

Westmeath County Council

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 2003
LANGUAGE SCHEME**

2016 to 2019

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a language scheme detailing the services which 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 currently provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

In accordance with section 14(3) of the Act, language schemes remain in force for a period of 3 years or until such time as a new scheme is confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, whichever is the later.

1.2 Preparation and Content of the Scheme

In the preparation of this scheme, due regard has been given to the Guidelines issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht. In addition, there has been a comprehensive process of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Westmeath County Council is guided by the principle that the provision of Irish language services should be based on:

- the underlying level of demand for specific services in the Irish language,
- the importance of a proactive approach to the provision of such services, and
- the resources, including human and financial resources, and the capacity of the body concerned to develop or access the necessary language capability.

This scheme complements the principles of Quality Customer Service and our Customer Charter. It has been formulated with the intention of ensuring that all relevant obligations under the Official Languages Act by Westmeath County Council will be fully addressed on an incremental basis, through this and future schemes.

This Scheme is predicated on all of the commitments in any previous scheme having been implemented. In the event of commitments in earlier schemes not having been fully implemented to date, this matter has been the subject of discussion with the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga.

The time and effort put in by all concerned in this process is acknowledged and appreciated.

1.3 Commencement date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed on **29 February 2016** by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from this date and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years or until a new scheme has been confirmed, whichever is the later.

Chapter 2: Overview of Westmeath County Council

2.1 Mission and Objectives

Mission Statement: To lead the Economic, Social and Cultural Development of County Westmeath, and to deliver quality services

2.2 Main Functions

Economic Development, Enterprise and Community

- Local Economic and Enterprise Development
- Local Community Development Committee

Environment, Water and Emergency Services

- Environmental Protection
- Water Services (on behalf of Irish Water Ltd)
- Fire and Emergency Services
- Civil Defence

Housing, Corporate and Culture

- Housing
- Corporate Services
- Library Services
- Arts Culture and Heritage
- Finance
- Motor Taxation
- Human Resources
- Information Technology

Planning and Transportation

- Planning and Sustainable Development
- Roads and Transportation

2.3 Key Services

Westmeath County Council is divided functionally into the following Directorates;

- Economic Development, Enterprise and Community
- Environment, Water and Emergency Services
- Housing, Corporate and Culture
- Planning and Transportation

The primary service points for the Council are at the two Municipal District offices located in Mullingar and Athlone. Each of the offices has a dedicated Customer Service counter. There is also a network of 7 Libraries throughout the county all of which have extensive customer contact. Council non-office based staff also have contact with our customers both in their homes and in the public realm.

Activities provided by Westmeath County Council

Economic Development, Enterprise and Community

Local Economic and Enterprise Development (LEO)

The LEO provides support to individuals and businesses in every part of Westmeath, including new or existing businesses. The focus of this support is with businesses who employ 10 or less employees in every sector, including manufacturing, international trade, design and craft, services, retail, childcare and food production. The core supports provided include:

- Financial Assistance (Eligible Categories only)
- Provision of Business Information and Advice
- Business Training
- Encouraging Enterprise Development in County Westmeath

Local Community Development Committee

The primary role is to develop, co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development. This will be achieved through:

- Co-ordination, planning and oversight of local development spending.
Coherent approach to the implementation of local and community development programmes.
- Citizen and community engagement.

The committee's membership comprises of a range of statutory and non-statutory socio-economic partners drawn from the Council's administrative area.

Environment, Water and Emergency Services

Environmental Protection

The Environment Services Department has responsibility for environmental protection throughout the county. This involves the enforcement of all current environmental legislation in the areas of Waste Management and Pollution Control. In addition, it has responsibility for the promotion of Environmental Awareness.

Water Services (principally on behalf of Irish Water Ltd)

Water Services Department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of public water supply schemes, wastewater treatment facilities, public conveniences and burial grounds throughout the county, in accordance with current National and EU Legislation and Policy.

Fire and Emergency Services

The Fire Services Department has responsibility for responding to emergency situations, along with assessing buildings for fire safety and giving advice on fire safety. The Fire Services Department provides a 24-hour/365 day Fire Brigade Service for the county, which includes response to, fires, road traffic accidents and other emergencies.

Civil Defence

The role of the Civil Defence is to assist at search and rescue operations, accidents and major incident situations and to provide a resource of trained volunteers, equipment and logistical support to deal with a variety of community support and emergency situations.

Housing, Corporate and Culture

Housing

The Housing Department provides accommodation for people through the direct provision of housing for rent and also promotes home ownership through the various loan schemes offered. The Council's role as Housing Authority is to ensure that every household has a dwelling suitable to its needs at a price or rent that it can afford.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Section is responsible for the administration of the democratic process of the Council. This Department provides a secretariat service and is involved in the preparation of Agenda, Minutes and supporting documentation for the Statutory Meetings, Annual Meetings and Special Meetings of the Council. Corporate Services are also responsible for the Register of Electors, and Public Relations etc.

Library Services

The County Library service has a network of 7 branch libraries throughout the County, providing a comprehensive community service, making available reading and reference material with audio-visual material for both adults and children.

Arts Culture and Heritage

The main area of work in this function includes promotion of, access to, participation in and awareness of the arts in Westmeath.

Finance

Finance Section is tasked with accounting for all funds paid by, or to, the Council. The Council's revenue or day-to-day expenditure is funded from sources such as Commercial Rates, Commercial Water Charges, Government Grants and various other forms of income such as Development levies, housing rents, planning application fees etc. The amount of capital funds available is dependent on Government allocations in the areas of Housing, Roads, Environmental Services, etc. Property Management/ Asset Register are also functions of Finance Section.

Motor Taxation

The Motor Taxation Department is responsible for the issue of Vehicle Licences and other related functions and services on behalf of Central Government.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department has responsibility for recruitment and selection of new staff, training and development of staff, promoting family friendly policies, attendance management, employee relationships in the workplace.

Information Technology

The Council's Information Technology Department is responsible for maintaining the Council's computer systems, for overseeing the development of the Council's Information Technology strategies and to support other departments in service delivery.

Planning and Transportation

Planning and Sustainable Development

The vision of the Planning Department is to facilitate and promote the highest quality planning, efficient use of land, resources and infrastructures and promote sustainable development and safeguard the natural and built environment of this unique county, with maximum participation of the citizens in its physical, economic, social and cultural development.

Roads and Transportation

The Council is responsible for the construction and maintenance of public roads in the county. This involves responsibility for planning, design and development of National Roads and Non-National roads. This includes safety considerations and ongoing maintenance in order to provide a safe and efficient network to serve the needs of the county for Industrial, Agricultural, Tourism and Community Development. |

2.4 Customers and Clients

- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Westmeath County Council Customers and the General Public
- Local Community Groups
- Other State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other Local and Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- Local community and development organisations
- Private sector service providers
- Business and enterprises |

Chapter 3: Details of services currently being provided in English only or bilingually

Details of services currently being provided in English only or bilingually in Irish and English; including services in Gaeltacht areas.

Current Provision of Services		
Services (General)	In English only	In English only or bilingually in English and Irish
Application forms		Bilingual
Brochures and information leaflets	English only	
Major Policy Documents		Bi-lingual Annual Report Customer Services Action Plan & Charter Arts Plan Official Language Scheme
Correspondence		Correspondence is replied to in either Irish or English, depending on the official language chosen by the customer.
Press releases	Generally in English	Where subject matter relates to Irish language, the press release is issued bi-lingually.
Customer Services Desk and Phone switchboard	Generally in English	There is at present a very limited capacity in Westmeath County Council to provide personnel who are fluent in speaking Irish. Therefore, the provision of customer services in Irish is dependent on a very small number of individuals being present and available to do so in addition to their normal assigned duties.
Email		Correspondence is replied to in either Irish or English, depending on the official language chosen by the customer. Disclaimer is bi-lingual
Website	In English	
IT systems	Generally in English	Systems that have a bilingual capacity supported by LGMA are utilised.

Chapter 4: Enhancing the provision of Irish Language Services

The provisions shaded in grey in the table below are mandatory requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	
Recorded Oral Announcements		<p>The following recorded oral announcements will be in Irish or bilingual:</p> <p>(a) Recorded oral announcements provided on the telephone when the offices of the public body are closed;</p> <p>(b) Recorded oral announcements transmitted by a public address system;</p> <p>(c) Recorded oral announcements created and transmitted by means of a computerised messaging system or a computerised telephone answering system.</p> <p>This provision relates to 'recorded' announcements rather than 'live announcements'.</p> <p>Where a Placenames Order is in force, a public body is required to use the Irish language version of the placename specified in that Order in recorded oral announcements made by it or on its behalf.</p>	Mandatory
Written Communication	Letters and electronic mail	All written communication will be responded to in the official language in which it was received.	Mandatory
	Stationery	Headings of stationery, including notepaper, compliment slips, fax cover sheets, file covers and other folders, labels and envelopes are provided in Irish or bilingually.	Mandatory
Signage	Signage	All signage placed by Westmeath County Council or on its behalf must be in Irish or bilingually, in accordance with the regulations (S.I. No.391/2008).	Mandatory
Publications	Publications	Documents setting out public policy proposals, audited accounts or financial	Mandatory

		statements, annual reports and strategy statements will be published simultaneously in Irish and English.	
	Circulars/Mailshots	Where a public body communicates in writing or by electronic mail with the general public or a class of the general public for the purpose of furnishing information to the public or the class, the body shall ensure that the communication is in the Irish language or in the English and Irish languages.	Mandatory
An Ghaeltacht	Gaeltacht Placenames	The official placenames of Gaeltacht areas will be used by the public body in accordance with the relevant legislation.	Mandatory

Westmeath County Council will also undertake the following lists of actions under each service.

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	Timeline By end Yr 1, Yr 2 or Yr 3
Oral /Written Communication	Reception	Customer Services Customers will be greeted firstly in Irish and then in English.	Ongoing
		All Corporate Services & Area staff that habitually man counters or phones/switch will be given training to enable simple greetings to be given in Irish.	Year 1
		The names of the members of staff who are able to communicate in Irish will be advertised in the various sections of the office of the public body and at reception. Seeking services in Irish at reception will not cause any undue delay. Arrangements are in place to put members of the public in touch speedily with the relevant official(s) responsible for providing the service required through Irish.	Year 1
		The choice of language of the customer will be established and he/she will be directed to the appropriate official. If the official is	Year 2

		<p>unavailable, the following options will be offered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) calling back when an Irish speaker is available, 2) conducting business through another member of staff providing a translation service, or 3) continuing to conduct business in English. 	
	Face to Face/Counter Service	<p>All other Customer Services Customers will be greeted firstly in Irish and then in English.</p> <p>All Corporate Services & Area staff that habitually man counters or phones/switch will be given training to enable simple greetings to be given in Irish.</p> <p>The names of the members of staff who are able to communicate in Irish will be advertised in the various sections of the office of the public body and at reception.</p> <p>Seeking services in Irish at reception will not cause any undue delay. Arrangements are in place to put members of the public in touch speedily with the relevant official(s) responsible for providing the service required through Irish.</p> <p>The choice of language of the customer will be established and he/she will be directed to the appropriate official. If the official is unavailable, the following options will be offered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) calling back when an Irish speaker is available, 2) conducting business through another member of staff providing a translation service, or 3) continuing to conduct business in English. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Year 1</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Year 2</p>
	Switchboard	Switchboard staff will give the name of the public body in Irish and English.	Ongoing

		<p>Switchboard staff will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and will then be able to transfer the call to another member of staff who can speak Irish.</p> <p>Standard guidelines will be developed to deal with callers who wish to speak Irish and they will be distributed to the various sections of the office.</p> <p>Staff who operate the switchboard are the first points of contact with the public. Training will be provided for switchboard staff to ensure that they;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are able to greet the public and give the name of the Local Authority in Irish; • are capable of referring customers to the desired section or location; • are capable of directing customers without delay , to the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available. 	<p>Year 2</p> <p>Year1</p> <p>Year 1</p> <p>Year1</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Telephone communications with the public	<p>Staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the general public.</p> <p>Customers will be greeted in Irish and then in English.</p> <p>Bilingual staff will make customers aware that they are willing to conduct business in Irish if required.</p>	<p>Training to commence in Year 1</p> <p>Year 2</p> <p>Year 1</p>
	Live announcements	No live announcements are made in Westmeath Co. Co. buildings.	N/A
	Information Leaflets/ Brochures	Westmeath County Council is committed to ensuring that during the lifetime of the scheme, policy documents approved by Council for publication are made available in Irish and English within the same cover except where it is not feasible because of the nature, size or layout of the material.	Year 1

		10% of new information leaflets and brochures will be made available in Irish or bilingually. The selection criteria will be based on public demand which will be monitored annually.	
	Application Forms	All application forms published by the Council will be produced in both English and Irish and both versions will be given equal prominence. Application forms will be published within one cover except where this is not feasible due to the size, nature or layout of the document.	Ongoing
Media	Press Releases	Press releases relating to matters of Irish Language interest will be produced bilingually and circulated simultaneously.	Ongoing
	Media Spokespersons	The Council shall make available a media spokesperson to the media to respond in Irish when requested.	Ongoing
	Speeches	Speeches by the Cathaoirleach of the Council, Mayors of the Municipal Districts, and Chief Executive relating to matters of Irish Language interest will be produced bilingually and circulated simultaneously.	Ongoing
	Other	The Council will proactively develop relationships with Gaelscoileanna & other Irish Language organisations to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encourage the conduct of business through the medium of Irish, in so far as possible. • provide support for the achievement of a bi-lingual society in accordance with national policy. 	Ongoing
Information Technology	Email	The Council has the capacity to communicate through Irish where requested by a member of the public. Nominated persons have been assigned facilitator roles in order to ensure competent referral and responses to customer requirements through Irish.	Leanúnach

		<p>A dedicated e-mail gaeilge@westmeathcoco.ie address will be established for persons wishing to communicate directly in Irish with Westmeath County Council.</p> <p>Standard email messages such as disclaimers are bilingual.</p>	<p>Year 1</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Websites	<p>The static material on the home page and the specified main pages on Westmeath County Council's website will be available in Irish and in English.</p> <p>A system will be devised and implemented in order to ensure that the Irish version of material on the website corresponds with the English version.</p> <p>An Irish language page will be developed on the Council's intranet and will include basic guidance for staff regarding the provision of Irish language services and the availability of Irish language resources.</p>	<p>Year 1</p> <p>Year 1</p> <p>Year 1</p>
	Computer Systems	<p>The Council will avail of all ICT systems which are supported through the LGMA or other agent which have an Irish language public interface.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	Interactive Services	<p>The Council will avail of all ICT systems which are supported through the LGMA or other agent which have an Irish language public interface.</p> <p>All printing facilities will be fully capable of handling the Irish language.</p> <p>Westmeath Co. Co. will continue to actively use technology to improve the provision of bilingual services.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Other	<p>High profile public events routinely incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings as part of the Council's</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

		efforts to positively promote Irish in the community.	
	Meetings	<p>Regular meetings of the Councils routinely incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings as part of the Council's efforts to positively promote Irish in the community.</p> <p>Contributions in Irish or English are welcome at public meetings organised by Westmeath County Council.</p> <p>Meetings organised by the public body that deal with Irish language issues will be held in Irish or bilingually, as appropriate.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Year 1</p>

	<p>proficiency in the Irish language,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •enhance the capacity of staff to meet their Irish language obligations in the conduct of their duties, • and provide an accredited proficiency testing regime for staff. <p>Staff will be made aware of language resources such www.tearma.ie, www.focloir.ie, www.logainm.ie, www.teanglann.ie and www.abair.ie, as well as WinGléacht, the electronic version of the Ó Dónaill Irish- English dictionary.</p>	Year 1
Participation in language promotion activities /Provision of resources	<p>High profile public events routinely incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings as part of the Council's efforts to positively promote Irish in the community.</p>	Ongoing
	<p>Our internal library/internet will ensure that books and other materials in Irish are available as a resource to staff to improve their competence in the Irish language.</p>	Year 1
	<p>Staff will be aware of the concept of the proactive agreement - proactively offering services in Irish to the public.</p> <p>Access to information on language resources will be facilitated.</p>	Year 1
Other	<p>Westmeath County Council currently engages the services of Accredited Translation services. This ensures the highest standards in translation and guarantees adherence to acceptable and pre-set norms in the use of the Irish language.</p>	Ongoing

5.3 Designated Irish Language Posts

The posts listed below have been designated as having an Irish language competency requirement. It is the intention that holders of these posts will have achieved specified accredited standards in the Irish language, commensurate with the responsibilities of the post. When designating these posts, particular consideration has been given to posts located in Gaeltacht areas and to posts located outside Gaeltacht areas but whose customer base consists largely of Gaeltacht and/or Irish language speaking communities.

Title of Post	Location	Gaeltacht/Irish speaking community served	Indication of standard of Irish required (choose from basic, intermediate or advanced)
Customer Services	Front Desk	n/a	Basic
Customer Services	Switchboard	n/a	Basic
Oifigeach Gaeilge	Corporate Services	n/a	Advanced

Chapter 6: Monitoring and Review

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Corporate Services Department/Oifigeach Gaeilge. This takes place on a quarterly basis in order to ensure that implementation of policy and initiatives as outlined in this Scheme are maintained and progress is sustained. Outcomes are referred to the Council's Senior Management Team for information and action where required. Line managers in each of the departments will be responsible for the day to day operation of the scheme.

Details of progress in regard to implementation will be published in the Council's Annual Report. The contact person for the scheme will be the designated Oifigeach Gaeilge for Westmeath County Council.

A formal system for monitoring requests for services through Irish will be available and recorded in our Annual Report.

Chapter 7: Publicising of Agreed Scheme

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.

In addition, we will take every opportunity in our day to day interaction with customers to promote and publicise the services we provide in Irish through the following means:

- directly informing customers on a proactive basis of the option of conducting business with us through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available;
- prominently listing these services on our website;
- signifying on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms that these documents are also available in Irish, unless presented bilingually;
- giving equal prominence to Irish and English language materials.

A copy of the agreed scheme will be forwarded to the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga.

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

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