**Irish**

**Language**

**Policy**

**Beartas**

**Gaeilge**

**2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) recognises and celebrates the rich diversity of linguistic traditions that has helped to shape the history of the District, and that continues to reflect in the variety of languages that are written, spoken, and understood by the District’s residents and visitors. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is committed to protecting, promoting, growing and facilitating the use of Irish Language within its practices and throughout the wider District.

The Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Irish Language Policy intends to protect, promote and enhance the Irish Language within the District. This Policy will function within the broader context of the Council’s Linguistic Diversity Policy, Corporate Brand Identity and the Council’s Corporate Plan and Community Plan for the Fermanagh and Omagh District.

This Irish Language Policy is complemented by the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council’s Irish Language Strategy (2021-2026) and associated Implementation Plan (2022-2025).

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| **Our Commitment**  Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will enable, encourage and empower communities to learn, share and grow the Irish Language; promote the visibility and use of the Irish Language throughout the District; and work towards meeting the needs and objectives of existing and emerging Irish Language communities and networks. |

**Legislation and Guidance**

The Policy represents a local response to various regional, national and international policies and initiatives and meets Council’s statutory obligations, while also aspiring to help promote linguistic development within the Council and the District generally.

There have been a number of initiatives designed to help promote, protect and enhance linguistic diversity. Most significantly, in 2001 the UK Government ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, with Irish being designated as a minority language in the context of Northern Ireland. Part II of the Charter commits the UK Government to recognising Irish as a language to which the general principle of non-discrimination applies in Northern Ireland, with Part III applying only to Irish. The Charter continues to reflect in recent government initiatives in Northern Ireland and including the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) 2015, ‘Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language 2015 – 2035’.

The Council’s Irish Language Policy will operate in harmony with both the principles and practice of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This adherence will continue with regard to changes to legislation due to the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union. This Policy will be reviewed when further linguistic and language legislation is introduced.

In combination, the Policy has taken account of the legislation in Appendix I. See Appendix 1 for further details.

**Aim**

The policy aims to set out guiding principles that will demonstrate Fermanagh and Omagh District Council’s commitment to facilitate and encourage the promotion, protection, use and growth of Irish Language. This policy builds on Council’s commitments to celebrate linguistic diversity and shared heritage, and to deliver equality of opportunity for all who avail of Council services. It also sets out Fermanagh and Omagh District Council’s legislative obligations.

**Objectives**

By working in accordance with this Policy, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will:

* Work to protect, preserve, develop and grow Irish Language.
* Incorporate Irish Language in all forms including the encouragement of the use of Irish in both service delivery and in civic life.
* Facilitate residents and visitors who may wish to use Irish.
* Enhance positive attitudes towards the Irish Language within the District through promotion and celebrating its significance in shared heritage, history and culture.
* Encourage a collaborative, partnership-focussed approach.
* Help build capacity of Elected Members, staff and wider citizens in relation to Irish Language.
* Work to ensure that Irish Language is shared, owned and respected by all members of the community.

**Our Key Priorities are;**

1. Develop and grow Irish Language;
2. Increase visibility of and accessibility to Irish Language;
3. Empower Irish Language speakers and communities;
4. Showcase and celebrate Irish Language in the District.

**Priority One: Develop and grow Irish Language**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is committed to the protection and promotion of the Irish Language. The Council recognises that the Irish Language is an expression of cultural wealth and there is a need for the Council to support Irish in order to help protect and strengthen it. To ensure this the Council will:

* Implement an Irish Language Strategy, encouraging better understanding of the shared linguistic heritage of Irish. It will also recognise the contribution that the Irish Language can make to the vibrant society within the District.
* The Strategy identifies opportunities to protect, develop, share, promote and grow the language by encouraging networking, capacity building and opportunities for collaboration.

**Priority Two: Increase visibility and accessibility of Irish Language**

The Council’s Corporate identity will be English and Irish with English remaining the language of internal communications.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will respect the right of employees to use Irish within the workplace. The policy will facilitate Irish speakers to communicate with the Council through the medium of Irish.

* Key strategic documents of the Council and documents relevant to the Irish Language and the linguistic life of the District will be available in Irish.
* Within all bilingual documents or publicity produced by the Council, Irish will appear first or to the left hand side and English will be second and on the right hand side.
* Council literature and forms should be available to the public in English and Irish, where it is within Council’s remit and ability to do so.
* The Council will ensure that users of Irish Language may submit oral or written communications in Irish. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will correspond in the chosen language of the recipient, where this choice is known.
* The Council will ensure appropriate effort is made to take into account the use of Irish Language in the planning of presentations, events and festivals.
* The Council will enhance the visibility of Irish and foster different means of accessing the language as part of everyday life.
* The Council will facilitate a settlement signage programme on request; and maintain a bilingual street signage programme.

**Priority Three: Empower Irish Language speakers and communities**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will deliver training for Council Officers in the detail of this policy so that they will be able to respond appropriately to enquiries in Irish.

* Irish Language awareness and language training will be delivered to Elected Members and staff.
* Whilst fluency in Irish will not be a requirement for any Council position that would not ordinarily justify the appointment of an Irish speaker, Council staff will be encouraged to use any Irish they may have. The Council will provide translation services to staff and will provide Irish versions of internal documentation to staff on request.
* Council acknowledges the boundaries of its remit and will build partnerships with Irish Language lead organisations and community groups to support activity within the District.
* Council will collaborate with community groups and individuals and foster their growing capacity to deliver Irish Language projects and activities,

**Priority Four: Showcase and celebrate Irish Language in the District**

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has developed an Irish Language Strategy which is reactive to the development needs and objectives of the Irish Language speakers within the District. The Irish Language Strategy has an Implementation Plan which details actions that will:

* Promote Irish as a shared language, reducing intolerance and raising awareness of Irish as part of the District’s broader linguistic and cultural heritage.
* Facilitate opportunities across the District for individuals and communities, from all backgrounds, to develop, learn and use Irish Language.
* Enhance positive attitudes towards the Irish Language within the District through promotion and celebrating its significance in shared heritage, history and culture.
* Work to ensure that Irish Language is shared, owned and respected by all members of the community.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the implementation of the Policy. All employees are expected to follow the Policy and to take appropriate action to meet its aims and objectives.

**Directors and Heads of Service will:**

* Be responsible for the implementation of the Policy within their respective Departments.
* Monitor the delivery and implementation of the Policy within their Departments.

The **Director of Environment and Place** will have responsibility for the policy and to manage Requests for the use of bi-lingual street signage.

**Relevant Officers will:**

* Provide guidance and support in relation to the Policy.
* Deliver against the Irish Language Strategy and Action Plan which will ensure the effective implementation of the Policy.

**Elected Representatives** will be responsible for the overall monitoring of the Policy, as well as suggesting possible improvements and amendments.

**MONITORING**

The Council will monitor the implementation of the Policy at regular intervals and will respond to both regional and local changes in circumstance or new initiatives

**LINKAGES**

The Policy provides the framework to guide the Council’s practice in relation to Irish. The Policy operates in accord with the Council’s Corporate Plan which links it with all other plans and strategies carried out by the Council. It also links into the Corporate Customer Services Policy and Procedures, and the Council’s Equality Scheme

**REVIEW**

The Irish Language Policy, under normal circumstances, will be formally reviewed every three years. The Policy will also be subject to annual scrutiny and, from time to time, updates and re-issues will be circulated.

The Policy will be reviewed sooner in the event of any one or more of the following:

* A failure or weakness in the policy is highlighted.
* Changes in legislative requirements.
* Changes in Government/Council or other directives and requirements.

**Appendix One**

**Relevant Statutes and Guidance**

**European Charter for Regional and**

**Minority Languages 1992**

In 2001 the UK Government ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, with Irish and Ulster Scots both designated as minority languages in the

context of Northern Ireland. Part II of the Charter commits the UK Government to recognising Irish and Ulster- Scots as languages to which the general principles of non-discrimination should apply. The Government also signed up to Part III of the Charter in relation to Irish in Northern Ireland. This part contains a series of specific provisions concerning the place of regional or minority languages in the various sectors of the life of the community. For example, Article 10 of the Charter refers to local authorities’ duties, and including district councils, encouraging, as far as is reasonably possible, resolute action to promote minority languages, including the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of Irish in speech and writing in both private and public life. The overriding purpose of the Charter is to promote cultural diversity through the use of a regional minority language in the life of its speakers. The aim of the Charter is to ensure, as far as reasonably possible, the use of regional or minority languages in education and the media and to permit their use in judicial and administrative settings, economic and social life and cultural activities.

Where the numbers of users of regional or minority languages is such as to justify the measures, the Charter outlines steps that a public authority can take to promote that language. In particular, Part 3 Article 10 details the Council’s obligations as follows: Within the Administrative district of the State in which the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages justifies the measures specified below and according to the situation of each language, the Parties undertake, as far as this is reasonably possible to: Ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications in these languages; Allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in a regional or minority language; In respect of the local and regional authorities on whose territory the number of users of regional or minority languages is such as to justify the measures specified below, the Parties undertake to allow and/or encourage: The possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages; The use by local authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however the use of the official language of the state; The use or adoption, if necessary, in conjunction with the name in the official language(s) of traditional and correct forms of place- names in regional or minority languages. With regard to public services provided by the administrative authority or other persons acting on their behalf, the Parties undertake, within the territory in which regional or minority languages are used, in accordance with the situation of each language and as far as this is reasonably possible, to: Allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request in these languages. With a view to putting into effect the above provisions accepted by them, the Parties undertake to take one or more of the following measures: Translation or interpretation as may be required. The Parties undertake to allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages, at the request of those concerned.

**Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995 An tOrdú Rialtais Áitiúil (Forálacha Ilghnéitheacha) (TÉ) 1995**

Article 11 of the 1995 Order enables local councils to display street names in languages other than English. This provision has been used to display street names in Irish. Ceadaíonn Airteagal 11 d’Ordú 1995 do chomhairlí áitiúla ainmneacha sráide a thaispeáint i dteangacha seachas Béarla. Úsáideadh an fhoráil sin cheana féin chun ainmneacha sráide a thaispeáint sa Ghaeilge.

**Disability Discrimination Act 1995**

The Act recognises that various barriers existwithin society which may present practicaldifficulties for disabled people who are seekingemployment, who are currently in employmentor when accessing goods, facilities, services orpremises. In order to address some of thepractical difficulties that these barriers present,the disability legislation creates a positive dutyon employers and service providers to make‘reasonable adjustment’ to their policies andpremises where reasonable and appropriate.This would extend to access to and use ofmeans of communication.

**Race Relations (NI) Order 1997**

The Order 1997 follows closely the provisionsof the 1976 Race Relations Act in GB,outlawing discrimination on grounds ofcolour, race, nationality or ethnic or national

origin. The Order makes racial discrimination unlawful in employment; the provision of goods, facilities and services; education; and housing management and disposal of premises.

**Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998**

Article 19 places a requirement on employers in Northern Ireland to maintain a good and harmonious working environment. The Fair Employment Code of Practice provides guidance for employers on the promotion of such an environment. At Section 5.2 it states that, ‘To promote equality of opportunity you should….promote a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated because of his or her religious belief or political opinion.’

**Section 75 Northern Ireland Act 1998**

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998requires all designated public authorities inNorthern Ireland, and including Fermanaghand Omagh District Council, to have dueregard to the need to promote equality ofopportunity on nine specified grounds, namely:between persons of different religious belief,political opinion, racial group, age, maritalstatus or sexual orientation; between men andwomen generally; between persons with adisability and persons without; and betweenpersons with dependents and persons withouta designated public authority must also haveregard to the desirability of promoting goodrelations between persons of differentreligious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council areconsulting on a new Equality Scheme that

affirms its commitment to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The scheme makes a commitment to remove barriers to communication and includes the following statement, ‘Information will be made available on request, in alternative formats – such as Braille, disc and audio cassette’.

**Belfast / Good Friday Agreement 1998**

The Agreement commits Government to exercising power in Northern Ireland, ‘with

rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and

traditions and [with] parity of esteem and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and

aspirations of both communities’. In the section entitled ‘Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity: Economic, Social and Cultural Issues’ the agreement recommends that, ‘All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.’

Furthermore, the Agreement duly acknowledged obligations under the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in relation to the Irish language, ‘where appropriate and where people so desire it’,

**Human Rights Act 1998 Article 10**

(Freedom of Expression) of the Human RightsAct 1998 is a qualified right which states thateveryone has the right to freedom ofexpression, including freedom to hold opinionsand to receive and impart information andideas without interference by a publicauthority and regardless of frontiers. Thisguarantees the right to pass information toother people and to receive information thatother people want to give to you. It alsoguarantees the right to hold and expressopinions and ideas.

**Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006**

The Northern Ireland Act 2006 places a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt a strategy for the enhancement and protection of the Irish language.

**Equality Commission (NI) Guidance on Promoting a Good and Harmonious Working Environment 2010**

Following earlier advice made available by the Fair Employment Commission, in 2010 the Equality Commission issued revised guidance on promoting a good and harmonious environment, setting out responsibilities of both employers and employees. The guide acknowledges that while certain emblems and symbols will, by their history, nature and associations, have the potential to disrupt a good and harmonious working environment, others are unlikely to cause disharmony.

"This of course does not mean that working environments must always be devoid of anything that happens to be more closely associated with only one community in Northern Ireland. Some employers prefer to promote the workplace environment as a ‘neutral’ space given the organisation’s specific context and including its history, culture and/or workforce composition. On the other hand, many employers find ways to facilitate diverse expressions of identity in a sensitive way which does not disrupt a good and harmonious working environment. Neither approach is inherently right or wrong, but each should be founded on choices based on what is reasonable, fair and appropriate at that time and in that place. It is for employers to consider where such boundaries should be set.”

In relation to the use of the Irish language, the draft guide states, 'The use of languages other than English, for example in corporate logos and communications, should not in general infringe a good and harmonious working environment. In keeping with other elements of this guidance, decisions on this

must rest with the employer and should be based on relevant policies and procedures that are proportionate, reasonable and appropriate to the context in which the organisation operates and be compliant with equality of opportunity.'

**DCAL Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language 2015 to 2035**

A bilingual (English | Irish) document on the 20 year strategy for the Irish language for the period 2015 to 2035. This strategy sets out a long term vision of needs to be addressed if Irish is to be enhanced, protected and developed as a language in terms of learning, use, status and respect in a quality and sustainable way. The measures suggested are broadly in line with those included in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

**OFMDFM Together: Building a Shared Community 2013**

In May 2013, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) produced a good relations /shared future strategy document which contains a number of commitments to help improve community relations and build a united and shared society in Northern Ireland. Of particular note, the strategy contains a shared aim to, ‘Create a community which promotes mutual respect and understanding, is strengthened by its diversity and where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced’. To further this aim, the strategy requires each district council to put in place a District Council Good Relations Programme and an associated Action Plan.

**New Decade, New Approach 2020**

This agreement marks a new approach togovernment in Northern Ireland. It enables therestoration to full operation of all theinstitutions of the Belfast (Good Friday)Agreement, including the Executive, theAssembly, the North South Ministerial Council,the British-Irish Council and the British-IrishIntergovernmental Conference. It contains arange of proposals to make governmentbetter. At the time of writing, the relevant commitments within the New Decade, New Approach Agreement have not been implemented.

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