



**An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil**
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government

**Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local
Government**

Language Scheme

2017 - 2020

under Section 15 of the

Official Languages Act 2003

March 2017

An Irish version and an English version of the Language Scheme is available on www.tithiocht.ie and www.housing.gov.ie

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Chapter 1 Background

1.1 Introduction

The Department's first Language Scheme, prepared in accordance with Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003, came into effect in August 2005. The second and third Schemes covering the periods 2009-2012 and 2013-2016 built on the progress made in the provision of services through Irish and bilingually in the Department.

This fourth Scheme has been developed to strengthen the emphasis given to the Irish language in the daily conduct of the Department's business, taking account of what is reasonably practicable over the next three years.

The Department's previous Schemes have been reviewed internally on an annual basis and the results of that process have contributed to the development of this fourth Scheme. The new Scheme reflects the newly restructured Department, following the post-General Election transfer of functions in 2016, when certain community-related functions transferred from this Department to the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and environmental functions in relation to climate, waste, resource efficiency, air quality and environmental radiation transferred to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

1.2 Review of the operation of the Irish Language Scheme 2013-2016

The Language Scheme 2013-2016 set further challenges for the Department and further embedded the implementation of Irish language obligations into the Department's culture.

Over the course of the Scheme, staff in the Strategic & Business Support Unit (SBSU) have worked closely with colleagues from across the Department to promote an awareness of, and to ensure compliance with, the terms and spirit of the Scheme. Through a series of annual internal surveys, the Department has sought to gauge the level of demand for services through Irish, both orally and in print.

There is a recognition within the Department of the importance of our Language Scheme, and of the statutory obligations arising on foot of both the Scheme and the Official Languages Act. The SBSU has been committed to ensuring that staff and managers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to providing a service through the Irish language. The Department's electronic magazine, 'Weekly Wrap', is regularly used to remind staff of Irish language commitments such as the requirement to make certain publications available in both Irish and English. In order to support staff in meeting these requirements and ensure the effective implementation of the Scheme, Irish language training is available to staff and a variety of online resources are provided, including guidance documents and details on translation services. The Department's intranet, *Doras*, was redeveloped in 2016 and work is now underway on updating and improving Irish language resources for staff on this site.

The annual survey also allows the Department to assess progress in relation to the implementation of the Scheme and provides an indication of any issues business units are encountering in relation to implementation. Similarly, the annual audit provides

information on the level of demand from the public for services in Irish. The results have consistently indicated that the level of demand for services from the public through Irish – in person or via telephone calls – has remained relatively low.

The Department has also worked with officials from An Comisinéir Teanga's office to ensure that complaints and issues of non-compliance are brought to staff's attention and addressed, with a view to avoiding a recurrence.

1.3 Approach to Developing New Scheme

The Department published a notice on its website on 19 October 2016 under *Section 13* of the Official Languages Act 2003 inviting representations from interested parties in relation to the preparation of this new Language Scheme. Notification of the consultation process was also tweeted from the Department's Twitter account, and advertised on Tuairisc.ie. All bodies under the aegis of the Department were notified of the development of the new Scheme and invited to submit their views.

Suggestions were also gathered from staff across the various Divisions of the Department and from the annual surveys which have assessed progress under the Department's previous language Schemes.

1.4 The Content of the Language Scheme 2017-2020

This new Irish Language Scheme aims to continue to deliver on the commitments outlined in previous Schemes and also to build on the progress achieved.

The new Scheme will also build on the principles of Quality Customer Service and continue to ensure that persons who wish to conduct their business in Irish are facilitated.

The Department will continue to gauge the level of demand for its services in the Irish language by carrying out annual audits of the demand for services and the implementation measures undertaken. The Department intends to report on progress made annually in its Annual Report.

1.5 Commencement date of Scheme

This Scheme has been by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. It commences with effect on the **13 March 2017** and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed, whichever is the later.

Chapter 2 Overview of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

2.1 Mission and Mandate

The Department's mission, as set out in its *Statement of Strategy 2016-2019* is to support the sustainable and efficient delivery of well-planned homes, effective local government and vibrant inclusive communities.

Our strategic goals are:

- To ensure that planning and building in our regions and communities contributes to sustainable and balanced development;
- To provide for a stable, sustainable supply of good quality housing;
- To provide a framework for the sustainable management of water resources from source to sea;
- To support and enable democratic, responsive and effective local government, effective electoral management and high quality fire services and emergency management;
- To promote and support the development of vibrant, inclusive communities and the community and voluntary sector;
- To serve society through the production and communication of reliable weather and climate information to protect life and property and to further enhance Met Éireann's role as the authoritative voice for high impact weather in Ireland.

The Department has offices in: the Custom House, Dublin; Newtown Road, Wexford; and Ballina, Co. Mayo. Staff in the housing and water inspectorates and the local government audit service are located throughout the country. Met Éireann is headquartered in Glasnevin, Dublin, and has staff in regional locations.

2.2 Departmental Customers

Given the breadth and nature of the Department's mandate, its work impacts on a wide range of people and communities across the country. While the majority of services promoted by the Department are delivered through the local government sector, the Department has an extensive customer base. This includes:

- Members of the public;
- Communities throughout the country;
- Social Partners;
- Non-Governmental Organisations;
- Bodies under the aegis of the Department;
- Other Government Departments and Offices;
- Local and Regional Authorities;
- Elected representatives; and
- European and International Institutions.

2.3 Summary of Services and Activities provided by the Department

The work of the Department is carried out through seven Divisions – Planning & Housing Market Policy & Land Management; Social Housing Policy and Rental Policy; Housing Programme Delivery; Local Government and Community Services; Water; Corporate and Business Support; and Met Éireann. The Local Government Audit Service is also based in the Department.

An outline of the main functions of the seven divisions of the Department is set out below.

Planning & Housing Market Policy & Land Management Division

The Planning, Housing Market Policy & Land Management Division is responsible for ensuring that the appropriate strategic policy and legislative planning framework is in place to promote sustainable economic growth and balanced regional development, e.g. through development of a new long-term National Planning Framework, maintaining a transparent and robust planning system, and providing appropriate policy guidance and resources to planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála to deliver their statutory functions and requirements. It also oversees the coordination and implementation of *Rebuilding Ireland - the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* aimed at addressing the significant challenges to increase housing output and enhancing housing supports and other services, and provides a vital cross-cutting role across the Housing, Water and Local Government Divisions within the Department as well as co-ordinating policies and priorities with other relevant Departments and Agencies.

Social Housing Policy and Rental Policy Division

The Social Housing Policy and Rental Policy Division incorporates Social Housing Policy; Homelessness and Housing Inclusion Supports; Rental Market and Approved Housing Bodies Regulation; and the development of New Funding Models for the delivery of social housing and affordable rental properties.

Housing Programme Delivery Division

The Housing Programme Delivery Division is charged with the oversight and management of the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP) and the Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SCHEP), which encompasses the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF) and the Mortgage to Rent schemes. The Division has responsibility for the roll out and implementation of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). In addition to leading social housing programme delivery and the related policy areas, functions also encompass responsibility for the planning, management and oversight of housing finance and expenditure. Oversight of architectural and building standards, including the development of policy and legislation in respect of building control, building standards, construction products and pyrite remediation, also falls under the remit of this Division.

Local Government and Community Services Division

The Local Government and Community Services Division deals with policies related to the development and reform agenda for the local government sector, including in relation to organisational and structural matters and the provision of oversight and governance. It also has responsibility for Community functions, including Public Participation Networks, Local Community Development Committees and Local Economic and Community Plans as well as associated cross departmental coordination. Community related programmes such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the RAPID programme and the Community Facilities programme as well as a range of community support schemes and engagement with the community and voluntary sector also fall under the remit of this Division.

Other functions include the development of the public library service, dog control and dog breeding establishments and commercial rates.

Water Division

The Water Division is concerned with Water Sector Policy, including the implementation of sectoral reforms, the governance and funding of Irish Water and the Ervia Group, the oversight of the Group Water sector and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. It is also responsible for the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the development of a marine spatial planning framework for Ireland and the foreshore legal framework.

Corporate and Business Support Division

The functions of the Corporate and Business Support Division are wide-ranging and include the following: Human Resources; training and development; departmental corporate governance; driving the Department's reform programme; finance and accounts; overseeing implementation of the public spending code; ICT; economic and statistical policy support, including Value for Money; facilities management; the Franchise function; the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management; Local Government Finance, including Local Property Tax, Motor Tax and the financial system within which local authorities operate; the Legal Unit and Internal Audit. In addition, communications functions including the press office, as well as the provision of various strategic and business support services to the wider Department are included in the remit of this Division.

Met Éireann

Met Éireann, Ireland's National Meteorological Service is the leading provider of weather information and related services in the State. Its mission is to monitor, analyse and predict Ireland's weather and climate and to provide a range of high quality meteorological and related information to the public and to specific customers in, for example, the aviation and agricultural sectors. The Director develops strategic direction in line with Departmental policies; maintains and upgrades operational quality and efficiency; is responsible for ensuring that Met Éireann fulfils its national and international obligations, and acts as Ireland's Permanent Representative to the World Meteorological Organisation.

Chapter 3 Summary of Irish Language Services and Improvements planned for 2017 - 2020

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is committed to providing quality services in Irish and/or bilingually to its customers. This chapter sets out the measures which the Department will undertake over the next three years in order to build on the progress that was made with respect to the development of bilingual services over the period of the previous Schemes.

3.1 Services that the Department provides bilingually

Generally, the Department does not provide services directly to the public, apart from dealing with day-to-day queries. In relation to the small number of Business Units that do provide direct services, arrangements have been made to ensure that a designated member of staff is available to provide the service in the language of the customer's choosing.

3.2 Means of communicating with the Public / Information to the Public

3.2.1 Customer Service

The Department's **Customer Service Action Plan (CSAP)** and **Customer Charter** cover the current period up to the end of 2018. The Charter continues to reflect the principles of Quality Customer Service and, in this way, ensures that persons who wish to conduct their business in Irish are facilitated. Both documents continue to promote the profile of the Irish language in the Department by giving more prominence to the Irish language text. In addition, a short leaflet setting out the services available in Irish in the Department is being reviewed and updated and will be available at our Reception desks and on our website shortly and used as a means of promoting awareness of the specific services available.

3.2.2 Departmental Websites and Computer Systems

- (i) In addition to the provision of all static content, the Department will continue to build on the amount of Irish language content available on its website www.housing.gov.ie / www.tithiocht.ie. Aims to further increase the amount of Irish on the website will be informed by results from the most recent internal survey on services provided in Irish by the Department. Business Units that have not yet contributed content in Irish to the Department's website will be specifically encouraged to examine their online content in an effort to further increase the amount of Irish content available. In addition, those Business Units that experience the highest demand for communication in Irish will be encouraged to increase the level of information provided in Irish on the Department's website. In order to assist the Department to meet its obligations on the availability of Irish versions of static material on the website, a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in the SBSU will be nominated. This SPOC can procure and arrange for the translation of material from English to Irish and its subsequent uploading to the website. The Department will also continue to ensure that all publications, including information leaflets and brochures, that are produced in Irish or

bilingually, will continue to be made available on the Irish version of the website at the same time as the English version.

- (ii) The Department will continue to work progressively towards making static content on other websites for which it has responsibility available in Irish. In particular, the focus will be on websites that increase public awareness on important issues and/or charges for local services, including www.firesafetyweek.ie, <http://www.myplan.ie>, and www.constituency-commission.ie. The Department is currently reviewing its website portfolio and will address Irish language content provision in this context.
- (iii) The Department will continue to have Irish versions of the static content of these sites maintained and available throughout the period of this Scheme.
- (iv) The Department will also continue to ensure that the static content on all new websites developed by it or on its behalf is made available bilingually.
- (v) All new online interactive services (i.e. services which enable members of the public to make applications, receive benefits or make payments) developed over the course of this Scheme will be made available simultaneously in Irish and English.
- (vi) The Department will continue to ensure that new software and computer systems developed by the Department or on its behalf, which require information in relation to members of the public to be inputted, for example names and addresses, will be Irish language compatible. The Department will also make bodies under its aegis (in particular, the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) which assists local authorities in the development of certain ICT solutions) aware of commitments in this regard.
- (vii) The Department will continue to ensure that all ICT developments adhere to statutory Irish language obligations.

3.2.3 Speeches

Speeches or statements, given by Ministers in the Oireachtas or elsewhere, as well as speeches made by senior officials will continue to be made available in the language(s) in which they are delivered.

3.2.4 Correspondence

In addition to fulfilling its legal obligation to reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, the Department will strive to initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer correspondence in Irish. Staff will continue to be instructed to maintain a record of such organisations with a view to fulfilling this commitment. This information will be updated on a regular basis on the Department's intranet. Standard messages on the Department's email, such as disclaimers of responsibility, will be in both Irish and English. Staff will be supported in providing automatic 'Out of Office' replies in Irish and English.

3.2.5 Official Invitations

The Department will continue to ensure that invitations to official functions hosted by the Minister or Ministers of State are printed bilingually.

3.2.6 Information Leaflets / Application Forms / Posters

The Department produces a number of leaflets, posters and application forms of general public interest. The Department will continue to ensure that all commonly used application forms, posters and leaflets e.g. in relation to voting, community and public awareness campaigns etc. , will be produced bilingually under the one cover. Where this is not feasible because of the nature, size, or layout of the material, a separate Irish and English version will be provided. In such instances, the Irish version will be made available in the same manner as the English version. Where leaflets, application forms and posters are made available on the Department's website, the Irish version will be made available at the same time as the English version. The Department specifically undertakes to have the Customer Service Charter and information leaflet on services available in English and Irish made available bilingually under the one cover.

3.2.7 Publications

A broad range of publications are produced by the various policy areas of the Department. The Department undertakes to continue to provide bilingual versions of core publications (major policy statements, strategies etc.) preferably within the same cover (either hard copy or electronic publications). However, where the length of any bilingual publication would reduce its effectiveness or involve excessive additional cost, separate Irish and English language versions will be provided. In this regard, each will contain a statement that a version is available in the other language. It is not the intention to publish bilingually large documents which are of a technical nature or have a small circulation.

3.2.8 Oral announcements / Telephone communications with the public

In line with the principles of Quality Customer Service, the Department will continue to ensure that receptionists and switchboard operators, who are the first point of contact with the public:

- will give the name of the Department in Irish and English;
- are familiar with basic greetings in Irish;
- can put members of the public in contact without delay with whatever offices or officer is responsible for offering the service required through Irish.

Individual staff members will continue to be encouraged to provide voice mailbox messages bilingually, where possible.

3.2.9 Press Releases

The Department will produce and issue bilingually 30% of all press releases throughout the period of the Scheme. In choosing which press releases are to be issued bilingually, the Department will ensure that priority is given to press releases involved with Irish

language or Gaeltacht affairs, with particular attention to community matters, as well as pre-planned announcements of significant national importance. All such press releases will be issued to the Irish language media in particular.

The bilingual version of the press release will also continue to be made available on the Department's website.

3.2.10 Local Government

The Department will continue to supply local authorities in bilingual format, circulars and any associated forms which are used directly by local authority staff to provide services to members of the public.

3.2.11 Public Meetings Policy

The Department conducts the majority of its public meetings in the English language only. However, it is the policy of this Department that, when warranted, staff proficient in Irish will continue to be provided for meetings in Gaeltacht areas and/or when meeting Irish language organisations/groups where sufficient notice is given.

3.2.12 Service to Gaeltacht areas

The Department undertakes to continue with the provision of a service through Irish to members of the public in Gaeltacht areas over the lifetime of the Scheme.

3.2.13 Gaeltacht Placenames

The official Placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will continue to be used by the Department. Official Irish language versions of placenames, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht, are available on www.logainm.ie.

3.3 Improving the Department's Irish Language Capability

3.3.1 Workforce Planning

Having regard to Government policy for enhanced provision of services in Irish, the Department will, by the end of year one of the scheme, identify any posts for which Irish language competency is an essential requirement. Every effort will be made to fulfil these requirements by the end of this scheme having regard to recruitment, promotion and training policies, as appropriate. This will enable this Department to plan and prioritise the incremental improvement of services in Irish in a more strategic manner.

3.3.2 Training & Development

In its commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, the Department will:

- Continue to include language awareness as part of relevant training courses, to ensure that staff understand their bilingual obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003.
- Continue to offer Irish language training and facilitate staff attending Irish language training during office hours.
- Continue to offer advice, and in certain circumstances financial assistance, to staff in relation to the range of high-quality Irish language classes available outside office hours.
- Continue to make Irish language training available, as required, to all reception staff /telephonists and Service Officers to increase their awareness of basic greetings and knowledge of Irish.
- Continue to seek volunteers to provide Irish language services across the Department where the requirement to provide services through the medium of Irish may arise. Such staff are listed on the intranet site, *Doras*.

3.3.3 Language resources

The Department will continue to provide all staff with easy access to information and language resources, e.g. dictionaries, both in hard copy, where requested, and in electronic format, advice on written Irish and lists of common phrases etc. The use of online resources such as spellcheckers, www.tearma.ie, www.focal.ie and www.foclóir.ie will be actively promoted. The Irish language section of the Department's new Intranet site, *Doras*, will be redeveloped to include additional guidance and resources for staff.

3.3.4 Translation Services

The Department will continue to make available to staff a list of all companies and individuals providing translation services. Detailed guidance and advice on the

procedures and best practices to be followed in the engagement and facilitation of these services will also be provided to staff.

In order to assist the Department meet its obligations on the availability of Irish versions of static material on the website, a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) will be nominated. This SPOC can procure and arrange for the translation of material from English to Irish and its subsequent uploading to the website.

3.3.5 *Seachtain na Gaeilge*

The Department is committed to promoting cultural initiatives which support and encourage the use of the Irish language. In this way, the Department will continue to support activities organised during *Seachtain na Gaeilge* over the period of this Scheme.

3.3.6 *Internal Communication*

The 'Weekly Wrap' – the Department's weekly electronic newsletter – and the Intranet will continue to be used to provide Irish language related information.

Chapter 4 Monitoring & Revision

An annual review of the progress made with regard to the implementation of the Scheme will be undertaken. In order to assess this progress, information will be collected annually on:

- policies or initiatives that have promoted the use of Irish;
- materials published in whole or in part in Irish;
- the incidence and nature of any complaints and suggestions relating to the provision of services in Irish by the Department;
- progress against each of the commitments set out in the Scheme;
- the level of demand for services through Irish.

The Department will continue to consider any additional measures that are necessary to improve the level of service provided by the organisation in the light of demand and arising from the annual assessment of progress.

In addition, a report of the measures implemented under the Scheme will be included in the Department's Annual Report.

Chapter 5 Publicising of Agreed Scheme

Staff have been informed of their responsibilities in respect of the Official Languages Act 2003 and detailed guidance and instructions have been made available to those who may need to implement Irish Language measures. Staff will continue to be made aware of their responsibilities under the Scheme through a variety of means e.g.:

- Office Notices;
- information on the Department's intranet e.g. within the 'Weekly Wrap' (weekly electronic newsletter); and
- inclusion of information on the Department's Irish language commitments in the relevant training courses.

The contents of this Scheme, along with its commitments and provisions, will be made available to the general public by means of:

- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies;
- Prominence on the Department's website;
- Prominence in the Department's Quality Customer Charter and Quality Customer Service Action Plan;
- A short leaflet setting out services available in Irish being made available at reception desks.

In addition to these measures, the Department will continue to 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 the Department 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 the Department's website;
- including footnotes on selected guidelines, leaflets, and applications 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 the Department 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 Scheme has also been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.

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