

Scéim Údaráis Áitiúla na Mi 2005-2008

Ullmhú faoi Alt 11 d'Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla 2003

**Meath Local Authorities Scheme
2006-2009**

Prepared under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003

Meitheamh, 2006

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

The Meath Local Authorities prepared this scheme under the Official Languages Act 2003. Section 11 of that act provides that public bodies have a duty to prepare a statutory scheme specifying the services that they will provide:

- through the medium of Irish
- through the medium of English, and
- through the medium of both Irish and English

This scheme sets out the measures to be adopted to ensure that any services not provided by the local authorities through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

1.1 Inputs to the scheme

Section 12 of the act provides that guidelines shall be prepared to assist public bodies in the preparation of schemes. These guidelines were published by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in September 2004 and this scheme has been prepared in line with those guidelines.

Meath Local Authorities received an official notice (dated 14th June 2005) from the Minister of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs under Section 11 of the Act requiring preparation of a draft scheme.

In the preparation of this Scheme, Meath Local Authorities undertook a three-pronged consultation process, which involved:

- (i) Seeking submissions from the public on the preparation of a draft scheme
- (ii) A Customer Survey to assess the underlying needs and the demand for services through the medium of Irish
- (iii) An internal audit of services provided/capable of being provided through Irish by each section.

Meath Local Authorities received a total of 11 submissions from the public during the consultation process and this scheme has been informed by these submissions.

The main findings of the Customer Survey undertaken in relation to the provision of services through Irish outlined a particularly low level of customers seeking to conduct business through Irish (4%). However at the same time 16% of those surveyed indicated that would avail of a service in Irish if it were made available. It is likely therefore that the low level of demand from Irish speakers for a service may be a direct consequence of low expectations of being able to receive such a service through Irish.

An internal Steering Committee consisting of representatives of senior management and heads of functional / service areas assisted in drafting the scheme. Officials also participated in meetings of the Support Network for Public Bodies set up by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

1.2 Commencement Date of Scheme

This scheme will have effect following confirmation by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The scheme is commenced with effect from the **1st September 2006** and shall remain in force for a period of 3 years from that date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister (pursuant to Section 15 of the Official Languages Act), whichever is earlier.

1.3 Overview of Meath Local Authorities

Meath Local Authorities comprises of Meath County Council, the primary unit of local government in County Meath with responsibility for administration of the County, plus three Town Councils – Kells, Navan and Trim. Each Town Council, within the county area, comes under the jurisdiction of the County Manager.

Our mission is.....to drive the economic, social, cultural and environmental growth of our county in a balanced manner that is inclusive of all our citizens..... while our vision for Meath is of a county that is recognized locally, nationally and internationally as an excellent place to invest in, to visit and to live in, renowned for the quality of its environment, heritage, culture and the strength and viability of its communities

The functions of the Meath Local Authorities are classified into the following 8 programme groups.

- ***Housing and Building***
- ***Road Transportation and Safety***
- ***Water Supply and Sewerage***
- ***Development Incentives and Control***
- ***Environmental Protection***
- ***Recreation and Amenity***
- ***Agriculture, Education, Health & Welfare***
- ***General and Miscellaneous***

Our Local Authorities also have powers of general competence to take action in the interests of the local community.

Meath Local Authorities' Corporate Plan 2005-2009 sets out the objectives and strategies for the authorities and for each of its departments. As outlined in the plan all our actions and operations are guided by the following core values:

- ***Citizen Focus***
- ***Building Communities***
- ***Enhancing Local Democracy***
- ***Accessibility, Accountability & Openness***
- ***Equality & Social Inclusion***
- ***Embracing Change***
- ***Partnership***
- ***Sustainability***
- ***Management of Resources***

1.4 Customers and Clients

Meath Local Authorities' customer base is primarily the population of County Meath. The county had a recorded population of 134,000 (2002 Census), representing the largest percentage increase in population experienced by any Irish county over the 1996-2002 period. The population is currently in excess of 140,000, with demographic projections suggesting a population of 151,000 by the year 2010.

We interact daily with a diverse range of external and internal customers and clients. Internal customers are our staff members. Our external customers include the current Meath Population, our transient population who travel through our county on a daily basis, electronic customers who avail of our services via email and internet as well as:

- The Minister and Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Members of the Oireachtas
- Other State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other local and regional authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- Local community groups
- LEADER Groups
- Private sector service providers
- Local private businesses

1.5 Content of the Scheme

As a starting base this scheme builds on the extent to which services are currently available through Irish. Future enhancement of the service provided by Meath Local Authorities are identified in the body of the scheme.

We commit to an ongoing assessment of the level of demand for services through Irish and ensure that Meath Local Authorities will strive to make provisions to meet this need on an incremental basis.

1.6 Assessment of the extent to which services are already available through Irish

The primary objective of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish.

In this regard Meath County Local Authorities currently provides very limited services either bilingually or through the medium of Irish. Conscious of the need to introduce a recognised method of gradually improving the level and standard of the services to be provided through Irish, our Customer Charter commits to ***“accommodate our customers who wish to conduct their business through the Irish language”***.

Chapter 2

Provision of General Council Services/Activities

2.1 Means of Communication with the Public

Meath Local Authorities communicate with the general public in terms of service provision on a very regular basis. This communication is currently made available primarily in English and in both Irish and English where possible. Our means of communication include:

- Application Forms
- Brochures & Information Leaflets
- Publications
- Press Releases and News Statements
- Website
- Signage

2.2 Written Documentation

Meath Local Authorities will initiate the following policies in relation to our written documentation during the lifetime of this scheme:

Brochures, Information Leaflets & Application Forms

- 10% of new Information Leaflets & Application Forms to be produced by the local authorities shall be fully bilingual.
- 50% of new brochures and information leaflets to be produced will be produced bilingually by the local authorities by the end of this scheme.
- Other existing information: brochures, leaflets and documents produced for public consumption will be available bilingually. These publications relate to “inhouse” support publications eg Housing Loan application notes, DPG/ ERG Grant application notes, Well Grant application notes etc.

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme

Other Publications

- Documents intended for audience outside of the state and documents intended for internal use will in general be made available in English only.
- Any other publication not listed and not referred to in any other section will be considered on a case by case basis with due regard for public interest.

Press Releases & News Statements

- Press releases relating to the Gaeltacht Area will be produced bilingually and circulated to the Irish language and English language media simultaneously.

Deadline: One year after commencement date

- 10% of News Statements relating to the Gaeltacht Area will be produced bilingually circulated to the Irish language and English language media simultaneously.

Deadline: One year after commencement date

- 20% of total Press Releases will be produced bilingually and circulated simultaneously

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme.

It is important at this point to differentiate between Press Repeases and News Statements and the rationale behind the variances in proposals.

Public relations practitioners generally term Press Release as a “pro-active” media technique. It is used as advance notification and is generally associated in local authority terms with good news stories eg imminent opening of new road/ scheme/ facility. (In other words in terms of the Scheme there would be adequate preparatory time involved to facilitate translation)

News Statements on the other hand are generally recognised in the media business as being “reactionary “ and are often issued in direct response to someone else’s statement or release. In local authority terms these are often issues as a direct result of a call from the media (print and broadcast) looking for a direct and immediate response to an allegation or situation eg half the town without water as a result of a water main burst. (In other words in terms of the Scheme there would be less preparatory time involved to facilitate translation)

Website

- 10% of the documents on the website (excluding technical documents) will be bilingual within the first year of the scheme, increasing incrementally by a further 10% each year of this scheme.
Deadline: 30% within the lifetime of the scheme
- Meath Local Authorities shall make provisions to make its existing computer services and any new or existing intranet services available through Irish.
Deadline: by 2010, subject to the provision of the necessary systems from the Local Government Computer Services Board.

2.3 Oral Communication

- Receptionists and switchboard operators are often the first points of contact with the public. It will be the policy of Meath Local Authorities to ensure that staff will apply Quality Customer Service (QCS) which is:
 - to give the name of the Local Authority in Irish and English
 - to be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish. Suitable arrangements will be put in place so that they can put members of the public in touch, without delay, with the office or officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where available.**Deadline: One year after commencement date**
- At each of these primary points, front line staff will have a list of staff in the relevant section /area who are available to provide a more comprehensive service through Irish
Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme
- The public counters in each section will display notices inviting the public to use Irish.
Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme
- Efforts will be made to introduce an element of bilingualism during all Council meetings
Deadline: Two years after commencement
- Efforts will be made to introduce an element of bilingualism into the proceedings of major Public Meetings

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme

- As part of the Council's efforts to positively promote Irish in the community, high profile corporate events shall incorporate an element of bilingualism into the proceedings

Deadline: Two Years after commencement

- Meath Local Authorities commits to providing a spokesperson to talk to the Irish language media on matters relative to the Gaeltacht area(s) should the need arise, subject to advance reasonable notice eg minimum 24 hours

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme

- Anyone from the Gaeltacht area(s) wishing to speak in Irish as part of a delegation to a meeting of the Kells Electoral Area on matters relative to the Gaeltacht area(s) shall be facilitated, subject to advance notice, details of which will be outlined in amended Standing Orders. In the normal course of events any delegation / deputation must make a request to the Meeting Administrator / Town Clerk and a request for a delegation from An Gaeltacht would be facilitated in line with normal requirements.

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme

Meath Local Authorities shall use the official Placenames of Gaeltacht areas for official purposes.

Deadline: From Commencement Date

- The official Irish language name of Gaeltacht places shall become the default on registers and databases relative to the Gaeltacht areas of Rath Cairn and Baile Ghibb

Deadline: In the lifetime of the scheme

Chapter 3

Summary of Services/Activities provided by Sections

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision/activities by individual sections within Meath Local Authorities. The first part of the chapter lists the various sections and the official language regime operated in each case. The second part briefly describes the objectives / functions/activities of each section.

3.2 Meath Local Authorities - Sections and Civic Offices

- Ashbourne Civic Office
- Duleek Civic Office
- Dunshaughlin Civic Office
- Kells Civic Office
- Navan Civic Office
- Trim Civic Office
- Community & Enterprise (incl Library Service)
- Corporate Service
- Environment
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Information Technology
- Planning & Development

3.3 Operating language of each section

In prefacing this documentation, Meath Local Authorities acknowledge the current provision of a very limited range of services either bilingually or through the medium of Irish. Furthermore, an inhouse staff audit, which was undertaken during the drafting of this scheme, has determined existing relatively low Irish Language competencies, with the exception of competencies within the Library Service. It is outlined in the next chapter how this deficiency will be addressed as a matter of priority.

The following provide a comprehensive bilingual service

- Meath Library Service (5/12)

Library HQ, Navan
Ashbourne
Duleek
Dunboyne
Trim

The following sections offer a limited bilingual “counter” service only:

- Each section outlined hereunder has a limited compliment of staff who can provide bilingual greetings and a bilingual service available by appointment .

- Ashbourne Civic Office
- Duleek Civic Office
- Navan Civic Office
- Trim Civic Office
- Corporate Service
- Community & Enterprise : Pride of Place
- Environment
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Planning

The following sections offer English language only service:

- Dunshaughlin Civic Offices
- Kells Civic Office
- Information Technology
- Motor Tax
- **Athboy, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Laytown, Nobber, Oldcastle and Slane Library Services**
While Athboy, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Laytown, Nobber, Oldcastle and Slane branches cannot provide a direct service through Irish, activities through Irish are organised for these branches through/by HQ.

3.4 Functions / activities of sections working in Irish

The following sets out the proposals, which Meath Local Authorities will undertake to address the deficit particularly evident in the provision of services bilingually or through the medium of Irish only. It also briefly describes the functions/activities of each section.

3.4.1 Irish Officer

Meath Local Authorities will, subject to the sanction of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, engage the services of Irish Officer to develop a bilingual policy ensuring customers have a choice to do business in either of the two official languages.

Deadline: Three months from commencement date

3.4.2 Meath Library Service

Library HQ, Navan
Ashbourne,
Duleek,
Dunboyne,
Trim

(It is felt desirable to outline the branches at which a bilingual service is provided to ensure that there is no misunderstanding in relation to the services available throughout the entire Library Service)

The library service delivers a modern library and information service through the implementation of a five-year library Development Programme. It meets the informational, educational, cultural and recreational needs of the community through a network of Branch Libraries and the delivery of a service to primary schools in the county. In particular the service delivers:

- Free Internet access and email services in all branches
- Public Information Services
- A comprehensive collection of information about the heritage and history of the county
- Cultural development support for individuals and for groups with common interests from adult literacy to support to reading groups.
- Centres, which highlight local issues, excellence and achievement via exhibition and activity spaces, community meeting rooms and staff support.

3.5 Sections providing a limited bilingual service (counter greeting and limited counter service)

The following section sets out the functions/activities of the bilingual service available from the sections referred to at 3.3.

- Ashbourne Civic Office
- Duleek Civic Office
- Navan Civic Office
- Trim Civic Office

*The purpose of the Meath Local Authorities' Civic Offices is to provide a quality area based customer service delivery through a network of One-Stop Shops. Services delivered at local level include

- Housing applications and allocations
- Rent and Annuity Payments
- Road Opening Licences
- Taking in charge of Public Lights
- Water and Sewerage Connection Applications
- Preplanning clinics for one off houses and domestic extensions
- Planning Control (applications)
- Motor tax (Duleek and Dunshaughlin), Well Grants

Corporate Service - The functions of the Corporate Services Department include supporting the role of the Councillors and the democratic process, providing information on organisational activities and ensuring the delivery of a quality customer-focused service.

Community & Enterprise - The main functions of this section are:

- supporting the activities of the Council and the Meath County Development Board and its sub-structures
- enhancing and promoting local service co-ordination
- working closely with Local Development Sector, Public Sector, State Sector and the Social Partners
- ensuring that local communities are informed on local authority activities through the county

The aim of **Pride of Place** is to assist towns, villages and rural areas of Meath to become quality places to visit and to live in, and to be centres of best practice in terms of sustainable development of the natural and built environment.

Environment - The environmental objectives focus on strategic goals across 6 core areas of Environmental activity which comprise

- Waste,
- Water,
- Education,
- Fire & Emergency,
- Regulation,
- Effective Service Delivery.

The section supports and promotes the clean, safe and healthy environment, for present and future generations.

Finance - The Finance Department manages and monitors the income and expenditure of the organisation.

Human Resources – The objective of the HR section is to contribute to the achievement of corporate objectives by developing a competent, highly motivated staff; and fostering a flexible, responsive working environment that enhances opportunities and maximises the potential of every staff member.

Housing - The objective of the housing section is to ensure that all our citizens enjoy an adequate standard of housing accommodation appropriate to their needs and, as far as possible, in a location and tenure of their choice and to provide a responsive and supportive housing service for those in need of assistance

Infrastructure – The objective of the Infrastructure Section is to maintain and further develop the Infrastructure of the county and to ensure that infrastructural investment facilitates the physical, economic, social and cultural development of the county.

Planning - This section deals with the physical planning and sustainable development of the county

and the promotion of economic and tourism activity. Its primary objective is to operate a system of physical planning within sustainable patterns of settlement which facilitates and provides the impetus for economic development in County Meath, whilst at all times fostering protection of the natural and built environment of the county.

In the case of all of these sections the Local Authorities commit to the assignment or upskilling of at least one appropriate member of staff so that each of these Sections can offer a more comprehensive service through the medium of Irish as required to members of the public.

Deadline : within the lifetime of this scheme.

3.6 Sections providing an English language only service

The following sets out the functions/activities of the Sections referred to above that currently are not in a position to provide a one-to-one service to customers through the Irish language.

In relation to these sections, preparatory work will begin in order to develop a service through Irish within the lifetime of this scheme. This preparatory work will be carried out with a view to addressing the issue of the provision of a quality one-to-one customer service through Irish from these offices in the second and subsequent language schemes. However, a particular effort will be

made to address the deficit in counter service available at the Kells Area office within the lifetime of this scheme. Staff audits will continue to ascertain the level of Irish of all staff and training will be provided to improve staff competence in the Irish language.

Motor Tax

Meath County Council's **Motor Taxation Office** in Duleek, Dunshaughlin and Navan processes applications for Motor Taxation & Driver Licensing for Meath County.

Information Technology

The Information Technology Department provides quality customer services, enabling universal participation, innovation and excellence in eGovernment and technology.

***Dunshaughlin Civic Offices**

***Kells Civic Office**

As outlined in Civic Offices at 3.5

Chapter 4

Enhancement of Services to be Provided Bilingually

4.1 *General Policy*

The primary objective of Meath Local Authorities in relation to this scheme is to create and foster an atmosphere of bilingualism within all its sections / departments. Irish speaking customers will be encouraged to transact their business in Irish and it is intended that customers and staff alike will be comfortable with conducting official business through the Irish language.

Meath Local Authorities are committed to securing an adequate number of staff competent to provide a service through Irish in all sections dealing regularly with the public. The following actions are proposed in order to ensure that both the level and standard of our services are improved during the lifetime of this and future schemes.

It is proposed to promote the availability of an Irish language service as follows:

4.2 *Information Technology*

In relation to electronic communication, Meath Local Authorities will ensure that the following policies will be implemented:

- Standard disclaimer or message on e-mail correspondence will be bilingual by the end of 2006.
- Establish a generic e-mail address for queries 'as Gaeilge'. The Local Authorities will ensure that such queries are addressed promptly in the same manner as English language queries, as outlined in the Customer Action Plan.
Deadline: By the end of 2006
- Provide an online listing of staff contact who are available to provide services as well as providing an updated list of the services which are available bilingually.
It is predicted that this policy will reverse the apparent existing low demand for services through Irish currently a consequence of low expectations of being able to receive such a service.
Deadline: In the lifetime of this scheme.

4.3 *Recruitment & Placement*

The Human Resources Section will manage staffing issues in the context of the Official Languages Act. In light of an established limited Irish Language competency base Meath Local Authorities will prioritise a number of issues:

- In light of its obligations to ensure that an adequate number of staff is competent in the Irish language the Human Resources will review existing recruitment and staff mobility policies. These reviews will be initiated through the partnership process, with particular input requested from the Quality Customer Service Working Group.
Deadline: From commencement date
- The requirements and obligations of each section in relation to providing a high quality service through Irish will be taken into account when placing or deploying staff within the organisation.
Deadline: From commencement date

Meath Local Authorities do not have any offices located directly in the Gaeltacht. However, as the Civic Offices in Kells serve the gaeltacht communities of both Rath Cairn and Baile Ghibb we shall prioritize steps to ensure that counter services are available bilingually in these offices
Deadline: Within the lifetime of this scheme.

4.4 Training & Development

The Local Authorities acknowledge the importance of having a highly trained workforce to ensure efficient and effective service delivery. This requires significant investment in training and development of our human resources.

- The Training Officer will source Irish Language classes focused on customer services needs for those staff members who work at primary points of contact and who are required to provide one to one counter service.
- All staff will be encouragement and given equal opportunity to improve their Irish language skills through training and development courses, and shall be facilitated to attend Irish language classes during office hours.
- The Training Officer shall provide advice and support to staff in relation to a range of Irish language classes available outside office hours, including third level qualifications.
- The Induction programme shall be reviewed to include language awareness initiatives.
- Seek volunteers to provide Irish language services in relevant sections across the Local Authorities. (Such staff will be identified at primary counter contact points, on phone lists and on the e-mail list.)

Deadline: From commencement date

4.5 An Ghaeltacht

Meath Local Authorities are committed to the protection and development of the Gaeltacht areas and are committed to continuing its long-standing relationships with the communities of Rath Cairn and Baile Ghibb. Certain measures proposed have already been outlined and we will ensure that our services are available in Irish to the people of the Gaeltacht

- Public Meetings organised by the Local Authorities in the Gaeltacht shall be in Irish only, or fully bilingual.

Deadline: Within the lifetime of this scheme.

- Information directed at the public in the Gaeltacht will be available in Irish only, or in both English and Irish where appropriate

Deadline: Within the lifetime of this scheme.

4.6 Gaelscoileanna & Other Irish Language Organisations

Meath Local Authorities are conscious of the significant number of gaelscoileanna throughout County Meath.

We recognise the linguistic preferences of Irish language schools, as well as other Irish Language organisations and groups operating throughout the county and nationally. The provision of services in Irish to these particular bodies and groups will be prioritized.

- Any dealings initiated with Irish language schools, Gaelscoileanna and other Irish speaking groups or organisations shall be in the Irish language only or bilingual and provision of an Irish language service to such institutions and organisations will be prioritised over the lifetime of the first scheme.

Deadline: Over the lifetime of this scheme

Chapter 5

Monitoring, Revision & Publicising of Agreed Scheme

5.1 *Monitoring & Revision*

Responsibility for ensuring implementation of the scheme, as well as monitoring and reviewing the scheme, will rest with senior management within the Meath Local Authorities

The day-to-day monitoring will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the functions / service areas (who are responsible for the implementation of the scheme within their own areas). This will be done with guidance from the designated Irish Officer and regular reports will be provided to the relevant Director of Services.

A report on the implementation of the provisions of the scheme, along with details of demand for the services provided, will be published for each of the three years of this scheme in Meath Local Authorities' Annual Report.

5.2 *Publicising of Agreed Scheme*

The contents of this scheme, along with the commitments and provisions of the scheme, will be publicised to the general public by means of:-

- ◆ Press Release
- ◆ Official Launch of the scheme
- ◆ Advertising of provisions
- ◆ Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies
- ◆ Website

A copy of this scheme will be forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.