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| <b>Title of Report: Overview of projects and initiatives to promote the languages of Irish and Ulster-Scots</b> | <b>Officer Presenting: Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer</b><br><b>Author: Policy Officer (Irish Language)</b> |
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## **1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of projects and initiatives which have been undertaken to promote the languages of Irish and Ulster-Scots in the 2019/20 period.
- 1.2 To demonstrate how these projects and initiatives enable Council to fulfil its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) which was ratified by the UK government and entered into force in 2001.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Derry City and Strabane District Council is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (hereafter referred to as the 'ECRML' or the 'Charter'). The ECRML is designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages and to encourage their use in public and private life.
- 2.2 The Charter applies to the following languages in the UK: Welsh, Cornish, Manx, Scottish Gaelic, Irish and Ulster-Scots. In our regional context, the Charter applies to Irish and Ulster-Scots but does not apply to sign languages or ethnic minority languages.
- 2.3 The Charter is an international convention which is binding on each of the ratifying States and which has implications for a range of bodies, including Local Government. The Council of Europe's Committee of Experts (COMEX) monitors implementation of the Charter and issues periodic reports, the most recent of which was issued in July 2020.
- 2.4 The Charter sets out eight main principles upon which signatories must base their policies and legislation. These include,
  - Recognition of regional and minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth
  - Respect for the geographical area of each regional or minority language

- The need for resolute action to promote such languages
  - The facilitation and encouragement of the use of such languages in speech and writing, in public and private life
  - The provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of such languages at all appropriate stages
  - The promotion of relevant transnational exchanges
  - The prohibition of all unjustified forms of distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger its maintenance or development
  - The promotion by States of mutual understanding between all the country's linguistic groups
- 2.5 Different languages require different levels of intervention under the terms of the Charter. Cornish, Manx, Scots and Ulster-Scots require the interventions detailed under Part II of the Charter (Article 7) only, whereas Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh require additional interventions under both Part II and Part III (Articles 8-14).
- 2.6 As the ECRML has been developed in co-operation with the Council of Europe rather than with the European Union, the treaty is applicable in UK law, and the core legislation and protections are expected to continue to apply after Brexit.

### **3 Key Issues**

- 3.1 The Charter lists a number of potential measures which the State can take to protect and promote the languages of Irish and Ulster-Scots. Ulster-Scots receives protections under Part II of the Charter, and Irish receives protections under both Part II and Part III.
- 3.2 Council has developed its policies in respect of Irish and Ulster-Scots using the framework proposed within the Charter.

- 3.3 Part II of the Charter (Article 7) applies to Irish and Ulster-Scots and requires signatories to (a) recognise Irish and Ulster-Scots as an expression of cultural wealth; (b) ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the promotion of Irish and Ulster-Scots; (c) take resolute action to promote Irish and Ulster-Scots; (d) facilitate and encourage the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots in speech and writing in public life; (e) encourage users of Irish and Ulster-Scots to develop relationships with each other and with other linguistic groups; (f) make provision for the learning and teaching of Irish and Ulster-Scots; (g) promote research by third-level organisations into Irish and Ulster-Scots; (h) promote transnational exchanges which may be of benefit to Irish and Ulster-Scots; (i) eliminate any unjustified exclusion, restriction or discrimination against users of Irish and Ulster-Scots; (j) promote awareness of and respect for Irish and Ulster-Scots in the fields of civic life, education and training, and in the media; (k) take into consideration the needs and wishes of users of Irish and Ulster-Scots; and (l) establish relevant bodies to advise authorities on all matters pertaining to Irish and Ulster-Scots.
- 3.4 Part III of the Charter (Articles 8-14) applies to Irish only. This section of the Charter requires signatories to (a) make available pre-school, primary, secondary and third level education in Irish along with relevant teacher training; (b) make available important national statutory texts in Irish; (c) ensure that users of Irish can submit oral and written application to authorities including local Councils; (d) ensure that Irish can be used in debates in assemblies at local and regional government level; (e) use and or adopt place names in Irish; (f) provide translation and interpretation services; (g) allow the use or adoption of family names in Irish (h) make provision for the Irish language in the broadcast and print media and ensure freedom of expression and free circulation of information in Irish in the written press; (i) ensure that the Irish language is promoted at cultural events and festivals; (j) facilitate the use of Irish in economic and social life; (k) promote cross-border and transnational exchanges which may benefit the Irish language.
- 3.5 The Council of Europe undertakes periodic monitoring to ensure that signatories are fulfilling their obligations under the treaty. The body tasked with this role – COMEX - is a committee of independent experts which examines the situation facing each language receiving protections under the Charter, and makes recommendations for actions to promote and protect the languages. An executive summary from the most recent COMEX report is available at Appendix 4 and the full text of the report can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/europeancharter>.

- 3.6 It is noted, that in an independent report titled 'Local Councils, Obligations and the Irish Language: A Framework for Compliance' (2019) commissioned by - Ulster University, the Committee for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) and Conradh na Gaeilge - Derry City and Strabane District Council was one of only three Councils which were deemed to be meeting their obligations under the Charter. This report, which gives an assessment of each local Council's performance in respect of their duties under the ECRML ranked this Council within the top three highest-performing Councils who were deemed by the research team to be showing a commitment to progressively realising their obligations under the framework.
- 3.7 It is further noted that the Council continues to work collaboratively with partners in the Ulster-Scots Agency, the Ulster-Scots Community Network and with community partners to identify new approaches to promote awareness of Ulster-Scots. We were the first legacy Council to adopt a policy for Ulster-Scots and we were also the first Council to have an initiative jointly endorsed by the Ulster-Scots Agency and the Irish Language Agency (Book of Days Plantation Drama Project). Most recently, the Ulster-Scots Agency has put on record its endorsement for our proactive approach in marking events such as Ulster-Scots Language Week. On 14 October 2019 an early day motion was tabled at the House of Commons supporting the lead our Council had taken to mark Ulster-Scots Language Week, welcoming our contribution to promoting awareness of Ulster-Scots and drawing support for the motion from parties across the UK regions. More recently, Council has launched a social media presence on Twitter to promote our Ulster-Scots work and to enhance public awareness of Ulster-Scots within the city and district; this complements an already diverse programme of events and activities, a summary of which is provided at Appendix 2.
- 3.8 In order to demonstrate 'resolute action' as required by the Charter, the Council has taken a creative approach to identify opportunities to promote the languages in public life, and where possible, to jointly promote the languages. An overview of some highlight projects is provided at Appendix 1. Appendix 2 of the report provides a brief visual summary of projects and initiatives and areas where synergy between the language has been achieved. Appendix 3 showcases examples of how Council is using a variety of communication channels to engage with the Irish language and Ulster-Scots communities.

## **4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications**

4.1 The actions outlined in this report demonstrate a commitment to the following: (a) meeting relevant legal obligations in respect of language and diversity; (b) a dedication to continuous improvement; and (c) a desire to ensure meaningful participation for rural communities in projects and initiatives which promote Irish and Ulster-Scots as evidenced by targeted initiatives to encourage participation from rural communities e.g. Language Links – an Irish and Ulster-Scots language awareness programme delivered to rural communities in Eglinton and Castlederg as part of our Island Voices programme, further details of which are provided in Appendix 1.

## **5 Recommendations**

5.1 That Members note the positive progress made to date in fulfilling our obligations under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages as illustrated by the breadth and diversity of projects and initiatives being undertaken to promote Irish and Ulster-Scots.

5.2 That Members endorse the approach undertaken to date.

### **Background Papers**

**Appendix 1: Initiatives to promote Irish and Ulster-Scots 2019/20**

**Appendix 2: Overview of Irish and Ulster-Scots initiatives 2019/20**

**Appendix 3: Communication Channels: MailChimp (Irish) and Twitter (Ulster-Scots)**

**Appendix 4: Executive Summary from the COMEX report into the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the UK**