



Subject:	Applications for dual language street signs with the second language in Irish for Applications for dual language street signs for Mount Merrion Avenue, Isoline Street, Onslow Gardens, Lismain Street, Kimberley Street and Loopland Drive.
Date:	8 th April 2025
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager ext 2430 Heather Wylie, Property and Legal Coordinator, ext. 2464

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
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	To consider if a street survey of occupiers will be carried out for six applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish within the city where potential adverse impacts have been identified by the initial assessments. Objections have also been received from an elected member for Mount Merrion Avenue and Isoline Street.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>Members are asked to consider the report and matters raised in relation to the applications for dual language street signs in Irish received for Mount Merrion Avenue, Isoline Street, Onslow Gardens, Lismain Street, Kimberley Street, Loopland Drive and either:</p> <p>a) Agree that surveys of occupiers of these streets be carried out.</p> <p>or</p> <p>b) Agree that no surveys will be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified and these applications are closed.</p>
	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The power for the Council to consider applications to erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.</p>
3.2	<p>The Dual Language Street Sign policy states that “<i>each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee.</i>”</p>
3.3	<p>The initial assessments were carried out for all the streets listed and potential adverse impacts were identified. Draft equality screenings were therefore carried out, assessing the request for dual language street signs in Irish for Mount Merrion Avenue, Isoline Street, Onslow Gardens, Lismain Street, Kimberley Street and Loopland Drive for equality and good relations issues.</p>
3.4	<p>The screenings have identified that the carrying out of surveys and the erection of Irish language street signs in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension. Conversely the screenings also identified that the process could assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings are outlined in the equality and good relation section below.</p>
3.5	<p>Objections have also been received from elected members for Mount Merrion Avenue and Isoline Street, during the elected member notification procedure.</p>

3.6

Mount Merrion Avenue – Cllr Davy Douglas, member for Lisnasharragh raised an objection stating: -

“Mount Merrion is a mixed area bisecting the Cregagh estate and Flush Park, both traditional unionist areas. There have been issues in the area in recent years around messaging and posters on the Cregagh bonfire, election posters being stolen etc however a lot of progress has been made in the past couple of years. I feel that the adoption of Irish street signage could be seen as divisive and have an adverse impact on good relations within the community, undoing some of the progress that has been made to date. I would therefore ask that the Council exercise its discretion not to apply its policy at this location”

3.7

Isoline Street – Cllr Ruth Brooks, member for Titanic raised an objection stating: -

Demographics:

*“According to the 2021 census results, this street and neighbouring streets (classed as Titanic_W2) has a population of **352 people across 220 households**. Of this figure, **8%** claim to have ‘some ability’ in Irish, meaning that approximately **28 people** would have some ability to understand an English-Irish dual language sign.*

*In comparison, **11%** of this area have some ability in Ulster-Scots. This community do not want street signs in either language”.*

“The enforcement of Irish language street signs in this context may attempt to garner respect for the language, but it will unlikely encourage genuine acceptance or a positive sentiment within the community”.

Cultural and Political Sensitivities:

“The neighbouring street of Clara Street is used as a loyalist parade route throughout the year. The introduction of street signs in Irish within this area will be interpreted as political and culturally insensitive, and antagonistic”.

“Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, Belfast City Council need to have a due regard for promoting equality and fostering good relations. The implementation of Irish in an area that has no natural ties with the language but strong loyalist ties, will be seen to contravene this obligation and heighten tensions”.

“Understanding that this application was first lodged in 2022, I wish to request that the Council exercises its residual discretion under the Dual Language Street Sign Policy to not proceed with the application for English-Irish Street signs in Isoline Street”.

3.8 These applications are therefore being brought to Committee to determine if surveys of residents of these streets will take place, considering this information.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.9 If it is decided to carry out surveys, the resulting tasks are included within the normal resources for the process.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.10 An EQIA was carried out on the main Dual Language Street Signs policy in 2021-22. This confirmed the initial assessment process to be carried out, which may indicate the requirement for equality screening.

3.11 The applications for dual language street signs (with the second language in Irish) Mount Merrion Avenue, Isoline Street, Onslow Gardens, Lismain Street, Kimberley Street and Loopland Drive were assessed for equality of opportunity and good relations issues through the initial assessment process. This process identified that the potential for adverse impact existed and recommended further screening prior to referral to committee for authority to proceed to survey.

3.12 The draft screenings have identified that the carrying out of a survey in itself in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore has the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations. It is acknowledged; however, the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.

3.13 The applications were also presented to elected members as part of the elected member notification procedure and objections were received from Cllr Davy Douglas with regard to Mount Merrion Avenue and from Cllr Ruth Brooks with regard to Isoline Street. The members were concerned about the potential for adverse impacts on good relations with full details of their objections in paragraphs 3.5-3.13 above.

The council retains ‘residual discretion’ in relation to these applications. In effect this gives elected members the option to not proceed to survey and/ or halt the erection of an Irish

	language street sign in this street where, in the view of elected members taking into account the agreed criteria, this action would be considered inappropriate.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	None