

**Sligo Local Authorities Language Scheme prepared
under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 2010-
2013**

SLIGO LOCAL AUTHORITIES



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Chapter One

1. (a) Introduction and Background

This Scheme was prepared under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 by Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council (hereinafter referred to Sligo Local Authorities). This Section of the Act states that public bodies must make provisions for the services that they propose to provide through

- The medium of Irish
- The medium of English and
- The medium of both Irish and English

As well as stating the services that Sligo Local Authorities will provide in the different languages, the Scheme sets out measures and timeframes for the improvement and addition of services provided in the first language of the city and county.

1. (b) Content of the Language Scheme

The Corporate Plan includes objectives in respect to the Irish language, as follows:

- *“Provide quality services through Irish and/or English and inform customers of their right to choose the language medium.”* and¹
- *“Improving the level of services available through Irish. We 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

Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing this Scheme will rest with the Senior Management of Sligo Local Authorities.

¹ Corporate Plan

² Corporate Plan 2004-2009 pg. 36

1. (c) Commencement Date of Scheme

The Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and will commence with effect from **28th July 2010**.

It will 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 earlier.

1. (d) Sligo Local Authorities - Overview

The mission statement is as follows:

“To provide a process for democratic decision making at a local level and to enhance the lives of the people.”³

Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council seek to enforce the Corporate Policy Mission statement as well as fulfill our leadership role and democratic mandate with regard to the following core values:

- Democracy- Our democratic mandate governs all our decisions and actions.
- Public Service- The public interest is central to all activities.
- Inclusion- All people are valued equally.
- Fairness- All decisions are made in a fair, equitable and impartial manner.⁴

Sligo Local Authorities provide many services to enhance the local area and the quality of the lives of those who reside or visit there including;

- Housing and Social Support
- Road Transportation and Safety
- Water Services
- Environmental Protection

³ Corporate plan for Sligo local authorities 2004-2009 pg.14

⁴ Corporate plan for Sligo local authorities 2004-2009 pg.14

- Economic, Planning and Development
- Recreation and Amenity
- Corporate Services
- Finance
- Emergency Services
- Support for Arts and Culture

1. (e) Customers and Clients

Sligo Local Authorities have the responsibility for delivering a wide and diverse range of services for its customers throughout the county. The authorities provides the services for a population of c 60 000 persons. This represents an increase of 3,444 (6.2%) over the 1991 census figure, and 2,379 (4.26%) compared with 1996 directly showing that Sligo Local Authorities are catering for an ever growing population either directly to individuals or to a variety of organisations. The Local Authorities work with and liaise with many groups and organisations in delivering its range of services and in undertaking its statutory role including:

- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Local community Groups
- Sligo Local Authorities Customers and the general public
- Other state agencies
- Social partners
- Other Local and Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- LEADER groups
- Private sector service providers
- Local private businesses

1. (f) 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. The demand for services from the Sligo Local authorities through the medium of Irish is low at present. However it is anticipated that the demand will increase as the Authorities improve their capacity to work with the Irish language and as the language grows in the community. The establishment of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré in 1996 and its continuing success is having a discernible effect on the prominence of Irish in the city and county.

Members of the staff of the Local Authorities have undertaken training in the Irish language. Some have completed courses such as the NUIG programme “Diplóma sa Ghaeilge”. A number of in house courses have also been run including one such course conducted in the Council Offices in Tobercurry. The Local Authorities commit to continue to build capacity in the use of the Irish language.

Chapter 2

Context within which the Official Languages Act 2003 operates in Sligo Local Authorities

Summary of Services/ Activities

2. (a) Introduction

Outlined in this chapter are the main Services/ Activities provided by the various departments within the Local Authorities.

2. (b) Operating Language of Each Section

English is the spoken and working language in use throughout all sections of the Sligo Local Authorities. Through the implementation of this scheme the local authorities intend to develop the capabilities and competence of individual employees in the use of the Irish language and thus enhance our ability to deliver a greater range of services through Irish.

2. (c) Sections Working in Irish

Currently there is no team within the Local Authorities working solely through the medium of Irish. A part time Irish Officer is in place. The role of the Irish Officer is to assist in the provision of services through Irish and, working with other sections of the Local Authorities, to improve the overall standing of Irish within both organisations.

It is the intention of the Sligo Local authorities to grow their capacity to conduct business through the medium of Irish. Presently the demand for services through Irish is limited.

However with the growing interest in Irish generally we expect an increasing demand to use Irish and we intend to grow the capacity of our teams to respond to that demand.

2. (d) Sections working in English Language only

The following summarises the individual directorates, each of which works in the English language at this time.

Directorate of Housing, Corporate, Fire & Emergency Services & Libraries

Customer services

Housing and Building

Human Resources

Sligo County Library, Museum and Cultural Services

Communications office

Sligo Civil Defense

Information Technology / Register of Electors / Higher Education Grants

Finance Department

Finance and Accounts

Claims

Rates

Directorate of Infrastructural Services

Road Transportation and Safety

Bridge Restoration and Repairs

Water Services

Health & Safety

Directorate of Community & Enterprise, Arts & Cultural Services and Environment

Sligo County Development Board

Sligo County Community Forum

Sligo Social Inclusion Measures Group
Civic Pride Awards / Omagh – Sligo Partnership
Telecommunications Infrastructure / Tidy Towns
County Council led Peace II Task Force / Burial Grounds
Sligo RAPID Programme
Sligo Volunteer Bureau / Volunteer Development Programme
County Sligo Arts Department

Directorate of Planning, Sligo Borough Council, Sligo Harbour, Enforcement & Heritage

Development Planning Unit
Enforcement
Environmental Services
County Sligo Heritage Office

Chapter 3

Provision of General Services/ Activities

3. (a) Methodology and Research Undertaken

In preparing this Scheme, Sligo Local authorities:

- (a) Invited submissions from the public
- (b) Surveyed its employees to assess their capacity to deliver services through Irish, and
- (c) Reviewed the availability of services through Irish.

3. (b) Means of Communication with the Public

Almost all of the communication in the Sligo Local Authorities is conducted through the medium of English with limited communication through Irish. Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council seek to produce material in both languages where it has a specific public interest. It is accepted that the present situation can be improved and the Councils are committed to doing so. Communication in Irish presently includes;

- Application Forms
- Annual Report
- Some Public Information Leaflets and Brochures
- Media Releases

The Sligo Local Authorities recognize and acknowledge the particular linguistic preferences of Irish language groups, organizations involved in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage including the Irish language and local Gaelscoileanna. The provision of services in Irish to these particular bodies and groups will be facilitated over the lifetime of the scheme.

3. (c) Written Documentation

Sligo Local Authorities in preparing this scheme commit to continuing and improving the publication of bilingual material to the public and media during the lifetime of the scheme.

Within 2 years of the commencement of the scheme, Sligo Local Authorities will ensure that all new application forms and associated information leaflets will be produced bilingually, each within one cover. The issue of existing application forms will be considered as part of the second and subsequent language schemes.

Within 2 years of the commencement of the scheme, generic forms used nationally will be requested in Irish.

By the end of the scheme, Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council will produce all new information booklets in both languages and within one cover (unless one cover is not practicable because of size or nature of the document) where they have a specific public interest or local significance. This will not include information of a very technical nature.

3. (d) Correspondence

The Sligo Local Authorities understand that persons may communicate in their chosen language of Irish or English. The Councils wish to facilitate use by customers of their chosen language. Where the Councils receive correspondence through the medium of Irish it will reply in that language in accordance with the provisions of section 9(2) of the Official Languages Act 2003. Where an individual employee or team does not have the necessary competence to reply in Irish they will liaise with the Irish Officer.

3. (e) Telephone

Customer Services Desk staff are the first points of contact with the public. It shall be the policy of Sligo Local Authorities to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice applies in this area:

- Within six months of adoption of the scheme the Local Authorities' Customer Services Desk staff will give the Council's name in Irish.
- Within six months of adoption of the scheme Customer Services Desk staff will be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.
- Within eighteen months of adoption of the scheme arrangements will be put in place to ensure that members of the public can be put in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

3. (f) E-mail

The generic message and disclaimer attached to the councils' official e-mail service is not currently in Irish but will be produced in bilingual form during the lifetime of the scheme, referencing the Irish names "Comhairle Chontae Shligigh" and "Comhairle Bhuirg Shligigh" which are already used on letter heads by both local authorities.

3. (g) Website

- Work is ongoing on developing the bilingual nature of the websites by including a monthly "Nuacht" section on the site.
- The local authorities will make all application forms of significant public interest available on their websites in both languages by the end of the scheme.
- As part of the Scheme the Local Authorities will make Irish Sections of the external website more accessible and make part of the static content of the website bilingual.

We commit that by the end of the scheme, the following sections of the Sligo County Council and Sligo Borough Council websites will be available bilingually:

- **SCC website** www.sligococo.ie
 1. Council Members
 2. The Council
 3. Meetings
 4. SPCs
 5. Standing Orders
 6. Sligo Vision
 7. A Brief History

- **SBC website** www.sligoborough.ie
 1. Council Members
 2. About us
 3. Services
 4. Council Meetings
 5. Mayor's Office

3. (h) One-to-One services

During the course of this scheme, the following sections will be prioritised with a view to the development of an enhanced service through Irish:

- Cranmore Regeneration Office
- Customer Services
- Corporate Services

By the end of the scheme, a one-to-one counter service will be available from the Cranmore Regeneration office. Preparatory work will be carried out in order to ensure that the provision of a one-to one counter service from the Customer Services and Corporate Services Departments will be addressed in the Local Authorities' second language scheme.

3. (i) Press Releases

From adoption of the scheme the Sligo Local Authorities will ensure that at least five percent of press releases per annum will issue bilingually. These will relate to issues or developments of local/national/international significance and will include releases concerning the Irish language.

3. (j) Computer and Interactive Systems

New computer systems being installed will have the capability of handling the Irish language. Existing computer systems will, where necessary, be upgraded in conjunction with the next suitable planned maintenance or upgrade work.

The Local Authorities commit to upgrading its existing on-line interactive services to make them available bilingually in conjunction with the next suitable planned maintenance or upgrade work and as resources and pressures on other work in the IT area allow. Should the Local Authorities introduce any new interactive services, these will be introduced bilingually simultaneously. These commitments are subject to the provision of the necessary systems and resources by the Local Government Computer Services Board.

During the life time of the scheme the Sligo Local Authorities will work with and seek the agreement of staff competent in the Irish language to provide services in Irish across a range of areas where a demand for such services in Irish arises. Subject to their consent such staff will be identified for customers on the web sites.

3. (k) Training and Development

At present no customer service training is given regarding the requirements of the Official Languages Act . Within one year of the scheme being confirmed language awareness and the

requirements of the Official Languages Act will be included in induction and customer service training.

Media communications are presently conducted through English alone. During the life time of the scheme the Council will identify and provide training to staff to conduct interviews to the Irish language media including Radio na Gaeltachta and TG4.

Chapter 4

4. (a) Monitoring and Review

The Senior Management of Sligo County Council will implement this Scheme and keep it under continual review. Day to day monitoring will be undertaken by Managers in each of the sections who are responsible for the implementation of the scheme in their areas. They will be assisted and encouraged in this by the Irish Officer. They will report through the Irish Officer to the Management Team on a regular basis throughout the operation of the scheme. Progress on increasing the organisations' capacity to deliver services through the medium of Irish will become a feature of the Annual Report.

Management will monitor the level of demand of services through Irish so that in time and in accordance with community requirements the Sligo Local Authorities can develop more ambitious schemes in the area of the Irish language and its use.

4. (b) Publishing of Agreed Scheme

The contents, commitments and provisions of the Scheme will be published and brought to the awareness of the public through

- Website
- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies
- Public display / availability within Sligo's Public Libraries

On adoption of the plan we will place notices on our website and similarly indicate at reception desk, the availability of Irish language services.

The Sligo Local Authorities may initiate further development activities not included in this Scheme.

A copy of the scheme has been forwarded to Oifig an Choimisinéir Teanga.

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