

Public views sought on how to save the Gaeltacht areas

BY LOUISE DOYLE

PUBLIC views on the importance and future of Irish language are to be sought in the coming weeks in a bid to form a major plan.

Meitheal Pleanála an Iarthuaiscirt are currently undertaking language planning work in the Language Planning Area of Gaoth Dobhair, Anagaire, Rann na Feirste and Loch an Iuir.

Under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, every Gaeltacht area has to prepare a language plan, the aim of which will be to preserve and strengthen Irish.

In September 2014, Comharchumann Forbartha Ghaoth Dobhair was appointed the Ceanneagraíocht, or 'Lead Organisation', with the responsibility for directing the language planning process in this area. Meitheal Pleanála Teanga an Iarthuaiscirt (MPTIT), a voluntary committee with representatives from the various areas and communities within this area, was then founded to get to work on the language plan.

The plan will be ready by the end of this year, with the action points identified to be effected within seven years.

Speaking to the Donegal News, Language Planning Consultant, Hannah Ní Dhoimhin, said implementing the plan from the responses garnered was crucial in order to keep the Gaeltacht status from jeopardy.

"The whole project is deriving from an Act introduced in 2012 on how the Gaeltacht is going to be defined on a linguistic level and so because of that the project has been broken down to language planning areas.

"The Government has a new strategy for the Gaeltacht and the Irish language. Under the new strategy,



Errigal mountain in the heart of the Donegal gaeltacht.

every Gaeltacht has to write a plan to support the use of Irish in the area. If we don't we will lose our status as a Gaeltacht.

"There are eight language planning areas in Donegal and 26 in Ireland.

"In the coming weeks, we will be contacting the various organisations and businesses in our LPT to get their opinion on language issues in our area. As well as that, a short, general questionnaire will be going out in the next fortnight to 500 individuals in the LPT (language planning area)."

Commenting on what participants can be expected to be asked, Ms Ní Dhoimhin added: "This is a random sample; a computer programme was used to pick out 500 names, completely randomly. Therefore, there's a good chance that someone will come to you with a questionnaire and if they do, we would be very grateful if you could take the time to fill it out. It won't take you more than five to 10 minutes, and all of the information gathered will be kept completely anonymous. The questionnaire will be a matter of ticking boxes. It will ask participants of their background, what language they were raised with and their ability in Irish as well as their opinion of the Irish language.

"The information collated from the

questionnaire will form a plan which will be implemented over the next seven years. If we don't produce the plan, we could be in danger of losing our Gaeltacht status."

She hopes once the questionnaires go out in two weeks' time that they will be returned in a further fortnight. She called on people to exercise honesty in their responses.

"I'm hoping for honest feedback. This will be a practical plan, informed by the people, so we need to have honesty. We are under time pressure. The plan will indicate research results and from those we will have to come up with specific actions to strengthen Irish language. Those actions will not just be community based, but will be far-reaching. We hope the plan will be an inclusive one.

"We will then collate the findings and draw up a plan for October."

Ms Ní Dhoimhin stressed that if an assistant does not call to your home but you wish to have your views heard, then you are encouraged to get in touch by telephoning 074 95 60620, e mail mpt.iarthuaiscirt@gmail.com.

Alternatively, you can visit or write to MPT an Iarthuaiscirt, An Chranóg, Doirí Beaga, Leitir Ceanainn.