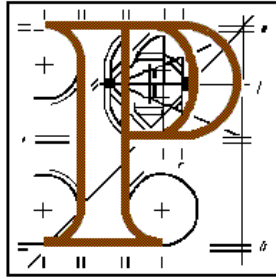


An Bord Pleanála



An Bord Pleanála Language Scheme 2015 – 2018

under Section 15 of

the Official Languages Act 2003

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Chapter 1

An Bord Pleanála – Introduction, Overview and Summary of Services.

An Bord Pleanála was established in 1977 under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1976 and is responsible for the determination of appeals and certain other matters under the Planning and Development Acts, 2000 to 2014 and determination of applications for strategic infrastructure development including major road and railway cases. It is also responsible for dealing with proposals for the compulsory acquisition of land by local authorities and others under various enactments. The Board also has functions to determine appeals under Water and Air Pollution Acts and the Building Control Act.

Our mission statement is:

"To play our part as an independent national body in an impartial, efficient and open manner, to ensure that physical development and major infrastructure projects in Ireland respect the principles of sustainable development, including the protection of the environment."

An Bord Pleanála has a number of obligations under Section 135(8) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 concerning the Irish language. These are:

- (a) An oral hearing may be conducted through the medium of the Irish or the English language.
- (b) Where an oral hearing relates to development within the Gaeltacht, the hearing shall be conducted through the medium of the Irish language, unless the parties to the appeal or referral to which the hearing relates agree that the hearing should be conducted in English.
- (c) Where an oral hearing relates to development outside the Gaeltacht, the hearing shall be conducted through the medium of the English Language, unless the parties to the appeal or referral to which the hearing relates agree that the hearing should be conducted in the Irish language.

An Bord Pleanála, under Section 120(1) of the 2000 Act, must also appoint persons to be employees having regard to the need to ensure that an adequate number of staff are competent in the Irish language so as to be able to provide service through Irish.

Furthermore, Section 10(2)(m) of the 2000 Act provides that a development plan shall include objectives for the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht including the promotion of Irish as the community language, where there is a Gaeltacht area in the area of the development plan. An Bord Pleanála is bound to have regard to the development plan of the planning authority when making its decisions.

An Bord Pleanála welcomes the preparation of this Language Scheme as an opportunity to assess the adequacy of the services it offers and to expand on the availability of services through Irish.

An Bord Pleanála is currently involved in an upgrade of its Information and Communication Technology systems (the Plean-IT project). This upgrade will include enhanced functionality to view information and provide the opportunity to make applications, appeals or observations remotely and electronically via a new website. As part of this overall project, the organisation will also consider the use of communication channels for example, social media to disseminate information in respect of the functions and activities of An Bord Pleanála. An Bord Pleanála recognises that the design and implementation of these customer interface elements of the project which are focussed on improving customer service will comply with provisions set out in this Scheme.

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

Chapter 2

2.1 Preparation of New Language Scheme

An Bord Pleanála prepared its second Scheme under Section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003.

The Minister of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht requested the An Bord Pleanála in accordance with section 15 of the Act to review its Second Scheme and to prepare a new draft scheme.

Section 11 of the Act provides that, for the purposes of promoting the use of the Irish Language for official purposes in the State, public bodies prepare a statutory Scheme specifying the services, which the public body proposes to provide

- exclusively through the medium of the Irish Language
- exclusively through the medium of the English Language, and
- through the medium of both the Irish and English Languages

and the measures the body proposes to adopt to ensure that any service that are not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish Language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

This Scheme was prepared having regard to the Guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 issued by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in September 2004.

An Bord Pleanála published a notice under section 13 of the Act, inviting submissions from any interested parties regarding the preparation of the new draft Scheme. This notice was also made available on our website. Any submissions received are available at www.pleanala.ie

This new Third Scheme was prepared and approved by the Board of An Bord Pleanála following consideration of all relevant submissions received. These included the views of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Office of An Coimisinéir Teanga and the Management, Partnership and Irish Language Committees of An Bord Pleanála. The Scheme has also been approved by the Minister of State with responsibility for Gaeltacht and Affairs, Mr. Joe McHugh, T.D.

2.2 Content and Objectives of the Language Scheme

An Bord Pleanála recognises that members of the public can express their views and needs better in their preferred language, that enabling the public to use their preferred language is a matter of good practice, and that denying the customer the right to use their preferred language could place members of the public at a disadvantage. With the implementation of this Scheme, An Bord Pleanála is committed to creating a bilingual culture in its dealings with customers and to provide all its services through the medium of Irish in a phased manner over a number of years.

The primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 and this Scheme is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

Significant commitments were given in An Bord Pleanála's first two schemes to improve the level of services through Irish. This third scheme is based on the understanding that all of these commitments in the earlier Schemes were implemented.

The objective of this third scheme is to continue the delivery of the commitments made in the earlier schemes and to build on the progress achieved over the period of those schemes and on the language policy that has been operated by An Bord Pleanála for a number of years. The following provisions are in accordance with this objective:

- Callers to our offices are able to conduct their business in Irish if they wish.
- Where an appeal or observation is written in Irish, the decision of the Board will be issued in Irish or bilingually.
- Where an oral hearing relates to a proposed development within the Gaeltacht, the oral hearing will be conducted through Irish, unless the parties to the appeal agree that the oral hearing should be conducted in English.
- Any correspondence received in Irish will be responded to in Irish in accordance with the provisions of section 9(2) of the Official Languages Act 2003.
- In-house training courses will be provided to staff to encourage staff to increase their knowledge of Irish with the intention of providing a better service through Irish.
- Staff will be encouraged and facilitated in attending external Irish language courses through the reimbursement of fees and the granting of study leave.
- Staff will be facilitated to attend Irish language courses in the Gaeltacht during the summer months.

It is intended that the Scheme will strengthen the commitments made in our Customer Action Plan concerning Official Languages Equality.

2.3 Commencement Date of the Scheme

This Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Scheme will commence with effect from 5 October 2015 and will remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister under section 15 of Official Languages Act 2003, whichever is the later.

Chapter 3

3.1 Means of Communications in relation to Services

An Bord Pleanála's main means of communications with appellants/applicants/observers/objectors and the general public are through:

- (i) Decisions and correspondence issued in relation to individual appeals, referrals and applications.
- (ii) Corporate publication including Statement of Strategy, Annual Report, Customer Charter/Customer Action Plan and Language Scheme
- (iii) Website.
- (iv) General Information and Guideline Documents.
- (v) National and Local Media.

(i) Decisions and Correspondence

Where the application relates to development in a Gaeltacht area and where the application, appeal or observation was made in Irish, it is the policy to issue an order bilingually. In addition, it is Board practice to issue a bilingual order on any decision relating to a significant development in a Gaeltacht area notwithstanding that no submission was received in Irish.

(ii) Corporate Publications

Corporate Publications are produced and made available bilingually. Any media statement issued in conjunction with publications are also issued bilingually. Media launches are held through English but, if requested, a spokesperson will conduct an interview through Irish to Irish language television and radio news programmes, where possible.

(iii) Website

An Bord Pleanála's website contains Irish and English versions of information documents and guidelines published by the organisation.

Development descriptions of new and decided cases are posted on the website every week. Current policy is that the development descriptions are placed on the website in the language in which the applications were made.

(iv) Information/Guidelines

Information and guidelines published by An Bord Pleanála are produced in both languages and are put on the website in both languages.

(v) National and Local Media

Decisions on major developments or of media interest generally are released to the media following their notification to the parties concerned. Media queries in relation to decisions are dealt with in the language in which they are made.

Chapter 4

Enhancement of Services to be Provided Bilingually.

An Bord Pleanála is committed to providing access to its services through the Irish language. As well as the measures listed in the following pages, An Bord Pleanála's aim is to continue to deliver and enhance a quality customer service in Irish.

4.1 Publication of Documentation

All information, including guidance and advice notes, annual reports, etc. will continue to be available bilingually and will be primarily available via the website of An Bord Pleanála. Where documents are produced in a hard copy format, they will be produced bilingually within one document with both languages given equal status.

Target: Ongoing

4.2 Written Communications

4.2.1 An Bord Pleanála will continue to welcome correspondence in Irish.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.2 Correspondence received will be acknowledged in the language of the original communication. When further correspondence is required, it will continue in the same language.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.3 Corresponding with An Bord Pleanála in Irish will not cause any undue delay. The aim will be that all correspondence will receive a reply within the target periods set out in the Customer Action Plan.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.4 Correspondence following a telephone or face-to-face conversation in Irish will be in Irish unless the caller has indicated otherwise.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.5 Correspondence ensuing from a meeting/telephone conversation where it has been established that the person's preferred language is Irish, will be in Irish, although the meeting/telephone conversation may not have been held through the medium of Irish.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.6 Correspondence initiated by An Bord Pleanála with a member of the public or organisation in a Gaeltacht area will be in Irish or may be bilingual if requested or deemed necessary.

Target: Ongoing

4.2.7 In the day-to-day delivery of services, standard correspondence is now and will continue to be issued in either Irish or English, as appropriate.

Target: Ongoing

4.3 Application/Appeal Forms

4.3.1 All planning application or appeal forms, guides and associated explanatory material will be available in both official languages on the website of An Bord Pleanála. Any hard copy versions will be fully bilingual within one document.

Target: Ongoing

4.3.2 In exceptional cases where the above proves impractical due to the technicality or the size of the documents, separate Irish and English versions may be made available. Their availability will be simultaneous and both versions will be given equal prominence.

Target: Ongoing

4.3.3 An Bord Pleanála will make every effort to ensure that the Irish used in forms and guidelines is easily understood while having regard to accuracy of standard spelling and grammar.

Target: Ongoing

4.4 Press Releases and Statements

4.4.1 All press releases and statements will be issued bilingually simultaneously.

Target: Ongoing

4.4.2 An Bord Pleanála will ensure that an Irish speaking spokesperson, of sufficient authority, will be available for media interviews, where possible.

Target: Ongoing

4.4.3 Where further information is to be given in relation to press releases/statements, contact with an employee who can give that information in Irish will be arranged, where requested.

Target: Ongoing

4.5 Publications/Public Access

4.5.1 All Corporate publications will be bilingual and within the same cover in accordance with best practice.

Target: Ongoing

4.5.2 Where a publication or a document is being made available through public access, any charge for a bilingual document will not be greater than that made for a single language version of the document.

Target: Ongoing

4.6 Website, Online and IT Services

4.6.1 An Bord Pleanála's website will continue to be bilingual and up to date, equal as regards functionality and be fully interchangeable between both official languages in relation to all static content and functionality. All guidelines or other information will continue to be made available on the Irish version of the website at the same time as on the English version.

Target: Ongoing

4.6.2 New Digital services will allow An Bord Pleanála to provide a full range of services and information bilingually. Computer systems, new and existing, are and will continue to be compatible with the Irish language.

Target: Ongoing

4.6.3 Any new printing facilities will be fully capable of handling the Irish language.

Target: Ongoing

4.6.4 An Bord Pleanála will continue to actively use technology to improve the provision of bilingual services.

Target: Ongoing

4.6.5 The official languages section of the Intranet will be expanded as a support and resource for staff.

Target: Ongoing

4.7 Telephone Communication

4.7.1 Receptionists/switchboard operators are the first points of contact with the public. It shall be the policy of An Bord Pleanála to continue to ensure that best practice customer service principles apply in this area, which is that:

- Reception/switchboard staff will give the name of An Bord Pleanála in Irish.
- The receptionist is at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish.
- Suitable arrangements are in place so that the receptionist can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.

Target: Ongoing

4.7.2 An Bord Pleanála will continue to ensure that any caller, who wishes to conduct their business through Irish, will be able to do so with particular regard to sections that most frequently deal with the public. If an Irish speaker is unavailable to deal with the call, the person receiving the call will explain the situation and take the caller's name, phone number and details of the query and will ensure that an Irish speaker returns the call that day. Where this is not possible e.g. due to the lateness of the call, the call will be returned within one working day.

Target: Ongoing

4.7.3 If an Irish speaker is unavailable to deal with a specialised enquiry, the caller will be given the choice of being called back in Irish or continuing the call in English.

Target: Ongoing

4.7.4 A directory of Irish speakers to deal with Irish language calls has been integrated to the internal telephone directory as a guide to staff who wish to transfer calls to Irish speakers. The names of these administrative staff are clearly highlighted on the directory.

Target: Ongoing

4.7.5 Any answer phone system for public calls that facilitates messages being left will continue to have a bilingual recorded message inviting the caller to leave a message in either language.

Target: Ongoing

4.8 Reception/Counter Services

4.8.1 A bilingual service will be available to callers to our offices who wish to conduct business in Irish. This will be made known to the public.

Target: Ongoing

4.8.2 All callers are and will continue to be treated on a basis of courtesy and equality and the principles of best practice customer service. The choice of language of the caller will be established. If the caller wishes to communicate in Irish and an Irish speaker is unavailable to deal with the caller, the caller will be informed when an Irish speaker able to give the service will be available and will be given the option of (1) calling back when an Irish speaker is available, (2) conducting business through another member of staff providing a translation service or (3) continuing in English.

Target: Ongoing

4.8.3 Any correspondence, consequent to a reception transaction where the caller's language preference was Irish, will be in Irish.

Target: Ongoing

4.8.4 Seeking service in Irish at reception will not cause any undue delay.

Target: Ongoing

4.8.5 Staff will readily accept any caller's details in Irish and there will be no attempt to seek to get the caller to change the details to English.

Target: Ongoing

4.9 Meeting with Stakeholders

Any meeting organised with a stakeholder group from the Gaeltacht or where the group's interest relates to the Irish language or planning and sustainable development issues in Gaeltacht areas will be held in Irish or bilingually.

Target: Ongoing

4.10 Consultation

All consultation conducted by or on behalf of An Bord Pleanála will comply with the Scheme.

Target: Ongoing

4.11 Corporate Image and Signage

4.11.1 An Bord Pleanála has adopted a fully bilingual corporate identity.

Target: Ongoing

4.11.2 All signage erected by An Bord Pleanála or on its behalf shall comply with the provisions of the Official Languages Act (Section 9).

Target: Ongoing

4.11.3 Any public notices required by the Board to be published/erected by an applicant or planning authority in a Gaeltacht area or relating to proposed development in a Gaeltacht area will be in Irish/bilingual.

Target: Ongoing

4.12 Library

Our internal library staff will ensure that an amount of books and other material in Irish are available as a resource to staff to encourage proficiency in the Irish language.

Target: Ongoing

4.13. New Policies and Initiatives

New policies and initiatives will be consistent with the Scheme.

Target: Ongoing

Chapter 5

Implementation

The Official Languages Act 2003 states that a public body in preparing a draft Scheme 'shall ensure that an adequate number of its staff are competent in the Irish Language so as to be able to provide its services through Irish as well as English'. This is to enable An Bord Pleanála to deliver the services it commits to provide bilingually in this Scheme or over a series of Schemes in line with the principles of quality customer services.

An Bord Pleanála is committed to providing services that are efficient and of good quality to those who wish to deal with it through Irish. An Bord Pleanála's aim is that it will continue to have sufficient numbers of staff competent in the Irish language to enable quality customer service through Irish. Training and other support initiatives will continue to be available to staff members in order to underpin and increase proficiency in the Irish language and to encourage wider general use of the Irish language in the organisation.

5.1 Training

5.1.1 In-house and external training programmes will be continued and enhanced.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.2 Members of staff will be encouraged to attend appropriate courses aimed at increasing their level of competence in the language.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.3 A number of staff will be continuously identified as having sufficient competency in the Irish language that they could undertake appropriate third level courses in Irish, for the purpose of providing a better quality customer service. Such staff will be facilitated in undertaking the course.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.4 In house training programmes concerning oral hearings and the Irish language will continue.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.5 Irish dictionary software will continue to be installed on the PCs of all staff identified as having competency in Irish.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.6 Members and employees who are learning Irish will be encouraged to use it at every opportunity without being deterred by a lack of confidence. To this end, an internal group whose names will be publicised internally will try to conduct their business with each other through Irish.

Target: Ongoing

5.1.7 Staff will be encouraged to converse in Irish in the workplace as often as possible.

Target: Ongoing

5.2 Staffing Competitions

Additional marks will be awarded in all internal competitions for a demonstrated capability in the Irish language.

Target: Ongoing

5.3 Recruitment

5.3.1 All recruitment competitions will provide that additional marks will be awarded for a demonstrated capability in the Irish language.

Target: Ongoing

5.3.2 Interviews for any post may be conducted in Irish or bilingually on request from the interviewee subject to a panel of suitable interviewers or satisfactory interpretation facilities being available.

Target: Ongoing

5.3.3 Induction courses will contain a module on the Language Scheme.

Target: Ongoing

Chapter 6

Monitoring and Review

The Management Committee comprising senior management in the organisation will keep the operation of the Scheme under review. Additionally, the existing Irish Language Committee will continue to investigate ways to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services to be provided by the organisation through Irish. Feedback on the operation of the Scheme will also be sought from the Partnership Committee.

The day-to-day operation of the Scheme together with ongoing monitoring of the level of demand in the various areas is the responsibility of line managers.

As part of the monitoring process, Management will, following consultation with the Irish Language Committee, make an annual report to the Board on the progress of the various measures against the timetables set out in the Scheme. Following the commencement of the Scheme, any complaints concerning the commitments made in the Scheme will be processed in accordance with the procedures set out in An Bord Pleanála's Customer Action Plan.

Chapter 7

Publicising of New Scheme

- The contents of the new Scheme along with the commitments and the provisions of the Scheme will be notified to the general public by means of publication of the Scheme on the website and display in An Bord Pleanála's reception.

Staff and Board members will be informed of the new Scheme and reminded of the commitments as set out therein.

In addition, An Bord Pleanála will take every opportunity in its day-to-day interactions with customers to promote and publicise the services it provides through Irish, including by:

- Directly informing customers on a pro-active basis of the option of dealing with An Bord Pleanála through Irish, for example, by the display of notices at reception areas indicating the Irish language services that are available and also by prominently listing these on www.pleanala.ie:
- Including footnotes on selected guidelines, leaflets and application forms explaining that these documents are also available in Irish (in cases where bilingual printed material is not produced under a single cover); and
- Including notes in publications and advertisements that An Bord Pleanála provides services through Irish and, accordingly, welcomes customers who wish to deal with it in Irish, according to the commitments in its agreed Scheme.

A copy of this approved Scheme has been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.