

Language Strategy – Draft Action Plan 2023-2026

This is a draft action plan across the all the language strands in the Council’s Language Strategy 2018-23.

The Council launched its Language Strategy in April 2018. The Strategy commits to establishing a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city. There are five language strands within the Strategy:

- Irish
- Ulster-Scots
- Minority Ethnic Communities
- Sign Languages (British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language)
- Disability Communications

This Strategy is organised on thematic work streams setting out how the Council will deliver its commitments in the Language Strategy. It identifies both immediate priorities and longer- term goals. Whilst the immediate priorities will be in the initial focus, it is the aspiration to deliver all of the priorities identified within the lifetime of this plan.

The Council’s Legal & Civic Services Department will have overall responsibility for monitoring progress of the priorities with the action plan. However, it is the responsibility of each Council Department to ensure that the Language Strategy and this action plan informs the delivery of their functions. This action plan will be subject to annual review with regular update reports brought to the Elected Member Language Strategy Working Group which reports to the Council’s Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

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1.0 Access to Council Services

	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	Immediate Priority	Longer term Priority
1.1	All Languages	Provision and promotion of interpretation and translation services across the Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 		Yes
1.2	Minority Ethnic Communities	To explore the development of a signposting database, including identifying already available advice, on how to access public services in Belfast through different languages including an exploration of what may already be available and promoting this information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Good Relations Marketing and Comms 		Yes
1.3	Minority Ethnic Communities	To continue to provide good quality of automated translation software on external website.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
1.4	Disability Communications	To develop guidance to support departments in the accessibility to Council documents, services and facilities from a disability perspective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU All Departments 	Yes	
1.5	Irish	Creation and promotion of a gaeilge@belfastcity.gov.uk email address and website page explaining how the public can contact us in Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	Immediate Priority	Longer term Priority
1.6	Irish	Codify the arrangements for the use of Irish in Council meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
1.7	All Languages	Ensure Council-run events and festivals have regard to the promotion of different languages and encourage the delivery of relevant events in City Hall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Place and Economy/Economic Development City & Neighbourhood Services 	Yes	
1.8	Irish	Develop a list of key strategic Council documents and publications to proactively be made available in Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Lead department Marketing and Comms 	Yes	
1.9	Minority Ethnic Communities	To provide information on the website (and City Matters) on how to use the translation function on the website, how to telephone the council using BigWord and requesting an interpreter or documents in an alternative language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Customer Focus Legal & Civic Services/EDU Good Relations 	Yes	
1.10	Irish	Develop a protocol for the provision of Irish press statements where the subject relates to Irish or is related to a key strategic Council initiative where resources/timing permit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department (Resourcing to be confirmed)	Immediate Priority	Longer term Priority
1.11	Irish	Irish Language content will be provided across the Council’s social media platforms when the subject relates to Irish and where resources/timing permit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
1.12	All Languages	Requests for social media content in other languages where it relates to specific events or celebrations associated with the Council will be accommodated, where possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 		
1.13	Sign Languages	To provide a clear description on website and City Matters of what services are available in Sign Languages to members of the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU Customer Focus 	Yes	
1.14	All Languages	Develop an approach to provide regular content in other languages in City Matters. This will be developed in line with agreed parameters at Annex 1 .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Comms Legal & Civic Services/EDU Good Relations 	Yes	
1.15	All Languages	Review protocols for staff to support non-English speaking customers to include a code of courtesy for indigenous languages and provision of cultural awareness training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Hub Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	

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1.16	All Languages	Carry out an audit of Council staff to assess language capability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Corporate HR 	Yes	
1.17	Irish	Develop a corporate Irish language policy, including an approach to signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Departments 	Yes	
1.18	Ulster-Scots	Develop a corporate Ulster-Scots language policy, including an approach to signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Departments 	Yes	
1.19	All Languages	Include consideration of opportunities for development of language skills in staff development/ process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Hub Human Resources Legal & Civic Services/EDU 		Yes
1.20	Sign Languages	To expand the provision of Sign Language translation on popular pages on the website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Marketing & Comms 		Yes
1.21	All Languages	To ensure operating partners such as GLL provide appropriate language interpretation and translation services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
1.22	Irish	Explore the provision simultaneous interpretation for Members who wish to address the Council through the medium of Irish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services 		Yes

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2.0 Branding

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate Priority	Longer term Priority
2.1	Irish	Promote the availability of the Irish language Council logo, use of bilingual English/Irish corporate signatures and Irish language City brand for use in correspondence, documentation, literature etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 	Yes	
2.2	Irish	Carry out exploratory work on a bilingual corporate logo.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 		Yes
2.3	Ulster-Scots and Irish	Work with the stakeholders to develop an approach to raise awareness on Ulster-Scots and Irish place/street names.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Place and Economy/Economic Development • Good Relations • Marketing and Comms 		Yes
2.4	Ulster-Scots	Develop an Ulster-Scots Language Council logo, bilingual Ulster Scots/Irish corporate signatures and explore the development of Ulster Scots City brand for use in correspondence, documentation, literature etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Comms 	Yes	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate Priority	Longer term Priority
2.5	Sign Language	Develop an approach to translated Sign Language “welcome” information at identified council venues liaising with relevant departments on the installation and procurement of new screens where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Communications • Physical Programmes 	Yes	
2.6	Disability Communications	Develop an approach to signage across Council facilities liaising with relevant departments on the installation and procurement of new Disability signage e.g., braille, tactile maps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Programmes • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Marketing and Communications 		Yes

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3.0 Community, Education and Business

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate priority	Longer term priority
3.1	All Languages	Explore the development of a Language Strategy development fund for internal and external events and continue to host internal and external events promoting all strands of the Language Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Finance • Place and Economy/Economic Development 		Yes
3.2	All Languages	Support the implementation of language-related actions in the Belfast Stories Programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and Economy/Belfast Destination Hub • Physical Programmes • Legal and Civic Services 	Yes	
3.3	Irish	Development of a range of workshops/information sessions and events on council related issues such as recycling biodiversity etc aimed at Irish Medium Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • City and Neighbourhood 	Yes	
3.4	Irish	One-off external course, developed in consultation with stakeholders, delivered to community-based Irish language teachers on teaching methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
3.5	Irish	Delivery of Employment/Upskilling Academies for Irish-medium classroom assistants and others working in the Irish medium education sector'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and Economy/Economic Development • Legal and Civic Services 	Yes	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate priority	Longer term priority
3.6	Irish	Promote Irish language cultural initiatives and work in conjunction with tourism service providers to increase the visibility of Irish in Belfast’s tourist offering, including the Gaeltacht Quarter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place & Economy/Economic Development Legal and Civic Services/EDU 		
3.7	Irish	Creative writing competition launched aimed at students in Irish Medium schools and A-Level Irish students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU Good Relations 	Yes	
3.8	Irish	Production of Irish language booklet of basic Irish phrases, sayings and facts about the benefits of bilingualism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
3.9	Irish	Scope the potential for holding Oireachtas na Gaeilge (annual Irish language cultural and arts festival) in Belfast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place & Economy/Economic Development Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
3.10	Ulster-Scots	Distribution and promotion of Ulster-Scots Place Name of Belfast booklet at City Hall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
3.11	All Languages	Explore how the benefits of linguistic diversity can be promoted to the business community in Belfast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal & Civic Services/EDU Place and Economy/Economic Development 		

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4.0 Key Area of Work: Staff Awareness and Training

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate priority	Longer term priority
4.1	Sign Languages	To provide a range of Sign Language courses to staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Human Resources 	Yes	
4.2	Disability Communications	To promote awareness to the public through the website and City Matters of how to access Council documents, services and facilities, such as, how to request documents/forms in an alternative format.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Communications • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Customer Focus 	Yes	
4.3	All Languages	Development and roll-out of Making Communications Accessible Guide to staff and develop guidance for staff on providing accessible options (e.g., subtitles, dubbing) for remote meetings and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Corporate HR • Marketing & Communications • Digital Services 	Yes	
4.4	Irish	Establish an informal discussion group for Irish speaking staff and staff who wish to learn Irish and encourage the use of Irish amongst staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	
4.5	All languages	To support recruitment the Council will aim to extend our reach by, for example, by ensuring that job advertisements are distributed widely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources 	Yes	

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	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate priority	Longer term priority
		and specifically to employability and support organisations associated with particularly under-represented groups.			

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5.0 Key Area of Work: Engagement

	Language	Action	Responsible Department	Immediate priority	Longer term priority
5.1	Minority Ethnic Communities	Establishment of an Minority Ethnic Communities stakeholder forum to give input into action plans and policy development. This forum would be a sub-group from the Migrant Forum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and Civic Services/EDU • Good Relations 	Yes	
5.2	All Languages	Inclusion of young people in the Council’s external Language Strategy Engagement Fora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal & Civic Services/EDU 	Yes	

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Annex 1 – interim approach for selected languages for Minority Ethnic Communities

Information has been gathered from various sources to identify the most in demand language for Minority Ethnic Communities.

The number of language translation/interpreting requests to Council since April 2018 are set out below:

Language	Number of requests
Arabic	15
Russian	4
Polish	4
Somalian	2
Chinese (Mandarin Traditional)	1
Chinese (Mandarin Simplified)	1
Romanian	1
Spanish	1

The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust have provided latest statistics on their most requested languages for interpreting health matters:

Language	Requests
1. Arabic	9235
2. Polish	4697
3. Romanian	3032
4. Somali	2708
5. Slovak	2138

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A collection of Language statistics from Census 2021 were published in September 2022, however more details on Languages will be published during Winter/Spring 2023. Below we have a list of languages spoken at home.

	Main Language		
		Population	%
1	English	310,386	93.000944
2	Polish	3843	1.1514779
3	Irish*	2659	0.7967161
4	Chinese (Mandarin)	2272	0.6807593
5	Arabic	2046	0.6130429
6	Romanian	1460	0.4374597
7	Spanish	960	0.2876448
8	Portuguese	669	0.2004524
9	Slovak	649	0.1944598
10	Malayalam	527	0.157905
11	Tagalog/Filipino	462	0.138429
12	Hungarian	433	0.1297398
13	Chinese (Cantonese)	415	0.1243464
14	Lithuanian	397	0.1189531
15	Russian	228	0.0683156
16	Bulgarian	179	0.0536338
17	Latvian	123	0.0368545
18	Tetan	20	0.0059926
19	Other languages*	6017	1.8028735
	TOTAL	333,745	100

Please note that Census 2021 asked follow up questions on Irish and Ulster-Scots language ability:

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17,986 people in Belfast indicated that they can speak, write, and read Irish Language

2,553 people in Belfast indicated that they can speak, write, and read Ulster-Scots

Recommendation – top 5 Ethnic Minority Communities languages for translating Council material

Based on the Census 2021 statistics and from language requests issued to the Council and the Belfast Trust in recent years, we are recommending that the following languages to be listed as the top five for translating Council material:

1. Polish
2. Chinese (Mandarin & Simplified)
3. Arabic
4. Romanian
5. Somali