

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

**Language Scheme**

**2020 - 2023**

**under Section 15 of the**

**Official Languages Act 2003**

**March 2020**

An Irish version and an English version of the Language Scheme is available on [www.tithiocht.ie](http://www.tithiocht.ie) and [www.housing.gov.ie](http://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, third and fourth Schemes covering the periods 2009-2012, 2013-2016 and 2017-2020 built on the progress made in the provision of services through Irish and bilingually in the Department.

This fifth 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 fifth Scheme.

### **1.2 Review of the operation of the Language Scheme 2017-2020**

The Language Scheme 2017-2020 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*, is used to communicate with staff on Irish language matters.

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 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 13 November 2019 under *Section 13* of the Official Languages Act 2003 inviting representations from interested parties in relation to the preparation of this new Language Scheme. 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 sought 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 2020-2023**

This new 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 reports on commitments annually in its Annual Report.

### **1.5 Commencement date of Scheme**

This Scheme has been confirmed on by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. It commences with effect from 8th May 2020 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, and Local Government**

### **2.1 Mission and Mandate**

The Department's mission, as set out in its *Statement of Strategy 2017-2020* is to support sustainable development, with a particular focus on strategic planning, the efficient delivery of well-planned homes, in vibrant communities and a sustainable management of our water resources, and to ensure effective local government.

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 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 on meteorology 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 Policy; Legislation and Governance; Housing Delivery Local Government; 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.

### **Housing Policy, Legislation and Governance**

The functions of the Housing Policy, Legislation and Governance Division, include the development of Housing Policy and Building Standards Policy incorporating elements of the Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The Division is also responsible for ensuring that a regulatory structure is in place to support Housing Funding Mechanisms and Governance such as the implementation of the AHB Innovation Fund and the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme and for developing a national strategy for the rented sector and ensuring that economic analysis and monitoring of the housing market and related areas are provided

### **Housing Delivery**

The Housing Delivery Division drives a significant number of actions under the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness- Rebuilding Ireland. Some of the key areas include: Homelessness and Housing Inclusion Supports; Affordability & Cost Rental; 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 and also responsible for implementation and management of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). In addition to leading social housing programme delivery, the Division also has responsibility for social housing delivery co-ordination, planning, management and oversight of housing finance and expenditure as well as for oversight of building standards legacy issues and pyrite remediation governance and oversight of the Pyrite Resolution Board.

### **Planning**

The Planning Division ensures that the appropriate strategic policy and legislative planning framework is in place to promote sustainable economic growth and balanced regional development, e.g. through implementation of Project Ireland 2040: The National Planning Framework (NPF), maintains a transparent and robust planning system, and provides appropriate policy guidance and resources to planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála to deliver their statutory functions and requirements and functions relating to the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR). This role necessarily involves interaction on Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES), urban regeneration policy including the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and land management

policy, including the Land Development Agency. It also has responsibility for marine planning and the regulation of development and activity on the foreshore.

### **Local Government Division**

The Local Government Division oversees the development and implementation of the effectiveness and modernisation agenda for the local government sector. It deals with, inter alia, resourcing – staffing & funding; organisational, political and structural effectiveness and modernisation; oversight and governance in respect of local and regional government. In terms of finances, it deals with commercial rates policy and the allocation of local property tax. The Division also provides national leadership and coordination on fire; severe weather and emergency management through the dedicated National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management. The Division has lead responsibility for coordination of the oversight and governance of the Department's State Agencies, in particular the Valuation Office, Ordnance Survey Ireland and the Property Registration Authority.

### **Water Division**

The Water Division, which 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, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and 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; facilities management; the Franchise function; the National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management; 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 2020-2023**

The Department of Housing, Planning, 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 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

#### **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](http://www.housing.gov.ie) / [www.tithiocht.ie](http://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 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 was nominated. This SPOC procures and arranges 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, for example [www.firesafetyweek.ie](http://www.firesafetyweek.ie) and <http://www.myplan.ie>.

- (iii) The Department is currently migrating to Gov.ie and is reviewing its website portfolio and Irish language content provision will be addressed in this context.
- (iv) The Department will continue to have Irish versions of the static content of these sites maintained and available throughout the period of this Scheme.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) 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.
- (vii) 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).
- (viii) The Department will continue to ensure that all ICT developments adhere to statutory Irish language obligations.

### **3.2.3 Social Media**

The Department has two social media platforms that are used to communicate with its customers. A review of the content with a view to including more posts in Irish will be carried out in 2020. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring the Department's Social Media platforms and podcasts are used to increase the output of Irish from the Department.

### **3.2.4 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.

### **3.2.5 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.

### **3.2.6 Official Invitations**

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

### **3.2.7 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.

### **3.2.8 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.

### **3.2.9 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.

### **3.2.10 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.

### **3.2.11 Local Government**

The Department will continue to supply local authorities with circulars and associated forms in a bilingual format where such documents are used directly by local authority staff to provide services to members of the public.

### **3.2.12 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.

### **3.2.13 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.

### **3.2.14 Gaeltacht Placenames**

The official Placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht 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](http://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 continue to identify any posts for which Irish language competency is an essential requirement. Every effort will be made to fulfil these requirements having regard to recruitment, promotion and training policies, as appropriate. This enables the 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](http://www.tearma.ie), [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie) and [www.foclóir.ie](http://www.foclóir.ie) will be actively promoted.

#### **3.3.4 Translation Services**

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) is available. This SPOC can procure and arrange for the translation of material from English to Irish.

### **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.