

Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

26th January, 2021

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 5.15 pm on Tuesday, 26th January, 2021.

Yours faithfully,

SUZANNE WYLIE

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

- (b) 'Any Use' Relationship & Sexuality Education (RSE) campaign (Pages 1 - 4)
(Correspondence received from Department of Health)

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Subject:	Response from Department of Health - Permanent Secretary re: Request to attend Committee
Date:	26th January, 2021
Reporting Officer:	Sara Steele, Democratic Services Officer
Contact Officer:	Sara Steele, Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To note the response from the DoH Permanent Secretary in response to an invitation to attend a meeting of the People and Communities Committee.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the response.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	The Committee will recall that at its meeting on 20th October it was agreed that letters be forwarded to the Permanent Secretaries of both the Department of Health and Department of Education seeking a joint meeting to discuss its “Any Use?” Relationship and Sexual Education Campaign report and its “Elephant in the Room” Mental Health Campaign.

3.2	It was agreed also that representatives of the Public Health Agency would be invited to the meeting.
3.3	A response has now been received from the Permanent Secretary, Richard Pengelly, a copy of which is attached.
3.4	Mr. Pengelly referred to the current pressures on the Health Service as a result of the ongoing pandemic and detailed that as a result the Department was currently focusing on a number of other urgent health issues and respectively declined the invitation to attend.
3.5	<p>He also noted that the Department of Health had already extensively engaged with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum on these matters and suggested that, as the Department did not directly commission Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE), it might be more appropriate for the report to be further discussed with the Public Health Agency, who currently commission RSE in two ways: training of teachers to deliver RSE; and funding of voluntary sector providers to deliver RSE in community settings.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.6	<p>None associated with this report.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p>
3.7	None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Copy of response from the Permanent Secretary.

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Our ref: RP5661
SINV-0071-2020

Date: 25 January 2021

Dear Sara

Thank you for your letter dated 13 November 2020, inviting me to attend a joint meeting with the Council's People and Communities Committee and the Belfast Youth Forum, the Permanent Secretary of Department of Education, and representatives from the Public Health Agency, to discuss the 'Any Use?' Relationship and Sexual Education Campaign report and 'Elephant in the Room' mental health campaign.

As you may already be aware, I hosted a joint meeting with the Permanent Secretary of Department of Education, officials from the Public Health Agency (PHA) and members of Belfast Youth Forum on 1 August 2019 to discuss proposals stemming from the Elephant in the Room Report on young people's mental health. This was a very useful meeting to understand the issues being raised.

Following on from this meeting, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum gave a presentation on the Elephant in the Room campaign at the Executive Group on Mental Well-being, Emotional Resilience and Suicide Prevention meeting held on 29 July 2020 and that Ministers discussed the report and the recommendations contained within it. I understand that Ministers were very impressed with the work of all of the young people involved and also that they agreed, where possible, to support implementation of the recommendations made in the report.

There is much work being done within both Health and Education independently and collaboratively to challenge the culture of silence and negative stigma around mental health, developing new and positive language for mental health, and creating digital solutions to receive mental health information and support. Also, creating a curriculum programme for schools and colleges on mental health and wellbeing which, whilst led by Education, we in Health are keen to assist.

The PHA have been engaged with young people through the Facilitating Life and Resilience Education (FLARE) project. The young people involved identified similar issues to those raised in the *Elephant in the Room* Report including having a safe place to talk,

raising awareness of support services in other areas and increasing knowledge of mental illness and health issues and self-care.

FLARE's main aim is to support young people who are struggling with mental ill health, suicide ideation or previous suicide attempts. Young people are referred from various sources including social services, youth service, self-referral, schools, parents, guardians, CAMHS, PSNI, community groups.

Programme outcomes for young people include increased self-awareness and ability to manage emotions; increased understanding of the reason behind negative and suicidal thoughts; increased resilience and positive sense of wellbeing; improved interpersonal skills and sense of purpose.

I also note that at the Executive Group meeting on 29 July, the Minister for Communities asked for a meeting to be arranged with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and that it was suggested that the FLARE project should also be invited to participate given their similar interests.

I am also aware that the Youth Forum is involved in the PHA work on Young People's Covid messaging and I have been advised that PHA are open to further engagement with the forum around mental health. I understand that Olive Macleod, Interim Chief Executive and David Tumilty, BCC Lead from PHA have agreed to participate in the proposed meeting.

My Department does not directly commission Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE). It may be more appropriate for you to discuss this with the Public Health Agency, who currently commission RSE in two ways: training of teachers to deliver RSE; and funding of voluntary sector providers to deliver RSE in community settings.

Given that my Department has already extensively engaged with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum on these matters and also the priority being given by the Department to a number of urgent health issues, including the Coronavirus response we are not in a position to accept your kind invitation at this time. Thank you again for your interest in this area and I trust this provides a further update on the issues raised.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD PENGELLY
ACCOUNTING OFFICER