Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Comhairle Ceantair Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí

Equality Impact Assessment: Irish Language Policy 2027 – 2030

Background

This Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) relates to the draft revision of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's Irish Language Policy 2027 - 2030. The policy aims to set out guiding principles that will demonstrate the 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.

Section 75

The EQIA is being carried out in accordance with the Council's statutory duties under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 75 requires the Council, in carrying out its functions in Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between persons with a disability and persons without; and between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to these obligations, the Council is also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('the 1998 Act') sets out the detailed procedure for the implementation of these duties, including the conduct of screening exercises and EQIAs of policies.

When undertaking an EQIA, the Council's Equality Scheme commits to following the guidance issued by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This guidance recommends that there should be seven steps in the EQIA process:

- Step 1: Definition of the aims of the policy
- Step 2: Consideration of available data and research
- Step 3: Assessment of impact
- Step 4: Consideration of measures to mitigate
- Step 5: Formal consultation

- Step 6: Decision and publication of the results of the EQIA
- Step 7: Monitoring for adverse impact

This Draft EQIA Consultation Report sets out the findings of the first four steps of the EQIA process. Following the period of consultation, any feedback obtained will be reflected on by the Council and incorporated into a final decision report.

Purpose of the EQIA

An EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy to determine the extent of differential impact upon any of the groups within the nine Section 75 categories and whether that impact is adverse. If it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact on groups within one or more of the nine categories, the Council must consider measures which may mitigate the adverse impact and alternative ways of delivering policy aims which have a less adverse impact on groups within each of the relevant categories.

In order to determine whether the policy is likely to have any adverse impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the Section 75 categories to which they belong.

Definition of the aims of the policy

The draft revised policy recognises and celebrates the rich diversity of linguistic traditions that has helped to shape the history of the District, and that continues to be reflected 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 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 (2027-2030) and associated Implementation Plan (2027-2030).

Aim

The policy aims to set out the specific steps Fermanagh and Omagh District Council will take to facilitate and promote the Irish Language internally and across the District, as well as to nurture and support the growing community of speakers within the District. In developing this policy, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council aims to create the conditions and capacity where a person requesting a service through the medium of Irish is entitled to the same standard of service as they would receive were they to request it in English. 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. This policy is underpinned by the principle of "active offer"; i.e. when a service user requests a service or document they will immediately be informed whether the service/document they seek is available through Irish. The policy also sets out Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's legislative obligations.

Key Priorities

1. Mainstream, develop and grow the Irish Language;
2. Increase the visibility, accessibility and use of the Irish Language;
3. Empower, support and foster the development of Irish Language speakers and communities;
4. Actively promote and celebrate the Irish Language in the District.

Analysis of available data and research

Legal position

International Legal Obligations

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992)

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a Council of Europe Treaty adopted in 1992 to protect and promote regional and minority languages. The United Kingdom ratified the Charter in 2001 and registered Irish under Part III, alongside Scottish Gaelic and Welsh. Part III requires specific undertakings across

areas including education, administrative authorities, media, culture, economic and social life, and trans-frontier exchanges.

Article 10 is especially significant for local government because it concerns administrative authorities. In practical terms, the Charter supports the use of Irish in dealings with public authorities, in local democratic settings, in official documents, and in traditional place names.

- Users of Irish should be able to submit oral or written applications in Irish to administrative authorities.
- Administrative authorities should be permitted to draft documents in Irish.
- Irish may be used in debates in public assemblies, while not excluding the use of the official language or languages of the State.
- Traditional and correct Irish forms of place names may be used or adopted where necessary alongside the official language form.
- Users of Irish should be able to request public services in Irish.
- Irish forms of family names should be permitted upon request.
- Translation or interpretation should be provided where required to make these obligations effective.

Article 12 addresses cultural activities and facilities, including libraries, cultural centres, museums, archives, theatres, cinemas, literary work, film production, festivals, and the cultural industries. Where public authorities are competent or play a role in these fields, they are expected to support access to Irish-language cultural expression and participation.

- Encourage forms of expression and initiative specific to regional or minority languages.
- Foster access to works produced in Irish and other protected languages.
- Ensure that bodies organising or supporting cultural activities make appropriate allowance for Irish Language and cultural provision.
- Promote measures so that relevant cultural bodies have access to staff with command of Irish and of the language or languages of the wider population.
- Encourage direct participation by Irish Language users in planning facilities and cultural activities.

The Charter is grounded in non-discrimination. Special measures designed to support regional or minority languages are not treated as discrimination against speakers of more widely used languages where they aim to promote equality and take account of the specific conditions faced by minority language users.

> "The Parties undertake to eliminate, if they have not yet done so, any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of it. The adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages" (COMEX report to CoE on European Charter for Regional Minority Languages **(**ECRML) 2004).

As the Charter states, parties undertake to eliminate unjustified distinctions, exclusions, restrictions, or preferences relating to the use of a regional or minority language where these would discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of that language.

The Council of Europe Committee of Experts (COMEX) carry out periodical monitoring reports of state parties and have consistently criticised the UK Government for non-compliance with core elements of the Charter and recommending additional legislative and policy-based protections for Irish. As part of the Committee of Experts 5th Monitoring Report on UK Compliance with UK undertakings of ECRML, the following recommendations were made:

> *h. Ensure that users of Irish may submit oral or written applications in Irish to local branches of the national authorities, the authorities of Northern Ireland, local authorities and public service providers… Introduce simultaneous translation facilitating the full use of Irish in the Northern Ireland Assembly and in local councils.*

k. Facilitate the adoption and use, by local and regional authorities as well as public service providers, of place names in Irish.

The vast majority of these recommendations remain unfulfilled or unresolved; through the adoption of a progressive, Irish Language Policy, the Council has a chance to align with recommendations set out by international experts.

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM) is a Council of Europe Treaty aimed at protecting minority rights. The United Kingdom is a signatory ratifying the FCPNM in 1998. Article 10 recognises the right of national minorities to use their language in private and in public, while Article 11 requires facilitation of traditional local names, street names, and other topographical indications in the minority language.

The Advisory Committee monitoring the Framework Convention has repeatedly criticised approaches that treat Irish Language promotion as discriminatory or that restrict bilingual provision on broad good relations grounds. This strengthens the position that Irish Language measures should be evaluated as a rights-based and equality-focused provision.

Domestic Political Commitments

Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Strand Three of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement recognises the importance of respect, understanding, and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity. This includes Irish, Ulster Scots, and the languages of ethnic communities, all of which are described as part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

The Agreement commits the UK Government to take “resolute action” to promote Irish, to facilitate and encourage its use in speech and writing in public and private life where there is appropriate demand, and to remove restrictions that would work against the maintenance and development of the language.

This commitment provides an important domestic political foundation for practical Irish Language provision by public authorities. It frames promotion of the Irish

Language as part of the broader peace settlement and as a matter of cultural respect and inclusion.

St Andrews Agreement 2006

The St Andrews Agreement included a commitment to an Irish Language Act based on the experience of Wales. Although the introduction of such legislation was delayed, the commitment remained significant and was later reflected in the New Decade, New Approach Agreement and the Act finally passed in Westminster in 2022.

The practical importance of this commitment is that Irish Language protection has been repeatedly recognised in the political agreements underpinning devolved government in Northern Ireland. Additionally, the St Andrews Agreement brought forward the original legal duty on the Executive to adopt an Irish Language Strategy. That provision was reflected through an amendment in the 1998 NI Act via Article 28d to the same effect.

New Decade, New Approach 2020

New Decade, New Approach restored power-sharing institutions in 2020 and included a commitment to bring forward legislative protection for Irish. A key element was provision of an Irish Language Commissioner, who would develop best-practice language standards for public authorities concerning the promotion of Irish and the use of Irish in services.

This moves Irish Language provision beyond general cultural recognition and toward operational standards for public bodies. For Councils and other authorities, the implication is that service design, communications, signage, and corporate identity will need to be assessed against emerging or recommended Irish Language standards.

The Language & Identity (Northern Ireland) Act 2022

In December 2022, Royal Assent was given to the Identity & Language (Northern Ireland) Act. This legislation gives official recognition of the status of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland. The Act states that ***"a public authority must, in***

carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, have due regard to the national and cultural identity principles". These principles are:

A. The principle that everybody in Northern Ireland is free to:
   - choose, affirm, maintain, and develop their national and cultural identity.
   - express and celebrate that identity in a manner that takes account of the sensitivities of those with different national and cultural identities and respects the rule of law.

B. The principle that public authorities should encourage and promote reconciliation, tolerance and meaningful dialogue between those with different national and cultural identities with a view to promoting parity of esteem, mutual respect and understanding, and cooperation.

The Act provides for the establishment of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, the Office of the Commissioner for the Irish Language, and the Office of the Commissioner for Ulster Scots and The Ulster British Tradition.

The principal aims of the Office of identity and Cultural Expression are:

- to promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity,
- to promote social cohesion and reconciliation between those of different national and cultural identities,
- to increase the capacity and resilience of people to address issues related to differences in national and cultural identity, and
- to support and promote the celebration of the cultural and linguistic heritage of all people living here.

The principal aim of the Irish Language Commissioner is to enhance and protect the use of the Irish Language by public authorities in the provision of services to the public or a section of the public.

The principal aim of the Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition is to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition

Public Authority Duties and Service Provision

Expert Advisory Panel Recommendations for an Irish Language Strategy (2022)

New Decade, New Approach also recommitted to the development of an Irish Language Strategy, distinct from legislation. The aim of the Strategy is to enhance and protect the development of Irish over a twenty-year period.

The Expert Advisory Panel, published by the Department for Communities in 2022, made a series of recommendations concerning Irish Language use in public services. These recommendations indicate the type of practical measures that public bodies should consider when planning accessible, visible, and meaningful Irish Language provision.

- Irish speakers should be able to access government services through Irish, and those services should be of the same standard as services provided in English.
- Public bodies should take resolute action to promote Irish internally and maximise the services available through Irish.
- Publicly available forms should be available in Irish.
- Public bodies should use bilingual Irish/English corporate identity.
- Public buildings should have bilingual Irish/English signage inside and outside the building.
- Key corporate documents should be made available in Irish.

For local authorities, these recommendations point toward a coherent service model: visible bilingual identity, accessible Irish Language forms and documents, staff capacity, and service quality that does not fall below the standard available in English.

Department for Communities Guidance Document for Local Authorities on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages (2016)

> *"The adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the*

rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages."

Foras na Gaeilge Guidance Document

Irish Languages services in the new Councils

In light of the review of public administration, in 2014 Foras na Gaeilge published a guidance document for the new local Councils relating to best-practice in Irish Language provision and protection. The document suggested the following areas of action in order for Councils to be in line with international best practice:

- Branding
- Documents
- Council staff (audit and training and awareness)
- Correspondence
- Services for Irish Language media
- Social media
- Council websites
- Translation and interpretation services
- Signage
- Support for schools
- Support for the public
- Development of an Irish Language Policy

Human Rights, Non-Discrimination, and Good Relations

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Briefing (2010)

'Minority Language Rights: The Irish Language and Ulster Scots, Briefing paper on the implications of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, European Convention on Human Rights and other instruments'

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has emphasised that there is no general "right to be offended" by another party exercising a right. In the context of Irish, this principle is linked to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the

European Convention on Human Rights, read alongside Article 14 on non-discrimination, including discrimination on grounds of language.

The Commission's position is that restricting the use or promotion of Irish merely to accommodate the sensitivities of others would generally be incompatible with freedom of expression. This is important because it limits the extent to which discomfort or opposition can justify restricting Irish Language visibility or services.

> *"... the Commission has drawn attention to the fact that there is no "right to be (sic) offended" by another party exercising a right. This is a general principle of freedom of expression (European Convention on Human Rights - ECHR Article 10, which must be read in conjunction with ECHR Article 14 on non-discrimination on grounds that include language). The Commission is aware of arguments that there are 'sensitivities' regarding the Irish language. In general restricting use or promotion of Irish to accommodate the 'sensitivities' of others would be incompatible with freedom of expression."*

United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation (2017).

> *[Page 5]: "She identified and discussed nine areas of concern: (1) threats to the existence of minority languages and linguistic minorities; (2) recognition of minority languages and linguistic rights; (3) the use of minority languages in public life; (4) minority languages in education; (5) minority languages in the media; (6) minority languages in public administration and judicial fields; (7) minority language use in names, place names and public signs; (8) participation in economic and political life; and (9) the provision of information and services in minority languages. The purpose of this Guide is to further assist policymakers and rights holders to understand the full scope of linguistic rights of linguistic minorities for their practical implementation."*
>
> *[Page 27]:4.4 Minority Languages and Identity - What should be done?*

A person's own identity, in the form of one's own name or surname in a minority language, must be respected, recognized and used by the state authorities. Where practicable, the use of minority languages on street signs and topographical designations should also be added, particularly where they have historical significance or where minorities are concentrated.

[Page 28]: Street and locality names and topographical indicators intended for the public are important as markers of social identity, culture and history. A good, practical approach adopted in most countries is for the authorities to provide transparent legislation or procedures to allow bilingual or even trilingual signs, usually following the proportionality principle where there is a sufficient concentration or demand for such signs in minority languages… The criteria for the display of signs in minority languages must be given a clear and unambiguous legislative basis for it to be effectively implemented.

Bilingual or multilingual signs used by public authorities demonstrate inclusiveness, and that various population groups share a locality in harmony and mutual respect.

Equality Commission

'Promoting a Good & Harmonious Working Environment' (2009)

"The use of languages other than English, for example in corporate logos and communications, will not, in general, constitute an infringement of a good and harmonious working environment." [pg 9].

"...They should also be compliant with the requirement and principles of equality of opportunity. Such decisions may also be affected by the terms of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages." [pg. 9]"

Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL): Report on Consultation for Draft Irish Language Act (2015)

"Assessment of impact on equality"

4.4 The available evidence suggests that those speaking and possessing some knowledge of Irish are more likely to be Catholic, nationalist, young, without a disability, with dependants and single. There were no differences in relation to gender and racial group. No data is available in relation to sexual orientation.

4.5 DCAL's view that establishing Irish language legislation will have a positive impact on Irish speakers and therefore indirectly on Catholics, nationalists, single people, younger people, people without a disability and people with dependants. In DCAL's view there are no discriminatory or adverse impacts.

Assessment of Impact on Good Relations

4.6 DCAL considered that the introduction of an Irish Language Bill has the potential to improve good relations, as it will give the Irish language a more equality and accessibility platform for all sections of the community."

Use of Irish in the district

2021 NI Census

The 2021 Census showed that 17.83% of the district's residents have some ability in Irish. The Fermanagh and Omagh district has the third largest percentage of people with some ability in Irish after Mid Ulster (20.41%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (18.63%).

Additionally, 2.81% of district residents speak Irish on a daily basis with a further 2.13% speaking Irish on a weekly basis.

Pre-consultation

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council 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.

The Council has standalone Irish Language and Ulster Scots Policies in addition to a Linguistic Diversity Policy (2022) which extends beyond Irish and Ulster Scots to all forms of linguistic diversity including Minority Languages, Sign Language, Makaton, Braille and other language forms.

Prior to this consultation Fermanagh and Omagh District Council hosted 2 Dáil na Gaeilge in both Enniskillen and Omagh in March 2026, where the policy review process was discussed with attendees from a variety of backgrounds within the Irish Language community and sector. Pre Consultation meetings were held with the following organisations to gain further insight into the Irish Language sector within the District and outside of it:

Conradh na Gaeilge, Foras na Gaeilge, An tOireachtas, Glór na nGael, Office of The Commissioner for the Irish Language, Ulster University, Tús Nua Fhear Manach, Pobal ar a'n Iúl, Club Óige, Sruth na hÉirne, Fermanagh GAA, Office of Identity & Cultural Expression, Tyrone GAA, and local businesses.

Equality Scheme

The Council's Equality Scheme (adopted January 2022) sets out the Council's arrangements for complying with the equality duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, includes a commitment to providing information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. The Scheme states that alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, audio formats (CD, mp3 or DAISY), large print or in minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

Assessment of impacts

Section 75 Category	Details of Evidence/Information[1] and assessment of impact
Religious Belief	The most up-to-date population statistics indicate that the profile of the District is: • 61.15% identifying as 'Roman Catholic'. • 28.75% identifying as 'Protestant or other Christian' religion. • 10.10% identified as 'No Religion/Other'. The most recent Equality Monitoring Process of Council employees demonstrated those responding identified as: • 58% - 'Roman Catholic'. • 35% - 'Protestant'. • 7% - 'No Religion/Other' Evidence suggests that Irish Language use is more prevalent within some religious communities than others. The Policy is therefore likely to have a positive impact on sections of the population with an

[1] Data from NI Census 2021

	interest in accessing services through Irish or promoting the language. The Council does not consider that these positive impacts automatically result in adverse impacts on people of other religious beliefs, as services will continue to be available through English and the Policy will be implemented in accordance with equality and good relations obligations.
Political Opinion	The current political opinion of the Council's elected members is as follows: Sinn Féin: 21 UUP: 7 DUP: 6 SDLP: 3 Alliance Party: 2 Independent: 1 This breakdown is taken as an approximate representation of the political opinion among people within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area. The Council recognises that views regarding the Irish Language may differ across political opinion groups. The Policy seeks to facilitate access to services through Irish where requested and does not reduce access to services for any individual or group.
Race	Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District, 98.29% of the local population identifies as 'White'. 1.71% of the local population identifies as 'Other'. The District is becoming more diverse, with approximately 5.17% of the local population being born outside of the UK and Ireland. There are also approximately 4,427 people whose first language is not English. Monitoring statistics for Council employees broadly reflects this, with 99.6% identifying as 'White' and 0.4% identifying as 'Other'. The Policy is not anticipated to have an adverse impact on people from different racial groups. While the Policy specifically relates to the Irish Language, it sits within the wider context of the Council's commitment to linguistic diversity and inclusive communication. The District has a growing population whose first language is neither English nor Irish. The implementation of the Policy may contribute positively to wider awareness and acceptance of linguistic diversity and minority language rights. Council services will continue to be provided through English and, where appropriate,

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>alternative formats and languages may be made available in accordance with existing Council policies.

Therefore, no adverse impact has been identified in relation to race.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Disability</td><td>Statistics demonstrate that within the Fermanagh and Omagh District, 23.94% of the population identifies as having a long-term health problem or disability that limits their day-to-day activities, split as follows:

• Long-term health problem or disability (Day-to-day activities limited a lot): 12,841 people.
• Long-term health problem or disability (Day-to-day activities limited a little): 15,126 people.
• Long-term health problem or disability (Day-to-day activities not limited): 88,845

The Council recognises that people with disabilities may experience additional barriers in accessing information and services. The implementation of the Policy will continue alongside the Council's commitment to provide information in accessible formats where reasonably practicable, including large print, audio and other accessible formats on request.

While evidence suggests that people with limiting long-term illnesses may be less likely to report knowledge of Irish than the wider population, the Policy does not require services to be accessed through Irish and English only; other services will be made available.

Consequently, no adverse impact has been identified and the Policy may provide opportunities to improve accessibility through the provision of bilingual and accessible communications.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Age</td><td>The Age Profile of the Fermanagh and Omagh District is as follows:

<table>
<tr><th>Age Band</th><th>Number of Individuals within each Age Band</th><th>District Percentage (%)</th></tr>
<tr><td>0-16</td><td>24,779</td><td>21.23</td></tr>
<tr><td>16-29</td><td>17,954</td><td>15.37</td></tr>
<tr><td>30-44</td><td>21,892</td><td>18.74</td></tr>
<tr><td>45-59</td><td>23,457</td><td>20.08</td></tr>
<tr><td>60-74</td><td>19,453</td><td>16.65</td></tr>
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<table>
<tr><td></td><td>
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<tr><td>75+</td><td>9,256</td><td>7.92</td></tr>
</table>

Census and previous research indicate that younger people are more likely to have knowledge of or experience of learning Irish through the education system.

As a result, the Policy may have a positive impact for younger people by increasing opportunities to access services, information and cultural activities through Irish. However, the Policy does not restrict access to services for people in other age groups and English language services will continue to be available.

Therefore, while a potential positive impact has been identified for younger age groups, no adverse impact has been identified for older people.
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Marital Status</td><td>
The Marital Status statistics for the Fermanagh and Omagh District are:
<table>
<tr><th>Marital Status</th><th>District Profile (%)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Divorced</td><td>4.92</td></tr>
<tr><td>Single</td><td>35.81</td></tr>
<tr><td>Married</td><td>49.14</td></tr>
<tr><td>Separated</td><td>3.44</td></tr>
<tr><td>Widowed</td><td>6.55</td></tr>
<tr><td>Same-sex Civil Partnership</td><td>0.14</td></tr>
</table>

There is no evidence to suggest that the impact of the Policy will differ according to marital status.

The Policy seeks to facilitate access to services and information through Irish where requested and does not create barriers or provide preferential access based on whether an individual is single, married, separated, divorced, widowed or in a civil partnership.

Accordingly, no adverse impact has been identified in relation to marital status.
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sexual Orientation</td><td>The Sexual Orientation statistics for the Fermanagh and Omagh District are:</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>
<table>
<tr><th>Sexual Orientation</th><th>Number of individuals aged 16 or over</th><th>District Percentage (%)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Straight or heterosexual</td><td>82,373</td><td>89.52</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gay or lesbian</td><td>523</td><td>0.57</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bisexual</td><td>392</td><td>0.43</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other sexual orientation</td><td>146</td><td>0.16</td></tr>
<tr><td>Prefer not to say or Not Stated</td><td>8,579</td><td>9.32</td></tr>
</table>
There is no evidence to suggest that the impact of the Policy will differ according to sexual orientation.

The Policy applies equally to all residents, visitors, service users and employees and aims to support access to services through Irish where requested.

No adverse impact has been identified in relation to sexual orientation.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gender</td><td>The Fermanagh and Omagh District is comprised of the following Gender breakdown:

• Male: 49.93%
• Female: 50.07%

Available evidence does not suggest that the Policy will have a significantly different impact on men and women.
The opportunities arising from the Policy, including access to services, information, learning opportunities and cultural participation, will be available regardless of gender.
Therefore, no adverse impact has been identified in relation to gender.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dependency</td><td>Adult Dependents:

Within the Fermanagh and Omagh District, 11.02% of the population identified as providing unpaid care to a family, friend or neighbour.

Children:

• Families in households with no dependent children: 32,179 families.
• Families in households with one dependent child: 4,666 families.
• Families in households with two dependent children: 5,068 families.
Families in households with three or more dependent children: 3,880 families.</td></tr>
</table>

	People with dependants may benefit from increased opportunities to access Irish Language services, educational initiatives, family-focused programmes and cultural activities where these are delivered as part of the Policy and accompanying Strategy. The Policy does not place additional burdens on people with dependants or those without dependants, nor does it restrict access to services. Accordingly, while there may be limited positive impacts for some families and carers, no adverse impact has been identified in relation to dependency status.

In accordance with the EQIA process, having gathered information on the draft Policy and those that are likely to be affected by it, the Council must then assess whether there is likely to be a differential impact on groups within one or more of the Section 75 categories should the Policy be adopted, before determining the extent of that differential impact and whether it is likely to be adverse.

On this occasion, Irish speakers and members of Irish groups and communities are likely to advance an argument that the Policy should be regarded first and foremost as a positive action measure, while downplaying any potential adverse impact on those who have a different perception. The EQIA will endeavour to take account of these competing perspectives.

The Policy seeks to promote, protect and enhance the Irish language and culture for the benefit of the District's residents and visitors. The Policy and any subsequent actions will be applied consistently for all, regardless of their Religious Belief or Political Opinion. It is worthwhile noting that language in itself is not a Section 75 category; however, using proxy indicators, people with different religious beliefs and political opinions have the potential to benefit from aspects of the Policy. The Council is mindful of the legislative background under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 and its obligations thereunder relating to the national and cultural identity principles.

In terms of equality of opportunity, it is anticipated that there will be potential positive impacts for some groups, particularly Irish speakers and those who wish to access services through the medium of Irish. Evidence also suggests that these benefits may be experienced more strongly by certain religious belief, political opinion and age groups than others. However, the Council does not consider that these positive impacts automatically result in adverse impacts for other Section 75 groups.

Services will continue to be available through English and the Policy will be implemented in accordance with the Council's statutory equality and good relations duties.

Having considered the available demographic data, research evidence, legislative framework and stakeholder information, the Council has not identified any evidence that the Policy will result in adverse impacts for any Section 75 category. The Council nevertheless recognises that consultees may hold differing views on the potential impacts of the Policy and welcomes any additional evidence, information or alternative perspectives through the consultation process, including suggestions for mitigation measures or alternative approaches.

Consideration of measure to mitigate

The draft Policy and the accompanying assessment of impacts are now being presented for consultation. The EQIA process requires that, if it is decided that the Policy is likely to have an adverse impact on those within one or more of the nine Section 75 categories then a series of mitigations or alternatives should be put forward for consideration, and an assessment of the possible impact of these alternatives undertaken.

The Council must then consider the adoption of measures that may mitigate the adverse impact and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy aims which have a less adverse impact on those within the relevant category or which better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Equality Commission Guidance on this section advises that the Council should give consideration to options/measures that may mitigate any adverse impact, and to alternative policies that may better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity. The guidance states:

‘The consideration of mitigating measures and alternative policies is at the heart of the EQIA process. Different options must be developed which reflect different ways of delivering the policy aims. The consideration of these measures is intertwined with the consideration of alternative policies. Mitigation can take the form of lessening the severity of the adverse impact.’

‘Ways of delivering policy aims that have a less adverse effect on the relevant equality category, or which better promote equality of opportunity for the relevant equality category, must in particular be considered. Consideration must be given to whether separate implementation strategies are necessary for the policy to be effective for the relevant group.’

The Council has decided to seek views on the draft Policy and proposals contained therein, along with mitigating options, through public consultation. The Council will collate and analyse all comments received and this feedback will be used to inform the final version of the Policy.

In reaching a decision, the Council commits to remaining open to feedback and is committed to responding in a positive manner to views expressed through the consultation process.

Consultation

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is committed to a consultation process which is timely, open and inclusive. The consultation on the EQIA will last for 12 weeks from 12pm 22 October 2026 to 5pm on 13 January 2027.

3 public meetings will be held within the district as well as smaller meetings with Irish Language community groups, details of these meetings will be available on the Council's website and social media, in addition to the specific Irish Language social media channels on Facebook and Instagram and the Irish Language mailing list.

An online questionnaire survey will be made available for the public, along with hardcopies for those who are unable to access the material electronically.

All consultation documents can be made available in hard copy, email and alternative formats on request. For further enquiries please email: Gaeilge@fermanaghomagh.com

Further steps

At the end of the consultation period, the EQIA report will be revised to take account relevant comments received from consultees. An EQIA final decision report will then be submitted to Council to assist elected members in reaching a decision in respect of the policy. The Council's decisions will be incorporated into an EQIA final decision report which will set out the consideration given to the impact of alternative policies and mitigating actions. This will complete Step 6 of the EQIA process.

The EQIA final decision report will be made available on the Council's website.

The results of ongoing monitoring will be reviewed on an annual basis and included in the annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. This will complete Step 7 of the EQIA process.

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Comhairle Ceantair Fhear Manach agus na hÓmaí

EQIA Consultation Questions

1. Are there any data, needs or issues in relation to any of the Section 75 equality categories that have not been identified in the Analysis of Available Data and Research section and the Assessment of Impacts section of the EQIA consultation document? If so, what are they? Please provide details.

2. Are there any impacts in relation to any of the Section 75 equality groups that have not been identified in Assessment of Impacts section of the EQIA Consultation document? If so, what are they?

3. Are there any other comments you would like to make in regard to the consultation process generally?