

**FORWARD.
FASTER.**

**Alliance Language Policy
for Belfast City Council
2016**

A New Chapter
Tús maith, leath na hoibre

A good start is half the work

Irish

Ulster-Scots

**Minority
Languages**

Alliance
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Introduction

Alliance recognises that the main spoken language in Belfast is English but we also recognise the important role that other languages and cultures play in our city.

Alliance believes that public bodies should be required to assess the need for the use of their services in languages other than English, including indigenous minority languages but also other languages spoken by users of their service.

The public body would then have to take a decision on what appropriate level of provision was required to address this need, taking into account cost considerations. They would then produce a Language Scheme to outline their plans to meet this. It is in following this policy that we have drafted our Language Policy for Belfast.

Irish

We particularly recognise the importance of the Irish language to life in Belfast, and we believe that the language should be promoted given that Belfast has the highest number of Irish speakers in Northern Ireland and has a rich cultural heritage in the city.

We value the contribution that the Irish language, its speakers and its advocates make to the diversity of Belfast and we will support a strategy which honours this. This policy will form part of our new Language Policy for Belfast and will take account of best practice guidelines published by Foras na Gaelige. We also believe that the policy should be informed by the Irish Language policies adopted by other Northern Ireland Councils.

The aims of the policy will include:

- 1 To increase the visibility and usage of the Irish language in Belfast as appropriate through Council services, facilities and events.**
- 2 To publicise the fact that the Council will facilitate the use of the Irish language in the provision of its services as appropriate.**
- 3 To encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish.**
- 4 To promote the knowledge and use of the Irish language amongst non-traditional users.**

Communication – correspondence and telephone calls received in Irish should be responded to in Irish through a callback service, subject to resources.

Translation and Interpretation – requests from Irish speakers to use the Irish language in face-to-face discussions are welcome if notice is given so that simultaneous interpretation service can be made available.

Signage – we will support the use of Irish language signs at appropriate locations in Belfast City Hall.

Council Meetings – we recognise the practice of speaking Irish in the Council chamber and Committee meetings by elected members and public delegations, including the provision of interpreting services.

Website/Social Media – development of Irish language microsite as part of the Council website and ability to place Irish language material on Facebook as required. We also support the introduction of an Irish language section in City Matters on a regular basis.

Irish Language Media – support the provision of Irish language versions of media releases where appropriate and in keeping with financial and resource constraints.

Irish in the Community – support the use of the language within communities in Belfast.

We support promoting the language in conjunction with sporting organisations, including GAA.

We support the introduction of guided tours in City Hall in Irish and taster sessions for tourists to City hall in the language.

We support an Irish language trail for tourists.

We support the Seachtain na Gaelige initiative and encourage the Council to take part in events related to it.

We support initiatives to promote the Irish language amongst staff through taster sessions and the opportunity to take language classes.

Support of Irish Medium Schools – the provision of Irish versions of information generally provided to schools in relation to Council services and events.

Appointment of an Irish Language Officer – we will support the appointment of such an officer within the Council with responsibility for the development of an action plan to ensure the promotion of the Irish language. This would include developing a Courtesy Code and awareness and language training. This officer would have a key role in ensuring the promotion of the language to those of non-traditional backgrounds.

Promotion of the Irish language to non-traditional backgrounds.

We regret the way in which the language has been used and abused by many politicians over the years and we wish to see a new beginning for the Irish language in City Hall. In order to achieve this, we believe that there should be promotion and educational support provided particularly to sections of our community who would have had less opportunities to learn Irish. This would include those from a Protestant or Unionist background.

This would involve specific engagement in a range of activities to be drawn up by the new Officer but may include educational visits to state run schools, where the language is not taught, outreach on the language and its history in communities where there is little or no current use of the language. It could also involve joint initiatives with the Ulster Scots language to look at our shared history.

It could also involve roadshows, lectures, multimedia events and trips to Gaeltacht areas for those in non-traditional areas and groups eg Protestant churches, Orange Order. We would support working with Libraries NI to allow their facilities to provide neutral venues for Irish language events.

We also support outreach programmes to newcomers to the city to inform them of the Irish language.

Street Signage – we will work with other Councils to try and formulate an agreed policy across Northern Ireland on the thresholds required for the provision of Irish language street signs.

Support for Irish language development officer.

Tacaíocht don feidhmeannach forbairt na Gaeilge.

Promoting Irish to new groups.

An Gaeilge a cuir in aghaidh le ghrúpaí nua.

Increasing Irish language signage.

An méid comharthaí Ghaeilge a ardú.

Ulster-Scots

We also support the promotion of Ulster-Scots but feel that the main aspect in this work would be to focus on the cultural and heritage aspects of Ulster-Scots. We would therefore prefer that money is focussed in increasing the visibility of Ulster-Scots in this manner.

We would therefore support the development of a cultural trail across the city based on Ulster Scots and would encourage the promotion of Ulster-Scots in this way and through other cultural and heritage tourism initiatives. We also support the Council publicising that we can facilitate the use of the Ulster-Scots language as appropriate.

We support correspondence received in Ulster-Scots being replied to in that language. We also support the provision of documents being bilingual when likely to be used by Ulster-Scots speakers as appropriate.

Correspondence and telephone calls received in Ulster-Scots should be responded to in Ulster-Scots through a callback service, subject to resources.

Translation and Interpretation – requests from Ulster-Scots speakers to use the Ulster-Scots language in face-to-face discussions are welcome if notice is given so that simultaneous interpretation service can be made available.

We will support the ability to place Ulster-Scots language material on Facebook as required.

Ulster-Scots Language Media – support the provision of Ulster-Scots language versions of media releases where appropriate and in keeping with financial and resource constraints.

Minority Languages

Finally, we wish to recognise the languages spoken by many newcomers to our city.

We will support increased provision of language classes and will set up a time-limited working group with representatives of various ethnic and language minority groups to identify how the Council can best provide services to them to increase their ability to integrate into our society.

This group will produce a minority language policy with recommendations which we will hope the Council will support subject to financial and resource constraints. It will aim to ensure that residents and customers who have difficulty communicating in English are not disadvantaged in accessing key Council service.

It will ensure good practice is observed in producing information for people with sensory disabilities and make appropriate provision for those with learning difficulties.

It will support community cohesion and good relations by seeking to remove barriers to the development of positive relationships caused by the inability to communicate in a common language.

It will also encourage the promotion of cultural and heritage tourism through minority languages and traditions.

It will look at translation and interpretative services, welcome guides provision, and ensuring that meetings, the website and events are all accessible.

It will also look to ensure that minority language services are effectively provided including development of linguistic diversity guidelines, awareness and language training and the provision of language identification cards and hearing loop induction at customer service reception desks.

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