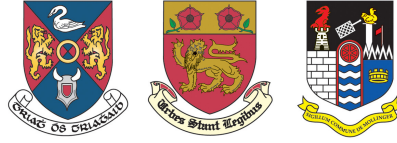


Westmeath Local Authorities



*Irish Language Scheme
2007 - 2010*

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Draft Irish language Scheme Westmeath Local Authorities

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

This Scheme was prepared under Section 11 of the Official Languages Act 2003 by Westmeath Local Authorities and with regard to Guidelines under Section 12 of the Official Languages Act 2003 issued by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Westmeath Local Authorities published a notice of Intention to prepare a draft scheme in accordance with Section 13(1)(a) of the Act, in both local and national newspapers, and on www.westmeathcoco.ie/. The primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 and this scheme is to ensure better availability and higher standard of public services through Irish.

1.1 Research Undertaken

In the preparation of this Scheme, Westmeath Local Authorities undertook consultation as follows

- (i) Submissions from the public on the preparation of a draft scheme
- (ii) A Customer Survey of our clients at the Customer Service counters and Public Libraries
- (iii) An internal survey of the staff of Westmeath Local Authorities on their proficiency in Irish and willingness to deal with clients through the medium of Irish. Results of which will be used as a benchmark for future evaluation of progress under this scheme.
- (iv) A staff seminar

Findings from Staff and Public Surveys

Staff Survey results	
No. of staff responded to staff survey	101
No. of public responded to public survey	27
Staff members with average level of spoken Irish	39%
Staff members with high level of Irish	4%
Staff interest in Irish classes	60%

Public Survey Results	
Public currently conducting business through Irish	7%
Public's interest in conducting business through Irish	44%

1.2 Content of the language Scheme

The scheme provides a brief overview of Westmeath Local Authorities, the services we provide and the level of services which will be available through Irish, English and bilingually. The scheme sets out the actions to be taken within an agreed timeframe.

1.3 Commencement Date of Scheme

The Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has approved the scheme & it is effective from 1st October 2007 and it 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.

1.4 Implementation of the Scheme

The scheme has the full approval of the Council and Management Team, who will be responsible for the overall implementation, monitoring and review of the scheme. Directors of Services will be responsible for implementing the scheme within their own directorates/sections and for reporting progress on implementation at least annually or every six months if necessary. Each Directorate/section will be required to prepare an Action plan to include details of the actions required to ensure implementation of the scheme, together with target dates to correspond with target dates set out in the scheme. A senior officer within each directorate/section may be nominated to take managerial responsibility for implementation within a directorate/section. SEO Corporate Affairs will coordinate the corporate implementation of the scheme for the organisation as a whole and evaluate the Westmeath Local Authorities performance in delivering the requirements of the scheme and report on these matters to the Council (through the annual report or a similar appropriate mechanism)

Chapter 2

Provision of General Services/Activities by Westmeath Local Authorities

2.1 Corporate Strategy

The Council's corporate strategy is set out in our Corporate Plan 2005-2009 - "Putting People First". Its principal elements are as follows:

Mission Statement

"To Lead the Economic, Social and Cultural Development of County Westmeath and to Deliver Quality Services"

Corporate Commitment:

- Strive to deliver Customer satisfaction
- Act with integrity
- Treat people with respect
- Respect the democratic mandate
- Take pride in our work
- Be open and responsive
- Be flexible and adaptable to change and constraints
- Work for the common good

Cross Cutting Principles:

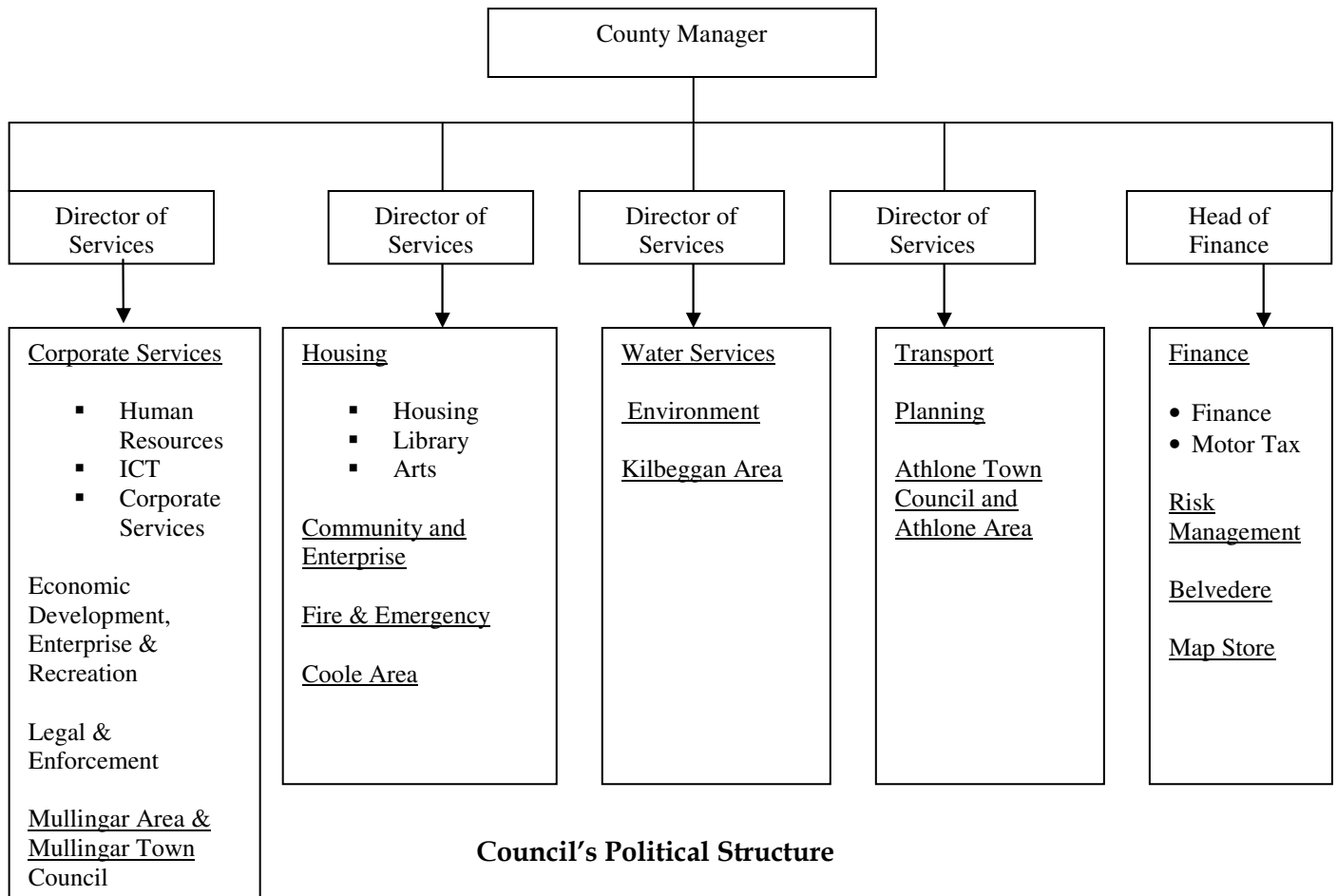
- Sustainable development
- Social Inclusion

Key Priority Themes

- Planning for and influencing the development of the County - "Planning for the economic, social and cultural development of the County"
- Building Communities - "Supporting, encouraging and facilitating an integrated, co-operative and targeted approach to community development"
- Service to our customers/citizens - "Providing quality services in a professional manner"
- Organisational capacity - "Being an effective and efficient organisation"

2.2 The Political and Senior Management Structure of Westmeath Local Authorities

Council's Senior Management Structure:



Cathairoleach

Cllr. M. Dollard

Leas Cathaoirleach

Cllr. M. Cooney

Athlone Electoral Area
Cllr. Frankie Keena
Cllr. Kieran Molloy
Cllr. Tom Allen
Cllr. Kevin "Boxer" Moran
Cllr. Joe Whelan
Cllr. Mark Cooney
Cllr. John Dolan

Mullingar East Electoral Area
Cllr. Jim Burke
Cllr. Michael Dollard
Cllr. Dan McCarthy
Cllr. Patrick McLoughlin

Oireachtas Members
Deputy Willie Penrose (T.D.)
Deputy Mary O'Rourke (T.D.)
Deputy Peter Kelly (T.D.)
Deputy James Bannon(T.D.)
Senator Camillius Glynn
Senator Donie Cassidy
Senator N. McFadden

Coole Electoral Area
Cllr. Paddy Hill
Cllr. Frank McDermott
Cllr. Eugene Dolan

Mullingar West Electoral Area
Cllr. Robert Troy
Cllr. Johnny Penrose
Cllr. Ken Glynn
Cllr. Detty Cornally
Cllr. Fintan Cooney

Kilbeggan Electoral Area
Cllr. Joseph Flanagan
Cllr. Mark Nugent
Cllr. Tom Cowley
Cllr. Michael Newman

Corporate Policy Group
(Cathairoleach, Co. Manager and 4 SPC's chairs)

Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's)

- Housing Social and Cultural SPC
- Environment SPC
- Economic Development & Planning

County Development Board
(4 SPC chairs, Manager etc)

2.3 List of Customers/Clients

- The Minister and Department of the Environment
- Other Government Departments and Ministerial Offices
- Westmeath Local Authorities Customers and the General Public
- Local Community Groups
- Other State Agencies
- Social Partners
- Other Local and Regional Authorities
- Organisations of the European Union
- Leader Groups
- Private sector service providers
- Local private businesses

2.4 Overview of Services provided by Westmeath Local Authorities

Westmeath Local Authorities is divided functionally into the following Departments.

- Community & Enterprise
- Corporate Services
- Economic Development & Planning
- Environmental Services
- Finance
- Housing & Social & Cultural
- Transport & Infrastructure
- Water Services

The primary service points for the Council are at the four Area Offices located in Mullingar, Castlepollard, Athlone and Kilbeggan. Each of the offices has a dedicated Customer Service counter. There is also a network of 7 Libraries throughout the county all of which have extensive customer contact. Council non-office based staff also have contact with our customers both in their homes and in the public realm.

2.5 Activities provided by Westmeath Local Authorities

Libraries

The County Library service has a network of 7 branch libraries throughout the County, providing a comprehensive community service, making available reading and reference material with audio-visual material for both adults and children.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Section is responsible for the administration of the democratic process of the Council. This Department provides a secretariat service and is involved in the preparation of Agenda, Minutes and supporting documentation for the Statutory Meetings, Annual Meetings and Special Meetings of the Council. Corporate Services are also responsible for the Register of Electors, Higher Education Grants Scheme and Public Relations etc.

Environmental Services

The Environment Services Department has responsibility for environmental protection throughout the county. This involves the enforcement of all current environmental legislation in the areas of Waste Management and Pollution Control. In addition, it has responsibility for the promotion of Environmental Awareness.

Housing Department

The Housing Department provides accommodation for people through the direct provision of housing for rent and also promotes home ownership through the various loan schemes offered. The Council's role as Housing Authority is to ensure that every household has a dwelling suitable to its needs at a price or rent that it can afford.

Roads & Transportation Department

Westmeath Local Authorities is responsible for the construction and maintenance of public roads in the county. This involves responsibility for planning, design and development of National Roads and Non-National roads. This includes safety considerations and ongoing maintenance in order to provide a safe and efficient network to serve the needs of the county for Industrial, Agricultural, Tourism and Community Development.

Motor Taxation Department

The Motor Taxation Department is responsible for the issue of Driver and Vehicle Licences and other related functions and services on behalf of Central Government. All monies are credited to the Local Government Fund.

Water Services Department

Water Services Department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of public water supply schemes, wastewater treatment facilities, public conveniences and burial grounds throughout the county, in accordance with current National and EU Legislation and Policy.

Planning Department

The vision of the Planning Department is to facilitate and promote the highest quality planning, efficient use of land, resources and infrastructures and promote sustainable development and safeguard the natural and built environment of this unique county, with maximum participation of the citizens in its physical, economic, social and cultural development.

Finance

Finance Section is tasked with accounting for all funds paid by, or to, the Council. The Council's revenue or day-to-day expenditure is funded from sources such as Commercial Rates, Commercial Water Charges, Government Grants and various other forms of income such as Development levies, housing rents, planning application fees etc., The amount of capital funds available is dependent on Government allocations in the areas of Housing, Roads, Environmental Services, etc. Property Management/ Asset Register are also functions of Finance Section..

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department has responsibility for recruitment and selection of new staff, training and development of staff, promoting family friendly policies, attendance management, employee relationships and Partnership in the workplace.

Fire Services Department

The Fire Services Department has responsibility for response to emergency situations by brigades, along with assessing buildings for fire safety and giving advice on fire safety. The Fire Services Department provides a 24-hour/365 day Fire Brigade Service for the county, which includes response to, fires, road traffic accidents and other emergencies.

Information Technology Department

The Council's Information Technology Department is responsible for maintaining the Council's computer systems, for overseeing the development of the Council's Information Technology strategies and to support other departments in service delivery.

Civil Defence

The role of the Civil Defence is to assist at search and rescue operations, accidents and major incident situations and to provide a resource of trained volunteers, equipment and logistical support to deal with a variety of community support and emergency situations.

Arts Culture and Heritage

The main area of work in this function includes promotion of, access to, participation in and awareness of the arts in Westmeath.

Community and Enterprise

The Community and Enterprise Department supports the County Development Board (CDB) and the development of policies and initiatives with a social inclusion and enterprise focus for Westmeath Local Authorities.

2.6 Assessment of Current Irish Services

No Department of Westmeath Local Authorities can currently deliver services comprehensively through the medium of Irish.

Chapter 3

Measures of the Scheme & Means of Communication with the Public/Information to the public

Many of Westmeath Local Authorities' methods of communication with the general public in terms of service provision are currently made available in English, with some in Irish. These methods of communication include:

- Brochures & Information Leaflets
- Application Forms
- Publications
- Press releases
- One to one communication at our Customer Service counters and Libraries
- Internet

Specific actions under this scheme are as follows:

Objective 3.1 Written Documentation/Communication/Application Forms

	Action	Target
3.1.1	All application forms published by the Council will be produced in both English and Irish and both versions will be given equal prominence. Application forms will be published within one cover except where this is not feasible due to the size, nature or layout of the document.	End 2007
3.1.2	Application forms used or provided by the Council, being issued by another body will be requested in both Irish only and bilingual.	End 2007
3.1.3	Existing brochures and information leaflets produced by the Council will become fully bilingual on renewal of stock.	End 2008
3.1.4	Brochures and information leaflets used or provided by the Council, being issued by another body will be requested in both Irish only and bilingual.	End 2008
3.1.5	Major Policy Documents will be published in both English and Irish (see Appendix 1). Documents will be published within one cover except where this is not feasible due to the size, nature or layout of the document.	End 2008
3.1.6	Press releases relating to matters of Irish Language interest will be produced bilingually and circulated simultaneously.	End 2007
3.1.7	The Council will welcome correspondence in either Irish or English.	Ongoing
3.1.8	Corresponding with the Council in Irish will not cause any undue delay. All correspondence will receive a reply within the target period set out in the Customer Action Plan.	End 2006

Objective 3.2 Oral Communication

	Action	Target
3.2.1	Customer Service/switchboard staff will be able to give the name of the Local Authority in Irish.	Commencement of Scheme
3.2.2	Customer Service/switchboard staff will at least be familiar with the basic greetings in Irish, and will be in a position to acknowledge a request for service in Irish and put customers in touch with the minimum possible delay, with the appropriate officer responsible for offering the service required through Irish, where such is available.	End 2008
3.2.3	The Council will within the scheme period, ensure that at least one member of the Customer Service staff and one person in the Library service will be in a position to offer a bilingual service.	End 2007
3.2.4	If the Irish speaker able to deal with the enquiry is not available the caller will be given the choice of being called back in Irish or continuing in English.	End 2007

Objective 3.3 Counter Services

	Action	Target
3.3.1	The Council welcomes callers to its offices in Irish or English .	End 2007
3.3.2	All callers to public counters will be greeted with a simple bilingual greeting	End 2007
3.3.3	All callers to counters will be treated on a basis of courtesy and equality and the principles of Quality Customer Services	End 2007
3.3.4	Westmeath Local Authorities will ensure, both through recruitment, upskilling or deployment, and in consultation with staff and their representative organisations, that a fully bilingual counter and telephone service will be available from the Mullingar and Athlone customer service units by the end of the current scheme.	End 2009

Objective 3.4 Information and Communications Technology

	Action	Target
3.4.1	Any standard disclaimer or message on email correspondence will be bilingual.	End 2007
3.4.2	The Council's website, including all new & existing interactive services will be bilingual and the website will be interchangeable between languages.	End 2008
3.4.3	All website content will be simultaneously published in Irish and English.	End 2008
3.4.4	New computer systems, supporting public services, shall be compatible with the use of the Irish language. Existing systems shall be similarly adapted during the next upgrade	End 2009

Objective 3.5 Corporate Images, Signage, General Measures

	Action	Target
3.5.4	Westmeath Local Authorities will, where requested, conduct their business with Gaelscoileanna & other Irish Language Organisations through the medium of Irish, in so far as possible .	End 2007

Westmeath Local Authorities acknowledge the importance of having a highly trained workforce to ensure efficient and effective delivery of service. If continued improvement is to be sustained, we must develop the knowledge, skills and competencies of all staff to full potential. This involves significant investment in training and development.

Objective 3.7 Training and Development

	Action	Target
3.6.1	Ensure that all staff and Members are given encouragement and opportunity to improve their Irish Language skills through training and development courses with a view to improving service provision through the Irish Language.	End 2007
3.6.2	Include language awareness as part of both Induction and Customer Service training.	End 2007
3.6.3	Implement an Irish language-training programme on a phased basis. Learners of Irish will be encouraged to attend appropriate classes.	End 2007

Chapter 4

Monitoring, Revision & Publicising of agreed Scheme

4.1 Monitoring & Revision

Westmeath Local Authorities through the senior management team will keep the effective operation of this scheme under review principally through the mechanisms as outlined in 1.4. Details of progress will also be published in Westmeath Local Authorities' Annual Report.

4.2 Publicising of Agreed Scheme

The contents of this scheme, will be publicised to the general public by means of:-

- ◆ Press Release
- ◆ Official Launch
- ◆ Publication on the Council's website and Intranet
- ◆ Circulation to appropriate agencies, public bodies and individuals who have expressed interest
- ◆ A copy of this scheme has also been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.

Appendix 1

Major Policy Documents to be published in Irish

Corporate Plan

Annual Report

Customer Service Action Plan

Arts Plan

Annual Financial Statement (when audit is complete by Local Government Auditor and AFS is signed by him/her)

County Development Board Report

Heritage Plan

Economic Social Cultural Strategy prepared by CDB

Regional Waste Management Plan

County Development Plan