



Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Request from POBAL to address the Council
Date:	Friday 23 March 2012
Reporting Officer:	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

1.0	Relevant Background Information
	Members will be aware that POBAL, established in 1998, acts as the umbrella organisation for the Irish language community and seeks to raise the profile of Irish.

2.0	Key issues
2.1	The Chief Executive of POBAL has recently written to our Chief Executive pointing out that it monitors the use of Irish and the law around language rights (original e-mail attached, plus English translation). She has noted that the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has published its Third Report, which contains three specific proposals which, it feels, should be implemented immediately.
2.2	The first of these proposals (paragraph 146) centres on the "failure to adopt legislation on the Irish language due to a lack of political consensus in the Northern Ireland Assembly". The Committee will be aware that the adoption of such legislation falls outside the authority of the Council.
2.3	The second proposal (paragraph 148) relates to "a lack of promotion of the Irish language and culture". The Committee may be aware that the language policy adopted by Council in 2006 specifically refers to the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages and consequently incorporates a higher rating for the Irish language.
2.4	The third reference (paragraph 158) which "regrets the decision of Belfast City Council to reject in March 2011 a proposal to erect bilingual signs" relates to a decision regarding a proposal from the Department for Regional Development, an external body.
2.5	The Committee may recall the background to this decision. At the Council meeting on 1 February 2011, a Notice of Motion, welcoming the release of a consultation document by the Department for Regional Development on the proposed introduction of bi-lingual traffic signs was referred to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for consideration. At its meeting on 18 February, the Committee voted by 10 to 6 <u>not</u> to support the proposal to introduce the policy. At the full Council meeting on 1 March, an amendment to <u>support</u> the introduction of such a policy was moved but defeated 21 to 23.

2.6	The Committee will be aware that the use of the Irish language is currently one of the items under discussion within the Joint Working Group of Party Group Leaders and Centenaries Working Group, which is examining broader diversity issues within the Council.
2.7	The POBAL request to make a presentation to the Council on the question of the Irish language in public life was reported on 9 March to this Joint Diversity Group, who agreed that a decision on this was a matter for the principal Committee.

3.0	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	The Council's current language policy was subject to equality screening in 2006 and screened out. The Council remains committed to building positive relationships in Belfast and the Good Relations Unit has supported a number of initiatives round the Irish language.

4.0	Resource Implications
	None at this stage.

5.0	Recommendations
	To agree that Ms Muller be invited to make a presentation to the Council on the question of the Irish language in public life at the earliest opportunity.

6.0	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 Copy of original request and translation.