



Subject:	Update on Dual-Language Street Signs
Date:	17th February, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of main Issues
1.1	At the Committee meeting on 20th January, it was agreed that a report would be brought to the meeting in February providing an update on dual language street signs applications.
1.2	The report: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provides an overview of applications and current status;• outlines the stages in the process; and• outlines the ongoing work in relation to applications within the City centre.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. note the contents of the report; andii. agree the process to be applied to City centre applications.

3.0	Main Report
	<p data-bbox="272 206 421 237"><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p data-bbox="272 250 699 286">Applicants and Current Status</p> <p data-bbox="165 353 1471 488">3.1 Following approval by the Council of the revised Dual Language Streets Signs Policy on 4th July 2022, the Building Control Service received over 500 requests for dual language street signs.</p> <p data-bbox="165 555 1471 689">3.2 These emailed requests had to be responded to individually, many of which did not contain the required information to validate and process the application. For example, requests which did not include the name of the street or the applicant's full address.</p> <p data-bbox="165 757 1471 1048">3.3 Further emails were sent to applicants requesting the required information. While many responded and provided the information, some did not, and the applications were closed. In writing to confirm the closing of these applications, a further period of time was given to provide the information. All the action above took some time to complete and proved to be much more resource intensive than envisaged. It also involved contacting a limited number of applicants more than once.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1115 1471 1451">3.4 The Council's application form went live on 9th September, available on the website through an online form, or via email, by post or in person. Any requests received after that date must be through that formal application form and applicants are advised of this where they have made requests by other means. The reason for this is that the form sets out the required information for a valid application and ensures that all relevant information is provided at the outset. This is in line with other application processes, and with GDPR requirements for the collection and use of data.</p> <p data-bbox="165 1518 1471 1899">3.5 As of 6th February 2023, the Service has received 611 requests under the new policy. Some streets have had multiple applications made. Following the aforementioned validation exercise to obtain the requisite missing information, 162 applications proved to be invalid leaving 449 applications to be taken through the process currently. Applications are being processed in batches, in the order received. In relation to the 449 live applications the validity of the applicant is being determined as each batch is processed so it may be the case that the Service discover further invalid applications as processing proceeds. In addition, it can be confirmed the 449 applications involves 352 unique streets.</p>

Stages of the Application Process

Validation

3.6 Once an application is being processed, checks are carried out to ensure the applicant is an occupier of the street. This must be done by attending the Electoral Office for residential applications, which make up the majority of the applications received.

Implementation of the initial assessment process

3.7 The initial assessment process, on the grounds of equality and good relations, as described in the public consultation and the EQIA in relation to the policy, was finalised in September and is now being applied to all applications.

3.8 This initial assessment is high-level and intended to identify any potential equality or good relations issues. Such assessment is in the context of the considerations set out in the EQIA which accompanied the Policy which set out the various protections in place for minority languages, together with Equality Commission advice that the use of Irish in signage is, in their opinion, a neutral act and that the use of minority languages, particularly Irish and Ulster Scots for common or official purposes would normally or objectively be considered to be a neutral act that would not be discriminatory.

3.9 Where adverse impacts on the grounds of equality or good relations are identified as part of this initial assessment the applications will be referred to Committee for direction.

Elected Member Notification

3.10 The most recent notification to Members was issued on 26th January. These lists of applications for streets will be issued via Democratic Services as batches are being processed. The purpose of this notification is solely to allow Members to raise equality or good relations concerns in respect of a particular application. Those concerns must be forwarded to the Director of Planning & Building Control who will, in consultation with the City Solicitor, determine whether the issues raised warrant referral of the application to Committee before a survey takes place.

Electoral Office

3.11 Appointments to view files at the Electoral Office have been booked in advance. While these are used to validate that the applicant is an occupier of the street, they are also used to confirm the occupants of the street who will be surveyed.

3.12	<p><u>Survey Preparation and Issue</u></p> <p>The issuing of surveys is dependent on the previous stages being undertaken, but the time taken is also determined by the number of properties and occupiers, with some streets involving hundreds of surveys. Surveys are issued with a unique identifier, to ensure they can be tracked, and with a prepaid envelope for return. Results are collated against each application as returned, and the final results provided for the committee report. Occupiers are given 30 days to respond to the survey.</p>
3.13	<p><u>Committee Report</u></p> <p>Committee reports will be presented for all applications where the 15% threshold of occupiers in favour of the erection of dual language street sign has been met. The report will include all the results from the surveys, and any findings from the equality and good relations assessment.</p>
3.14	<p><u>Erection of Signs</u></p> <p>Following ratification of the Committee decision, erection of the relevant sign will take around 4-6 weeks depending upon the availability of the contract.</p>
3.15	<p>Current Position</p> <p>As outlined at last month's Committee meeting, the first completed application was taken to the People and Communities Committee earlier this month. 5 applications are currently out for survey, with the anticipation that they can be brought to March or April P and C Committee. To date, 6 streets have been surveyed with a total of 707 residents being surveyed. With the further Elected Member notification and initial assessments carried out this will result in more applications being brought to Committee in the months ahead.</p>
3.16	<p>City Centre Applications</p> <p>The EQIA carried out in respect of the Policy states that "any decision relating to the erection of a second nameplate in the city centre (business core) will, in addition to the current policy considerations and the survey of occupiers, be subject to a wider public consultation to reflect the community of users."</p>
3.17	<p>Officers have considered a number of options but believe that, from a consistency perspective, it would be appropriate to use the City Centre Boundary as set out in the draft</p>

	<p>BMAP, excluding the protected housing areas. A map outlining the proposed city centre boundary for the purposes of this Policy is attached.</p> <p>3.18 Officers would also propose that where an application is received for the city centre, that will be subject to public advertisement in accordance with the Council's policy on placing public adverts. This will be in addition to the survey of the residents of the street. Committee is asked to approve the proposed city centre boundary and the proposed method of wider public consultation for applications in this area.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.19 In December, three additional staff members were recruited on a temporary basis to deal with the volume of applications received. However, as two of these posts were from within the existing team, the process for backfilling and covering their duties is still ongoing. While they are being trained and are processing dual language street sign applications, there are also other duties in their substantive posts to be undertaken. When they are fully released to their new roles and training completed, this will allow for an increase in the number of applications being processed.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>3.20 The process for carrying out initial assessments on the ground of equality and good relations is in place. Where adverse impacts are identified, a further screening will take place and finding presented to Members. This work has been developed working with colleagues in our Equality and Diversity Unit together with an external consultant.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Proposed City Centre Boundary</p>