

Language Strategy Working Group

Friday, 26th January, 2024

LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP MINUTES HELD IN PERSON AND REMOTELY

Members present: Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Walsh (Chairperson) and Groogan.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. J. Beck, Sign Language Interpreter; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 1st September, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Verbal update on Language Strategy Action Plan Consultation

The Irish Language Officer advised the Working Group that officers had spent a considerable amount of time constructing the Action Plan and that they had consulted with numerous sections within the Council, as well as benchmarking it against other Councils in terms of best practice. The Members were reminded that the consultation period had lasted for 14 weeks and, as part of that, a number of events had been held online as well as a number of focus groups with the Disability Stakeholder Forum, the Irish Language Stakeholder Forum and the Ulster-Scots Stakeholder Forum. The City Solicitor added that the Migrant Forum had also been consulted in respect of its thoughts on the Language Action Plan.

The Irish Language Officer explained that a number of very detailed responses had been received in response to the Action Plan and that officers would collate the information over the next few weeks and present their recommendations to the Working Group in due course.

A Member sought clarification regarding the Council's use of computer-assisted translation tools and suggested that a policy should perhaps be developed regarding the use of such software. In response, the City Solicitor confirmed that she was aware of concerns which had been raised regarding the Irish signage within one of the Council's Leisure Centres. She stated that she was satisfied that the Council engaged accredited translators, who had been appointed following a formal process, and that there was no onus on them to use software. She advised the Members that the issue was also likely to be raised by stakeholders during the course of the consultation period and that she was content to raise the issue with them, in terms of best practice regarding translation services.

In response to a request from the City Solicitor, the Working Group agreed to meet the following month in order to consider the feedback from the consultation exercise.

Noted.

Draft Irish Language Policy

The City Solicitor reminded the Working Group that it had been presented with an earlier draft of the Irish Language Policy in September, 2022. At that time, the Working Group had been broadly content but had requested further detail on the proposals within it.

The City Solicitor reported that the draft policy had since been subject to redrafting, with the actions in the policy having been benchmarked against the Councils' policies, similar policies in Wales and in the Republic of Ireland, and the contents of the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan.

She outlined the main aspects of the Policy to the Working Group.

The Working Group was advised that any Irish Language Policy adopted by the Council would be subject to a review after two years but would also be subject to revision in light of any relevant legislation or guidance from an Irish Language Commissioner.

The City Solicitor reminded the Working Group that work was also ongoing in respect of an Ulster-Scots Policy but that, given that the ask from those stakeholders was different, it was likely to be focused more so on culture and heritage, and less so on language.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the updated draft Irish Language Policy and agreed that officers would proceed with the informal consultation with stakeholders, noting that a further meeting of the Working Group would be held in a fortnight to discuss the outcomes.

Chairperson