

Irish Language Provision	13th September 2016
To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Decision	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	Stable and Cohesive Communities
Lead Officer	Julie Welsh – Head of Community and Culture Margaret Edgar – Cultural Services Manager
Cost: (If applicable)	Approx. £18,000

The purpose of this report to present Members with options on future Irish language provision within Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.

Background

Limavady Borough Council was the only legacy council to make provision for the promotion and development of the Irish language. In 2007, the Council entered into a three-year partnership agreement with Magherafelt District Council to share the cost of employing an Irish Language Officer. The post was co-funded by Foras na Gaeilge, the statutory body with responsibility for promoting the Irish language, who contributed 50% of the salary costs through its Language Officers Scheme. The remaining cost was shared between the two councils with Magherafelt District Council the employing organisation. The scheme was extended twice with the current funding period and agreement between Mid Ulster District Council and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council ending on 1 September 2016.

Costs

In 2014-15, Limavady Borough Council allocated £21,000 to Irish language provision to include salary and programme costs. In 2015-16, with 5% savings applied, the budget was £19,950 with salary costs £12,911 and programme costs £7,039. In this financial year, there is provision of £6,500 in the Cultural Services budget to cover salary costs until September 2016.

Current Position with Foras na Gaeilge

Foras na Gaeilge, the body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language, has confirmed that the Irish Language Officers' Scheme will finish on 1 September 2016. However it doesn't regard the ending of the scheme as an end to the on-going development of the Irish Language in the Causeway Coast and Glens area and has reaffirmed its commitment to engaging with Council to build on the work initiated under the Irish Language Officers' Scheme.

Foras continues to invest in the area through their recent announcement of funding of £137,500 to Glór Dhún Geimhin under the Scúim Pobal Gaelige. This will fund a Development programme in Dungiven over the next three years.

Current Position with Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council employs the member of staff, who currently provides the service on a part-time basis. As the employer, Mid Ulster have verbally informed Council that it would be agreeable to continue to share the cost of an Irish Language Officer, although no written proposal has been received to date.

Irish Language Profile in Causeway Coast and Glens Area

In terms of existing infrastructure and recorded levels of activity relating to Irish Language, Foras na Gaelige reports the following:

Pre-schools/Nursery Units	4
Irish Medium Education Primary Schools/Units	3
Primary Schools with Peripatetic Irish Provision	6
Secondary Level Irish Medium Provision	1
Secondary Schools teaching Irish	7
Cultural Centres (2 in development)	3
Local Committees	5

Current Provision in Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

The Irish Language Officer has been responsible for implementing an Irish Language Development Plan with aims and objectives agreed between both council and Foras na Gaelige. The main themes addressed in the plan are as follows:

1. Promoting opportunities to learn.
2. Promoting the Irish Language in the Community.
3. Promoting Heritage and Cultural Tourism.
4. Promotion and use of Irish within and by Council.

Until April 2015, the officer provided a service to the legacy Limavady Borough Council area. Within the context of Causeway Coast & Glens, the officer has worked with a number of community groups, cultural groups, schools and youth groups across the Borough. Provision in 2016 has included the following:

- A Bursary Scheme for young people.
- Funding advice and developmental support for Irish Language groups including advice and guidance with funding applications.
- Support for Irish language courses, events and programmes.

Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy

In May 2016, Council adopted the new Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy 2016-21 and Action Plan 2016-19. Within the new strategy there is provision to continue the work which has been carried out.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a European Treaty adopted in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe to protect and promote regional and minority languages in Europe. Within the Charter there is a non-retrogression clause in the which in summary states that the new administrative boundaries should not become an obstacle in the promotion of the regional or minority language in question, namely Article 7 (1)b.

One of the four strategic themes of Council's Cultural Strategy specifically references regional minority languages as follows:

Theme 3 History, Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Promote a sense of pride, identity and deeper understanding of our area by bringing together the many stories, histories, identities and languages.

Operational Action

Support & develop the cultural diversity of the area, working in partnership with external agencies and community groups to enable access to regional minority languages.

Within the context of Leisure & Development, specifically Community & Culture's Cultural Services remit, Council will continue to provide support to enable communities to access regional minority languages through bursaries, grant programmes and the facilitation of arts and culture and heritage activities.

Community Development & Good Relations

A significant element of the current provision includes community development support to Irish Language groups. Within its new staffing structure, Council has and will continue to provide assistance to all community & voluntary groups, including groups promoting regional minority languages. Support from both the Community Development and Good Relations units includes development support, mentoring, capacity building, guidance in terms of governance and where relevant, access to Community Festival and Good Relations grant funding for project activity.

Policy & legislative compliance

In terms of service level strategy/policy, the Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy has been subject to a Section 75 screening report in August 2016 and subsequently screened out in terms of a full equality impact assessment.

At a corporate level, although Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council currently has no policy in terms of Regional Minority languages, it does have duties in terms of The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages relating to both translation and interpretation, as well as equality commitments and legislative responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998).

In terms of legislative compliance at a corporate level, provision will be available in terms of translation and interpretation as requested and in conjunction with and guidance from the Policy & Equality sections within Council. Any additional compliance requirements will be facilitated by relevant sections of Council.

Options

There are two options available to Council, including:

1. That Council enters into a new contract with Mid Ulster District Council and funds a proportion of an Irish Language Officer's salary. Should Council wish to proceed on existing terms, and in the absence of a current funding scheme from Foras, costs for personnel time would equate to approximately £18,000 per annum, rising from circa 25% to 50% of staff costs.
2. That Council makes provision to continue to provide services as outlined in the report above through existing Council provision. This includes using existing Community and Culture resources to enable communities to access regional minority languages, including

Irish Language, while accessing additional guidance and support from other relevant sections of Council in terms of legislative compliance and policy.

Recommendation

That Council considers and agrees one of the options put forward in relation to Irish Language provision.