

## **Linguistic Diversity Policy**

### **Language Profile of the Derry City & Strabane Council Area**

The Derry City and Strabane District Council area is home to a diverse range of communities and languages. Alongside English, Irish and Ulster-Scots, this Council area is also home to minority ethnic language communities and to deaf and hard-of-hearing people whose first language is British or Irish sign language. The language profile of any area is constantly changing as communities evolve and grow.

### **Demographics**

In the Derry City and Strabane District Council area 13.92% (19,704) of the population has knowledge of Irish and 5.13% (7,266) of the population has knowledge of Ulster-Scots.

Research carried out in 2018 into the most widely spoken minority ethnic languages in schools identified the following languages in the top 5: Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Romanian and Malayalam (one of 22 languages spoken in India).

Both British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) were embraced within the Good Friday Agreement and both were recognised as languages in their own right in 2004. BSL is used by 3,500 members of the deaf population of Northern Ireland while approximately 1,500 use ISL but there is a language specific to Northern Ireland known as Northern Ireland Sign Language (NISL) which combines ISL syntax (structure) with the BSL lexicon (vocabulary).

### **Linguistic Diversity Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to recognise the right of individuals to use their language of choice, and to allow Council to address any disparity of opportunity which may exist for those who speak languages other than English, or who belong to minority linguistic communities. The policy asks us to place equality of opportunity and cultural sensitivity at the heart of what we do and specifies the following commitments:

- To promote an appreciation of linguistic diversity in the Council area;
- To allow individuals to use their language of choice;
- To endeavour to achieve equality of opportunity for minority language communities;
- To give special consideration to facilitating communication with people with disabilities (i.e. users with sensory impairments or learning disabilities);

## Derry City and Strabane District Council

- To allow minority language communities to request information in their own language;
- To make information available in a range of alternative formats;
- To provide training to staff to enhance cultural and linguistic sensitivity;
- To promote good relations between different minority language groups;
- To support different language communities with grant aid opportunities;
- To consult with language communities to identify communication needs.

### What the policy means in practical terms?

- **We respect the right of members of the public and employees to speak their preferred language and we will make efforts to facilitate communication in that language;**
- **We respect the rights of the public and employees to use their names in their preferred language;**
- **We consult with organisations which represent different language communities when making decisions which may affect equality of opportunity;**
- **We train our staff to understand the needs and sensitivities of different language communities and make sure all service users feel respected and included;**
- **We accept correspondence in any language and endeavour to reply in the language of the original and in cases where we already know the language preference we will initiate correspondence in the preferred language;**
- **We adhere to a Code of Practice on Producing Information which seeks to ensure that all our information and publications are presented in an accessible format;**
- **We provide translations of any document or publication on request;**
- **We offer the Language Line telephone interpretation service;**
- **We provide ISL and BSL interpreters upon request;**
- **We encourage participation from members of different language communities at Council-run festivals and events;**
- **We ensure that funded events and cultural celebrations pay due regard to the need to promote good relations between different language communities;**
- **We provide street and road names in different languages where community consensus exists;**
- **We encourage language communities to avail of opportunities to apply for funding under our Grant Aid schemes to support the promotion and development of linguistic diversity in the Council area.**