

Language Strategy Working Group

Thursday, 2nd March, 2023

LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillors Walsh (in Chair), Long, O'Hara and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mrs. S. Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Mr. R. Connolly, Policy, Research and Compliance
Officer ;
Mrs. G. Boyd, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. A. McMullan, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies

No apologies were noted.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th November were taken as read and signed as correct.

Language Strategy Action Plan - progress update

The City Solicitor advised the members of the working group that the purpose of this report is to update the working group on the progress achieved in relation to the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan. She outlined a number of events that were being held to celebrate a number of cultural events, these included a Burns event that was organised in partnership with the Ulster-Scots Agency on Friday 27 January 2023 at the City Hall where over 400 school children attended from two different schools.

She outlined the plans for Seachtain na Gaeilge/Irish Language Week, and advised that the Council was planning to hold an event for primary schoolchildren in the City Hall in partnership with a local Irish-language author, Maire Zeyr on Tuesday 14 March. Belfast City Council would host the inaugural meeting of the Irish Language Stakeholder Forum on Thursday 9 March 2023 at which they would be presenting the draft Action Plan. She said they would be arranging a facilitated workshop to have detailed discussions about the draft Action Plan after that initial meeting before they would present an updated Action Plan to the Working Group.

To celebrate Sign Language Week, she advised members that they would be hosting an event in partnership with the British Deaf Association on Thursday 16 March 2023 at the City Hall. The theme for this event was 'Protecting BSL and ISL' which included a showcase of accessible health resources for Sign Language users.

In relation to the learning and development plan for Council staff, the City Solicitor advised Members of the working group that the Language Officer had held discussions with Autism NI, the Now Group and Deafblind UK on how the Council could become:

- An Autism NI Impact Champion
- A Jam Card Partner
- A Deafblind friendly service provider

Sign Solutions, a Sign Language training provider was also approached to deliver Sign Language courses for Council staff. She outlined to members that as a result of these discussions with the above disability organisations, training material had been received and the next step is to put a learning and development plan together for implementation as from April 2023. Members would be provided with further updates on this work. After discussion, members of the working group noted the contents of the report.

Stakeholder Fora meetings - update

The City Solicitor told the members of the working group that the purpose of the report was to update the working group on the progress in relation to stakeholders' consultations. She reminded members of the background to the consultations and said that arrangements were being made to hold meetings with each of the Language Strategy Stakeholder Fora in March 2023 with the exception of the Disabled Related Communications strand as the actions related to this workstrand were consulted on last year as part of the Disability Action Plan.

She advised that officers proposed to hold a facilitated workshop with each of the four fora to get feedback on the Council's draft Language Strategy Action Plan before reporting the matter back to the Working Group and SP&R Committee before issuing the draft plan for public consultation.

She said that it had been proposed to hold an inaugural meeting of the Irish Stakeholder Fora during Irish Language Week on Thursday 9 March which would be chaired by the City Solicitor and held in English. This would be followed by a second facilitated workshop session to get feedback on the draft Language Strategy Action Plan. Feedback from the various stakeholder forums would be brought to the next meeting of the Language Strategy Working Group.

After discussion, the working group noted the contents of the report.

Chairperson