

Mayo County Council

Language Scheme

2015-2018

**Under Section 15 of the Official Languages
Act 2003**

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Section 1

1.1 Introduction and Background

This Scheme was prepared in accordance with Section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003 by Mayo County Council. Since the 1st June 2014, Ballina Town Council, Castlebar Town Council and Westport Town Council were merged with Mayo County Council and shall be referred to collectively as “Mayo County Council”. This is the second scheme prepared by Mayo County Council.

Section 15 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide:

- through the medium of Irish;
- through the medium of English; and
- through the medium of Irish and English.

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

Mayo County Council recognises that our customers and the public have the right to choose to do business with us in their preferred language and that they will be facilitated in their dealings with us, whether that is through English or through Irish. One of the main objectives of this Language Scheme is to ensure higher standards of public services are made available through the Irish Language

1.2 Irish language in County Mayo

County Mayo is the third largest county geographically in the country, comprising of 3 Gaeltacht areas, a number of Island Communities and 1,168 kms of coastline and a population of 130,638. Of this population, 8.33%% reside in the county’s three Gaeltacht areas Acaill, Iorras and Tuar Mhic Éadaigh. 43.58% of the County’s population are Irish speakers.

There are 6 Naíonraí, 25 Primary and 5 Secondary Schools situated in the Gaeltacht areas of Mayo and 4 Gaelscoileanna and 6 Naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht areas. There are also a number of enterprises and festivals operating through Irish within the County; Scoil Acla, Coláiste Uisce, Ceol na Locha, Coláiste Mhuigh Eo, Coláiste Néifinn, Féile an Fhómhair etc.

Mayo has a vibrant Irish speaking community, which supports the activities of Irish Language and Cultural Organisations in the county including Coiste Forbartha Thuar Mhic Éadaigh, Comhar Dún Chaocháin, Comhar Deirbhile, Comhlacht Forbartha Áitiúil Acla, Conradh na Gaeilge, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and Gnó Mhaigh Eo.

The success of these organisations is testimony to the interest of the public in the Irish language and their efforts to keep the language strong in County Mayo, efforts which Mayo County Council intends to develop and support.

Mayo County Council is aware of the significant challenges that exist to the sustainability of Irish as a community language in the Mayo Gaeltacht, and is committed to the protection and development of the Gaeltacht.

1.3 Preparation of the Language Scheme

This Scheme was prepared having regard to the Guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Mayo County Council published a notice under Section 13 of the Act inviting submissions from any interested parties in relation to the preparation of the draft Scheme under Section 15. Mayo County Council undertook an internal survey of the staff on their proficiency and willingness to deal with clients through the medium of Irish. An electronic survey of individuals and organisations that have regular dealings with Mayo County Council was also undertaken.

The Scheme was prepared taking the submissions from interested parties, and the thoughts and suggestions of the staff of Mayo County Council into consideration.

Mayo County Council is extremely grateful for the thoughts and support of each person and organisation that made the effort to contribute to the preparation of this Scheme.

1.4 Content of the Language Scheme

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure a better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. This scheme builds on the progress achieved across the organisation during the implementation of the last Scheme. It sets out a commitment on behalf of Mayo County Council and its staff to develop the extent to which services are currently available through Irish and it identifies areas for future enhancement.

1.5 Commencement Date of the Language Scheme

The Scheme will commence with effect from 21 September 2015 and shall remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until a new Scheme has been confirmed by the Minister, pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the later.

1.6 An Overview of Mayo County Council

Mayo County Council provides the range of services outlined below. The Chief Executive is responsible for the administration of Mayo County Council.

Mission Statement

We work to improve the quality of life for people living in Mayo and enhance the attractiveness of the county as a place in which to live, work, invest in and enjoy.

Mayo County Council provides a variety of services which influence the life of every citizen in the county. The services provided by Mayo County Council can be broken down into eight programme groups.

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

1.7 Customers and Clients

The Council's customer base is primarily the population of County Mayo which in 2011 amounted to 130,638. Of this population, 8.33% reside in the county's three Gaeltacht areas; Acaill, Iorras and Tuar Mhic Éadaigh. 43.58 % of the County's population are Irish speakers.

The Council also work and liaise with the following groups and organisations:

- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government
- The Minister and Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Local community groups
- Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Other State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other Local & Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- LEADER Groups
- Private Sector Service Providers
- Local Businesses

1.8 Assessment of services currently available through Irish

This second scheme further develops the extent to which services are currently available through Irish. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by Mayo County Council are identified in the body of the scheme. The scheme also includes a commitment to assess, on an ongoing basis, the level of demand for services through Irish, and to ensure the Council continues to meet this demand in a proactive, planned and coherent way. Mayo County Council will continue to actively promote the use of the Irish language within the organisation, endeavour to increase demand for its

services through Irish and monitor the number of queries/requests for services through Irish.

- The Customer Care Charter adopted by Mayo Co. Council on March 9th 2009 was an important reference source in the preparation of this scheme. Mayo County Council Customer Care Charter outlines how the organisation as a whole deals with the public and it also outlines the services the public can expect to get.
- The staff are another very important factor in this process and the preparation of this scheme involved a staff survey. The availability of services through Irish from Mayo County Council is hugely dependent on broad staff participation.
- Language Plans are being developed by communities in the Gaeltacht areas in Mayo. These provide an indication of the level of support required by the Gaeltachtaí from Mayo County Council.
- The last factor identified in this section is the demand for services in Irish from individuals and organisations within and outside Gaeltacht areas. A survey of individuals and organisations that have regular dealings with Mayo County Council was conducted. While the demand for services through Irish is quite low, considering that 8.33% of the County's population live within the Gaeltacht boundaries, the survey indicates a high level of satisfaction with the delivery of services, in that 78% were either satisfied or very satisfied. Both this survey, and the staff survey show that there needs to be increased awareness amongst the public that services are available through Irish, such increased awareness will, in time, increase the uptake of services provided through Irish.

Section 2

Provision of Council Services /Activities

The main objective of this Scheme is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

2.1 Communication with the Public

These methods of communication include:-

- Brochures, Information Leaflets & Application Forms
- Publications
- Press Releases
- Website
- Advertisements

2.2 Written Documentation

2.2.1 Brochures, Information Leaflets & Application Forms

- Information leaflets and application forms are issued fully bilingually within the one cover except where it is not feasible because of the nature, size or layout of the material.
- In the case where it is not feasible because of the nature, size or layout of the material, to print existing leaflets and application forms bilingually a statement will be included on the English version, indicating that an Irish version is available.
- Application forms and associated documentation will continue to be made available in both official languages for submission or download from our website.

In the case of brochures, information leaflets and application forms issued by another body, bilingual forms will be actively requested.

2.2.2 Publications

- Documents which are available in both Irish and English, are produced within the same cover, except where it is not feasible, because of the nature, size or layout of the material.
- Annual Reports, Budget Statements, Plans and Policy Documents will generally be published as PDF files issued on the internet or on CD ROM in order to avoid unnecessary printing costs, and to facilitate the simultaneous issue of both the Irish and English versions within the same cover.

2.2.3 Press releases

- Press releases relating to Gaeltacht areas of Co. Mayo and/or Irish language issues are produced bilingually and are circulated to the Irish language and English language media. Every effort will be made to do this simultaneously.
- All other Press Releases, are and will continue to be available bilingually.

2.2.4 Website

- Approximately 62% of the static content of www.mayococo.ie, is bilingual. In light of the constant revising and updating of such content there will be consistently 95-100% of the static content bilingual by the end of the scheme. Certain material, such as technical documents etc, will be available in English only on the website. Presentations, speeches, etc., may be published in the language in which they were given.
- The website address www.cocomhaigheo.ie is now established and linked to the Irish language version of Mayo County Council's homepage.
- To meet Accessibility guidelines, accessible versions of some documents will be available in single-language versions only to facilitate screenreaders.

2.2.5 Advertisements

- While Mayo County Council is not obliged to publish advertisements bilingually, we will continue to publish some advertisements bilingually where it is considered appropriate.
- In other cases, a statement may be included indicating that Mayo County Council welcomes correspondence through Irish - “cuirimid fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge.”

2.3 Oral Communication

2.3.1 Reception/Switchboard

- Receptionists / Switchboard Operators are the first points of contact with the public. It is the policy of Mayo County Council to ensure that standard Quality Customer Service (QCS) practice apply in this area, which is that:
 - reception/switchboard staff are able to give the name of the Council in Irish, and that
 - they are at least familiar with basic greetings in Irish. Arrangements are 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 required service through Irish, where available.
- The main reception desks and the individual public counters in each of the sections will display notices inviting the public to use Irish and the names of staff in each section that are willing and able to provide a service in Irish, will be available on the intranet.

2.3.2 Public meetings

- Efforts have been made to introduce an element of bilingualism into all Council meetings and public meetings throughout the county.
- Contributions in Irish or English will be welcome at meetings with the public, organised by the Council.
- All public events incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings as part of Mayo County Council’s effort to positively promote Irish in the community.
- An authorised spokesperson is available to give statements and interviews (where appropriate) to the Irish language media.

Section 3

Summary of Services/Activities provided by Sections

This section contains details of services currently available through Irish and English in the different sections and offices of Mayo County Council.

3.1 Operating Language of Each Section

3.1.1 Sections Providing Services in Irish

Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge

- Mayo County Council set up a full-time post of Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge in March 2008.
- The role of the Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge is to foster and promote the use of Irish in County Mayo and to develop Mayo County Council's bilingual policy, thereby ensuring that the public has the choice of doing business with the Council in either of the two official languages.
- The Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge works through the Irish language and provides all services in Irish except where a request is made for a service through English.
- A number of sections/offices are now in a position to provide a service through Irish, it is hoped to increase this number by the end of the Scheme. It is our intention that every office and library located in The Gaeltacht will be working through the medium of Irish by the end of this Scheme.
- It is our intention to offer a bilingual service in each section and office of Mayo County Council during the lifetime of this Scheme.

3.1.2 Sections Providing Services Bilingually

- The Area Office and Library in Belmullet, and the Library in Achill are now able to provide services bilingually.

3.1.3 Sections providing Services through English only

- Most Sections provide their services through the English language only. Mayo County Council's commitments in relation to enhancing the range and level of services available bilingually, during the lifetime of this Scheme, are set out in Section 4 of the Scheme.

Section 4

Enhancement of Services Provided Bilingually

4.1 General Policy

Mayo County Council is committed to securing an adequate number of staff capable of providing a service through Irish in all the sections of the Council that deal regularly with the public.

The primary objective will be to create and foster an atmosphere of bilingualism within all sections of the Council so that Irish speaking customers feel welcome and are encouraged to do their business in Irish and so that both customers and staff feel comfortable in conducting their business through the Irish language.

- As per first scheme Mayo County Council will ensure that appropriate structures are in place so that a fully bilingual counter service will be available throughout the Council.

4.1.1 Public Awareness

A survey of individuals and organisations who have regular dealings with Mayo County Council which was conducted as part of the consultation process prior to the drafting of this scheme, showed that while the demand for services through Irish has been relatively low, 66% said they would request a service in Irish if they knew it was available, and 89% said they would like to use their Irish more often. Both this survey and the staff survey, where 67% said they would like to have the opportunity to provide services through Irish, show that there is a need for an increased awareness amongst the public and staff of the provisions of the Language Scheme, such increased awareness will in time increase public confidence in the services provided through Irish, and also the uptake of these services.

It is proposed to promote the demand for an Irish language service in the various sections by increasing public awareness of the availability of these services.

- Appropriate signage will be displayed at public counters, reception areas etc., indicating that Irish language services are available.
- A statement will be included in the Council's email disclaimer indicating that the Council welcomes correspondence through Irish - "cuirimid fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge"
- A statement will be included on application forms (in cases where bilingual printed material has not been produced under a single cover) indicating that the application form is also available in Irish.
- The availability of various services available through Irish will be highlighted in our monthly newsletter.
- As there may be a reticence on the part of Irish speakers to request services through Irish, often due to unfamiliarity with terminology, Mayo County Council will ensure that

the Irish used in publications is legible and easily understood while adhering to the Official Standard regarding spelling and grammar.

4.1.2 Staff Awareness

In the staff survey undertaken by Mayo County Council 67% of the respondents indicated that they would like to have the opportunity to provide services through Irish. It is hoped that with appropriate training and support, and an increased awareness of the provisions of the Language Scheme, will lead to an increase in the provision of Irish language services in Mayo County Council.

- The agreed scheme will be circulated amongst the staff of Mayo County Council and published on the intranet
- Directorates/Sections will ensure that all members of staff are made aware of the requirements and implications of the Scheme
- An information seminar will be organised for line managers to ensure they are aware of the requirements and implications of this Scheme

4.2 Information Technology

Extensive and growing use is made of the Internet in Mayo County Council's dealings with its customers.

- The standard disclaimer on e-mail correspondence is bilingual. A statement indicating that Mayo County Council welcomes correspondence through Irish will be included in the disclaimer - "cuirimid fáilte roimh chomhfhreagras i nGaeilge"
- Mayo County Council will seek to ensure that any new computer software being purchased independently of the Local Government Computer Services Board is fully capable of handling the Irish language.
- The email addresses eolas@mayococo.ie and gaeilge@mayococo.ie have been added to the website as part of a proactive approach to encouraging and enabling customers to contact Mayo County Council through Irish. The Council will ensure that such queries are addressed promptly in the same manner as English language queries.
- New interactive systems for use by the general public are language compliant. Existing systems will be upgraded to be language compliant when the next upgrading of the systems takes place.

4.3 Recruitment & Placement

The Human Resources Section will address the issue of the Irish language in relation to recruitment, training and management of staff.

- We will, in the context of our staff recruitment and mobility policies, have regard to proficiency in the Irish language (both written and oral) where such would facilitate the achievement of specific commitments made in the scheme. Such issues will be incorporated through the Partnership process.
- The requirements and obligations of each section in relation to being able to provide a high quality service through Irish are taken into account when placing or deploying staff within the organisation.

4.4 Training & Development

It is a core strategic objective of Mayo County Council to develop a highly skilled, flexible and motivated workforce and elected council responsive to the changing environment in which we operate. The Council acknowledge the importance of having such a highly trained workforce to ensure efficient and effective delivery of service. If continued improvement is to be sustained, Mayo County Council must develop the knowledge, skills and competencies of all staff to full potential.

In the light of The Official Languages Act and this Scheme, the Human Resources Section will:

- Continue to ensure that all staff and Councillors are given equal encouragement and opportunity to improve their Irish language skills through training and development courses, including training courses within normal working hours, to maximise attendance and relevance to their work.
- Since the commencement of our first language scheme 10 members of staff have graduated with a Diploma in Irish from Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge, a further 40 have attended informal Irish language classes.
- Continue to include language awareness as part of both induction and customer service training courses, so as to ensure that staff:
 - understand why Mayo County Council is developing an Irish Language Service Policy
 - understand the context and background to the policy; and
 - are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work.

4.4.1 Language Support & Resources

Mayo County Council will continue to seek and support those staff willing to provide Irish language services in relevant sections across the Council.

- Make a list of companies and individuals providing translation services available to staff.
- Develop a translation memory, in order to reduce the burden of translation.
- Provide all staff with easy access to information and language resources, e.g. dictionaries.
- Maintain the 'Gaeilge' section of the intranet as a support and resource for staff, with phrasebooks, terminology, template letters, invitations, faxes, forms etc.
- Promote the use of online resources such as tearma.ie, logainm.ie, focloir.ie etc. amongst its staff.
- Mayo County Council is committed to promoting cultural initiatives which support and encourage the use of the Irish language. It will explore opportunities to encourage the development of Irish language skills through informal, social activities, and the possibility of organising such activities in partnership with other state bodies/organisations operating in County Mayo
- Information will be relayed to staff in relation to the range of Irish language/cultural events held in County Mayo.

4.5 An Ghaeltacht

- The Gaeltacht areas of Acaill, Iorras and Tuar Mhic Éadaigh fall within the functional area of Mayo County Council. The Council recognises the special needs that the Gaeltacht areas have as centres of our linguistic heritage and culture.
- Mayo County Council is aware of the challenges that exist to the sustainability of Irish as a community language in the Mayo Gaeltacht and is committed to the protection and development of the Gaeltacht and this will continue to be a priority.
- In accordance with Section 13(e) of the Official Languages Act, 2003, Mayo County Council is committed to ensuring that the Irish Language will become the working language of all Mayo County Council offices located in the Gaeltacht by 2025.
- Public meetings organised in the Gaeltacht shall be in Irish with appropriate support for those who don't speak Irish.
- Information directed at the public in the Gaeltacht will continue to be available in Irish only, or in both English and Irish where appropriate. This includes brochures and leaflets, application forms, press releases, policy documents and website, where within the Council's control.
- The Placenames (Ceantair Ghaeltachta) Order 2004 is used by the Council for official purposes.

4.6 Gaelscoileanna & other Irish Language and Gaeltacht Organisations

Mayo County Council also recognises and acknowledges the particular linguistic preferences of the 6 naíonraí, 25 primary schools and 5 secondary schools that are situated in the Gaeltacht areas of County Mayo, the 4 Gaelscoileanna and 6 Naíonraí outside of the Gaeltacht areas, as well as other Irish Language and Gaeltacht organisations, businesses and groups operating throughout the county and nationally.

The provision of services in Irish to these particular bodies and groups will be prioritised over the lifetime of this scheme.

- Any dealings initiated with Irish language schools, Gaelscoileanna and other Irish speaking groups or organisations is in the Irish language only or bilingually, provision of an Irish language service to these institutions and organisations has been prioritised over the lifetime of the first scheme and this policy will be continued.
- Materials for schemes such as the *Junior Road Safety Officer Campaign*, and the *Green Schools Scheme*, which are administered by Mayo County Council, are now available bilingually.

Chapter 5 Monitoring, Revision & Publicising of Agreed Scheme

5.1 Monitoring & Revision

The Senior Management within Mayo County Council will keep the effective operation of this scheme under review.

- 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 Oifig na Gaeilge, and will report on a regular basis to the relevant Director of Services.
- Details of progress will be published in Mayo County Council's Annual Report.
- It is our intention to record details of the number and types of requests through Irish received during the lifetime of this Scheme. By doing so, we can concentrate on improving our provision of service through Irish.

5.2 Publicising of Agreed Scheme

Details of the Scheme will be publicised in a variety of ways including the following:

- Official Launch of the Scheme;
- Publish the Scheme on Mayo County Council's Website
- A copy of this Scheme will be forwarded to Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga

The Irish language version is the original version of the scheme.