



Strabane
District Council
Comhairle Ceantair
an tSratha Báin
Stràbane Destrìck Council

Linguistic Diversity Policy Report of Equality Impact Assessment

June 2007

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Executive Summary

Following the launch of its Linguistic Diversity Policy in January 2004, Strabane District Council initiated an Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that the policy does not have a differential impact on any of the nine equality categories within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

Following qualitative and quantitative research, a range of differential impacts were found in relation to ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, most specifically those with hearing or sight disability and those with learning disabilities.

Subsequently, a number of mitigating measures have been introduced to the policy to ensure that the policy promotes equality of opportunity between all nine equality categories.

The policy, procedures and code of courtesy have also been expanded somewhat to promote equal access to information about Strabane District Council services for those people who have sight, hearing or learning disabilities.

Background

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 states:

(1) “A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity;

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

(b) between men and women generally;

(c) between persons with a disability and persons without;
and

(d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

(2) Without prejudice to its obligations above, a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.”

In line with commitments in its approved Equality scheme, Strabane District Council is committed to adhering to the principles of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 when reviewing and developing policy.

Strabane District Council's Equality Scheme already commits the Council to make information available in minority languages on request to those residents who are not fluent in English. Strabane District Council's Linguistic Diversity Policy is specifically designed to meet duties under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Following development of our Linguistic Diversity Policy in November 2003, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was carried out. The EQIA is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy. It allows us to identify whether there are differences in the way a policy impacts upon the nine equality categories outlined above and whether these differences are adverse. An adverse impact is a negative impact, and one, therefore, which Strabane District Council must address. This has involved developing measures to reduce the negative impact and changing some aspects of the policy.

This EQIA sets out the areas in the Linguistic Diversity Policy where Strabane District Council feels there may be differential impacts between the groups. Where any of these impacts are negative, this EQIA sets out what mitigating measures the Council proposes to take to address these.

3. Data Collection and Consultation

The purpose of consulting others on this policy was to ensure that all areas of the policy are considered according to their impacts on the nine equality categories. It was also equally important to ensure that the mitigating measures proposed by Strabane District Council go far enough to effectively promote Equality and meet our statutory duties.

The EQIA consultation ran between the period 7/06/2005 and on 31/08/2005. A list of those consulted and the data sources drawn on for the EQIA are listed below.

Quantitative Sources

- Northern Ireland Census 2001
- DoE RES survey 2004
- Strabane District Council Public Perceptions Survey 2003
- School roll for local Irish language preschool and primary school
- Monitoring of staff on British Sign Language course
- Monitoring of staff on Irish language course
- Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (1999)
- Foras na Gaeilge- Irish language classes for primary school children in English-medium schools.

Qualitative Sources

Caring for Difference – Report on the experience of black and minority ethnic people living in the Western area of Northern Ireland, compiled by Fee Chng Leong, Omi Consultancy, for Western Health Action Zone, March 2003.

- Customer feedback reports
- Websites
- Regard website – a Great Britain organisation for disabled lesbian, gay men, bisexual and transgender people.
- NISRA Equality Research and Information website
<http://www.equality.nisra.gov.uk>

Consultation meetings with the following section 75 and language groups were held:

- Strabane Ethnic Community Association- (meetings requested by Strabane District Council)
- Foyle Trust Sensory Support Service - Arlene Greene
- Coalition of Sexual Orientation (COSO) – James Knox
- British Deaf Association – Majella McAteer

- Artigarvan Ulster Scots Association
- Bready Ulster Scots Association
- Foras na Gaeilge
- Gaelphobal Cheantar an tSratha Báin
- Gael Scoil Ui Dhochartaigh
- Naoiscoil Ui Dhochartaigh
- Newtownstewart Ulster Scots Association

- Pobal Mhuileann an tSiáin
- Ulster Scots Agency
- Ulster Scots Language Society
- Villages Together

List of consultees for Equality Impact Assessment

7th June 2005 bold = sent.

Antaine ÓFearghail	Pobal Mhuileann an tSiáin	3 Rae na Marascal, Muileann an tSiáin BT82 9QA
Maol-losa Mac Aodha	Conradh na Gaeilge	89 Bothar Caislean na Finne, Caislean na Deirge
Maire Ni Dhochartaigh	Gael Scoil Ui Dhochartaigh	Melvin Playing Fields Ballycolman Estate Strabane
Tini McGlinchey	Naoiscoil Ui Dhochartaigh	Melvin Playing Fields Ballycolman Estate Strabane
Aodhan Harkin	Siegerson's GFC	11 Marian Park, Strabane, BT82 8JA
Peadar Ó Cuinneagáin	Foras na Gaeilge	Teach an Gheata Thiar 2-4 Sráid na Banríona, Béal Feirse BT1 6ET
Seán Ó Daimhín	Gaelphobal Chaeantar an tSratha Bán	31 Gairdíní Inis Fraoich An Srath Bán Tír Eoghain, BT82 8JD
Mrs Anne Smyth LLB	Chairman, Ulster Scots Language Society	218 York Street,(2nd Floor), Belfast BT15 1GY Northern Ireland

Derek Rainey	Ulster Scots Agency	Moffat Buildings, the Diamond, Raphoe.
Cormac ÓBriain	Pobal	Culturlann Mc Adam O Fiaich, 216 Bothar na bhFál, BT 12 6AH
David Sefton	Derry and Raphoe Action Group	55 Dublin Road, Newtownstewart, Co. Tyrone
Doctor Billy Kelly	Institute of Ulster Scots Studies	University of Ulster at Magee, Northland Road Londonderry
Mr. Hamilton Thompson	Artigarvan Ulster Scots Association	Holy Hill Artigarvan Strabane
Mr. Kenny McFarland	Villages Together	227 Victoria Road, Strabane, BT82 0EB
Mr. James Kee	Bready Ulster Scots Association	251 Victoria Road Bready Strabane
Bertie Campbell		8 Hayfield Park, Newbuildings, Londonderry
Doctor Clifford Smyth	Ulster Scots Language Society	218 York Street,(2nd Floor), Belfast BT15 1GY Northern Ireland
Diane Hoy	Ulster Scots Heritage Council	218 York Street,(2nd Floor), Belfast BT15 1GY Northern Ireland

		9075 8985
Mr Bobby Rao,	Strabane Ethnic Minority Association	26 Carricklynn Avenue STRABANE, BT82 9BF
Mrs Mary Galbraith	Parents & Friends of Glenside & Iona House	Stragullen, 3 Drum Road Strabane
Majella McAteer	British Deaf Association	611b Lisburn Road, Belfast BT9 7GT
Arlene Greene	Foyle Sensory Support Services	22 Bishops Street Londonderry BT48
Hilary Avery	Stranmillis College	Stranmillis Road, Belfast
George Patton	Chief Executive Officer Ulster Scots agency	Franklin House 5 th Floor 10-12 Brunswick Street, Belfast, BT2 7GE

Geraldine Stafford	Strabane District Council	
Patrick Walsh	Strabane District Council	
Michelle Hegarty	Strabane District Council	
Clare Morris	Strabane District Council	
Clare Mullen	Strabane District Council	
Roisin Connolly	Strabane District Council	
Johnny Dooher	Strabane District Council	
Ashley Moss	Strabane District Council	
Karen McFarland	Strabane District Council	

Strabane District Council councillors		
Ronnie Hill		15 Lisnafinn Road
		Newtownstewart, OMAGH
Jean Crawford		33 Droit Road Newtownstewart OMAGH
Irene McFarland		21 Kilymopre Road Newtownstewart, OMAGH
Sam Allison		32 Strahulter Road, Newtownstewart, OMAGH
Nigel Reid	C/o Donna Reid SDC offices	
Tony O'Reilly	Equality Commission Northern Ireland	58 Strand Road, Derry.

Results of Qualitative and Quantative Data Collection

Religious belief

The Northern Ireland 2001 Census showed that 17% of Catholics and 1.2% of Protestants in Strabane District Council area have some knowledge of Irish, 8% of people of 'other religions or philosophies' have some knowledge of Irish, whilst 7% of 'no religion' have some knowledge of Irish.

The Life and Times Survey showed that Catholics were more likely to speak Irish (29%) than Protestants (3%) and it revealed that Protestants were more likely (2%) to speak Ulster-Scots than Catholics (1%). It must be noted that The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey covered Northern Ireland and did not disaggregate statistics at District Council level. As Strabane District Council includes areas where Ulster Scots has traditionally been spoken, this figure is in reality expected to be much higher¹.

An analysis of local data reveals that, 89% of the staff of Strabane District Council that undertook Irish language classes from September to December 2004 were Catholic and 11% of participants were Protestant. Moreover, of the staff that participated in the British Sign Language classes, 74% are Catholic and 26% of participants are Protestant.

¹ Face to Face consultative meeting with the Ulster Scots Society refers

Political Opinion

The Life and Times Survey indicated that Nationalists (31%) were more likely to speak Irish than Unionists (2%). 12% of those classified as neither Nationalist nor Unionist spoke Irish. The same survey did not significantly indicate that Unionists or Nationalists were relatively any more or less likely to speak Ulster-Scots, although in absolute terms there were more Unionists who spoke Ulster-Scots than Nationalists.

There is no data on other political opinions held by Irish or Ulster-Scots speakers. The Census did not provide data on political opinion.

Age

According to the Northern Ireland Census, 2001, 11.8% of people aged 3 and over in Strabane District Council area have some knowledge of Irish. Young people are more likely to have some knowledge of Irish than older people. 26% of 12-15 year olds have some knowledge of Irish compared to 6.8% of people aged 60 and over.

The Life and Times Survey, which provided data for adults only, found that, broadly speaking, the younger the age group, the higher the proportion of Irish speakers. The youngest age group (18 to 24) was the most likely to speak Irish and people aged 65 and over were the least likely.

The same survey revealed that people aged 65 and over were the most likely to speak Ulster-Scots (3%) and the youngest group (18-24) was the least likely at 1%.

Among the hearing disabled community, older people are more likely to know sign language than younger people.

Ethnic minority residents are most likely to be in the 18-34 brackets because many are economic migrants.

Racial group

Just over 10% of the people who live in Strabane District Council area were definitely not born in Northern Ireland. Of these, about 102 were born in countries where English is not the first language² -0.3% of the population.

8.78% of ethnic minority people aged 3 and over in Northern Ireland have some understanding of Irish.³ A higher proportion of respondents in the Irish Travellers category have some knowledge of Irish than the other ethnic groups, at 19.4%.

A Council commissioned mystery-shopping exercise to Strabane District Council facilities revealed that the Equality / linguistic diversity policy provision for ethnic minorities was not visible.

² Allowing for a nominal 20% (4) of the people born in Oceania.

³ According to Northern Ireland Census 2001, see table 5.

Qualitative research⁴ has revealed that minority and ethnic people living in the Western area of Northern Ireland have specific needs in relation to information about services and that service providers and policy makers must look at:

- Providing accessible and comprehensible information on services and facilities and on how the different systems operate.
- Overcoming the English language barrier.
- Working together with ethnic minorities in an open-minded, involving, innovative and strategic manner to meet the specific needs of black and minority ethnic people.
- Developing race equality strategies in conjunction with black and minority ethnic users, support organisations and staff.
- Not giving too much attention to language and cultural differences but rather looking for different approaches to service delivery and the eradication of racial discrimination. This means that instead of concentrating on language and cultural barriers, public service providers should develop an organisational culture of positive attitudes among staff to

⁴ Caring for Difference – Report on the experience of black and minority ethnic people living in the Western area of Northern Ireland, compiled by Fee Chng Leong, Omi Consultancy, for Western Health Action Zone, March 2003.

black and thence minority people. This must be a collective approach as opposed to ad hoc and will involve staff training so that they understand and can implement racial equality strategies.

- Seeking to collect feedback forms and monitoring information on ethnic minority users and staff.
- Knowing the locality and the community/ies therein in order to provide appropriate services. This must include:
 - Accurate information systems
 - Extensive community networking and involvement.
 - Knowing the languages/dialects spoken in a particular area and competencies in English, in order to address language barriers.

Marital status

The Life and Times Survey showed that single people (19%) were more likely to speak Irish than other groups. Divorced (10%) and widowed people (10%) were the least likely groups to speak Irish (see Table 2). Those living as married (4%) were the most likely group to speak Ulster-Scots, with widowed people (1%) the least likely (see Table 3). The Northern Ireland Census 2001 showed that single people were more likely to have some knowledge of

Irish (12.8%) than married people. Widowed (5.5%), remarried (3.9%), and divorced people (7.3%), were less likely to have some knowledge of Irish.⁵

Gender

The 2001 Census revealed that very similar proportions of males (10.1%) and females (10.5%) had some knowledge of Irish (see Table 5).

The Life and Times Survey also revealed similar proportions of males (14%) and females (13%) who could speak Irish (see Table 2), and found that men (3%) were marginally more likely to speak Ulster-Scots than women (1%) (see Table 3).

Of the staff that have taken Irish language classes, 78% are female and 22% are male. Of the staff that have taken British Sign Language classes, 87% of participants are women and 13% are men.

People with or without dependants

According to the Northern Ireland Census, 2001, those people with dependent children in the household were slightly more likely (11.5%) to have some knowledge of Irish than those with no dependents (8.2%).

⁵ Equality Impact Assessment of Policy on Provision of Financial Support for Irish Language Film and Television Production in Northern Ireland Dec 2004 www.dcalni.gov.uk

There is no information available on adults with other types of dependent. There is no information at all on adults who have dependents and who have some knowledge of Ulster Scots.

Of the staff who have taken Irish classes, 70% have dependants. Of the staff that have taken British Sign Language classes, have dependants.

Sexual orientation

Advice was sought from COSA on this issue at a consultation meeting. Whilst representatives from sexual orientation groups would welcome monitoring of this category, it is felt that unfortunately we still live in a homophobic society. It is important, therefore, that we balance the need to protect people from harassment and respecting their human rights with the need to achieve equality and end discrimination. One way around this is to monitor sexual orientation information indirectly and anonymously. This will be considered as part of Strabane District Council's Equality scheme. Latest guidance from the Equality Commission is "to include monitoring questions on sexual orientation while remaining mindful of the environment in which this is undertaken."⁶

Disability

A consultation meeting was held with Arlene Greene, of Foyle Trust Sensory Support Services⁷ to ascertain the needs of those people with sensory impairments. The meeting revealed the

⁶ Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Revised June 2004, p. 14.

⁷ Figures are approximate.

following things, which should be addressed below in assessment of impacts stage:

- 76 people in the Strabane District Council area are registered as blind, meaning they have very severe sight loss.
- There are hundreds of partially sighted people in the district.
- Foyle Trust Sensory Support Services recommend a font size of 14 as the minimum size of print used by Strabane District Council. Font size 12 is too small.
- Only one person in the Strabane District Council area is known to use Braille as a means of reading. They prefer to use computer software or audio media.
- There are 10-12 people in the Strabane District Council area who are profoundly deaf.
- Of these, two are aged over 60.
- Children who are deaf do not know sign language, making communication very difficult.
- The preferred sign language of use in the Strabane District Council area is Irish Sign Language. One person uses British Sign Language only. Whilst some people can adapt

to both, Irish Sign Language is the dominant sign language used in the area.

- It is very difficult for sign language users to read documents that are either too complicated in language style or too voluminous.
- Black and yellow is the preferred colour combination of writing for clarity and pictorial representation is preferred.
- The British Deaf Association provides a service for adapting text to meet the needs of sign language users.

A Council commissioned mystery-shopping exercise to Strabane District Council facilities revealed that the provision for the hearing and sight impaired was not clearly accessible.

To date, Strabane District Council has received no requests for information in alternative formats.

Census information is available for those who speak Irish and have a 'limiting long-term illness', which covers any long-term illness, health problem or disability that limits daily activities or work. The Census found that those with a limiting long-term illness⁸ were less

⁸ *Long standing* was defined as 'having had a problem for three years or more or expecting a problem to last for three years or more'.

likely to have some knowledge of Irish (7.9%) than those without (11%), (see Table 8).

The Life and Times Survey found that people without long-standing health problems or disabilities (14%) were slightly more likely to speak Irish than those with such problems or disabilities (11%) (see Table 2). Regarding Ulster-Scots speakers, it found no difference.

Other consultation results

Consultation meetings with local Irish language groups revealed a high level of interest in communicating with Strabane District Council and its accessing services through the medium of Irish. The groups were also interested in seeing Irish in Council signage and stationery.

Consultation meetings with local Ulster Scots associations showed that they were not at this stage interested in communicating with Strabane District Council or accessing its services in Ulster Scots. They were interested, however, in seeing Ulster Scots in Council signage and stationery.

FINDINGS

The EQIA has shown that Strabane District Council's Linguistic Diversity Policy has a positive impact on Irish speakers and Ulster-Scots speakers. This reflects indirectly on Catholics, Nationalists and younger people; and Protestants, Unionists and older people; which are the groups most likely to have knowledge of Irish and Ulster-Scots respectively. Irish Travellers are more likely to speak Irish as are single people and people who are not disabled.

There are no apparent differentials in relation to gender, marital status, sexual orientation or people with dependants.

The EQIA has shown that the policy may have an adverse impact on those people with a sight, hearing or learning disabilities or ethnic minority groupings. The policy does not take into cognisance their needs, and as a result, opportunities to communicate with them may be missed.

At present, Strabane District Council has no way of knowing whether people with sight, hearing or learning disabilities, or ethnic minority groupings understand our publications.

We have also identified that the font size of 10 or 12 for correspondence and written documents is too small to facilitate people with sight disabilities. Moreover, Strabane District Council publications, posters and information are not proofed for compliance for Plain English for hearing impaired people.

Whilst Strabane District Council has created a pool of staff competent in British Sign Language to enable a swift response to British Sign Language users who visit Council facilities, such a pool has not been created for Irish Sign Language. At present, the Council can book an Irish Sign Language user, but with up to two weeks notice required. This time delay is an adverse impact on Irish Sign Language users.

Whilst Strabane District Council has published a welcome pack for new ethnic minority residents in a range of different languages, we have not received any formal requests to provide information in any language except Irish. Similarly, Strabane District Council has not received any requests to date to provide information in audio-visual formats. This may suggest a lack of clarity in relation to this provision and a need to raise awareness of the policy.

Moreover, whilst the policy explicitly provides a voice-mail facility for those customers who express the wish to conduct business in Irish, the voice-mail is available for all other languages. The policy does not specifically state this provision, mentioning only Irish.

CONCLUSION

Consideration of mitigating measures or alternative policies

Wording of policy

The policy will be changed to include provision for ethnic minorities and those people with disabilities. Section 1 (Introduction) will now read:

*“It also seeks to proactively facilitate residents and service users who are not fluent in English **as well as those people who have sight or learning disabilities or who use sign language to communicate.**”* (addition in bold)

Section 4 (Objectives) will have an additional objective:

“To promote equal access to information about Strabane District Council services for ethnic minorities and those people who have sight, hearing or learning disabilities.”

Section 5.1 (Written correspondence) will have an additional subsection:

[Strabane District Council will:]

“Proof read materials to ensure good practice in promoting equal access for those people with sight and hearing disabilities and make appropriate provision for those people with learning disabilities.”

Section 5.2 (Spoken Language) will have an additional subsection:

“Strabane District Council will respond to local demand as far as reasonable for those customers who express the wish to access services through the medium of spoken Irish, Ulster Scots or any other language. The service will include a dedicated voice messaging service for customers to leave a message the language of their choice. Strabane District Council will respond as far as reasonable to requests for meetings in other languages. This does not include interviews.”

Strabane District Council will address its current policy of provision on request for those people with sensory disabilities. The Council will endeavour to ensure that publications and the website comply with Plain English requirements and meet sight and hearing disability good practice guidelines from the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the British Deaf Association respectively.

The Council will work to create a mailing list of people with sight disabilities and distribute its publications in the appropriate format.

It is recognised that Strabane District Council’s current practice of writing letters in mainly 12 font may have an adverse impact on the hundreds of partially sighted people in the district. Subsequently, Strabane District Council will reiterate to staff good practice in terms of using font size 14 in all letters and e-mails.

Strabane District Council will make arrangements for Irish Sign language interpreters to ensure a quick response to requests.

Strabane District Council will implement good practice in carrying out effective communication with people with learning disabilities

The time of the Irish language classes was changed to a later slot to facilitate part-time workers.

Other Equality Issues to consider

Monitoring of participants in Strabane District Council programmes currently occurs in an ad hoc basis. The Equality Impact Assessment has revealed some consequential gaps in quantitative data that requires putting in place a standard monitoring process for Strabane District Council programmes.

Strabane District Council needs to consider the issue of sexual orientation in particular. Advice was sought from COSA on this issue. Whilst representatives from sexual orientation groups would welcome monitoring of this category, it is felt that unfortunately we live in a homophobic society. It is important therefore that we balance the need to protect people from harassment and respecting their human rights with the need to achieve equality and end discrimination. One way around this is to monitor sexual orientation information indirectly and anonymously.

Appendix One

Revised Linguistic Diversity Policy Following Equality Impact Assessment

Linguistic Diversity Policy, Procedures and Code of Courtesy

June 2007

1. Policy Statement

Strabane District Council will embrace linguistic diversity and promote the use of Irish and Ulster Scots in both its service delivery and in civic life. Strabane District Council also seeks to proactively facilitate residents and service users who are not fluent in English as well as those people who have sight and learning disabilities and use sign language to communicate.

Guiding principles:

- 1.1. Our mission statement, which states: “Strabane District Council will provide high quality services, strong civic leadership and strenuously promote Strabane District as an excellent place to live, work, invest and visit.”
- 1.2. Two of our four Corporate Themes –
Providing Better, High Quality Service
and
Positioning, Protecting and Promoting the Interests of the People
- 1.3 Our Corporate Values
 - **Professionalism** We believe that all our citizens deserve to be served in a competent and professional manner. We endeavour to operate with integrity; act responsibly, honestly and fairly at all times.
 - **Customer Focused** We value our community and are committed to meeting its needs. We endeavour to be a supportive, listening and responsive Council whilst valuing the well-being of our citizens and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations at all times.
 - **Teamwork** We are committed to working collectively with individuals and agencies both internally and externally. We recognise the commitment and contribution required from others to help us achieve our goals. We place priority in communicating openly and honestly, building trust and developing co-operation whilst encouraging creativity and innovation.
- 1.4. Providing Best Value by responding to community consultation.
- 1.5. Strabane District Council’s Equality policy

2. Background

This Linguistic Diversity Policy is designed to meet duties under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and our Equality Commitments according to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

The UK Government ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages⁹ in 2001, with Irish and Ulster Scots as designated languages for Northern Ireland. Part II of the Charter commits the Government to recognising Irish and Ulster Scots as languages to which the general principles of non-discrimination apply.

Strabane District Council's Equality Scheme already commits Strabane District Council to make information available in minority languages, on request, to those residents who are not fluent in English. Moreover, the Scheme, and our Disability Action plan, outlines measures in which we shall make information accessible to people with disabilities. This policy supports and develops this commitment.

⁹ The Charter defines "regional or minority languages" as languages that are:

- i. Traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and
- ii. Different from the official language(s) of that State;

4. Objectives

The objectives of this Linguistic Diversity Policy are:

- (1) To develop opportunities for customers and residents to use Irish and Ulster-Scots when using Council services.
- (2) To respond to local language communities in the development and integration of Irish and Ulster-Scots into mainstream civic life.
- (3) To ensure that ethnic minority residents access Strabane District Council services on an equal basis.
- (4) To promote equal access to information about Strabane District Council services for those people who have sight, hearing or learning disabilities.

5. The Procedure

5.1 Written Correspondence

Strabane District Council will:

Accept all written correspondence in Irish and Ulster Scots and reply in the relevant language. This includes letters, e-mails and application forms for Council services, with the exception of job applications.

Accept, as far as reasonable, written correspondence in languages other than English and reply in the relevant language.

Ensure full opportunities for participation of all schools in the district in Council initiatives by providing, as far as reasonable, Irish language versions of written materials and publications aimed at children aged 11 and under as a target audience (e.g. Schools' events, competitions.) This is to cater for the growing population of children receiving their pre-school and primary education through the medium of Irish.¹⁰

Respond to the development and growth of the Ulster Scots language in written and spoken form, in consultation with the local Ulster-Scots community, the Ulster-Scots Agency and Ulster Scots Language Society.

Proof read materials to ensure good practice in promoting equal access for those people with sight and hearing disabilities and make appropriate provision for those people with learning disabilities.

¹⁰ In September 2003, 24 children attend pre-school education and 105 children receive primary education in an Irish medium environment in Strabane.

5.2 Spoken Language

Strabane District Council will facilitate those customers from an ethnic minority group who have difficulty in accessing services through lack of knowledge of spoken English. The use of interpreters will be considered.

Strabane District Council will respond to local demand as far as reasonable for those customers who express the wish to access services through the medium of spoken Irish. This service will depend on the availability of employees with competency in spoken Irish and will not include interviews. In the first instance, the service will include a dedicated voice messaging service for customers to leave a message in Irish. Depending on competencies in Irish of available staff, a reply will be given in either Irish or English. Strabane District Council will respond, as far as reasonable, to requests for meetings in Irish.

5.3 Signage

Strabane District Council will provide bi-lingual versions of street names, in English and either Irish or Ulster-Scots on request, provided residents can show community consensus on this. This will be implemented in accordance with the existing regulations provided for in Section 11 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Order (NI) 1995, ie. 'Power of Councils in relation to Street Names and Numbering of Buildings.'

This policy will be considered when deciding the wording of all new signage for Council facilities.

6. Training

Elected representatives will be offered awareness and language training of Irish and Ulster-Scots language.

All staff will be offered awareness training on the policy and the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages. Deaf and blind awareness training will also be provided to front line staff.

Any language training offered to staff will be entirely voluntary and at the officer's discretion to decide whether to avail of this training.

Training needs of staff will be reviewed after twelve months to reassess demand for Irish and Ulster-Scots languages among local users.

Frontline employees will be trained in the procedure for dealing with an inquiry in or request to do business in any language other than English.

7. Officer Responsibilities:

Chief Executive Officer

The Chief Executive Officer will have overall responsibility for this policy.

Corporate Policy Officer

- The Corporate Policy Officer will be responsible for the implementation of the policy.
- Promoting the policy widely and conducting appropriate Public Relations.
- Organising twice-yearly reports to Council for the Chief Executive Officer.
- Setting up the Linguistic Diversity Working Group and undertaking two meetings per year.
- Co-ordinating language and awareness training of staff and elected members.
- Monitoring the policy

Chief Officers and Heads of Department

Chief officers and heads of department will be responsible for implementing the policy within their department.

Licensing Officer

The Licensing Officer will facilitate requests for the use of bi-lingual signs, in line with the policy.

Community Support Officer

The Community Support Officer will advise of community relations implications regarding requests for bilingual signage.

Business Manager

The Business Manager will advise on opportunities for integrating Irish and Ulster-Scots language into civic events as appropriate.

Human Resources Officer

The Human Resources Officer will advise on Equality implications regarding ethnic minority languages and hearing disabilities.

8. Monitoring

The Chief Executive Officer will report to Council twice a year on the implementation of the policy.

A Linguistic Diversity Working Group will be set up to monitor the implementation of the policy. It will meet twice a year and will include the Corporate Policy Officer, other officers, elected representatives and members of the Irish-language and Ulster Scots communities and ethnic minority communities.

The remit of this group will also be to identify potential for future development of both languages in Council business and civic life.

Linguistic Diversity Policy

Code Of Courtesy for languages other than English

1. Introduction

This code of courtesy is to be followed by all staff to enable Strabane District Council to successfully implement its Linguistic Diversity Policy.

2. Overriding Principles

Linguistic diversity must be regarded as a common cultural wealth. Everyone is entitled to respect and courtesy, which extends to their language. Whilst staff aren't expected to be familiar with any other language than English, every effort should be made to convey respect in dealing with people who wish to use another language.

3. Written correspondence

If you receive a letter, e-mail, or form in a language other than English, you should forward this to the Corporate Policy Officer. It will be translated into English using quality assured translations resources. Any reply must be translated into the language it was received in. You should therefore forward a reply to the Corporate Policy Officer for translation.

Any officer producing written materials aimed at children aged 11 and under should provide Irish language versions of these, where appropriate. Contact the Corporate Policy Officer to discuss the best method of translation and presentation. The Irish language version does not have to be the same format as the English version but effort must be made to translate and communicate the information.

4. Spoken Language

Whilst the code of courtesy for spoken language will apply to all languages, it is envisaged that the biggest demand for this service will be Irish.

4.1 Face-to-face meetings

If a customer begins a conversation in another language, the officer may, if in doubt, clarify what the language in question is, respond in the language (if they speak it) or English. If the officer does not speak the language they should explain this and offer alternatives for dealing with the query. The following form of words may be helpful:

“I am sorry I cannot answer you in (language). But I can offer you the following options for dealing with your query.

You may:

- *Continue the meeting in English;*
- *Give written views*
- *Talk to an officer who speaks (language) (if one is available)*
- *Make an appointment for a meeting when an interpreter is present (5 days’ notice).*

4.2 Telephone Calls

If a caller begins the conversation in another language the officer may respond in the language (if they speak it) or English. If the officer does not speak the language they should explain this and offer alternatives for dealing with the call. The following form of words may be helpful:

“I am sorry I cannot answer you in (language). But I can offer you the following options for dealing with your call. You may:

- *Continue the call in English*

- *Write to us*
- *Wait while I transfer you to an (language) speaking colleague
(If one is available and/or trained)*
- *Transfer you to our voice mail where you can leave a message.” (Extension 351)*

Procedures for use of language voicemail

If a caller contacts the reception or an individual department indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish and there is no Irish-speaking colleague available, the officer receiving the call will divert or direct the caller to the Irish language voice mail. This is ext. 351. The voice mail is monitored by the Corporate Policy Officer.

Messages received will be forwarded to an interpreter for translation. Translated enquiries will be forwarded to the appropriate department for action.

The message on Voicemail - 351

“Welcome to Strabane District Council. If you would like to leave a message with us someone will come back to you as soon as possible. You can leave your message after the tone. To handle your call we need you to give us the following information:

- Your name
- Your daytime telephone number
- The name of the person or department you would like to contact, if you know it
- The nature of your business

We will try to get back to you as soon as possible but if your business is very urgent you are advised to contact the particular department directly in English.”

5. Personal Names

The overriding principles of respect and courtesy extend to a person's name. Every effort should be made to pronounce a person's name correctly. This may mean asking other staff before contacting a person. If in doubt, contact the Corporate Policy Officer.

It is important that staff record the proper spelling of a name. If a person gives his/her name or the name of a child in Irish or any other language, and the officer dealing with the person has difficulty spelling it, the officer should ask the person to help them spell it. Also, if in doubt, the officer can ask whether the name is male or female.

Vowels in Irish may have an accent, or "fada" above them, e.g. Seán. If the name includes a fada, this should present no problem. Practically all computer software packages cater for this. The fada can be keyed in by pressing the *Alt Gr* key and then the vowel in question. In the case of capitals, the *Shift* key should also be used.

A person is legally entitled to assume any name he or she wishes – in English or in any other language. If he or she is generally known by that name, it is valid for purposes of legal identification. Unless it appears that he or she is not generally known by that name, staff must respect the wishes of anyone who wants to be known by the Irish version of their name, and should use only that name in official business. Care should be taken to avoid confusion and duplication if an individual is known by both Irish and English names. It may be useful to put a record of both versions on file.

If an officer believes that the person in question may also have been using an English form of their name, they might ask, *"Is this the form of your name you always use? I have to ensure that all your records are together."*

Strabane District Council welcomes any comments in relation to this EQIA, Linguistic Diversity Policy and/or our Code of Courtesy.

For further information, or to provide feedback, please contact:

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