

FOI Request DFC/2026 – 0038 – Ministerial Meetings

I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information from the Department for Communities. Please may you provide me with:

- minutes of any meetings between the Minister and the Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition since 1 January 2026.

- minutes of any meetings between the Minister and the Irish Language Commissioner since 1 January 2026.

- minutes of any meetings between the Minister and the Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression since 1 January 2026.

Information Disclosed

Response to FOI Request DFC/2026-0038

The information requested is enclosed in Annex A.

Some of the information you have requested is being withheld subject to the exemption in Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act. The information comprises personal data about an individual or a number of individuals named. Section 40(2) provides that information is exempt from disclosure if it is the personal data of, or could lead to the identification of, an individual and where one of the conditions listed in section 40(3A), 40(3B) or 40(4A) is satisfied. In applying this exemption, we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information.

In the Department's opinion, release of this information would breach the first principle of Data Protection legislation which requires personal data to be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently. In particular, it is not satisfied that it can rely on any of the Article 6 lawful bases contained within the UK General Data Protection Regulation, nor can it meet the fairness requirement contained within the principle to permit disclosure of this information to the world at large which is the consequence of any disclosure made under the Freedom of Information Act.

Annex A

MINISTERIAL MEETING NOTE

Meeting Date and time:		29 January 2026 at 2.45pm	
Meeting Title:		Meeting with Lee Reynolds Commissioner for the Ulster-Scots and the Ulster-British Tradition	
VENUE:	<input type="checkbox"/> Parliament Buildings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Causeway Exchange	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minister Gordon Lyons MLA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SpAd Peter Johnston	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APS Christina Parks	
OFFICIALS:	Iain Greenway, xxx (notetaker)		
OTHERS:	Lee Reynolds, Alan Cree		
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:			
<p>The Minister welcomed Mr Reynolds to his new role and received an overview of his three initial priorities for both Ulster-Scots and Ulster-British matters:</p> <p>(1) Clarifying and protecting the definition of Ulster-British within existing legislation.</p> <p>(2) Strengthening the promotion of Ulster-Scots and Ulster-British, including exploring a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ulster-Scots Agency and creating clearer space for Ulster-British identity.</p> <p>(3) Supporting USA/NI 250, ensuring legacy outcomes and developing relationships with relevant organisations.</p> <p>The Minister encouraged Mr Reynolds to consider the March events, and highlighted contacts and opportunities available through the Northern Ireland Bureau. Mr Reynolds confirmed plans to travel to the US in June.</p> <p>Both discussed the important longer-term potential for ongoing cultural links with the USA beyond USA 250.</p>			

Mr Reynolds updated the Minister on early organisational issues, including staffing and budget development, and confirmed his office is operating from Equality House.

He raised concerns about the Ulster-Scots Language & Heritage Strategy, particularly around the pace of delivery and some department's timelines. Mr Reynolds plans to meet the Minister for Education and is exploring hosting a conference on educational duty,

Mr Reynolds advised he is looking into recognition of Ulster-Scots as a national minority language under existing equality frameworks.

ACTIONS:

Minister Lyons

1. Share information on St Patrick's Week events / US engagement (**Private Office**)

Mr Reynolds

1. Keep Minister updated on plans to visit US in June.
2. Develop guidance on Ulster-British definition and protection.
3. Explore development of an MoU with the Ulster-Scots Agency.
4. Build organisational relationships relating to USA 250.
5. Engage with DE on educational duty commitments.
6. Look at recognition of U-S as a national minority.

Iain Greenway

1. Keep Mr Reynolds updated on USA 250 Working Group progress.

NOTE WRITTEN BY:

xxx

DATE:

5 February 2026

MINISTERIAL MEETING NOTE

Meeting Date and time:	29 January 2026 at 11.00am		
Meeting Title:	Meeting with Pól Deeds Irish language Commissioner for Northern Ireland		
VENUE:	<input type="checkbox"/> Parliament Buildings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Causeway Exchange	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minister Gordon Lyons MLA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SpAd Peter Johnston	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APS Christina Parks	
OFFICIALS:	Iain Greenway, xxx		
OTHERS:	Pól Deeds, Jolene Donnelly		

KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:

The Minister welcomed Mr Deeds to his new role. Mr Deeds provided an overview of his positive early engagement across communities and organisations, noting the success of the recent Unfinished Broadside performance and wider significance for cultural openness.

Discussion covered the role of the Irish Language Commissioner, the importance of tone, and the need to reduce cultural division while promoting respect for both Irish language and Ulster-Scots/Ulster-British traditions. Ulster-Scots language development, including the absence of an agreed standard or dictionary, and the distinct but complementary roles of the two language Commissioners were noted.

Minister highlighted opportunities for constructive engagement through North/South structures, notwithstanding current limitations in format. Both agreed that wider work delivered by Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency was often overshadowed by negative media narratives.

Mr Deeds acknowledged the Minister's work supporting funding pressures at Foras na Gaeilge. Minister noted wider Executive budget constraints.

Mr Deeds offered support to the ongoing development of the Irish Language Strategy, emphasising its importance for delivering legislative commitments and ECRML obligations. Minister Lyons noted the Strategy must balance ambition with feasibility and affordability. The renewed momentum in the cross-departmental work, ongoing engagement with the Commissioner, challenges around timelines, departmental input and alignment with ongoing work were noted. An update on the Inter-Departmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG) was provided. Mr Deeds noted that he is seeking clarification on his role.

There was discussion on the need for clear roles between the Commissioner, Foras na Gaeilge, and the North South Language Body to avoid duplication and ensure responsibilities are properly understood.

Mr Deeds will provide further detail on a proposal for a Translation Forum involving Foras, the DfC Translation Hub, and universities.

ACTIONS:

Minister

1. Consider proposal on *Translation Forum* when received.
2. Continue engagement with the Commissioner as the Irish Language Strategy progresses.

Mr Deeds

3. Seek clarification of his role in the Strategy/Charter process and revert to CDWG.
4. Support the Strategy team during development of the Irish Language Strategy.
5. Provide advice on how the North-South Language Body (NSLB) could operate more effectively.
6. Continue engagement with stakeholders in relation to translation standards and the proposed Translation Forum.

Iain Greenway

7. Progress the Strategy work within the CDWG, addressing practical issues required before Executive consideration.

8. Support continued alignment between the Irish Language Strategy and the Department for Education's parallel strategy work.
9. Oversee and prepare for the external quality assurance assessment of the DfC Translation Hub later in the year.

Language Strategy Team

10. Continue developing the Irish Language Strategy, incorporating Mr Deed's feedback where appropriate.
11. Coordinate with Mr Deeds on any clarification sought regarding his statutory role and Charter responsibilities.
12. Engage with DE to ensure timelines and content remain aligned across both strategies.

NOTE WRITTEN BY:

xxx

DATE:

10 February 2026

MINISTERIAL MEETING NOTE

Meeting Date and time:	29 January 2026 at 3.30pm		
Meeting Title:	Meeting with the Director of the Office of Identity and Cultural Expression		
VENUE:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:
	Parliament Buildings	Causeway Exchange	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Minister Gordon Lyons MLA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SpAd Peter Johnston	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APS Christina Parks	
OFFICIALS:	Iain Greenway, Director of Culture Division and, xxx, Language Operations (notetaker)		
OTHERS:	Dr Katy Radford, Director Office of Identity and Cultural Expression and Roisin Lavery, Office of Identity and Cultural Expression		
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:			
<p>Minister Lyons welcomed Dr Katy Radford to her new role and received an overview of her early priorities. Dr Radford invited the Minister to the upcoming Belfast Exposed exhibition and outlined wider projects the Office is progressing in partnership with cultural and civic organisations.</p> <p>USA 250 formed a significant part of the discussion. Dr Radford expressed interest in contributing to the programme, and the Minister highlighted the strategic opportunities it presents, including Northern Ireland's special status within the commemorations. He encouraged her to consider attending the March events and offered to share details of funded projects and facilitate connections with relevant organisations.</p> <p>Both noted the broader potential for cultural, economic and cohesion-focused work, with agreement that USA 250 could act as an important platform for this.</p> <p>Office accommodation was discussed, with Dr Radford exploring alternative locations more suitable for exhibition work. DfC will consider options on receipt of her requirements.</p>			

An update was provided on ongoing DfC work to establish a National Deposition Library. Dr Radford also set out early thinking on developing an oral archive in collaboration with partner institutions and sought the Minister's support.

Dr Radford outlined her intention to develop cultural principles for public bodies, including the possibility of using a pledge-based model.

Faith-based identity was raised as an important dimension, and Dr Radford confirmed that this will be incorporated into her work and in consideration of Board representation.

The meeting concluded with Dr Radford confirming she will further consider the invitation to attend USA 250 events in March.

ACTIONS:

Minister Lyons

1. Consider Belfast Exposed exhibition invitation (**Private Office**).
2. Share information on USA 250 developments and engagements, and relevant organisations Dr Radford may wish to engage with (**David Huddleston**).
3. Share list of successful applicants to the USA 250 fund (**xxx**).

Katy Radford

1. Consider attendance at USA 250 events in March.
2. Explore opportunities to incorporate USA 250 links into potential June visit to the United States.
3. Engage with organisations connected to USA 250 on receipt of the list.
4. Set out accommodation requirements for DfC to consider alternative office locations.
5. Progress discussions on a National Deposition Library, including considerations around PRONI overlap.
6. Advance proposals for an oral archive, following initial discussions with the Linen Hall Library and PRONI.
7. Develop proposals for cultural principles, including exploring the option of a pledge.
8. Consider how to include a faith-based perspective in the Office's work and in Board representation.

Iain Greenway

9. Consider potential office relocation for the OICE, when proposal is received.
10. Provide updates on DfC work in relation to a National Deposition Library.

NOTE WRITTEN BY:

xxx

DATE:

5 February 2026