



Subject:	Consultation Report on Draft Linguistic Diversity Policy and Language Strategy Action Plan
Date:	22 nd September 2017
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor
Contact Officer:	Lorraine Dennis, Equality and Diversity Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time 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 or summary of main issues
1.1	Members will be aware that at the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21 April 2017 approval was given to consult on the draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity (Appendix 1). A report on the findings from the consultation, which ran from 23 May 2017 to 18 July 2017 is presented for discussion (Appendix 2). One of the key recommendations is to further develop the draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity as a Language Strategy, and the related action plan, to run from October 2017 until March 2018, which has been developed from the consultation findings, is also presented for approval (Appendix 3).
1.2	Committee should note that this report was brought to Party Group Leaders and they requested briefings for clarity but Sinn Fein have asked that it is considered by September Committee.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To note the findings of the consultation on the draft Linguistic Diversity Policy and approve the recommendations; • To approve the Language Strategy Action Plan Oct 2017 – March 2018.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>Belfast aims to be a welcoming and inclusive city for all. To help achieve this aim and to meet other best practice guidance and legal requirements, we developed a draft Linguistic Diversity Policy, approved for consultation at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21 April 2017 (Appendix 1). The draft Linguistic Diversity Policy outlined our approach to promoting different languages in the Belfast City Council area. It builds on our 2006 Language Policy which needed to be revised to take account of the changing population and other developments.</p>
3.2	<p>The draft policy provided background on the changing dynamics of the population of Belfast and also explained the legal framework, current central government strategies and details of previous engagement with stakeholders.</p> <p>Based on this information, the draft policy recommended an approach which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of an over-arching Language Framework, which articulated our commitment to supporting minority languages whilst allowing the different needs of speakers of Irish, Ulster-Scots and other minority languages to be addressed effectively. • Development of an Irish Language Policy which focused primarily on the enhancement and protection of the language; • Development of an Ulster-Scots Language policy which looked more to the promotion of the language and the cultural and heritage aspects of the language rather than the need for translation of documents and interpretation services. • Development of a policy on other minority languages (including sign languages) which focused on ensuring good communication and increasing awareness and understanding of minority cultures.
3.3	<p>The draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity was subject to a formal consultation period which ran from 23 May 2017 to 18 July 2017. Prior to this period, there had already been informal engagement / pre-consultation meetings with relevant sectors to ensure that the draft policy reflected on priorities and issues for each stakeholder group, these had taken place</p>

	<p>over the period from 2013-17. The Policy was then considered in draft form by the various Party political groups represented within the Council before the formal consultation period began.</p> <p>The consultation was launched on with a press statement, article on staff intranet and an invitation on the Council's website to respond to the consultation.</p>
3.4	<p>For the general public different ways to respond were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online questionnaire of public opinion on the Council's Consultation Hub, including information (hard copies were also available) • Attendance at one of two engagement events, designed to gather the same information as the online questionnaire. • Attending any of four themed focus groups: Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language, New Communities and Deaf or Partial Hearing, and / or Disabled people. • Consultation comments could also be received by email and letter
3.5	<p>For staff different ways to respond were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An online survey available (internally only) on the online Consultation Hub, including information and completion of an online questionnaire, available from 26 June until 18 July 2017 (hard copies were also available); • One to one meetings with Dr John Kremer, independent equality and diversity consultant who co-facilitated the consultation activities <p>Meetings with Trade Union representatives were also planned as part of the consultation.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>A Consultation Report on the Draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity (Appendix 2) has been prepared is structured under the following headings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Information on the policy consulted upon B. Our approach C. Consultees' comments D. Emerging issues and preliminary recommendations <p>The following recommendations are put forward for approval:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The draft Linguistic Diversity Policy should be re-branded as a Language Strategy, outlining a strategic approach to the development of accessible and inclusive communications; • The current Section 3 (Recent developments) should be amended to take on board

	<p>consultees' comments and to ensure that the strategy is consistent with current legislation and guidance in Northern Ireland;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overarching principles should include further reference to the positive benefits attached to linguistic diversity and bilingualism; • Terminology used within the strategy should be consistent throughout, avoiding use of labels such as 'minority' wherever possible; • Separate strands of work should be established under the strategy, for example – Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language, Sign Language, New Communities' Communications and Language, and Communications and Language Strand for those with a Disability; • Each strand should be assessed fully to inform appropriate resourcing, for example with dedicated human and material resources that are tailored to the particular needs and priorities of that language community; • The job description for the post of language officers attached to one or more strands should be precise and reflect on the needs and priorities of the language communities in question. Recruitment of an Irish Language officer is recommended as an identified need for the Irish language community; • Further engagement with each sector should be used to fine tune the aims and implementation sections of each strand of work to reflect the needs and priorities of the relevant community in any agreed policy; • Pilots of work identified through the consultation will provide a useful insight in to wider implementation and how it impacts on operational delivery; • The principles of shared space should be considered in the development of actions within the strategy and its related strands of work; • Resource implications associated with the strategy should be clarified at an early stage, and action measures put in place that reflect on best value principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness; • Further analysis of staff training and capacity building needs should be undertaken; • To take forward these recommendations, an action plan should be put in place with immediate effect, setting out a staged approach to full implementation, with resources made available for each strand in order to provide continued momentum to the emerging strategy.
3.7	<p>Reflecting the recommendations a Language Strategy Action Plan to run from October 2017 to March 2018 (Appendix 3) has been prepared and Members are asked to approve</p>

	the Action Plan for implementation commencing in October 2017.
3.8	<p><u>Next steps</u></p> <p>The Language Strategy Action Plan will commence in October 2017 and run until March 2018. This will allow for alignment with the financial year, with a further one year action plan to run from April 2018 – March 2019 submitted for approval in early 2018.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>A budget of £25,000 was approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23 June 2017 to support the initial Language Strategy Action Plan, to run from October 2017 - March 2018.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>A draft Equality Screening Report was presented as part of the consultation documentation. An updated screening will be undertaken at appropriate stages in the implementation of the Language Strategy.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Consultation Report on Draft Policy on Linguistic Diversity</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Language Strategy Action Plan, October 2017 until March 2018</p>