

Kildare County Council

Official Languages Act 2003

Language Scheme 2018-2021

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Forward

We welcome the publication of this scheme which has been prepared in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003 and approved by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. We believe that it will promote the availability of public services through Irish and make a contribution to sustaining the language in County Kildare.

The scheme outlines how the county council proposes to meet its obligations in relation to the use of the Irish language in the period 2017 to 2020. It will pose significant challenges in a county where Irish is not the ordinary working language of most people. However, with the goodwill of members and staff, the understanding of the public and an ongoing Irish training programme, we are confident that the challenges can be met and overcome.

Thanks are due to the staff who were involved in the internal assessment of services, to those who have already undergone initial training, to the staff who have undertaken to be trained in the future and to the elected members of the council for their continuing support.

CEO: Peter Carey

Mayor: Martin Miley

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

This is the second Irish Language Scheme which was prepared by Kildare County Council under section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003. The Act provides that public bodies have a duty to prepare a statutory scheme specifying the services that they will provide:

- through the medium of Irish,
- through the medium of English and
- through the medium of both Irish and English.

The measures to be adopted in this scheme in order to provide such services through the medium of Irish are laid out with agreed timeframes

The scheme was prepared having regard to guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

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

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

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

Kildare County Council published a notice of intention to prepare a scheme in accordance with Section 13(1)(a) of the Act and all the resulting submissions which were received have been considered in the formulation of this scheme.

This scheme includes a brief overview of the services provided by Kildare County Council.

There are certain services to which each customer is entitled in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003, such as response to correspondence in Irish through Irish and the publication of certain documents, including our Annual Report, in Irish.

This scheme sets out to continue to improve the level of service provided to the customers of Kildare County Council through Irish.

Commencement Date of Scheme

The scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The scheme will commence from 15th January 2018 and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years, or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister, pursuant to Section 15 of the Official Languages Act, whichever is later.

Overview of Kildare Local Authorities

The local authorities' corporate strategy is set out in our Corporate Plan 2015 – 2019 - *“Making Kildare the Place: to live, to learn, to work, to visit and to do business”*.

The focus of the Corporate Plan is on the ways in which services are to be developed and delivered, in order to make local government more transparent and accountable by offering citizens an opportunity to assess the level of service given by their councils. We aim to ensure balanced growth and the enhancement of the built and natural environment.

Key organisational values in achieving our vision are:

- Economic Progress
- Partnership
- Environmental Sustainability
- Social Inclusion
- Community Participation
- Enhancement of the Natural Environment
- Protection of the Built Environment
- Communication and Innovation
- Strong Government

The functions of Kildare County Council are classified under the following eight programme groups:

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

Customers and Clients

County Kildare has an area of 1,694 sq kilometres, with a population approaching 190,000. The county has seen unprecedented population growth during the last number of years, however, the population is unevenly distributed with almost one third of the people concentrated in an area in and around the towns of Celbridge, Leixlip and Maynooth.

We interact on a daily basis with a diverse range of customers, both external and internal. Internal customers are our staff members. Our external customers include our elected members, the population of the county, our transient population who travel through our county on a daily basis, electronic customers as well as:

- The Minister and Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Members of the Oireachtas
- Other State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other local and regional authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- Local community groups
- LEADER Groups
- Private sector service providers
- Local private businesses

The primary service point for Kildare County Council is Áras Chill Dara, which is situated at Devoy Park, Naas. There is another service point at Rathstewart, Athy. There is also a network of libraries throughout the county, together with five municipal district offices all of which have extensive customer contact.

A key part of our customer service strategy is the development of our website. Increasingly we are facilitating our customers by improving the means to do business on-line. Examples of this would include motor tax or payments in respect of refuse charges and we would encourage people to use these excellent facilities as much as possible.

Assessment of the extent to which services are already available through Irish

The primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. Kildare County Council currently provides a very limited service either bilingually or through the medium of Irish. This Plan aims to continue to provide a gradual improvement in the level and standard of services to be provided through Irish.

Chapter 2

Summary of services/activities provided by Council Departments and levels of Irish language proficiency

This chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision/activities by individual departments within Kildare County Council, and the level of Irish proficiency in each of these.

Departments Operating through the medium of both Irish and English

At present no department within Kildare County Council is in a position to deliver all its services bilingually.

Departments operating with limited Irish language capability

The following departments currently have staff who are capable of providing a limited bilingual service to customers. Assessment of service available is based on current staff deployments and may vary subject to availability of staff within Sections. Kildare County Council will endeavour to respond to demand across departments by redeploying staff where possible. This arrangement has worked well, in particular in the following sections.

- Library and Arts Service
- Water Services
- Housing
- Human Resources
- Corporate Services
- Community and Enterprise/Local Enterprise Board LEO
- Finance

Library and Arts Service

The Library and Arts Service operates through a network of fourteen branch libraries and a Mobile Library Service, with its Headquarters at Riverbank in Newbridge. The service is involved in the promotion of artistic, educational and cultural events throughout the county and many such events take place in its branch libraries. All service points carry a range of books in Irish, for both adults and children. New material in Irish is added to stock on an ongoing basis; the provision of new stock is helped by the major improvements in the quality and attractiveness of Irish publications in recent years, particularly in respect of children's books. Every effort is made to facilitate requests for specific Irish material. All branches carry a range of audio-visual material, at a variety of levels, to assist those wishing to learn or to improve their knowledge of spoken Irish. Several members of library staff are competent in spoken and written Irish and every effort is made to accommodate library users who wish to transact business with the service through Irish.

Water Services

The Water Services Department is responsible for water and sewerage connections and provision of well grants on behalf of Irish Water. Application forms for these services are in English and Irish language format. Where an application for provision of a service is received in Irish, all attempts would be made to ensure that the application would be dealt with in Irish. The Water Services Department has initiated a policy whereby all water interruption notices are published bilingually. A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available.

Housing

The Housing Department is responsible for the provision of local authority housing. This obligation is fulfilled by the construction and purchase of housing units to accommodate eligible applicants on our housing list. The Housing Authority is then responsible for the allocation and renting of the units and their general upkeep.

A local authority is no longer a mere provider of accommodation, but is an active and involved supporter in the life of housing estates. In this council a team of specialist personnel has been employed to (a) facilitate local communities in their own development, and (b) combat anti-social behaviour in local authority housing. Community workers have been employed to actively pursue community involvement in social housing projects and in doing so to improve quality of life, by promoting active citizenship and social inclusion. They also support residents associations, recreational initiatives for young and old and educational programmes for local authority residents. Pre-tenancy training now forms part of the process of facilitating new tenants to move into, and become actively involved in, their new communities.

The Housing Department also provides affordable housing and these units are allocated to eligible applicants on our affordable housing list. Financial packages to aid the public in the acquisition of private housing, i.e. affordable housing loans and shared ownership loans are also available. A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available.

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department has responsibility for recruitment and selection, training and development of staff, attendance management, staff welfare, employee relationships in the workplace, promotion and implementation of HR policies, Industrial Relations and pensions. A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Department provides a secretariat service for meetings of the county council and its committees. This department also prepares agendas, minutes and supporting documentation for the statutory meetings and special meetings of the Council. Notices for attendance at meetings of the County Council are currently issued in bi-lingual format. Other services provided include Communications, Customer Care, Register of Electors, Higher Education Grants and

office accommodation/maintenance. A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available.

Community and Enterprise/Local Enterprise Board (LEO)

Among the most important functions of Kildare County Council is the creation of strong, sustainable and inclusive communities. Involved in this process is the delivery of a healthy social and economic environment for all the communities of County Kildare. The Community and Enterprise Department provides a range of services designed to encourage social inclusion and the active engagement of people in the development of their own communities including:

- Amenity, festival and community grants underpinning community activity in the development of inclusive projects encompassing all sectors of the community, with a view to fostering the development of viable, sustainable communities and to facilitate the development of A Sense of Place for those living within a community and the development of social capital
- Support for the Kildare Pride of Place Initiative
- Facilitating and actively engaging in the development of Comhairle na nÒg
- Supporting the designated RAPID area of Athy, INTERREG projects and twinning initiatives
- Servicing and supporting the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) in the delivery of the objectives as contained in the Kildare Local Economic & Community Plan (LECP) 2016-2021, encompassing measures and actions to actively promote and underpin the economic, social and cultural development of County Kildare and all its people
- Encouraging tidy towns groups to enter the National Tidy Towns Competition and giving them an incentive grant to do so
- Providing two education bursaries designed to provide an opportunity to study at third level to persons who may not be in a position to undertake a course of study, because of serious disadvantage or disability. (The William G. Carroll Bursary is mainly, but not exclusively, for third level courses in the field of community development. The Kildare Education Bursary for People with Disabilities is intended to cover any third level course.)

The main objective of LEO is to act as a catalyst, link and agent for economic development in the county by:

- Promoting high quality industrial and business sites
- Linking with economic development agencies in forward planning for the industrial and business development of the county
- Linking with promotional agencies and educational institutions
- Fostering and supporting business initiatives at all levels, including tourism.
- Acting as a single point of contact for pre-planning consultations/meetings for all projects with employment potential.

A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available.

Finance

The Finance Department is responsible for the short and long-term financing of the council's operations, both of a revenue and capital nature. This encompasses monitoring and control of income and expenditure in all areas, arranging long-term borrowing and leasing requirements and investment of surplus funds.

It is also concerned on a daily basis with accounting for all money paid by, or to, the council. The council's revenue or day-to-day expenditure is defrayed from sources such as Commercial Rates, Commercial Water Charges, Government Grants and various other forms of income such as housing rents, planning application fees etc. The amount of capital money available is dependent on Government allocations in the areas of Housing, Roads and Environmental Services etc. Current combined annual revenue and capital expenditure exceeds €440 million. A member of staff is willing to assist with requests for services in Irish, as and when available

Departments operating currently with no Irish language capability

The following Departments currently are not in a position to provide a one-to-one service to customers through the Irish language. With recruitment and training as set out in Chapter 3 we would expect that all departments will be able to provide one to one service through Irish in the lifetime of this plan.

- Environment
- Architects
- Economic Development
- Roads and Transport
- Motor Tax
- Sports, Leisure and Recreation
- Planning
- Information and Communications Technology

Environment

The Environmental Services Department has responsibility for waste management services. This department also provides cleansing services, including litter control, environmental awareness programmes and waste regulation and enforcement. Other services provided include provision of burial grounds, control of dogs and control of horses.

Architects

The Architectural Services Department provides the following services:

- Building design, urban design and construction project management services to all directorates.
- Planning advice in relation to the preparation of the county development plan, local area plans and individual planning applications.

- Technical support and project management services on the maintenance of existing building stock.
- Conservation services to protected structures under the aegis of Kildare County Council.

Roads and Transport

The primary objective of the Roads and Transport Department is to provide a well-maintained public road network subject to financial and human resource constraints. The Roads and Transport Department is responsible for the planning, design and construction of regional and local roads and for the maintenance of an extensive network of roads totalling some 2,250 kilometres. A list of frequently asked questions is on the Kildare County Council website.

Motor Tax

The Motor Taxation Department is responsible for issuing vehicle licences and driving licences. Our office is open to the public from 9.15 am to 3.15 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 9.30 am to 3.15 pm on Wednesday. Application forms are available in the office, at local garda stations and libraries, and also can be downloaded from our website which also has a section on 'Frequently Asked Questions'. All application forms are available in Irish on request. Telephone lines are open Monday to Friday from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm and from 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm.

Sports, Leisure and Recreation

In 1999, Kildare County Council set up a Leisure Services Department to operate and manage a sports, leisure and recreation unit. It was the second local authority in the country to do so.

The Department has responsibility for the management of:

- Newbridge Sports and Leisure Centre

The department has many functions in providing sport, leisure and recreation opportunities both directly and indirectly to residents and visitors including:

- Parks and landscaping services
- Playground development and maintenance
- Sports development
- Community Halls

In relation to parks and landscaping, services provided include the design and management of existing parks, open spaces and roundabouts in the county. Services such as tree pruning and planting, bulb planting are also provided throughout the county. Advice is also available to other departments and to tidy towns and resident's associations when requested.

Planning

The objective of Kildare Planning Authority is to deliver sustainable development for current and future generations in partnership with the community. This is achieved through the efficient delivery of a planning application process within the required statutory periods, establishing an effective enforcement programme and ensuring compliance with building regulations. The Planning Authority endeavours to provide easy public access to all planning activities, information and procedures through efficient public counter and online service provision.

Information and Communications Technology

The IT Department is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of all information and communications technologies throughout the organisation. By liaising with other sections' work programmes and policies are developed to show the overall needs of the organisation. This section will play a part in facilitating information and service provision through the use of the Irish language.

Chapter 3

Provision of Bilingual Services

Introduction

It should be noted that there has been a considerable reduction in the level of resources both financial and human available to the council. Notwithstanding this, Kildare County Council remains committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Official Languages Act, and providing services to the public through Irish, consistent with demand.

The staff of Kildare County Council was surveyed to determine the level of competency in Irish available within the organisation. The results of this survey indicate a low level of competence in Irish within the organisation. However the level of competence in Irish available within the organisation appears to be adequate in relation to the demand experienced to date. Any request for such services received during the lifetime of the current Scheme has been facilitated. All staff have been offered the opportunity to improve their Irish Language skills through training provided by Kildare County Council. To date, 6 members of staff have completed a level 5 certificate in professional Irish.

Means of Communication with the Public

The majority of Kildare County Council's methods of communication with the public are currently carried out in English, with limited Irish included.

These methods of communication include:

- Application Forms
- Publications
- Press Releases
- Website
- E-mail
- Brochures and Information Leaflets
- One-to-one communication at customer service desks, service counters and libraries.
- Signage

It is proposed to improve methods of communication in Irish, under this Scheme, as follows:

Oral Communication

The council's customer service desk is the first point of contact for visitors to Áras Chill Dara, while our telephone operators deal with all calls to our main telephone number.

- Reception/switchboard staff will give the name of the local authority, and /or the name of the Section, in Irish.

- They will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish and will acknowledge a request for a service in Irish.
- They will put customers in touch with the appropriate member of staff responsible for delivery of the service required
- Staff in the organisation will be made aware of the names of colleagues willing to deal with the public in Irish. This information will be displayed on our internal intranet system.

A new initiative has been introduced for customers wishing to pay their annual refuse charges using our automated telephone system through the medium of Irish. This facility may be extended to other automated payment services during the life of this plan.

Information Technology

- Much of the website, including the pages relating to the principal departments of Kildare County Council, can be accessed in Irish under the heading “Cúrsaí Gaeilge”.
- Any new interactive systems will be made available bilingually subject to the provision of the necessary systems/system changes from the Local Government Management Agency.
- Existing interactive systems will be upgraded to ensure they are available bilingually during the life of this scheme, subject to the provision of the necessary systems from the Local Government Management Agency.
- Kildare County Council shall ensure that any new computer software involving public accessibility which is being developed, is fully capable of being accessed by the public in the Irish language and will also ensure (in so far as it is under our control) that existing such systems are made compatible within the lifetime of this scheme.
- The disclaimer on all e-mail messages is now bilingual.
- A generic e-mail address for queries ‘as Gaeilge’ has been established to facilitate prompt response in the Irish language.

Written Documentation

During the lifetime of the scheme, Kildare County Council will apply the following principles to any written documentation produced:

- All new information leaflets and application forms produced by Kildare County Council are now bilingual and are available as one document unless the size, nature or layout of the document is such that separate leaflets are more practical.
- Any existing forms and information leaflets being updated or reviewed by Kildare County Council during the lifetime of this Scheme will be produced bilingually, or in separate Irish and English versions, as appropriate.
- All national standardised applications forms, available in bilingual or separate Irish and English versions, are made available to users either through our offices or on our website

Press Release

During the lifetime of this Scheme, 20% of all press releases will be produced simultaneously bilingually.

Media Communications

Kildare County Council will make spokespersons available to give interviews to the Irish language media where requested

Gaelscoileanna & Other Irish Language Organisations

Kildare County Council recognises and acknowledges the particular linguistic preferences of Irish language schools and Gaelscoileanna in County Kildare, as well as other Irish Language organisations and groups operating throughout the county and nationally. The provision of services in Irish to these particular bodies and groups will be facilitated over the lifetime of this scheme, within the limits of available resources. In particular, the Library & Arts Service will continue to provide Irish language material and resources through the Community library network, and will facilitate the provision of cultural events through Irish, when requested to do so.

Designated Irish Language Posts:

Irish Officer

An existing member of staff was appointed to the additional duties post of Irish Officer in 2014. The Irish Officer has monitored the council's compliance with the requirements of the Official Languages Act and associated regulations, and has assisted and advised council members and staff in relation to such matters as responding to correspondence, wording of signage, translation of information leaflets and forms etc. It is intended to maintain the appointment of an Irish Officer during the lifetime of this Scheme

Stationery and Signage

All statutory requirements in relation to stationery and signage were met during the lifetime of the first Scheme. In particular, the deadlines in relation to stationery and signage which occurred during this time were complied with. Where necessary, the Irish Officer has provided assistance in this regard; stationery from individual offices and departments was examined to ensure compliance, and text for bilingual fax covers was supplied as requested. Bilingual signage was provided for a Historical Trail in Naas, and similar provision will be made in relation to any similar project carried out during the lifetime of this Scheme. Kildare County Council is committed to monitoring and ensuring compliance in this regard. Any stationery or signage updated during the lifetime of this Scheme will meet the statutory requirements. To publicise the Council's willingness to facilitate correspondence in Irish, Kildare County Council's notepaper will carry the slogan "*Cuirtear fáilte roimh comhfhreagras i nGaeilge*" (Correspondence in Irish is welcome).

Naming of Housing Developments

It is the policy of the council, as contained in the County Development Plan, that the naming of new residential developments should reflect local heritage by encouraging the use of local place names or geographical, historical, cultural names in the naming of new residential developments. The use of Irish is, and will continue to be, encouraged in all naming proposals. The planning authority may consult with the Placenames Branch in the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in this regard.

Chapter 4

Training and Development

Kildare County Council encourages and supports training and development of all members and staff. Our Citizen Charter contains a commitment to deliver a quality service in an effective and caring manner and for this purpose to provide ongoing staff training and development.

In support of this objective, and in accordance with the Official Languages Act 2003, Kildare County Council will, within the limits of training resources available, facilitate any member of staff wishing to improve his/her competency in Irish. In this regard, attention is drawn to a new online self-learning language programme, for Irish and other languages, available to library users through the Library & Arts Section of Kildare County Council's website (Mango Languages). Also all staff have been offered the opportunity to improve their Irish Language skills through training provided by Kildare County Council. To date 6 members of staff have completed a level 5 certificate in professional Irish this has encouraged staff to setup a "ciorcal comhrá" and it meets every Wednesday.

Along with these new initiatives Kildare County Council's Coiste Gaeilge have started a scholarship scheme sending five students each year to Irish.

Chapter 5

Monitoring, Revision and Publicity of Agreed Scheme, Official Version of Agreed Scheme

Monitoring and Revision

Kildare County Council will keep the effective operation of this scheme under review as part of its process of annually reviewing its performance and details of progress will be published in our Annual Report. The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the departments, who are responsible for implementation of the plan within their own areas.

Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The contents of this scheme will be advertised to the general public by means of:

- Press Release
- Publication on the Council's Internet, Intranet and Extranet website
- Communication of improved Irish services to our customers

A copy of this Scheme will also be forwarded to the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga

Official Version of Agreed Scheme

The Irish version of this document is the official version of this scheme.