



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)
of the Draft Irish Language Policy
EQIA Final Decision Report

Draft

24th September 2015

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1. Introduction

Mid Ulster District Council (the Council) is in the process of developing an Irish Language Policy. A draft EQIA Consultation Report was prepared in April 2015 and published for consultation over a 14 week period ending 7th September 2015. This Final EQIA Decision Report has been prepared to assist the Council to make a final decision on the adoption of the policy and includes:

- a summary of the evidence presented in the Consultation Report on the potential equality of opportunity impacts of the proposed policy;
- the findings of the consultation process;
- recommendations resulting from the EQIA.

After the Council has made a decision, details of this will be included in this report which will then be published on the Council's website.

1.1 The EQIA process

The Council is committed to implementing the statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 75(1) requires any public authority, in carrying out its functions in Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different -
 - religious belief;
 - political opinion;
 - racial group;
 - age;
 - marital status;
 - sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to this obligation, Section 75(2) requires any public authority, in carrying out its functions, to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Schedule 9 of the Act sets out the detailed procedure for implementing these duties including the carrying out of screening exercises and EQIAs. When undertaking an EQIA, the

Council closely follows the guidance published by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) which recommends that there should be seven stages in the process:

Stage 1 : Definition of the aims of the policy

Stage 2 : Consideration of available data and research

Stage 3 : Assessment of impacts

Stage 4 : Consideration of:

- measures which might mitigate any adverse impact; and
- alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity

Stage 5 : Consultation

Stage 6 : Decision by public authority and publication of report on results of the EQIA

Stage 7 : Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring.

1.2 Mid Ulster District Council

The Council was established on 1st April 2015 as part of the review of local government in Northern Ireland and has responsibility for the areas previously administered by:

Cookstown District Council;

Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council; and

Magherafelt District Council.

The new district council covers an area of 1714 km² and is responsible for a wide range of services to a population of more than 140,000, living in a mix of urban and rural communities.

The Council is currently developing new policies. In the absence of an agreed new Council policy, the Council is implementing policies previously established and adopted by the three former legacy Councils. A draft Equality Scheme has been developed for the new Council setting out how it will implement the statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, but – at the time of writing – this has not yet been approved by the ECNI¹. The three previous councils all had similar approved Equality Schemes in place.

1.3 The Draft Irish Language Policy

The draft Irish Language Policy, which is attached at Appendix 1, sets out the background to the adoption of the policy (including the relevant legislation and guidance) and some of the key data regarding knowledge of Irish in the District. The draft policy makes clear that the Council recognises that the Irish language is an integral part of the linguistic, cultural and

¹ At this time, and mindful of ongoing discussions with the Equality Commission, the Council proposes to focus its Scheme on the first Section 75 duty (equality of opportunity) and to address the second duty (good relations) elsewhere. The EQIA has been written with this orientation in mind.

historical heritage of the area and believes that the proactive promotion of Irish, as well as catering to the needs of the growing Irish speaking population, can enhance the rich linguistic culture of the area-

The stated aim of the draft policy is as follows:

Operating within the spirit of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and having due regard to the status afforded to Irish within that Charter, Mid Ulster District Council aims to take resolute and positive actions that will aspire to promote, enhance and protect the Irish language within the Council and District.

The associated policy objectives are:

- To encourage the use of Irish in both speech and writing within the District and Council.
- To promote a range of initiatives that will reduce intolerance and promote understanding of the Irish language across the District and within the Council.
- To preserve townland names through the use of appropriate signage.
- To recognise and celebrate the Irish language within the broader context of linguistic and cultural diversity across the District and Council.
- To maintain and develop links between groups using Irish with other groups using Irish and/or Ulster Scots².

2. Assessment of Available Data and Research

The second step of the equality impact assessment process considers whether available data and research can provide an insight into the potential impacts on people in the various Section 75 categories. The available information which was presented in the Draft EQIA Consultation Report (published in May 2015) is summarised below.

- According to the 2011 Census, approximately 64% of the population of Mid Ulster is from a Catholic community background and 33% from a Protestant community background.
- Internal monitoring data shows that approximately 52% of Council staff are from a Catholic community background and 45% from a Protestant community background.
- Census data shows that 17.41% of the population of Mid Ulster (aged 3+) have some ability in Irish, compared with 10.65% of the Northern Ireland population as a whole. This is broken down into the following categories:

² It should be noted that the Council has agreed a draft policy on Ulster Scots which will be subject to a separate EQIA. -

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- 6.11% speak, read, write and understand Irish;
 - 0.73% speak and read but do not write Irish;
 - 2.43% speak but do not read or write Irish;
 - 6.60% understand but cannot read, write or speak Irish;
 - 1.54% have some other combination of skills.
- The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) recently published more information on people who have some knowledge of Irish within the Northern Ireland population as a whole which shows that in 2011:
 - people aged 12-15 were most likely to have some ability in Irish (20%), while those least likely to have such ability were aged 75 and over (6.2%);
 - 90% of people with some ability in Irish were or had been brought up as Catholics and 7.4% as Protestants;
 - drawing together both religion and age, and probably linked to the inclusion of the subject on the education curriculum and its particular popularity in non-Controlled over two-thirds (68%) of people with some ability in Irish had an Irish only national identity, 17% felt Northern Irish only and 7.0% British only.
 - The School Census 2014/15 showed that 1344 pupils were in schools and youth clubs in Mid Ulster where teaching was provided through the medium of Irish. There are also 22 Primary Schools in the District with peripatetic Irish provision and 13 Secondary Schools teaching Irish.
 - DCAL published a report in 2012 setting out the results of a module included in the NI Omnibus Survey concerning public attitudes towards the Irish language. This showed that a considerably higher proportion of Catholic respondents than Protestant respondents were in favour of the use of the Irish language (66% and 14% respectively).
 - Consultation carried out by Magherafelt District Council during the development of the Irish Language Policy adopted in 2014 showed that consultees tended to be characterised by one of two dominant opinions:
 - Those who wished to see the Council actively promote the use of Irish through its publications, communications, correspondence, presentations/events, staff and administrative processes and signage;
 - Those who felt that the policy was not a good use of Council staff or money, that it had the potential to be divisive and discriminatory, and that it focused on a single aspect of a single culture in a culturally rich and politically divided area at the expense of all other cultures.

3. Consultation

A vital stage of the EQIA process is formal consultation with interested parties to obtain their views on the various options and scenarios described in the EQIA report. The Council is committed to consultation which is timely, open and inclusive, and conducted in accordance with the Equality Commission's Guiding Principles. The consultation period in respect of this EQIA lasted for 13 weeks (from May to September 2015) and attracted a substantial response. The consultation process is outlined below together with a summary of the responses.

3.1 Consultation methodology

The Council appointed independent external consultants to facilitate the EQIA process and manage the consultation to ensure objectivity and confidentiality.

All consultation documents were made available on the Council's website in both English and Irish language versions and consultees normally consulted on Section 75 issues were informed of their availability. Copies could also be made available in hard copy and alternative formats on request on a timely basis.

A standard response form was developed and published on the Council's website to assist consultees and to facilitate focused responses. This invited consultees to comment on individual sections of the EQIA Consultation Report and allowed for the collection of some personal data about respondents (community background, gender and age). However, responses were welcomed in any format and a dedicated email address and post box were made available.

Staff and Trade Unions are key stakeholders in relation to the proposed policy. Advance notice of the EQIA consultation was given to all staff through the staff newsletter. At the start of the consultation process, a short paper was circulated (via email and in hard copy format for those staff who do not have regular access to email) providing a brief description of the EQIA process and the issues under consideration. A separate staff response form was developed, to maximise the opportunity for staff to comment on how they considered the proposed policy might affect service delivery and how it might affect them personally.

Staff were also offered an opportunity to meet with the consultant informally, either individually or in small groups, on a strictly confidential basis on specific dates at Council offices in Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt. A copy of the staff response form was completed at each interview and these are included in the analysis below.

3.2 Responses received

There was a substantial response to the consultation process. Responses included:

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- 67 completed standard response forms (including two in Irish), submitted by individual members of the public and some community groups by post or email;
 - 421 copies of a letter supporting the proposed policy submitted by individual members of the public and some community groups by post (see Appendix 2 for the text of the letter); it should be noted that each letter was signed by a different individual;
 - 360 copies of a letter opposing the proposed policy submitted by individual members of the public by post (see Appendix 3 for the text of the letter); it should be noted that each letter was signed by a different individual;
 - 53 signatures attaching to a letter from Tamnamore LOL 513 opposing the proposed policy (see Appendix 4 for the text of the letter)
 - 17 individual written responses (not using the response form) submitted by post or email;
 - 20 completed staff response forms, submitted anonymously by post or email or completed at face-to-face meetings;
 - 7 formal written submissions from the Ulster Unionist Party Group, the Equality Commission, Conradh na Gaeilge, the Ulster-Scots Community Network, Mid Ulster Victims Empowerment, Ballynakelly Concerned Protestant Community Group and the Committee on the Administration of Justice.

This represents a total of 945 responses.

Many (but not all) of the respondents who completed the standard response form, the staff response form or signed the letter opposing the proposed policy provided personal information on their gender, community background and age. Analysis of this information shows that there were a substantial number of responses from both men and women and from all age groups. All those who signed the letter opposing the proposed policy who indicated a community background were from the Protestant community.

3.3 Comments made

Respondents were invited to comment on each section of the EQIA Consultation Report and indicate whether they agreed with the findings. On the whole those who agreed with the findings did not offer detailed comments while those who disagreed commented extensively. The summary below therefore mostly reflects the views of those who disagreed with the findings; it should be noted that the comments are presented in no particular order.

(1) Scoping of the policy

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way the policy was scoped and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments.

Comments included:

- The need for the policy has not been sufficiently established.
- The Belfast Agreement commitment is to “facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life, ***‘where there is appropriate demand’***. Given that a relatively small number of people in Mid Ulster can actually speak the Irish language, it is not clear that appropriate demand exists.
- The proposed policy goes further than the requirements of the European Charter.
- The proposed policy goes further than those of the three previous legacy councils.
- There is no evidence as to how the proposed policy will improve tourism.
- It is clear that the Council has already decided to adopt the policy and that the EQIA is simply ‘ticking the boxes’.
- The EQIA was unnecessary given that the European Charter already states that the promotion of a minority language cannot be regarded as an infringement of the rights of the majority language speakers.
- The report gives no explanation of the policy screening process and does not explain why the Council did not screen out the policy from the EQIA process.
- The proposed policy addresses areas which will be of diminishing importance in the future; resources should be concentrated on increasing the number of people learning the Irish language.
- The EQIA should ensure that it considers the proposed Irish language policy in the context of the international obligations which exist in relation to the promotion of the Irish language in local councils³.
- It would have been helpful to include a timescale for addressing Ulster-Scots and British cultural issues to give the appearance of balance.

(2) Assessment of available data and research

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way in which relevant information had been analysed and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. Comments included:

³ No specific information on international obligations was provided.

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- The Census does not provide a true measure of the use of Irish; knowledge of a language is not the same as use.
 - Census data is voluntary and there is no way of checking if those who claim fluency in Irish to a certain level can actually speak, read or write the language.
 - Census statistics show that only 6.11% of the population say they can speak, read, write and understand Irish; in an area which is 33.46% Protestant and other Christian, and 63.77% Catholic, it is clear that the vast majority of people have no ability in Irish.
 - The Census statistics on people who can understand or speak but not read or write Irish should be discounted as, in practice, they would require a letter in English to confirm what has been said to them in Irish; this would be a ludicrous situation.
 - The Census statistics show that 17.41% of the population of Mid Ulster have some knowledge of Irish; this is considerably higher than the 11% of the north as a whole and illustrates how popular the language is in the area. As the Irish speaking community is growing and developing, the demand for access to services from the Council in the Irish language is also growing.
 - It should be made clear that not all staff expressed concern about the Irish Language Policy introduced by Magherafelt District Council and the impacts of the policies adopted by the three constituent councils should form part of the EQIA analysis.
 - More research is required on the users of the language – for example, actual demand for use of services in Irish in the three constituent councils, actual demand for use of services within government departments who are already offering services in Irish, trends in the number of pupils taking Irish at GCSE level.
 - More research is required on the use of other minority languages in the District.

Respondents suggested additional sources of information as follows:

- A report in the Republic of Ireland published in May 2015 and commissioned by Udaras na Gaeltachta suggesting that Irish will no longer be the primary language in any Gaeltacht community in ten years.

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- Numerous reports which show that students who have studied a second language perform better than their monolingual peers on many standardised tests.⁴
 - Monitoring reports from other councils on the impacts of Irish Language policies – Down District Council was specifically mentioned as an example.
 - A survey carried out by Millward Brown in partnership with Conradh na Gaeilge in January 2015 regarding support for the Irish language and Irish medium education.
 - Material regarding the experiences of Irish speakers, with reference to particular Section 75 groups. (The respondent assumed that the Council has consulted with Irish speakers in relation to the development of the policy).

In relation to this last point, it should be noted that Quarter Consultancy had previously undertaken research involving representatives from across the Irish Language Community in the three legacy Council areas now making up Mid Ulster, on the legal, social and moral obligations relating to the promotion of the Irish Language in the area. The report (published 16/4/2015) highlighted the extensive social and economic impact of the Irish Language Community in the Mid Ulster area, concluding that, ‘the new Mid Ulster Council will inherit a strong and vibrant Irish Language Community currently delivering a range of community services in the existing Councils of Cookstown, Dungannon and Magherafelt’.

(3) Assessment of impacts

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way the impacts had been analysed and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. Comments included:

- The proposed policy simply safeguards the rights of Irish speakers and will have no adverse impact; the European Charter makes it clear that the promotion of a minority language cannot be regarded as an infringement of the rights of the majority language speakers.
- The policy embraces bilingualism and it will be possible to access all Council services in English; therefore there will be no negative effect.
- The report indicates that the potential adverse impact scenarios are unlikely to occur and so there will be no adverse impacts from the introduction of the policy.

⁴ The respondent did not provide details of specific reports.

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- The idea that the non-Irish speaking community will benefit specifically from exposure to the Irish language fails to recognise that Northern Ireland's ever more diverse population has already experienced and embraced many languages. It may be more useful to expose people to a language spoken by visitors to Mid Ulster.
 - The EQIA report concludes that it is likely that the adverse impacts identified will relate to the two Section 75 grounds of religious belief or political opinion; it is not clear on the basis of which differentials this position was reached.
 - The financial implications attaching to the policy should be addressed in the report.

A number of respondents commented on the lack of attention in the EQIA report to the potential impacts on the promotion of good relations and some indicated how they considered the proposed policy could impact on good relations:

- The EQIA report indicates that it does not address potential good relations impacts; the process is therefore flawed and has no credibility.
- The report downplays serious issues about good relations.
- The Council should present its assessment of the impacts in relation to service users in a way that enables it to provide transparency in the balance it will strike between the need to promote equality of opportunity and the desirability of promoting good relations. It is recommended that the Council inform consultees of the arrangement for addressing the good relation duty.
- Whilst the Irish language is obviously important to those of the Irish culture, its use in supposedly 'shared spaces' is blatant intimidation to those of Ulster culture, Ulster-Scots or British.
- The proposed policy will highlight the Irish culture in an adverse way for good relations and create further divisions. To promote a single language in isolation is perceived as divisive, discriminatory and offensive.
- The report states that those who are most likely to experience an adverse effect are from the Protestant and/or Unionist communities; this sends a very clear signal to those communities as to how they are perceived and how they will be treated by the Nationalist and Republican majority on the Council and will have a very detrimental effect on community relations in the future.

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- The policy is designed to implement a cultural dominance and ownership of the council buildings and on the Unionist people.
 - The Irish language is divisive; the policy will drive a wedge between the two communities and do nothing to bring them together.
 - The use of the Irish language, for example among Council workers, will accentuate the differences between political and religious groupings.
 - Use of the Irish language will make some workers uncomfortable and could lead to lower numbers of Unionists applying for jobs.
 - It is inevitable that in a very short time a two tier class of Council staff will emerge and the Council will become a very cold house for non-Irish speakers.
 - One respondent organisation indicated that a high percentage of ex-services and victims and survivors of both religious communities who have suffered in violent incidents during 'The Troubles' suffer physical and mental disablement and associated problems of social isolation and exclusion. It was indicated that their disabled members feel intimidated by the overwhelming use of the Irish language because they have previously heard it used in abusive and violent situations and that the mental anguish and sense of isolation that the whole issue stirs up for these members cannot be overstated.

(4) Consideration of alternative policies and measure to mitigate adverse impacts

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way in which the measures to mitigate and preliminary recommendations had been drawn up and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. Comments included:

- Alternative policies have not been considered; it appears that the decision to adopt the policy has already been made.
- A number of measures to mitigate adverse impacts are outlined but these do not clearly explain how the impacts will be addressed.
- There is reference to the possibility of developing a human resources strategy but limited information is provided on specifically what issues it might address.
- The proposals regarding a human resources strategy imply that future recruitment will have language requirements, even though the policy is not intended to have a harmful effect on the progression of non-Irish speaking staff.
- The mitigating measures provide no protection for non-Irish speakers.

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- The inclusion of caveats such as “as resources allow” may provide an excuse for not implementing the policy.
 - The increased visibility of the Irish language would likely prove to be a very effective way of demonstrating how little impact the inclusion of Irish language services will have upon those who do not wish to avail of them.
 - The reports says that earlier consultation identified significant levels of concern but that these concerns will be managed through a planned and staged process of implementation. It appears that concerns will simply be worked through a process and noted as opposed to being respected and reflected in the initial policy shaping process.

Several respondents commented on the proposed Courtesy Code:

- The Code should clarify when staff should engage with the public in Irish and whether this is only on request.
- The Code should not prevent staff from speaking Irish to each other in the workplace; the Council should encourage the use of Irish on an increased level by staff.
- It would have been helpful to include detail of the Courtesy Code in the consultation documentation.

Several respondents suggested additional mitigating measures and revisions to the policy:

- The Council should consider a multi-language policy instead of focusing on the Irish language alone.
- The Council should provide more learning opportunities for staff and greater flexibility to encourage attendance.
- Those staff who use Irish should be afforded due recognition when it is an integral part of their work.
- Literature should be in one language with separate versions available on request in other languages including Irish.
- Favour using English, Irish and Ulster-Scots for certain matters, such as in the Council logo, but with English as the most visible to avoid confusion.
- Concerns regarding the creation of a ‘chill factor’ can be dealt with through working with groups and providing information on why these services are being delivered through the medium of Irish.

(5) Consultation

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way in which consultation was planned and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. There were very few comments on this section of the report, although a number of respondents indicated that they agreed with the process. Some respondents said that they had little confidence that the Council would take account of the consultation process when making a decision.

(6) Decision and publication of the results of the EQIA

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way in which the decision and publication procedures had been set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. There were no specific comments on this section of the report although a number of respondents indicated that they agreed with the process.

(7) Monitoring

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with the way in which monitoring of the policy was planned and set out in the EQIA Consultation Report and whether they had any further comments. Comments included:

- The final EQIA report should set out the mechanisms put in place to monitor the impact of any policy decision.
- The emphasis on future monitoring of the policy appears to be negative in its outlook. The policy should be monitored to determine how successfully it is being implemented and whether sufficient time, energy and resources are being put in place to ensure its success.
- The report has not identified any actual adverse impacts on equality of opportunity; any monitoring taken forward should be based on matters which would objectively constitute either an adverse or positive impact on equality of opportunity.

4. Findings

The main purpose of the EQIA process is to assess whether the proposed policy may have a differential impact on people in one or more of the Section 75 groups in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity, and to determine the extent of differential impact and whether that impact is adverse. This section of the report sets out conclusions based on the data and research considered and the findings of the consultation process.

With regard to the proposed policy, it is likely that the adverse impacts identified will relate primarily to two Section 75 grounds, religious belief and/or political opinion. A small number of consultees did suggest that the policy may also impact differentially on other groups, in particular young people, older people and those with a disability (primarily with regard to access issues), and these concerns should continue to be borne in mind during successive stages of implementation. At the same time, the consultation has generally confirmed that the primary impacts are likely to attach to community background, with those from the Protestant / Unionist community far more likely to identify the potential for adverse impact.

To examine the precise nature of potential adverse effects, it may be useful to draw a distinction between those who access the goods, facilities and services that the Council provides (Service Users) and those Council staff who must implement the policy (Council Staff). Furthermore, and despite concerns raised by some consultees, at this time the Council is minded to divorce the second Section 75 statutory duty (i.e. the promotion of good relations) from its Equality Scheme, and in turn policy screenings and EQIAs. Hence the focus of this EQIA, and the determination of adverse effects, will fall primarily on a consideration of the promotion of equality of opportunity.

4.1 Service Users

The policy is specifically designed to meet the needs of the considerable and growing Irish speaking population of the District and to allow them to access Council services in Irish, in keeping with the provisions contained within the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. The positive action measures proposed within the policy to protect and enhance Irish will undoubtedly meet this aspiration and afford greater access to the Irish language in both its written and spoken forms. These measures were duly welcomed by a considerable number of consultees.

At the same time, for those who will choose to engage with the Council exclusively through the medium of Irish, it should be noted that the service will not be directly equivalent to that provided in English. For example, an individual telephoning the Council and wishing to speak in Irish may need to be transferred to an Irish speaker who in turn may not be able to answer queries on the specific service concerned and may only be able to pass on a message. Hence there is no guarantee that the Council will be able to deliver a full service of comparable quality to Irish speakers when the policy is implemented.

From a Section 75 perspective, in the short term it is clear that the majority of those who will benefit most significantly from the policy (i.e. those with an existing knowledge of Irish) are from a Catholic community background, and these people tend to be young. However, it can also be argued that those with little knowledge of Irish will potentially benefit in the longer term from exposure to a new language.

Those who may feel most disadvantaged by the introduction of the policy (i.e. those with no working knowledge of Irish) tend to be members of the Protestant and Unionist communities. While the policy aspires to promote the Irish language, it also embraces bilingualism. Hence it will still be possible to access all documents in English and all directional signs to and within Council buildings will continue to be in English. It will therefore be possible to access all Council services in English.

At the same time, there may be the potential for an adverse impact on the quality and timeliness of service delivery which would have a negative impact on all customers. For example:

- translations into Irish may take time to process and hence may slow down the delivery of services, e.g. responses to Freedom of Information requests, publication of documents, access to the website, length of meetings – this would impact negatively on all service users;
- the policy will be expensive to implement and this may impact on expenditure on other services and may impact negatively on all service users through rate setting;
- signs in two languages may not be welcomed by all communities and could be vandalised as a consequence; there is evidence that this has already happened to street signs in certain communities.

It should be noted that these adverse effects would impact on all users of Council services, irrespective of Section 75 status.

More specific adverse effects relating to Section 75 grounds could attach to any ‘chill factor’ associated with the increased profile of Irish within the Council, a profile which may discourage engagement with the Council and its facilities and services. A number of respondents maintained that the policy could serve to distance members of their community from the Council and its functions. Any potential adverse effect attaching to this perception cannot be tested at this time but should not be ignored during stages of implementation.

While many supporters of use of the Irish language would argue that its use is, and should be, apolitical and neutral, a counterargument was advanced by a significant number of respondents that language could be used as a marker of ‘cultural dominance and ownership of the council buildings’. Whatever the merits of each argument, if this perception or sentiment is genuinely held then it cannot be ignored as it may impact adversely on willingness to engage

with the facilities and services which the Council provides. Those who were most likely to identify this potential for adverse effect came from the Protestant and/or Unionist communities, and a number of respondents did identify this as a concern.

Overall, the division of opinion among those who responded to the consultation was stark and reflected on diametrically opposed perceptions of the policy between the two main communities. On the one hand the policy was welcomed and embraced as a positive measure to promote, protect and enhance the Irish language within the district. On the other hand, the policy was seen as an imposition that represented a threat to identity and a mark of cultural dominance by the Council.

4.2 Council Staff

While the EQIA deliberately targets only the first Section 75 duty (to promote equality of opportunity), it must be borne in mind that the second duty (to promote good relations) cannot be disregarded insofar as it links with the anti-discrimination legislation generally. For example, under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO), the Council as an employer has a duty to maintain a good and harmonious working environment, that is, one in which no worker feels under threat or intimidated because of his or her religious belief or political opinion.

A substantial majority of those staff who responded during the consultation were in support of the draft policy and the positive opportunities which were presented to protect and enhance the Irish language, including personal development through training. At the same time, a small number of staff did raise concerns as to how the policy may impact on career prospects and good relations among staff. The small number of concerns specific to the working environment raised by staff during this consultation included the potential impact on good relations within the Council, the cost of implementation, impact on career opportunities for non-Irish speakers and the imposition of the language on those who were resistant or unwilling to learn.

4.3 Summary

At this time, despite concerns raised by a significant number of consultees regarding the introduction of the policy, there is little concrete evidence to suggest that its introduction will necessarily cause either a deterioration in service delivery or will harm the good and harmonious nature of the working environment within the Council. However, it would be naïve to ignore the possibility that this may happen. The Council should therefore ensure that safeguards are put in place to allay concerns and to ensure the smooth implementation of the policy through the establishment of a structured programme of awareness, communication and information, and through Human Resource planning.

With these caveats in mind, while the proposed policy may have potential adverse differential impacts, it is argued that these are not inevitable but instead can be managed through a planned and staged process of implementation.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This EQIA process is designed to provide decision makers with detailed information on the potential impacts, in terms of the promotion of equality of opportunity of the proposed policy. This section therefore presents the conclusions of the EQIA process and makes recommendations with regard to further action.

Initial recommendations

5.1 Implementing the policy

There are a number of practical issues that need to be addressed to ensure that the policy can be implemented without any deterioration in the timeliness and quality of service delivery, such as availability of Irish speaking staff and translation services. For example, there are some aspects of the draft policy which are subject to qualifying phrases such as 'according to need and as resources allow', and it will be necessary to determine the extent to which these elements will be implemented.

A significant number of consultees made explicit reference to the costs associated with implementing the policy in its entirety, and best value principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness should continue to underpin the outworking of the policy.

Consultees also suggested that the Council should make clear the precise detail of the proposed Courtesy Code and Human Resource Planning at an early stage of implementation, and subject these to further Section 75 screening if necessary.

There is also a need to ensure that the policy does not have an adverse impact on the promotion of a good and harmonious environment, either among Council staff or within the District as a whole.

With reference to the potential adverse effects identified in the previous section, it should be noted that the draft policy already contains a number of provisions to alleviate potential concerns and thereby mitigate adverse effects:

- the Courtesy Code for Irish will make provision for courtesy to employees who do not speak Irish but come in contact with a member of the public who wishes to speak Irish;
- simultaneous translation services will be made available to employees who have no knowledge of Irish when bi-lingual presentations need to be made;
- translation services will be made available to employees who have no knowledge of Irish who are required to process internal documentation that is in Irish;
- fluency in the Irish language will not be a requirement for any position that would not ordinarily justify the appointment of an Irish speaker.

In addition the Council has decided that the new corporate identity will include the name of the Council in both Irish and English but that the new uniforms will feature only the Council logo with no wording.

More generally, the Council commits to implementing the policy in a way which is respectful of the identity of all those that it engages with, including residents, visitors and staff, and in a manner that celebrates linguistic diversity within the District. The concerns raised by a significant number of consultees highlight the need to proceed in a sensitive manner to allay these concerns.

One of the key concerns expressed by staff during the consultation on the Magherafelt DC policy was that they may suffer a detriment if speaking Irish becomes an essential (or desirable) criterion for their post. The Council's Human Resource Planning (see above), with the full involvement of staff and trade unions, will determine how the delivery of services in Irish will be accomplished. The Welsh Language Commissioner has published a comprehensive guide to recruitment, training and development to ensure that public authorities in Wales can meet their commitments in relation to the conduct of business in Welsh; this points out that comprehensive workforce planning is necessary to ensure that staff with the requisite language skills are available whilst also ensuring that current staff are not disadvantaged.

In line with concerns raised by consultees, the Council also commits to the phased introduction of policies that have a bearing on other linguistic forms including Ulster-Scots, other minority ethnic languages (e.g. Polish and Lithuanian) and languages for those with sensory or cognitive disabilities (e.g. braille, sign language, easyread).

5.2 Communicating the policy

As the previous section indicates, the proposed introduction of the policy may cause concerns among residents and staff, including significant costs attaching to the translation of all Council policies, reports etc. in to Irish. In order to allay these concerns, the Council may consider clarifying aspects of the policy and communicating it to all residents and staff in a way that ensures that the intentions are better understood and the need for the policy is fully established. The policy could be publicised through internal communication channels, press releases, workshops and public meetings.

Further recommendations

Over and above those initial recommendations that have been either confirmed or modified as a result of the consultation process, a number of other specific recommendations were also suggested by consultees and these are outlined below:

5.3 Screening report

The original screening form which identified the need for an EQIA will be made available on the Council website.

5.4 Good relations

While the Council has adopted a corporate policy of focusing attention on the first Section 75 duty (i.e. the promotion of equality of opportunity), when the EQIA decision is made by the Council then it will also make clear how any good relations considerations attaching to this decision will be considered.

5.5 Linguistic Diversity and Ulster-Scots policies

The Council commits to scheduling an EQIA on a new Ulster Scots policy, and to develop policies dealing with linguistic diversity generally, following the EQIA decision on the Irish language policy.

5.6 Courtesy Code and HR Planning

The Council commits to consulting with staff and their representatives on the contents of the Irish language Courtesy Code and associated HR Planning.

5.7 Monitoring

Consultees made a number of suggestions regarding monitoring arrangements for the new policy and these have been incorporated into the monitoring strategy (see below).

6. Monitoring

The final step in the EQIA process is the establishment of a system to monitor the impact of the policy. The results of the monitoring must be reviewed on an annual basis and must be published in the Council's annual Section 75 report to the Equality Commission⁵.

In the short term, the Council will note any feedback received after the decision has been made and the final EQIA report has been published.

In the longer term, and further to the consultation responses, the Council commits to taking the following monitoring actions on an annual basis:

- to assess demand for Irish language services elsewhere, eg DCAL, and to modify the policy as appropriate;
- to consider the impact of the policy on the profile of job applicants by community background;
- to monitor uptake of Irish language services and to obtain qualitative feedback on benefits that people perceive and/or complaints registered;
- to monitor any decrease in the usage of Council facilities by the Protestant / Unionist community in response to the introduction of the policy;
- to gather and analyse feedback from staff on the policy on an annual basis.

⁵ Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI (2004) p50

Appendix 1: Draft Mid Ulster District Council Irish Language Policy

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Introduction

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Part 2 – applies to Irish Language and Ulster Scots), within the territories in which such languages are used and according to the situation of each language, requires Parties to base their policies on:

- The need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them; and
- Facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages in speech and writing in private and public life.

In particular, Part 3 Article 10 details the Council's obligations as follows:

- Within the Administrative district of the State in which the number of residents who are users of regional or minority languages justifies the measures specified below and according to the situation of each language, the Parties undertake, as far as this is reasonably possible to:
 - Ensure that users of regional or minority languages may submit oral or written applications in these languages;
 - Allow the administrative authorities to draft documents in a regional or minority language;
- In respect of the local and regional authorities on whose territory the number of users of regional or minority languages is such as to justify the measures specified below, the Parties undertake to allow and/or encourage:
 - The possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages;
 - The use by local authorities of regional or minority languages in debates in their assemblies, without excluding, however the use of the official language of the state;
 - The use or adoption, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s) of traditional and correct forms of place-names in regional or minority languages.
- With regard to public services provided by the administrative authority or other persons acting on their behalf, the Parties undertake, within the territory in which regional or minority languages are used, in accordance with the situation of each language and as far as this is reasonably possible, to:
 - Allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request in these languages.
- With a view to putting into effect the above provisions accepted by them, the Parties undertake to take one or more of the following measures:

-
- Translation or interpretation as may be required.
 - The Parties undertake to allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages, at the request of those concerned.

With regard to cultural activities and facilities, Article 12 of the European Charter also details the Council's obligations to ensure that when organising or supporting cultural activities, they make appropriate allowance for incorporating the knowledge and use of regional or minority languages and cultures in the undertakings which they initiate or for which they provide backing.

Article 12 details the following obligations:-

- With regard to cultural activities and facilities, especially libraries, video libraries, cultural centres, museums, archives, academies, theatres and cinemas as well as literary work and film productions, vernacular forms of cultural expression, festivals and the cultural industries, including inter alia the use of new technologies – the Parties undertake, within the territory in which such languages are used and to the extent that the public authorities are competent, have power or play a role in this field:
 - to encourage types of expression and initiative specific to regional or minority languages and foster the different means of access to works produced in these languages;
 - to ensure that the bodies responsible for organising or supporting cultural activities of various kinds make appropriate allowance for incorporating the knowledge and use of regional or minority languages and cultures in the undertakings which they initiate or for which they provide backing;
 - to promote measures to ensure that the bodies responsible for organising or supporting cultural activities have at their disposal staff who have a full command of the regional or minority language concerned as well as of the language(s) of the rest of the population;
 - to encourage direct participation by representatives of the users of a given regional or minority language in providing facilities and planning cultural activities.

Article 14, Transfrontier Exchanges encourages the Council to foster contacts between users of Irish on a cross border basis “for the benefit of regional or minority languages, to facilitate and/or promote co-operation across borders, in particular between regional or local authorities in whose territory the same language is used in identical or similar form”.

The European Charter is based on a concept of non-discrimination, that is, the majority language group is not discriminated against by the implementation of actions designed to promote and protect the minority indigenous languages.

“The Parties undertake to eliminate, if they have not yet done so, any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of it. The adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages”.

The Belfast Agreement (1998)

The Belfast Agreement (1998) under section ‘Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity: Economic, Social and Cultural Issues (Point 4)’ gives recognition to the Irish language, in particular where appropriate and where people so desire it to:

- Take resolute action to promote the language;
- Facilitate and encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing, in private and public life where there is appropriate demand;
- Seek to remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;
- Make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;
- Place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education in line with current provision for integrated education;
- Explore urgently with the relevant British authorities, and in cooperation with the Irish Broadcasting authorities, the scope for achieving more wide spread availability of Teilifis na Gaelige in Northern Ireland;
- Seek more efficient ways to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland; and
- Encourage the parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by the new Assembly in a way which takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.

Northern Ireland (St Andrew's Agreement) Act 2006

This Act places a duty on the Northern Ireland Executive to adopt a strategy for the enhancement and protection of the Irish language.

European Charter on Human Rights

The NI Human Rights Commission has advised that, from a human rights perspective, it is difficult to see any legitimate grounds for objecting to a minority language being promoted by an employer or, more generally, a public body.

On broader issues, the Commission has drawn attention to the fact that there is no "right to be offended" by another party exercising a right. This is a general principle of freedom of expression (ECHR Article 10) which can be read in conjunction with ECHR Article 14 on non-discrimination on grounds that include language.

The Commission has advised that the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right conforming to the principles embodied in the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and according to the spirit of the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The Commission has concluded that official acknowledgement of a minority language cannot constitute a violation of the rights of those who do not use that language.

DCAL Consultative Document 2012 - Draft Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language

In July 2012 DCAL published a consultative document containing proposals for a strategy for protecting and enhancing the development of the Irish language, with a consultation period lasting for 20 weeks, from Wednesday 11 July until Tuesday 27 November 2012. The results of the consultation are not yet available.

The consultative document sets out a number of key aims of the draft Irish language strategy:

- To create a framework where Irish can flourish and be shared by all who wish to use it;
- To protect and support the development and learning of Irish; and
- To promote wider understanding of the background to the Irish language.

The draft strategy has the following objectives:

- To increase the number of those who can access Irish medium education;

-
- To increase the number of those that use public services through the Irish language; and
 - To increase access to Irish language media.

Key areas for action include:

1. Education
2. Family Transmission of the Language – Early Intervention
3. Administration, Services and Community
4. Media and Technology
5. Legislation and the Status of the Language
6. Economic Life

Under the administration heading, the draft strategy specifically states that local authorities should:

- Adopt Irish language policies and plans and appoint Irish language officers where needed;
- Maximise the provision of services through Irish;
- Expand/initiate facilities for the use of Irish in their council/committee meetings;
- Guard against any diminution of services provided through the Irish language as a result of those authorities with Irish language policies and services being merged under the Review of Public Administration (RPA) with those authorities that do not;
- Provide an Irish or bilingual version of all publications, official documents and forms in line with the approach of this Strategy and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
- Facilitate the proper preservation and signposting of Irish place-names and the naming of new housing developments to reflect local or national heritage; and
- Encourage tourism and cultural initiatives through Irish.

The draft strategy envisages Foras na Gaeilge providing support to local authorities to develop language planning initiatives. It also envisages that an Irish Language Bill will be prepared and presented to the Assembly at the earliest possible time.

Policy Aim and Objectives

Mid Ulster District Council recognises that we live in a multi-cultural and multi lingual society and that the Irish language is an integral part of the linguistic, cultural and historical heritage of this area.

Irish is the first official language of the Republic of Ireland and was accorded minority language status in Northern Ireland by the UK Government in March 2000. Irish was made an official working language of the European Union on 1st January 2007.

The 2011 Census indicates that 22,984 people (17.4%) out of a district population of 132,025 have some knowledge of Irish. In particular 8,063 (6.1%) people could speak, read, write and understand Irish. As such the Council recognises that the proactive promotion of Irish, as well as catering for the needs of its growing Irish speaking population, can enhance the rich linguistic culture of the area and add to the appeal of the area as a tourist destination. This policy will facilitate and encourage the use of Irish in speech and writing, in private and public life.

Policy Aim

Operating within the spirit of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and having due regard to the status afforded to Irish within that Charter, Mid Ulster District Council aims to take resolute and positive actions that will aspire to promote, enhance and protect the Irish language within the Council and District.

Policy Objectives

- To encourage the use of Irish in both speech and writing within the District and Council.
- To promote a range of initiatives that will reduce intolerance and promote understanding of the Irish language across the District and within the Council.
- To preserve townland names through the use of appropriate signage.
- To recognise and celebrate the Irish language within the broader context of linguistic and cultural diversity across the District and Council.
- To maintain and develop links between groups using Irish with other groups using Irish and/or Ulster Scots.

Policy Guiding Principles

The Mid Ulster District Council Irish Language Policy is based on the requirements of Parts II and III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The policy presents a number of guiding principles from which the Council will implement a range of positive actions to promote, enhance and protect the Irish language whilst encouraging its use in speech and writing in private and public life. Specific measures for implementation relating to each guiding principle are included in Appendix 1.

Guiding Principle 1: Support for the Irish Language

Mid Ulster District Council is committed to the protection and encouragement of the Irish Language. The Council recognises that the Irish language is an expression of cultural wealth and there is a need for the Council to promote Irish in order to help safeguard and strengthen it.

To this end:

- The Council will prepare a plan for the Mid Ulster Council area on how it will promote the development and promotion of the Irish language. The development plan will identify opportunities to promote and learn the language; and
- The Council, through implementation of the plan, will encourage better understanding of the shared linguistic heritage of Irish. It will also recognise the contribution that the Irish Language can make to the vibrant society within Mid Ulster.

Guiding Principle 2: Publications

The Council's corporate identity will be English and Irish although English will remain the language of communication internally. Employees wishing to communicate with each other in Irish will be facilitated. With regard to Council publications, our policy will facilitate Irish speakers to communicate with the Council orally and in written format through the medium of Irish. All written / printed materials produced by Mid Ulster District Council for public consumption will include Irish where appropriate.

To this end:

- Key corporate documents, e.g. Corporate Plan, Annual Report, will be made available in English and Irish format;
- Design / publishing of material in the Irish language will be of an equal standard with the same material in English; and
- Council literature and forms should be available to the public in English and Irish format where appropriate, according to need and as resources allow.

Guiding Principle 3: Publicity

Mid Ulster District Council will encourage and support radio, TV and video work that broadcast in English and Irish format.

To this end:

- The Council will build relationships with the Irish language media; and
- Where possible and appropriate, media work carried out by Mid Ulster District Council will contain English and Irish elements.

Guiding Principle 4: Correspondence

Mid Ulster District Council will ensure that users of Irish may submit oral or written communications in Irish. Mid Ulster District Council will correspond in the chosen language of the recipient, where this choice is known.

To this end:

- Users of Irish may submit oral or written correspondence in Irish to Mid Ulster District Council;
- Any correspondence received in Irish will be responded to in Irish; and
- Translation or interpretation will be available to all staff as may be required.

Guiding Principle 5: Presentations / Public Speaking / Events

Mid Ulster District Council will ensure that in planning its presentations, events and festivals that appropriate allowance is made for incorporating the knowledge and use of the Irish language and culture.

To this end Mid Ulster District Council will:

- Use increasing amounts of Irish in presentations;
- Provide simultaneous translation services on request; and
- Where appropriate, incorporate the Irish language and culture within events, festivals and civic celebrations.

Guiding Principle 6: Staff and Administrative Practices

Mid Ulster District Council will train Council officers in the detail of this policy so that they will be able to respond appropriately to enquiries in Irish. Staff will be encouraged to use what Irish they have. Fluency in Irish will not be a requirement for any position that would not ordinarily justify the appointment of an Irish speaker.

To this end Mid Ulster District Council will:

- Offer appropriate training and guidance to staff;
- Provide translation services to staff; and
- Provide Irish versions of internal documentation for use by staff on request.

Guiding Principle 7: Visibility of Irish

Mid Ulster District Council will enhance the visibility of Irish and foster different means of accessing the language as part of everyday life.

To this end Mid Ulster District Council will:

- Devise a corporate identity to include Irish reproduced in the same quality and presentational standards and status as English;
- Devise a phased implementation plan for the erection of English and Irish internal and external signage on all Mid Ulster District Council owned properties;
- Initiate a settlement signage programme on request; and
- Maintain an English and Irish street signage programme.

Appendix 1 – Guiding Principles Specific Measures for Implementation

Timeframe relates to Year 1 – Year 4 of the first term of the Mid Ulster District Council.

Guiding Principle	Measures for Implementation	Timeline
Support for the Irish language	Prepare and implement plan on the development and promotion of the Irish language.	Year 1 – Year 4
Publications	Annual Reports and Corporate Plans will be made available in English and Irish format.	Year 1 and annually
	Mid Ulster District Council’s website will include an English and Irish format with the Irish language text updated in line with the English text where possible. Those pages on Mid Ulster District Council’s website receiving most user traffic, for example main front pages, will be available initially in English and Irish format. Headings of dynamic sections will also be of English and Irish format, while eventually the entire web site will be English and Irish.	Year 1 – Year 4
	According to needs and as resources allow forms will be produced in English and Irish format.	Year 1
	The format for English and Irish materials will be Irish and English, side-by-side, with both languages of equal size.	Year 1 – Year 4
	According to need and as resources allow, information leaflets, flyers and other Council literature should be available to the public in English and Irish format where appropriate. It is recommended that all such literature should be English and Irish as opposed to being separately produced, in Irish and in English.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Material aimed exclusively at users of Irish may be produced in Irish only.	Year 1 – Year 4

Guiding Principle	Measures for Implementation	Timeline
	Newsletters / bulletins will contain articles in Irish, where appropriate.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Design/ publishing of material in the Irish language will be of an equal standard with the same material in English.	Year 1 – Year 4
Publicity	Relationships with the Irish language media will be established and maintained with press releases being issued in Irish and in English where appropriate.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Where possible and appropriate, radio, T.V. and video work carried out by members of Mid Ulster District Council will contain significant English and Irish elements. Employees will not be excluded from radio, T.V. and video work because of a lack of knowledge of the Irish language.	Year 1 – Year 4
Correspondence	In written communications of English and Irish format, both languages will be placed side-by-side, with the Irish version on the left and the English on the right, or if this is not practicable, by placing the Irish version above the English.	Year 1 – Year 4
	The letterhead and logo of the organisation will be English and Irish.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Any correspondence received in Irish will be responded to in Irish.	Year 1 – Year 4
	When initiating correspondence, Mid Ulster District Council will correspond in the chosen language of the recipient, where this choice is known.	Year 1 – Year 4
	All staff within each department will be trained in the Courtesy Code for Irish which will also make provision for courtesy to employees of the Council who do not speak Irish but come in contact with a member of the public who wishes to communicate in Irish. Contact details for Irish speaking staff will be made known so that a pool of fluent	Year 1

Guiding Principle	Measures for Implementation	Timeline
	speakers is available to handle enquiries from the public.	
	Translation or interpretation will be available to all staff as may be required.	Year 1 – Year 4
Presentations / Public Speaking / Events	Representatives of Mid Ulster District Council, who are comfortable to do so, will aim to use increasing amounts of Irish in their presentations. Standard practice of using Irish at formal occasions and public meetings will be actively promoted.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Visual presentation on PowerPoint or other systems will be English and Irish where appropriate. When English and Irish presentations need to be made, simultaneous translation services will be made available to employees who have no knowledge of the Irish language.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Where large-scale public events are planned, simultaneous translation systems will be made available on request	Year 1 – Year 4
	Mid Ulster District Council will ensure that festivals/ civic celebrations which the Council organises or supports make appropriate allowance for incorporating the knowledge and use of the Irish language and culture.	Year 1 – Year 4
Staff and Administrative Practices	Guidance will be offered to receptionists and telephonists so that they will be able to respond appropriately to enquiries in Irish.	Year 1
	Irish versions of all internal documentation will be made available for use by staff on request e.g. order forms, pay slips, time sheets etc. Translation services will be made available to employees who have no knowledge of the Irish language but who are required to process internal documentation that is in Irish. Administrative staff will ensure	Year 1 – Year 4

Guiding Principle	Measures for Implementation	Timeline
	that all staff can access the Irish language accent command (Alt Gr+vowel) on all computers.	
	Translation, correction and proof-reading services will be made available to all staff and external providers of these services will be quality-assured.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Irish classes at different levels will be available as part of an in-service training programme for staff who wish to avail of it.	Year 1 – Year 4
	All staff will be encouraged to use what Irish they have. Encouragement will be given to the establishment of informal Irish speaking lunches, conversation classes etc. in employees' own time to be convened by Mid Ulster District Council, with the assistance of external groups/individuals when required.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Mid Ulster District Council recognises the importance of identifying situations or posts in which the use of Irish is an essential duty of the job. Fluency in the Irish language will not be a requirement for any position that would not ordinarily justify the appointment of an Irish speaker.	Year 1 – Year 4
Visibility of Irish	An implementation plan will be devised for branding, logos and the erection of English and Irish internal and external signage on all Mid Ulster Council owned properties including buildings and offices.	Phased
	An approach using English and Irish will be taken to advertising where appropriate.	Year 1 – Year 4
	Council's street signage programme of English and Irish, resident-liaison and street-name translation index service will be maintained.	Year 1 – Year 4

Guiding Principle	Measures for Implementation	Timeline
	An English and Irish settlement signage programme will be initiated on request.	Year 1 – Year 4

Appendix 2: Consultee Response Letter 1

I am pleased to see that Mid Ulster Council is moving ahead with its commitments to the Irish language and its continued development and use across the Council area.

I believe that if the policy is fully implemented it will help safeguard the rights of Irish language speakers in the District. The policy does not restrict or limit the rights of others in society nor does it have any adverse impact on any s.75 grouping, In fact I believe that it enhances everyone's rights.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages already sets out that the promotion of a language cannot be regarded as an infringement of the rights of the majority language speakers. I do not therefore believe that an equality impact assessment was required especially given the cost of carrying this out. There is no detriment to anyone by having the policy, only by not having it would there be a detriment.

In relation to the use of the Irish language in Council or by Council staff, service users or the public I look forward to the successful promotion of the Irish language policy and its implementation. I would suggest that a Courtesy Code should reflect the fact that English is the dominant language and that there is a need for others to respect the rights of minority language speakers such as Irish. I would go further and encourage the use of Irish on an increased level by staff and would not like to think that any Courtesy Code would be used as a means to prevent Irish being spoken.

I take exception to the emphasis on future monitoring of the policy. It comes at it from the wrong angle and is negative in its outlook. The European Charter referred to above already highlights that promotion cannot be regarded as an infringement of rights, rather it is an enhancement of rights. Instead I believe the policy should be monitored to determine how successfully the policy is being implemented and whether sufficient time, energy and resources are being put into ensuring its success.

Finally, I commend the Council for working to improve and develop the Irish language across Mid Ulster and look forward to its continued growth.

Appendix 3: Consultee Response Letter 2

I wish to have it recorded that I do NOT approve the way Mid Ulster Council is planning and has imposed to further the Irish Language, this is designed to implement a cultural dominance and ownership of the council buildings and on the Unionist people. The Mid Ulster Council because it has a Nationalist majority thinks it can impose its wishes on the Protestant/Unionist people, firstly by the ban on the sales of Poppies, the flying of the Union Flag, taking the Oath, etc. and now by the imposing of an Irish Language over English, which will be spoken at council offices, thus seeking to employ from one side of the divide, and safeguarding jobs which will only be available to Nationalists.

Referring and comparing to the Welsh Language, for Irish language, the Government does not give Article 10 commitment to employ staff, the Mid Ulster Council applies this inappropriately to the position of Northern Ireland.

I feel the purpose and policy of this document is not linguistic but of dominance and ownership. I feel that this sham report which will be documented to serve its own ends, will be imposed on the minority Protestant and Unionist people, causing a greater divide and destroying any "faith" they may have in Nationalism.

This is an increased continuance of destroying any British presence and replacing with Irish nationalism, completely ignoring the Unionist viewpoint, which I feel is not only illegal but is designed to spark a backlash from Unionism.

In my opinion it goes to show what it would be like if/when Nationalists get a majority in local government with overall power and how they would treat the Unionist minority, taking away our cultural ethos and eventually our liberty as has happened in the past. No mention has been given to the overall costs of implementing this policy and in these times of austerity it is an unnecessary burden on the ratepayers in Mid Ulster Council area.

Appendix 4: Consultee Response Petition

We the undersigned members and associated family members would like to take this opportunity to communicate our opposition to the proposed Irish Language Policy of the Mid Ulster Council.

While we wholly accept the validity and history of the Irish Language and the right of those practising its use in the area to have support, we do not feel the reported numbers and data mitigate the implementation of all aspects of the proposed policy, especially in relation to street signage and council literature.

As some of the findings in the EQIA have highlighted, even among staff of the council there have been concerns raised that the implementation of the policy may cause a disruption of harmony. We believe at this point in time the policy is being used more as a political tool than a cultural promotion. English is the language of Northern Ireland, yet already on our new council literature Irish is the first language displayed with the new logo, what was the consultation here and rationale behind this decision?

In an age of government austerity cuts, the council themselves openly admit to the challenges facing them in agreeing a budget and merging the budgets of three district councils. Policies such as the Irish Language Policy at this point in time can only lead to an increase in rates to enable the council to cover the additional costs required to fund the implementation of the policy as well as adhering to government enforced spending cuts. So far communication on the proposed policy has not mentioned the costs for implementation or where this funding will come from.

On the whole as a group we have signed this letter to outline our opposition to the implementation of this policy as it currently stands for both cultural and economic reasons. Given our religious and educational backgrounds, this policy in no way brings any benefits to our day to day living and we believe it is currently being forced upon us.