



Comhairle Chontae Shligigh

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES
ACT 2003
LANGUAGE SCHEME**

2017 - 2020

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The Official Languages Act 2003 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a language scheme detailing the services which they will provide:

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

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not currently provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

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

1.2 Preparation and Content of the Scheme

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Commencement Date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It commences with effect from July 24th 2017 and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years or until a new scheme has been confirmed, whichever is the later.

Chapter 2: Overview of Sligo County Council

2.1 Mission and Objectives

The mission statement of Sligo County Council is as follows:

“To maximise economic, social, cultural and community development, and deliver efficient and cost-effective services in a democratic, accountable and transparent manner in partnership with local communities, voluntary and statutory agencies” (Sligo Corporate Plan 2015 – 2019)

Sligo County Council seeks to enforce its Corporate Policy Mission statement as well as fulfilling its leadership role and democratic mandate with regard to the following core values:

- Democracy – To ensure actions and decisions are guided by democratic principles
- Public Service – The highest standards of customer service will be observed
- Inclusion – The Council promotes a culture of openness and diversity and full accessibility to all its services
- Fairness – Impartiality and fairness to inform policies, procedures and actions
- Communication – To embed effective, accessible internal and external communications to fully inform processes and decisions, and to provide clear, user-friendly information
- Openness, Transparency & Accountability – To formulate and implement policy in an open, transparent and accountable manner
- Innovation – To embed an innovative approach to service delivery and cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship and economic development
- Community Focus – To recognise the important and integral role of local communities
- Health & Safety – To further foster a health and safety culture in Sligo County Council

Sligo County Council’s Corporate Plan also includes objectives in respect to the Irish language, as follows:

- *“to provide quality services through Irish and/or English and inform customers of their right to choose the language medium.”*
- *... and to improve the level of services available through Irish.*

The Council will seek to ensure that all Sections will have access to a staff member capable of communicating with the public in Irish in order that, in so far as possible, services are available bilingually.”

2.2 Main Functions

Sligo County Council’s main functions are:

- Economic development, enterprise and job creation
- Environmental services (including beaches, public spaces, and dog & horse control)
- Local Authority housing provision and maintenance
- Roads and transportation
- Water services (under a Public Services Agreement with Irish Water)
- Fire and emergency services
- Tourism development and festivals
- Library services
- Arts and cultural services, including archives, Irish language, conservation and Heritage
- Community development
- Motor tax and finance
- Corporate services (Council meetings and Administration)

2.3 Key Services

Directorate of Housing, Corporate Services

- Social Housing provision/maintenance, grants and other supports /Traveller Accommodation / Homelessness
- Cranmore Regeneration Project
- Corporate Services
- Human Resources
- Civil Defence
- Health & Safety
- Internal Audit

Finance Department

- Financial Management
- Procurement

- Revenue Collection
- Motor Tax
- Information Technology

Directorate of Infrastructure, Environment, and Fire Services

- Water & Waste Water Services
- Road Transportation and Safety
- Bridge Restoration and Repairs
- Environmental Services
- Fire & Emergency Services

Directorate of Planning, Community & Economic Development, Arts & Cultural Services

- Tourism Development and Promotion
- Community and Economic Development
- Local Enterprise Office
- Public Participation Network
- Sligo County Library, Museum, Arts and Cultural Services
- Planning Control, Forward Planning & Enforcement
- County Sligo Heritage Office

2.4 Customers and Clients

Sligo County Council has the responsibility for delivering a wide and diverse range of services for its customers throughout the county. The Council provides for a population of c. 65,000 persons, and in delivering its services and undertaking its statutory role, it works and liaises with many groups and organisations, including:

- The Minister and Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Local community groups
- Other State agencies
- Social partners
- Other Local and Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- LEADER groups
- Private sector service providers
- Local private businesses and the general public

Chapter 3: Assessment of Irish language use in Sligo County Council and details of services currently being provided in English only, in Irish only, or bilingually

The primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. The demand for services from Sligo County Council through the medium of Irish is low at present. However, this demand may increase as the Council improves its capacity to work with the Irish language and as the language grows in the community. The continuing success of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré, which was established in 1996 and has seen increased growth year on year since, is having a notable effect on the prominence of and demand for Irish in the county. This growth in the prevalence of Irish will see an additional boost with the imminent opening of the new Gaelcholáiste in September 2017.

Various staff of the Council have undertaken training in the Irish language and some have completed courses in the Irish language, such as the NUIG programme “Diplóma sa Ghaeilge”. A number of in-house courses have also been provided, and the Council commits to continuing to build capacity in the use of the Irish language.

It is the intention of the Council to grow its capacity to conduct its business through the medium of Irish, and also to encourage the public to make use of this service, mainly by:

- ✓ **Drawing attention to its Irish content and service provision by placing this information in a prominent position on the Council’s website and in its other published material (social media, advertising, publicising etc.)**
- ✓ **By stepping up staff training and awareness of the language context in order to empower staff to deal with people confidently through Irish**

Despite the fact that demand for services through Irish is limited at present, in light of the growing interest in Irish generally, it is expected that there will be an increase in public demand for services through the Irish language from the Council going forward. The provision of such services will depend on staff members with Irish being present and available to take them on in addition to their normal assigned duties. These staff members have been extremely accommodating thus far and have voiced their commitment to future Irish language service provision. Ongoing training will be provided with the aim of creating and fostering an atmosphere of bilingualism in terms of the services listed below, so that Irish-speaking customers will be encouraged to conduct their business through Irish, and staff members will feel comfortable in dealing with such customers through Irish.

Details of services currently being provided in English only, or bilingually in Irish or English.

Provision of Services			
Name of Service	In English Only	In Irish only	Bilingually
Application forms			New app. forms and associated info leaflets within one cover.
Brochures and information leaflets		Some in Irish	
Major policy documents		5% or more in Irish	
Correspondence			Correspondence is replied to in either Irish or English, depending on the language required by the customer.
Press releases	Generally English only	5% or more in Irish	
Customer Services desk and phone switchboard	Generally English only	Some Irish used	The Council's Customer Services Desk staff at County Hall are the first point of contact with the public. These staff give the Council's name in Irish and are familiar with the basic greetings in Irish. Members of the public can be put in touch without delay with the officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.
Email			The generic message and disclaimer attached to the Council's official email, referencing the Irish name "Comhairle Chontae Shligigh" will continue to be used on letter heads. Bilingual disclaimers are used on all emails.
Website (www.sligococo.ie)	Mainly English	'Nuacht' section included	

Chapter 4: Enhancing the provision of Irish Language Services

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

		statements will be published simultaneously in Irish and English.	
	Circulars/Mailshots	Where a public body communicates in writing or by electronic mail with the general public or a class of the general public for the purpose of furnishing information to the public or the class, the body shall ensure that the communication is in the Irish language or in the English and Irish languages.	Mandatory

Under each of the above services, Sligo County Council will undertake the following list of actions:

Means of communication with the public		Commitment	Timeline By end Yr 1/ Yr 2 / Yr 3
Oral / Written Communication	Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The team will master basic greetings in Irish and the ability to pass a customer on to an Irish-speaking employee - The main reception desks will display notices inviting the public to use Irish - A team member at Reception/Switchboard will be assigned to keep a continuous log of any demand that comes through by phone, email or face to face for services in Irish. 	Year 1 Year 1 Year 1
	Face to Face/Counter Service	The team will master basic greetings in Irish and the ability to pass a customer on to an Irish-speaking employee.	Year 1
	Switchboard	The team will give the name “Comhairle Chontae Shligigh” on answering, in addition to a basic greeting and the ability to pass the call on to an Irish-speaking employee.	Year 1
	Telephone communications with the public	Sligo County Council will give the team training and guidelines on dealing with members of the public wishing to avail of an Irish service.	Year 1

	Recorded Oral Announcements	The Council will put in place an out of office recorded message in both Irish and English. Messages can go to voicemail and be handled via callback by an Irish speaker if required.	Year 1
	Live announcements	n/a	
	Information Leaflets/ Brochures	Major policy documents approved by the Council for publication to be produced in both languages within one cover (size and nature of the document permitting), where they have a specific public interest or local significance.	Ongoing
	Application Forms	Either an Irish or a bilingual version of the most-used application form in each department will be provided.	Year 1
	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - summonses to Councillors to meetings will be issued bilingually - the details of any Councillors willing to conduct business through Irish will be given on the Council's website. - the opening prayer at County Council and Municipal District Council meetings will be cited in Irish - all yearly publications will be translated to Irish (e.g., Annual Report) 	Year 1 Year 2 Ongoing Year 1
Media	Press Releases	10% of press releases will be translated into Irish and released simultaneously with the English version.	Year 1
	Media Spokespersons	Team members willing to or capable of dealing with the media in Irish will be identified and trained as appropriate.	Year 2
	Speeches	Councillors will be encouraged to greet or sign off in Irish on public occasions, as will the Chief Executive, with appropriate support given.	Year 1
Information Technology	Email	A dedicated email address will be set up to deal with queries from the public in Irish, for	Year 1

		example, eolas@sligococo.ie , which will be linked in with the current address, info@sligococo.ie , giving equal status to both.	
	Websites	20% of the static content on Sligo County Council's website will be translated. There will be a navigational link between the Irish and English pages. All application forms of significant public interest will be available via the website by the end of the scheme.	Year 2 Year 3
	Computer Systems	The Council will avail of all ICT systems which are supported through the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) or other agent which have an Irish language public interface	Ongoing
	Other	10% of social media posts, publicity material & signage for major festivals and events being organised by the Council will be in Irish	Year 1

Chapter 5: Improving Language Capability

5.1 Recruitment

The recruitment of staff with the appropriate level of competence in the Irish language in each area of work of Sligo County Council will be the primary means of optimising the availability of services through Irish. Our recruitment policy, which is subject to the framework of agreed national recruitment procedures, will have regard to the need to improve Irish language capability on an incremental basis.

All new staff will be provided with an **induction pack** containing a copy of our agreed scheme in order to ensure that they are made aware of our commitments under the legislation.

5.2 Training and Development

Sligo County Council is committed to making available opportunities for staff to attend appropriately accredited Irish language training courses, as resources permit. All staff will be advised of facilities/opportunities to improve their competency in Irish.

		Commitment	Timeline By end Yr 1/ Yr 2 / Yr 3
Improving Irish Language Capability	Recruitment	<p>The Council's HR department will have regard to proficiency in the Irish language (both written and oral) in its hiring procedures,</p> <p>New staff will be provided with an induction pack containing a copy of this scheme</p> <p>The requirements and obligations of each section in relation to being able to provide a high-quality service through Irish will be taken into account when placing or deploying staff within the organisation.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Year 1</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All staff and Councillors to be given equal opportunity to improve their Irish language skills through training and 	Ongoing

		<p>development courses, including training courses within normal working hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - language awareness to be part of staff induction and customer service training to ensure that staff know why Sligo County Council is developing an Irish language policy; understand the background of the policy; and are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work. 	Year1
	<p>Participation in language promotion activities /Provision of resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sligo County Council is committed to promoting and publicising language/cultural initiatives that support the use of the Irish language. Informal, social activities will be encouraged, including the possibility of working in partnership with Gaelscoileanna and other social groups in Sligo, such as the “ciorcail comhrá.” This will be done through the intranet of the Council (see below). - A “Gaeilge” section will be set up on the Council’s intranet for staff, which will contain info for staff on Irish language resources (www.focloir.ie, www.tearma.ie, www.logainm.ie etc.); phrase books; letter templates; info leaflets, faxes forms etc. This can be expanded over the life of the scheme to include other resources supporting the Council in offering its services through Irish. This can also be used to inform staff of Irish language-based social activities. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Year 2</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advise staff on availability of accredited translation services through which translation memory/glossaries can be developed, if necessary, to reduce the translation burden. 	Year 1
	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engage the services of accredited translation services to ensure the highest standards in translations - assignment of a staff member or subcommittee or group of staff (with Irish ability) to monitor the progress of the scheme's implementation. 	Ongoing Year 1

Chapter 6: Monitoring and Review

The implementation of the scheme will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by the Senior Management of Sligo County Council.

- The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the sections who are responsible for the implementation of the Scheme within their own areas, with support from An tOifigeach Gaeilge, and will report on a regular basis to the Management Team.
- Details of progress will be published in Sligo County Council's Annual Report
- The Council intend to keep a record of the number and types of request received through Irish during the lifetime of this Scheme. This will allow us to tailor Irish language service provision more appropriately and to increase our publicity of such services in particular areas. The person responsible for this will be the Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Services.

Chapter 7: Publicising of Agreed Scheme

This scheme will be publicised both internally and externally, through a press release initially. A bilingual version of the scheme will be made available on our website and circulated to all staff and appropriate agencies. Other means to publicise the scheme may also be used.

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

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

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

The English language version is the original text of this scheme.