.1 Brochures, Information Leaflets and Application Forms

- From the commencement of the scheme, all new information leaflets and application forms produced shall be bilingual, and will be available as one document unless the size, nature or layout of the document is such that separate cover would be more practical.
- Over the lifetime of this scheme, information leaflets and application forms that are not currently available bilingually shall be reviewed. All application forms and any associated information leaflets currently in use shall be made available bilingually, and will be available as one document unless the size, nature and layout of the document is such that separate cover would be more practical.
- In the case of national standardized applications forms not produced by Clare Local Authorities, it shall be ensured that an adequate supply of bilingual forms be available where such is available in bilingual format. In the case of documents under separate cover, an adequate supply of Irish forms shall be stocked.
- Tender documents shall not be available bilingually over the lifespan of the first scheme.

### 2.2.2 Publications

- Clare Local Authorities will continue to prepare bilingual editions of such documents as is prescribed by section 10 of the Official Languages Act, 2003, under one cover, except where this might not be possible by virtue of the nature, size and layout of the document.

### 2.2.3 Press Releases

- From the commencement of the scheme, press releases relating to Irish language activities shall be produced bilingually and circulated to the media organisations prescribed by the Corporate Services Department, public relations firms engaged by Clare Local Authorities, and in accordance with conditions set out in the public relations strategy.
- From commencement of this scheme, 10% of all press releases issued per annum shall be made available bilingually. In subsequent schemes, this percentage shall be increased.
- Clare Local Authorities will also be in a position to provide spokespersons to Irish language media when the need arises.

#### 2.2.4 Website

- Publications detailed in section 10 of the Official Languages Act, 2003, application forms, contact details and information on services and departments of the Clare County Council website ([www.clarecoco.ie](http://www.clarecoco.ie)) and also brochures detailed in paragraph 2.3.1 of this scheme will be made available bilingually on the website over the lifespan of this Scheme. The websites of Ennis Town Council, Shannon Town Council, Kilrush and Kilkee Town Councils shall be assessed for bilingual content over the lifespan of subsequent schemes.

#### 2.2.5 E-mail

- The standard disclaimer message on e-mail correspondence will be reviewed and made appear in bilingual format by the end of the scheme.

#### 2.2.6 Signage

- All new signage erected by Clarec Local Authorities shall be in accordance with the regulations to be made in accordance with the regulations to be made under section 9(1) of the Official Languages Act, 2003.

### 2.3 Oral Communication

Receptionists / switchboard operators are the first points of contact with the public. From the commencement of this scheme, it shall be the policy of Clare Local Authorities to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice apply in this area, which is that:

- Reception / switchboard staff are able to give the name of the Local Authority in Irish.
- They are at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that they can put members of the public in touch without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.
- Guidelines will be developed for staff to assist in dealing with such instances.
- In cases where the official contact point for the service in question is unavailable, the caller will be offered a call-back so as to deal with the query in Irish, or if this is not their preference, that a regret be expressed and the caller be offered a service through English in the interim.
- Reception areas and various staff workstations will display notices welcoming the used of Irish.
- That the directory of the names of staff who can provide a service through Irish be increased over the lifespan of this scheme, and that it will be circulated to staff and published on both the Intranet and Internet sites.
- Staff competent in the Irish language will be encouraged to have bilingual voicemail and out-of-office email messages.
- The use of Irish at Council meetings and in speeches and addresses throughout the County be continued.
- Persons wishing to speak Irish at a public meeting shall be accommodated.
- Public events shall have a bilingual element, ex invitations, speeches, addresses.

## Chapter 3: Summary of Services/Activities provided by sections

### 3.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines the position regarding service provision / activities by individual sections with the Local Authorities. The first part of the chapter lists the various sections and the official language regime operated in each case. The second part briefly describes the functions / activities of each Section.

### 3.2 Operating Language of the various services available:

#### 3.2.1 Sections Working in Irish.

The Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge works through the medium of the Irish languages and thus provides services through the medium of Irish, except where the customer / client requests such a service be provided to them in the English language.

#### 3.2.2 Sections providing a Bilingual Service

The following services are provided bilingually, as outlined:

- **Conservation Office:**

The Conservation Officer provides an advisory services to owners and occupiers of Protected Structures and also to anyone interested in conserving or restoring old houses, commercial premises or other structures of architectural or historical merit.

- **Clare Placenames Committee:**

As a subgroup of the County Heritage Forum, the Clare Placenames Committee was set up in 2002 to give advice on selecting placenames and to monitor names given to new developments. The Committee encourages the use of Irish in such placenames, and will continue with this work over the lifespan of the Scheme.

- **Local Studies Centre:**

Clare County Library's Local Studies Centre is a reference library and research centre dedicated to the collection of material on any aspect of County Clare. Queries relating to the materials held can be dealt with through the medium of Irish.

To reflect the number of staff who have undertaken the Dioplóma sa Ghaeilge and those who are currently studying the Teastas Eorpach sa Ghaeilge course, Clare Local Authorities feels that it is important to mention that the following sections have staff who are willing to deal with the public through the medium of Irish, and their contact details are available at all reception areas.

- ❑ **Community & Enterprise** (Enterprise)
- ❑ **Clare County Library:** Library Headquarters and Clare Museum.

### 3.2.3 Sections Providing a Service through English only

The following are the sections within Clare Local Authorities that currently provide a service through the medium of English only”

- Roads (with the exception of the Scarriff/Killaloe area office as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Water Services
- Finance (Revenue, Higher Education Grants with the exception of Motor Tax in the Ennis and Ennistymon offices in respect of which mechanism will be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme).
- Kilkee Town Council
- Housing Section
- Ennistymon Area Office (with the exception of Motor Tax as detailed in chapter 4)
- Kilrush Town Council and Area Office (with the exception of the Finance Section to be dealt with in the lifespan of this scheme as detailed in chapter 4)
- Clare County Council, Shannon Area Office (mechanisms to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Ennis Town Council (mechanisms to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Environment (mechanisms to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Corporate Services (mechanisms to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Human Resources (mechanisms to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4)
- Planning Section (with the exception of the Conservation Office as detailed in section 3.2.2 above) but mechanisms are to be put in place over the lifetime of this Scheme as detailed in Chapter 4.
- Clare County Library (with the exception of Clare Museum and Library Headquarters as listed in paragraph 3.2.2 above and branch libraries in Ennis, Ennistymon, Shannon and Killaloe and Clare County Archives as detailed in Chapter 4).

## Chapter 4 - Commitments under the Scheme

### 4.1 Introduction

Clare Local Authorities are committed to having an adequate number of staff competent to provide a service through Irish in all sections of the Authorities that deal regularly with the public. However, we acknowledge that this will not be possible over the course of our initial language scheme. Thus a selection of services on which Clare Local Authorities will focus during the lifespan of this scheme has been decided upon, by virtue of feasibility, public demand and customer suggestions.

It is proposed to promote the availability of an Irish language service in its service areas identified on the website, and at various reception points. It is felt that this will encourage members of the public to avail of such services in a more comfortable and confident manner.

### 4.2 Commitments under the scheme

#### 4.2.1 Information Technology

The department itself has three main areas of operation:

- Network Support and Infrastructure
- Systems Maintenance
- Web Systems Development

The following policies will be implemented in relation to electronic communication and the promotion of the Irish language over the lifespan of the scheme.

- The standard disclaimer message on e-mail correspondence will be reviewed and made appear in bilingual format by the end of the scheme.
- The Council will ensure that the ability of systems 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 the Council similar to most other County Council's is dependant on the Local Government Computer Services Board for the provision of many of its systems and the Council will request that the Board should provide new systems which can handle the Irish language
- Clare Local Authorities will ensure that the web content management system used will be capable of handling content in Irish and will have support for bilingual web content and web sites.
- The following sections of the current Clare County Council website shall be made available bilingually within the lifetime of this scheme: Your Council; Contact Us; Opening Hours, Forms; Voting and Electoral Register; and Careers.
- I.T. can ensure that any new computer software involving public accessibility which is being developed, is fully capable of being accessed by the public in the Irish language and will also ensure (in so far as it is under our control) that existing such systems are made compatible within the lifetime of this scheme.
- Any new interactive systems will be language compliant and existing systems upgraded, by the end of this scheme subject to the provision of the necessary systems from the Local Government Computer Services Board.

#### 4.2.2 Clare County Library

##### The Library Service.

To date it has registered or re-registered over 170,000 readers with 150,000 visits annually. The Library Service aims to meet the information, cultural and educational needs of County Clare with sixteen branch libraries.

By the end of this scheme, a bilingual counter service will be available in the following branch libraries: Ennis, Ennistymon, Shannon and Killaloe.

##### Library Website

The Clare County Library website was the first public library in Ireland to offer its catalogue on the web, and offers a local authority museum website, an online community information service, online publications, literature promotions, a catalogue of photographs, and online maps. It's award-winning website is a fundamental part of its operations and structure, viewing the 'library' as neither a building or an institution but a resource to be used by people for information, learning, culture and imagination, thereby improving the intellectual and cultural quality of life of the community.

- Over the lifespan of this scheme, all writings and commentaries received in Irish will continue to be added to the content of the website.

##### Clare County Archives Service.

The County Archives is a county-wide service and in addition to Local Authority records, it also collects other material relating to history of the county including private papers, solicitors papers, architectural drawings, maps and plans, estate papers, photographs collections and records of academic, social and economic institutions.

- During the lifetime of this scheme, descriptive lists of collections of records in Irish will be provided bilingually.

##### Clare Museum

The function of Clare Museum is to preserve the material culture of County Clare.

During the lifespan of this scheme:

- The remaining interactive information systems located within the Museum will be made available bilingually similar to that of the interactives which currently cater for Irish.
- Tours of the Museum through Irish are currently available throughout Seachtain na Gaeilge. This practice will continue once per month and this will be extended to other designated times of the year, for example, Lá Eorpach na dTeangacha.
- That a programme of historical workshops for young children and adults through the medium of Irish be facilitated every three months.

##### The Arts Office

The Arts Office aims to establish structures and strategies which enable the arts to flourish in Clare and to enable individuals, groups and communities to use the arts as a vehicle for human expression, community building and the encouragement of creative responses to society.

During the lifespan of this Scheme:

- The Arts Office will provide a bilingual service when required and
- Will continue to promote Irish in its' educational programmes.

#### 4.2.3 Motor Taxation

The Motor Taxation Office deals with Motor Taxation and driver licensing for County Clare. Over the lifespan of this scheme:

As a starting point the Ennistymon Area Office will provide a service through the medium of Irish on three days of the week, and the Ennis Office will introduce the provision of such a service on one week day which shall be reviewed and increased in subsequent schemes. The Local Authorities intend to expand this service in the second and subsequent schemes so that a fully bilingual service will be made available from the Motor Taxation Offices in the future.

#### 4.2.4 Kilrush Civic Offices

Kilrush Civic Offices are responsible for taking action to promote the community interest whilst operating the activities of the Local Authority's eight programme groups in Kilrush. Over the lifespan of this Scheme:

The Finance Section will provide a bilingual counter and telephone service.

#### 4.2.5 Availability of Irish Language Counter Services

Over the lifespan of the scheme, the following public offices will provide counter services through the medium of Irish:

- Scarriff/Killaloe Area Office;
- Corporate Services Section;
- Human Resources Section;
- Planning Section;
- The Ennis offices of the Environment Section with the extension of such services to area offices over the course of subsequent schemes;
- Ennis Town Council;
- Shannon Civic Offices. The Irish language will continue to be accommodated and welcomed at meetings of Shannon Town Council.

#### 4.3 Staff Recruitment

In relation to the Irish language, the following objectives shall be implemented:

- The practice of holding Irish language interviews as part of the recruitment process for administrative grades shall continue, and this practice will be introduced also for technical grades.
- The Human Resources Department shall review recruitment and mobility policies in relation to posts within Clare Local Authorities.
- The requirements and obligations of the various sections in providing a service through Irish be taken into account when considering staff placement and deployment.

#### 4.4 Staff Training and Development

One of the aims of our Corporate Plan is to develop a highly motivated, skilled and customer focused workforce. Clare Local Authorities will continue its commitment in relation to the provision of staff training and development, in both official languages, so as to improve staff competency. In relation to the Irish language, the following objectives shall be implemented:

- The provision of Irish language courses of a high standard during and after work hours, such as the Ciorcail Cainte and Irish classes for beginners, and that the Training Policy be updated to define this aim.
- That staff be encourage to apply for the Gaeleagras scholarship, to undertake the Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge and Dioplóma sa Ghaeilge programmes and to wear a fáinne.
- The provision of learning materials (publications, lists of useful websites dictionaries) to ease the provision of services through Irish
- That each Irish language training course provided be assessed on an ongoing basis as to it's effectiveness.
- That language awareness be included as part of induction training to ensure that staff understand it's importance and that staff would be very aware of the obligations by virtue of the Official Languages Act and the Language Scheme.
- That an annual acknowledgement system be put in place for the staff who have undertaken to act as an Irish contact point, or who have undertaken a training course.

#### 4.5 Gaelscoileanna and Irish Language Organisations

- Any projects initiated with gaelscoileanna, gaelcholaistí or Irish language organizations in the County shall be conducted in the Irish language only.
- That Clare Local Authorities will further progress links with Irish language organisations such as An Clár as Gaeilge and other such groups to further the promotion of both the Irish language in general in the County and the advertising of the availability of Irish services in the Local Authority. To this end, Fóram Gaeilge an Chláir was established. Its functions include the encouragement of better communication between Irish language groups in the County, and joint projects within the County, for Seachtain na Gaeilge and Lá Eorpach na dTeangacha.

## Chapter 5: Monitoring, Revision and Publicising of Agreed Scheme.

### 5.1 Monitoring and Revision

The Senior Management of Clare Local Authorities shall be responsible for monitoring the effective operation of this Scheme.

The daily monitoring will be undertaken by those who are responsible for the scheme in their own areas, and with the assistance of the Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge will report bi-monthly on the progress.

The newly constituted Coiste Gaeilge, comprising of members from various sections, shall monitor the availability of bilingual resources in their own section.

### 5.2 Publicising the Agreed Scheme.

The principal means of publicising the scheme to the public are by means of:

Press Releases;

Official Launch of the Scheme;

Advertising of provisions of the Scheme;

Circulation to parties who made submissions, in so far as their contact details are available.

## Appendix 1: Surveys Undertaken

### Results of Staff Survey.

In a recent survey which was conducted amongst staff to ascertain whether or not they would be willing to improve their current level of Irish and/or use it in the workplace, of 139 respondents, the results were as follows:

- (a) Have you ever expressed an interest in improving your knowledge and understanding of Irish?

83 answered in affirmative, which accounts for 59.7% of the respondents or 8.6% of the total workforce

- (b) Would you be willing to use your current knowledge of Irish in the workplace?

87 answered in affirmative, which accounts for 62.6% of the respondents or 9.02% of the total workforce.

### Results of Customer Survey

The top three preferences as regards service requirements through the medium of Irish were website information, library services and motor tax. (Percentages to be included). Thus this collates with what the public consultation workshops for this Scheme highlights, and thus these three service areas were prioritised for the lifetime of this Scheme.