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Sent: 13 April 2026 17:26
To: Aidan McPeake <Aidan.McPeake@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk>; David Jackson <David.Jackson@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk>; committee meetings <committee.meetings@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk>
Cc: Deeds, Pól <[REDACTED]>; McDaid, Amber <[REDACTED]>; Donnelly, Jolene <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Best Practice Guidance Note

A chairde,

An imminent policy decision by your Council relating to dual language street signage has been brought to the attention of An Coimisinéir Gaeilge.

As you may be aware, Dr. Pól Deeds was recently appointed as the first Irish Language Commissioner for Northern Ireland. This appointment was made following the enactment of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act, and forms part of a range of measures that give official recognition to the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

Section 78L of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022, allows for An Coimisinéir Gaeilge to provide advice, support and guidance to public authorities in relation to the use of the Irish language. The purpose of the attached Best Practice Guidance Note is to provide Causeway Coast and Glens Council with advice in relation to their Review of Street Naming and Property Numbering Policy including Dual Language Street Signage.

An Coimisinéir Gaeilge will in due course publish Standards of Best Practice under the Act. This Best Practice Guidance Note does not replace the Council's obligation to have due regard to any future standards issued by An Coimisinéir Gaeilge, which have been approved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Dr Deeds may at some future date issue further guidance to the Council in relation to its dual language policy and any other policies relating to the Irish language, and he looks forward to discussing with senior management in the council other ways in which this office can support you in enhancing and protecting the use of the Irish language within your Council area.

Le meas,

Terry Curran

An Coimisinéir Gaeilge
Oifig an Choimisinéara Gaeilge
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7-9 Cearnóg Shaftesbury
Béal Feirste
BT2 7DP

13 April 2026

A chara,

RE: Policy Decision Relating To Dual Language Street Signage

I hope that this letter finds you well.

An imminent policy decision by your Council relating to dual language street signage has been brought to my attention.

As you may be aware, I have recently been appointed as the first Irish Language Commissioner (An Coimisinéir Gaeilge) for Northern Ireland. This appointment was made following the enactment of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act, and forms part of a range of measures that give official recognition to the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

Under section 78L of the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022, I, as An Coimisinéir Gaeilge, may provide advice, support and guidance to public authorities in relation to the use of the Irish language. In exercising these functions my principal aim is to enhance and protect the use of the Irish language by public authorities in the delivery of services to the public, or to any section of the public, in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of this Best Practice Guidance Note is to provide Causeway Coast and Glens Council with advice in relation to their Review of Street Naming and Property Numbering Policy including Dual Language Street Signage. This advice relates specifically to the use of the Irish language by Causeway Coast and Glens Council, as a public authority, in their provision of services to the public or a section of the public in Northern Ireland.

As An Coimisinéir Gaeilge I will in due course publish Standards of Best Practice under the Act. This Best Practice Guidance Note does not replace the Council's obligation to have due regard to any future standards issued by me, as An Coimisinéir Gaeilge, which have been approved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Background

Bilingual street signs are widely recognised as an important measure for the protection and enhancement of minority languages. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to which the UK is a signatory, places a clear obligation on the UK to facilitate the visibility of minority languages in public life, including using the “traditional and correct forms of place-names” on public signage.

International best practice, reinforced by guidance from the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, emphasises that unnecessary barriers such as excessively high voting thresholds that prevent minority communities from enjoying recognition of their linguistic identity should be removed. In many jurisdictions, thresholds of around 10–20% local support are considered reasonable, proportionate, and aligned with the principle that minority rights cannot depend on majority approval. These lower thresholds help ensure that linguistic provision remains accessible and is not rendered ineffective by procedural hurdles. The Department for Communities’ Guidance on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages provides further information on thresholds.

UN human rights bodies have consistently underlined that measures protecting minority languages should be facilitative rather than restrictive. The UN’s Guidance Note on Effective Participation of Minorities stresses that procedural requirements must not be so demanding that they undermine the ability of minority groups to exercise cultural and linguistic rights.

Thresholds of around 10% to 20% recognise that visibility of a minority language such as Irish is not only symbolic; it strengthens linguistic confidence, supports daily use, and contributes to equality of esteem. Approaches based on achievable thresholds are therefore viewed internationally as best practice for ensuring that minority languages are protected, promoted, and treated with respect within shared public spaces.

Considerations of Options

Your report for Committee lays out several options on two decisions – on the policy’s criteria and on whether or not it should be stand-alone – which I address below.

Option 1:

This option is fundamentally out of line with international best practice because it creates multiple, overlapping barriers that make it disproportionately difficult for Irish speakers to access bilingual signage. Requiring one-third of occupiers to initiate a request is excessively high and setting a two-thirds approval threshold places the outcome effectively in the hands of a super-majority, contradicting UK commitments

under the European Charter in addition to European and UN guidance that minority language protections should not depend on majority consent.

Treating non-responses as opposition further distorts the process by effectively manufacturing “no” votes, undermining the principle that decisions should reflect actual, expressed views rather than silence.

Finally, imposing a five-year ban on reapplication freezes progress and prevents communities from revisiting decisions as demographics or attitudes evolve. Taken together, these measures create a system that is procedurally restrictive, structurally biased, and inconsistent with international norms and UK commitments that favour low, proportionate thresholds and facilitative access to minority-language protections.

Option 2:

This option represents a meaningful improvement on the current position, as it lowers procedural barriers and adopts a more democratic, participation-based approach by allowing any resident or an elected member acting on their behalf to initiate the process, and by counting only the views of those who respond to the survey.

However, while more accessible, the requirement for support from more than 50% of responding occupiers still falls short of international best practice for minority language protection. As a result, although this model removes some of the structural barriers present in the first option, it still does not safeguard Irish speaking communities whose language service provision should not depend on securing majority endorsement.

Option 3:

Option 3 is most consistent with international best practice as it strikes a reasonable balance between accessibility, proportionality, and genuine protection of minority language use. By allowing a sole resident, elected representative, or developer to initiate the process, it removes unnecessary gatekeeping and ensures that legitimate linguistic or community needs can be raised without large scale mobilisation. The proposed support threshold is aligned with recognised European practices and UK commitments and low enough to prevent majority vetoes over minority language communities.

Crucially, non-responses are not treated as opposition, avoiding structural bias and ensuring that only actual, expressed views determine the outcome.

Finally, allowing members to determine a reasonable reapplication period ensures flexibility rather than imposing a rigid, multi-year freeze that could block progress. Taken together, these features create a fair and proportionate model that supports minority-language visibility while remaining practical and democratic.

Option 4 and Option 5, decision re stand alone policy:

I would recommend adopting Option 5. Introducing a standalone policy would provide a cleaner and more coherent approach overall, making the policy easier to understand, manage, and communicate. It would also create better opportunities to apply future improvements in line with best practice and any emerging changes, ensuring the policy remains robust and up to date.

My Office has prepared this guidance note to assist you with your decision-making, having only been made aware today by a third party of the Council's imminent decision. Any future policy decisions taken in relation to the Council's use of the Irish language should be discussed with my Office.

I may at some future date issue further guidance to the Council in relation to its dual language policy and any other policies relating to the Irish language, and I look forward to discussing with your senior management other ways that we can support you in enhancing and protecting the use of the Irish language within your Council area.

Le dea-mhéin,

Pól Deeds
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