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| <b>Subject:</b>           | Draft Language Strategy Action Plan  |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 19 <sup>th</sup> April 2024  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Russell Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer                    |

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| <b>Restricted Reports</b>   |   |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <b>Is this report restricted?</b>   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <p><b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b></p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol> |   |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <p><b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b></p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 80%;"><b>After Committee Decision</b></td> <td style="width: 20%;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>After Council Decision</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Sometime in the future</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Never</b></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>  |   | <b>After Committee Decision</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>After Council Decision</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Sometime in the future</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <b>Never</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>After Committee Decision</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <b>After Council Decision</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <b>Sometime in the future</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |
| <b>Never</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |                                 |                          |                               |                          |                               |                          |              |                          |

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of report or summary of main issues</b>   |
| 1.1        | The purpose of this report is to update Committee of the results of the consultation on the draft Language Strategy Action Plan and present a revised Draft Action Plan to Members for approval. |

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| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendations</b>  |
| 2.1        | <p>The Committee are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of this report;</li> <li>• Note the findings contained in the Consultation Report attached at Appendix 1;</li> <li>• Approve the revised the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan at Appendix 2.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main report</b>  |
| 3.1        | <p><b>Background</b></p> <p>Belfast City Council launched its Language Strategy in 2018. An initial Action Plan covered the period until September 2018, with a second, more comprehensive Action Plan covering the period after that until March 2020.</p> <p>The onset of Covid-19 caused significant delay in rolling out the Language Strategy. Officers did, however, work on a range of issues in the intervening time such as the consultation on the decision to erect bilingual/multilingual signage at the Council's four citywide leisure centres and the revision of the dual language street signage policy.</p> <p>3.2 Officers then developed a comprehensive draft Action Plan to roll out the Language Strategy. This Action Plan and the actions therein were the subject of significant discussion at managerial level across the Council with input being sought from the relevant departments. Officers also benchmarked the actions in the action plan against the work carried out in other Councils. The Action Plan was then subject to pre-consultation with relevant stakeholders before being brought to Strategic Policy and Resources on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2023. .</p> <p><b>Key issues</b></p> <p>3.3 A public consultation was launched on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and ran until 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024. Respondents could fill in an online questionnaire in English or Irish and submit their own written responses. There were four public meetings and focus groups were held with the Council's Irish Language and Ulster-Scots Stakeholder Fora, as well as the Migrant Forum.</p> <p>3.4 The draft Action Plan has been subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and has been screened out. This has been updated on foot of feedback received during the consultation.</p> |
| 3.5        | <p>A number of themes appeared consistently throughout the responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A concern over the cost of these actions</li> <li>• The need for the Council to do more for Ethnic Minority Communities</li> <li>• The need for the Council to do more for Deaf and Disabled people</li> <li>• The need for more actions in relation to the promotion of Irish and Ulster Scots.</li> </ul>  |

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| 3.6   | <p>The consultation in relation to the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan has shown a spectrum of opinions within the public and language community and voluntary sectors. Whilst the indications that there was strong disagreement with the proposals in the Action Plan, for the most part this was due to those responding not believing that the proposed action go far enough. Interrogation of the majority of those responses show support for the measures which have been proposed, albeit one response suggested that the actions were too heavily weighted in terms of Irish Language.</p>      |
| 3.7   | <p>Officers carried out significant consultation on the proposed Action Plan through its various stakeholder groups to identify actions which could improve access to Council Services as well as language visibility. As part of that engagement, it was recognised that there are capacity issues for some language groups/communities and that is something that officers are considering how best to address. Members will also note that the Action Plan commits to bringing forward an Ulster Scots Policy and work on the promotion of language initiatives for the purposes of cultural tourism.</p> |
| 3.8   | <p>A separate report on existing support for non-verbal and neurodivergent children and adults at Council facilities will be brought to the Disability and Language Strategy Working Groups in the coming months.</p>  |
| <p><b>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</b></p>   |  |
| 3.9   | <p>The costs for implementing the actions in the Draft Action Plan will be found within existing departmental budgets.</p>   |
| <p><b>Equality, good relations or rural needs implications</b></p>  |  |
| 3.10  | <p>The Draft Language Strategy Action Plan has been the subject of a Section 75 Equality Screening and a Draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment.</p>  |
| 4.0   | <p><b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b></p>  |
| <p>Appendix 1: Consultation Report on the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan<br/>Appendix 2: Revised Draft Language Strategy Action Plan</p> |  |