

**Department of the Environment, Heritage
and Local Government Scheme**

2005-2008

**under Section 11 of the
Official Languages Act 2003**



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Chapter 1 Introduction & Background

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, in the conduct of its public business, will treat the Irish and the English languages on an equal basis. The scheme sets out how the Department will give effect to this principle taking account of what is reasonably practicable within the duration of this scheme.

This scheme was prepared under *Section 11* of the Official Languages Act 2003 ("the Act") by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. Section 11 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide

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

and the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

1.1 Consultation Process

The Department published a notice under Section 13 on 22 October 2004, inviting representations in relation to the preparation of the draft scheme under Section 11 from any interested parties. Some 21 submissions were received all of which are available for viewing on the Department's website **www.environ.ie**. The Department is grateful for the views put forward by these organisations and individuals.

The scheme has been informed by these submissions and views and suggestions put forward by staff in the various Divisions of the Department.

1.2 The Content of the Language Scheme

Personnel from each functional area of the Department, have assisted in drafting the scheme. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the scheme will rest with the senior management within this Department. The scheme builds on the extent to which services are currently available through Irish as a starting base. Areas for future enhancement of the service provided by this Department

are identified in the body of the scheme. The scheme also includes a commitment to assess on an ongoing basis the level of demand for services through Irish and to ensure that the Department continues to meet this demand in a planned, coherent and accessible way. The Department will continue to gauge the level of demand for its services in the Irish language by carrying out regular and timed audits through a system of counting/measuring the level of queries/requests for services through Irish in a given period.

1.3 Commencement date of Scheme

This scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs. The scheme is commenced with effect from 15 August 2005 and will remain in force for a period of 3 years from this date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the earlier.

1.4 Overview of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Mandate and Mission

To promote sustainable development and improve the quality of life through protection of the environment and heritage, infrastructure provision, balanced regional development and good local government

The Department has a wide mandate for the environment and heritage, for housing and other infrastructure; for physical and spatial planning and for local government.

The Department is currently headquartered at the Custom House, Dublin 1. Other offices with significant staff numbers include, Irish Life Buildings, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, 7 Ely Place Dublin 2, Dún Scéine Harcourt Lane, Dublin 2, Government Offices, Ballina, Vehicle Registration Unit, Shannon Town Centre, and ENFO, Andrew Street. Some staff of the heritage division, the Housing and Engineering Inspectorate are located throughout the country. Met Éireann, a constituent division of the Department, is headquartered in Glasnevin and has staff in regional locations.

As part of the Government decentralisation programme, announced in the budget in December 2003, plans are being progressed to re-locate the Department to four new locations: Wexford, Waterford, New Ross and Kilkenny.

1.5 Customers and Clients

The work of the Department impacts on a wide array of communities and people and accordingly has an extensive customer base e.g.

- Elected representatives
- Individual members of the public
- Communities throughout the country
- Other Government Departments
- State Agencies under the aegis of the Department
- Local and Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- Social Partners, including the community and voluntary sector

1.6 Functional Areas of the Department

The Department is organised into six Divisions which are supported by administrative, professional, technical and industrial staff. The six Divisions are

- Housing
- Local Government
- Heritage & Planning
- Environment
- Water and Natural Heritage
- Corporate Services

Each Division is headed by an Assistant Secretary who, with the Secretary General and the Legal Adviser, are members of the Management Advisory Committee. Met Eireann, headed by a Director, and the Local Government Audit Service, headed by an Inspector of Audits, are constituent parts of the Department.

1.7 Assessment of 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. The Department's Customer Charter commits it to treating the Irish and English languages on an equal basis.

Generally the Department does not provide services directly to the public apart from a number of specific areas which are detailed in the following chapters. The Department provides the policy framework within which local authorities and other bodies under its aegis deliver services.

The Department will have a critical role to fulfil in providing leadership to local authorities in the context of the implementation of the Official Languages Act 2003. The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has established Comhairle Gaeilge an Rialtais Áitiúil, an advisory group, to promote the use of Irish in local authorities pursuant to section 68 of the Local Government Act 2001. Comhairle Gaeilge an Rialtais Áitiúil is representative of local authority members, County & City Managers, representatives of organisations concerned with the promotion of the Irish language and the Department. It will have an important role in assisting local authorities to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003. The Department has indicated to local authorities that it is anxious that full-time Irish Language Officers should be designated in all local authorities to assist in this regard.

Chapter 2 *Provision of General Departmental Services/Activities*

This Chapter sets out the official language regime operated by the Department in relation to the general provision of services by it.

2. Means of Communication with the Public / Information to the Public

2.1 Correspondence

In addition to fulfilling its legal obligation, to reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish, the Department will initiate correspondence in Irish with those who are known to prefer correspondence in Irish. Staff will be instructed to maintain a record of such persons with a view to fulfilling this commitment.

(From commencement of scheme)

2.2 email

Standard messages on the Department's Email, such as disclaimers of responsibility, will be in both Irish and English.

(From commencement of the scheme)

2.3 Information Leaflets/Application Forms/Posters

The Department produces a number of leaflets, posters and application forms for members of the general public. It will strive to ensure that all such material is provided in bilingual format within the one cover. However, where this is not feasible because of the nature, size, or layout of the material a separate Irish version will be provided.

(By end of year 1)

2.4 Speeches

Speeches or statements, including those in the Oireachtas, by Ministers or speeches by senior officials will be made available in the language(s) in which they are delivered.

2.5 Other Publications

A wide range of publications across all Divisions are produced. The Department undertakes to provide bilingual versions of core publications preferably within the same cover. However, where the length of any bilingual publication would reduce its effectiveness or involve excessive additional cost, separate Irish Language and English Language versions will be provided. In this regard each will contain a statement that a version is available in the other language. It is not the intention to translate large documents which are of a technical nature or have a small circulation.

(From commencement of scheme)

2.6 Oral announcements/ Telephone communications with the public

Receptionist / switchboard operator are the first points of contact with the public. Standard QCS practice is that:

- reception / switchboard staff are able to give the name of the Department in Irish and English, **(from commencement of scheme)**
- they are at least familiar with the basic greetings in Irish, **(from commencement of scheme)**
- suitable arrangements are in place so that they can put members of the public in touch without delay with whatever office or officer is responsible for offering the service required through Irish **(from commencement of scheme)**
- Telephonists will continue to be provided with a list of those staff members who have the capacity to deal with the public in Irish.
- Staff will be provided with guidance on handling telephone calls from Irish speaking members of the public. **(Within three months of scheme being approved)**

It is the policy of the Department to work towards ensuring that all pre-recorded oral announcements to our customers shall be in the Irish language, or in the English and Irish languages. This objective will be achieved by the end of the current scheme, i.e. by August 2008. However, individual staff members may leave messages in the language of their choice.

2.7 Motor Tax On Line

In February 2004 the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government launched a Motor Tax on-line Service (**www.motortax.ie**) which enables members of the public to renew their motor tax by means of the internet. A parallel service in Irish is available at **www.motarchain.ie**

2.8 National Parks and Wildlife

The National Parks & Wildlife Service manages the Irish State's nature conservation responsibilities under National and European law. Its website at **www.npws.ie** is available on a bilingual basis.

Chapter 3 Summary of Services / Activities provided by Divisions

Local authorities are generally responsible for delivering services within the financial and policy framework set by the Department. However, the following areas of the Department provide services directly to members of the public:

- National Parks and Wildlife
- ENFO
- Housing Grants
- Vehicle Registration
- Private Residential Tenancies Board
- Met Éireann

The following is a comprehensive list of business units in the Department. Apart from those sections listed above the remaining business units do not provide services directly to the public and conduct their business primarily through English.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Accounts	Manages and monitors the Department's accounts.
Affordable Housing	To oversee and ensure effective delivery of the various targeted schemes designed to assist certain first time purchasers to attain home ownership.
Air/Climate	Develops air pollution and climate change policy.
Building Standards Environmental Assessment	Reviews and updates national Building Regulations; Manages overall transposition and implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives and of the land use planning aspects of the Seveso II Directive and monitors/provides for harmonised standards under the EU Construction Products Directive.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Corporate Development & Decentralisation Section	<p>Coordinates and facilitates the Public Service Modernisation Programme in the Department and provides the staff Training and Development function.</p> <p>Manages the Decentralisation Programme for the Department, the accommodation needs of the Department and health and safety issues within the Department.</p>
Departmental Finance & Accounts	Coordinates the Department's estimates and expenditure. Customises and implements the Management Information Framework to suit the specific needs of the Department.
ENFO	Provides access to information on the environment and sustainable lifestyle choices.
Environment Awareness Environment International	<p>Develops and implements policies and measures to promote greater environmental awareness and behaviour change.</p> <p>Manages input and participation in international environmental fora.</p>
Environment Policy	Promotes sustainable development and environmental integration. Coordinates anti-litter action.
Internal Audit	This Unit is responsible for giving assurance to the Accounting Officer on the existence, adequacy and effectiveness of the Department's internal control systems.
Fire Services and Emergency Planning	Supports local fire authorities in the delivery of fire fighting and rescue services, fire safety and prevention programmes, and planning for and response to major emergencies.
Franchise	Develops electoral and referendum legislation.
Heritage Policy	Promotes the conservation and protection of the architectural heritage.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Housing Construction	Manages and monitors the local authority housing construction programme and the regeneration of housing areas including Ballymun. Organises the tri-annual assessment of housing needs undertaken by local authorities.
Housing Policy & Supply	Formulates and develops policy relating to housing in Ireland across all tenures. Monitors and assesses developments in the housing market.
Housing Procurement and Services	Responsible for developing and implementing policy in relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the procurement of accommodation and the provision of services by local authorities to meet social housing needs.
Local Government Audit Service	Conducts audits of the financial accounts of local authorities and value for money audits on local authorities' systems, practices and procedures.
Local Government Finance	Monitors the finance function in local authorities and develops legislation relating to local authority financial management and procedures.
Local Government Personnel	Develops Human Resource Management policy in local authorities including pay policy, pension schemes, regrading, restructuring, disability issues and workplace partnership.
Local Government Policy	Develops policy and legislation for the local government system.
Local Government Project Development Section	To develop priority projects on local government and related central government issues.
Roads & Local Services	Develops policy and funding for public libraries, manages and administers the non-national roads investment programme.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Met Éireann	Met Éireann is the Irish National Meteorological Service. It is the leading provider of weather information and related services for Ireland. Our mission is to monitor, analyse and predict Ireland's weather and climate, and to provide a range of high quality meteorological and related information to our customers.
Ministers' Offices	Provides support for Minister and Ministers of State.
National Monuments	Promotes the conservation and protection of the archaeological heritage.
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Manages the National Parks and administers the law in regard to the protection of the natural heritage.
Nuclear Safety	Supports and implements national and international policy on nuclear safety matters, including the Government commitment towards the safe closure of Sellafield.
Organisation	Provides and maintains office equipment, supplies and stationery, manages the Asset Register, maintains the Department's telephone directory and organisation chart, and monitors and promotes compliance with Prompt Payments legislation. Manages FOI and ICT functions.
Personnel	Manages the personnel function within the Department.
Planning	Maintains an up-to-date legislative and policy framework to facilitate an efficient, effective, balanced and quality planning system.
Press and Information	Liaises with the media and provides support to the Minister and Ministers of State on the delivery of speeches.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Private Housing Sector	Promotes the efficient and balanced operation and development of the private housing market.
Public Private Partnership & Construction	Promotes the use of the PPP approach across the local government sector and provides support for procuring agencies undertaking PPP projects. Manages the construction industry sector.
Secretary General's Office	Provides support to the Secretary General.
Social Inclusion & Traveller Accommodation	Oversees and promotes the ongoing development and implementation of policies and programmes to address the housing related needs of vulnerable groups such as elderly, disabled and homeless persons. Formulates and develops policy on the provision and management, by local authorities, of Traveller accommodation and the necessary funding for such accommodation.
Spatial Policy	Leads the implementation of the National Spatial Strategy to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development across Ireland, supported by more effective spatial planning.
Urban and Village Development	Implements and monitors the Urban and Village Renewal Programmes, Town Renewal and Living Over the Shop schemes. Organises the Tidy Towns' Competition, City Neighbourhoods' Competition, Ireland's Best Kept Town Competition and Ireland's entry in the European Entente Floreale Competition
Vehicle Registration	Facilitates the processing of all motor tax and driver licence business and support and maintains the computerised National Vehicle and Driver File. Manages the operation of the Motor Tax system
Voluntary, Housing & Housing Grants	Administers a number of housing schemes, makes recoupments to local authorities in respect of other schemes, issues various certificates in respect of tax schemes. Fund the Voluntary and Co-Operative housing schemes.

Business Unit/ Section	Functions
Waste Infrastructure and Regulation	Develops policy and legislation to meet national requirements and ensure compliance with relevant obligations under EU waste Directives and manages the waste recovery infrastructure programme.
Waste Prevention and Recovery	Co-ordinates the implementation of national waste prevention, minimisation and recovery policy.
Water Quality	Promotes the protection and improvement of the quality of water in the environment e.g. rivers, lakes, groundwater.
Water Services Investment Programme	Manages the Water Services Investment Programme contained in the National Development Plan. Manages the Rural Water Programme and the Group Water Scheme Sector
Water Services Policy	Manages policy development in the Water Services Sector, including legislation and water services pricing policy.

Chapter 4 *Enhancement of Services to be provided bilingually*

4. The following sections of the Department provide a bilingual service to members of the public:

- ENFO
- Housing Grants
- Vehicle Registration

The following sections also provide a service to the public and the Department will ensure over the lifetime of this scheme the assignment or upskilling of at least one member of staff to each Division in headquarters so that a service through the medium of Irish will be provided to members of the public.

- Private Residential Tenancies Board
- Met Éireann
- National Parks and Wildlife

The National Parks and Wildlife section provides a service to the public on a regional basis and the Department will ensure, over the lifetime of the scheme, the assignment or upskilling of at least one member of staff to each region so that a service through the medium of Irish will be available from that region.

Improving the Department's Irish language capability

4.1 Translation Services

The Department will make available to staff a list of all companies and individuals providing translation services. Support IT services such as spell checker software will be available within the Department. **(from commencement of scheme)**

The Department, in monitoring the demand for services through Irish, will consider the option of recruiting a translator to provide in house translation services. (end of second year)

4.2 Language resources

All staff will have easy access to information and language resources, e.g. dictionaries, both hard copies and in electronic format, advice on written Irish and lists of common phrases etc in usage. **(from commencement of scheme)**

4.3 Corporate Identity

The Department's stationery such as headed paper and complimentary slips will continue to be produced in bilingual format. When it is necessary to change the Department's stationery or order new stocks a specific reference to Irish being welcome will be incorporated into the new stationery e.g

Beidh fáilte roimh chomhfhreagrás as Gaeilge

4.4 Press Releases

The bulk of Press Releases are currently issued in English. By the end of this scheme the Department undertakes to provide at least 20% of such Press Releases in Irish. Priority will be given to those relating to the heritage service or matters concerning Gaeltacht areas.

4.5 Circulars

The Department, in developing policy initiatives within which local authorities operate, issues numerous circulars on an annual basis to those authorities. The Department will provide an Irish version of those circulars used by local authority staff to provide services to members of the public.

(circulars issued from commencement of scheme)

4.6 Website

The Department will make appropriate use of the Internet in providing a service through Irish. It is our aim to develop a new Departmental website in 2005 in which context the Department will procure the technology to underpin the development of a bilingual site. Provision for accessing the site using both Irish and English addresses will be included e.g. **www.viron.ie** or **www.comhshaoil.ie**. Following development of the new site the Department will commence making material available in Irish and undertakes to have an Irish version of the static content available by the end of this scheme.

4.7 Computer Systems

Development of new interactive on-line services will be compatible with the Irish Language, taking into account the availability of Irish language software from the relevant software supplier.

4.8 Recruitment & Placement

The following measures will be put in place to ensure that an adequate number of staff with proficiency in the Irish language are recruited and retained within this Department in order to comply with the provisions of the Act:

- As part of its recruitment policy, the Department, in co-operation with the Public Appointments Service, will publicly advertise competitions for staff to work through Irish (especially in the Gaeltacht and/or serving Gaeltacht communities), when suitable people are not available through general entry level competitions.
- Appropriate placement of staff with such proficiency will be implemented throughout the Department, in particular in Gaeltacht offices, or in offices that will service Gaeltacht areas. Complementing this, staff with a working knowledge of Irish will be appropriately placed across the various divisions to support the commitments set out in this scheme.
- Departmental interviews through Irish or English will be available to staff, subject to advance notice by interviewees of their language choice. This option will not, however, apply where Irish is a particular requirement for the post in question.

(from commencement of scheme)

4.9 Training & Development

There is an ongoing commitment to provide appropriate training and development for all staff, in both official languages, to meet the evolving needs of our customers and to develop the full potential of staff during their careers in this Department. The Training Unit will:

- Seek volunteers to provide Irish language services across the Department where the requirement to provide services through the medium of Irish may arise. Such staff will be identified by asterisk on phone lists.
- Assess all courses, including Irish language courses and courses delivered through Irish, on a regular basis to ascertain how effectively they meet the Department's needs.
- Include language awareness as part of both Induction and Customer Service training courses so as to ensure that staff understand why the Department implements a bilingual policy; understand the context and background to the policy; and are fully informed about how the policy will affect their work.
- Training Unit will provide Irish language classes focused on customer service needs for those sections that interface most with customers.
- The Department will continue to facilitate staff attending Irish language classes during office hours.
- Advice and financial assistance will be given to staff in relation to the range of high-quality Irish language classes available outside office hours.
- The Department will continue its policy of facilitating staff who wish to avail of Gaeltacht Scholarships e.g. Gaeleagras Schemes.

(from commencement of scheme)

4.10 Public Meetings Policy

The Department conducts the majority of its public meetings in the English language only. However, it is the policy of this Department that, when warranted, staff proficient in Irish will be provided for meetings in Gaeltacht areas or when dealing with Gaeltacht issues.

4.11 Seachtain na Gaeilge

To help raise awareness of the Irish Language the Department will make a particular effort to support activities organised during Seachtain na Gaeilge and to promote the event within the Department.

4.12 Third Parties

Third parties working for the Department will be made aware of the scheme where relevant and will be encouraged to reflect the spirit of the scheme in the services being provided by them. **(from commencement of scheme)**

4.13 Service to Gaeltacht areas

The Department undertakes to provide a service through Irish to members of the public in Gaeltacht areas over the lifetime of this scheme.

4.14 Gaeltacht Placenames

The official Placenames of Gaeltacht areas, as declared by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs will be used by the Department.

Chapter 5 Monitoring & Revision

The Senior Management Group (MAC) within this Department will keep the effective operation of the scheme under review. A Coiste Gaeilge, representative of the various Divisions of the Department and chaired by an Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge, will be appointed to provide advice in this regard.

The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by line managers in each of the line Divisions who are responsible for the implementation of the scheme within their own areas.

Information will be collected annually on:

- Policies or initiatives that have promoted the use of Irish.
- The number of items of correspondence that have been received in Irish.
- Number of telephone calls received in Irish.
- Description of materials published in whole or in part in Irish.
- Achievements against the timetable in the Scheme.
- The incidence and nature of any complaints and suggestions relating to the provision of services in Irish by the Department.
- The number of face to face queries.
- The number of Parliamentary Questions answered in Irish.
- The number of representations answered in Irish.

The Department will consider any additional measures necessary in light of demand.

A report of the measures implemented under the Scheme will be included in the Department's Annual Report.

Chapter 6 Publicising of Agreed Scheme

Staff have been informed of their responsibilities in respect of the Acht Teanga. Detailed guidance and instructions have been made available to those who may need to implement Irish Language measures. Staff are made aware of their responsibilities under the scheme through a variety of means e.g

- written guidance
- seminars
- articles in Partnership News (Department's internal magazine)

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

- Press Release;
- Advertising of provisions;
- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies;
- Website.

A copy of this scheme has also been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla and all of those who made submissions to the Department in the context of this scheme being developed.