

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 9th February, 2021

MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Baker (In the Chair);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, Michael Collins, Corr,
de Faoite, Flynn, Garrett, M. Kelly, Magee, McAteer,
McCusker, McReynolds, Newton,
Pankhurst, Smyth and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Ms. J. Wilson, Business Manager;
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Also In attendance: Councillors Heading and O'Hara.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Cobain and Mulholland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th and special meeting of 26th January were taken as read and signed as correct.

It was reported that the minutes of 12th January had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st February with the following addition - "At the request of Councillor Brooks, the Council agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to highlight the necessity to improve the facilities and access to the Cregagh Glen, Castlereagh Hills, and suggest that it worked with its key stakeholders towards this objective."

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were recorded.

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 5 items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the Members of the Press and public from the Committee meeting during discussion on the following 5 items as, due to their nature, there would be a disclosure

of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Revenue Estimates and District Rate 2021/22

(Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee considered a report, which had been prepared by the Director of Finance and Resources, in relation to the establishment of the District Rate and the compilation of the Estimates of Revenue Expenditure for the year 2021/2022.

The Director outlined that the paper would not be subject to call-in as it would cause an unreasonable delay which would be prejudicial to the Council and the public's interest in striking the district rate by the legislative deadline of 1st March, 2021.

He referred to the cash limit for the People and Communities Committee for 2021/2022, as recommended by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd January, and outlined the next steps in the rate setting process leading to the setting of the district rate by Council at its meeting in March 2021.

Following consideration, the Committee noted the next steps in the rate setting process and:

- agreed that the report would not be subject to call-in, given that it would cause an unreasonable delay and would be prejudicial to both the Council and the public's interests in striking the district rate by the legislative deadline of 1st March, 2021; and
- agreed a cash limit for the People and Communities Committee for 2020/21 of £83,949,408 and the individual service cash limits.

Finance Update

The Committee was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources, at its meeting on 31st July, had received an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's financial position and a strategy to address the forecast deficit and the mitigation measures, which had and would be taken as the situation evolved. It had agreed to continue to provide Members with a monthly update on the financial position and that the same report would be presented to the subsequent standing Committees for noting and to provide further information on ongoing work.

The Committee noted the January 2021 financial update.

Wild Lights Show - Botanic Gardens 2020 – 2024

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting held on 8th December, 2020, a report had been considered which provided an update concerning a previous request from a promoter who had sought permission to hold a Wild Lights event in Botanic Gardens. The request had initially been approved at a meeting of the Committee held

on 14th January, 2020, however, at the July 2020 meeting of the Council, following a request from the promoter to amend the dates relating to the initial request (due to the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions), it had been agreed that the decision be amended to enable an environmental impact assessment to be carried out. Following this, the promoter had cancelled the 2020 event stating that the request had created potential operational and contractual difficulties but advised that he was still keen to run the event in future years, however, felt that a light impact assessment survey was unnecessary.

At the December 2020 meeting, the Members had agreed that a briefing paper would be submitted to a future meeting in respect of the legislation that existed around bats and their habitats.

Subsequent to this, at the January 2021 meeting of Council, it was further agreed that the briefing paper would include a legal opinion as to whether the Council, having asked one promoter to carry out an environmental assessment for the use of Botanic Gardens, had set a precedent to require all future promoters to do the same and also include any relevant legal considerations which the Committee should be aware of in relation to the potential 24 hour opening of the Council's Parks.

The Members considered the report, following which it was:

Moved by Councillor Smyth,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

“That the Council agrees to carry out an initial survey to see if and where bat roosts are in Botanic Park. Following which a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee detailing what measures would be put in place to protect any sites for the duration of the event and those conditions would be built into the licence for the event.”

On a recorded vote, six Members voted for the proposal and eleven against, with one no vote and it was declared lost:

<u>For 6</u>	<u>Against 11</u>	<u>No Vote 1</u>
Councillor De Faoite, Flynn, M. Kelly, McCusker, McReynolds and Smyth.	Alderman Rodgers, and Councillors Baker, Black, Bunting, Corr, Garrett, Magee, McAteer, Newton, Pankhurst and Verner.	Councillor Michael Collins.

The Members noted the legal opinions in regards to setting a precedent and also that the 24 hour opening of the Council's Parks was permissible under the Council's Bye-Laws.

In respect of the legislations pertaining to bats and their habitats, the Committee noted that, in the absence of assessments, officers would work with promoters to ensure compliance with all legal requirements, including legislation and it was requested that officers would ascertain the cost of a bat survey for future reference.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed to vote on the recommendation in the report to uphold the agreement of the Committee from January 2020 for the use of Botanic Gardens, throughout November/December up to December 2024 (inclusive), subject to any changes in Council policy and process in relation to event and environmental impact going forward.

On a recorded vote, eleven Members voted to accept the recommendation and six against, with one no vote and it was declared carried:

<u>For 11</u>	<u>Against 6</u>	<u>No Vote 1</u>
Alderman Rodgers, and Councillors Baker, Black, Bunting, Corr, Garrett, Magee, McAteer, Newton, Pankhurst and Verner.	Councillor De Faoite, Flynn, M. Kelly, McCusker, McReynolds and Smyth.	Councillor Michael Collins.

Request for Exhumation

The Director of City Services provided the Committee with the details in regard to a request to undertake an exhumation at Roselawn Cemetery.

The Members noted that the Department for Communities, the Public Health Agency and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council had been informed of the application and had granted permission, as required by the Burial Ground Regulations (NI) 1992.

The Committee granted the exhumation request and agreed, given the sensitivity of the request and in an effort to prevent any further delay or distress to the family, to grant officers authority to proceed with the relevant paperwork in advance of the March Council meeting to ensure that the exhumation could take place as soon as possible.

Southcity Resource and Development Centre Bridging Support

The Committee referred to a report which considered a request from Southcity Resource and Development Centre that were seeking support for St Simons Hall.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that in normal circumstances any approach for community revenue support would be directed via the Council's Community Development Grants programme, under the revenue grants programme. The Committee was reminded Committee that, due to the Covid pandemic, it had taken the decision not to proceed with an open call under this programme for 2021/22 and instead had agreed to extend existing funding contracts for the 2021/22 financial year.

The Members noted that the normal grant route was therefore not available to the organisations and, as a result of a previous implied decision of a previous committee around potential Council support with revenue costs, the Members were asked to consider a one off bridging support grant as a contribution towards the revenue costs associated with opening the building.

The Committee noted that officers had assessed the application from the organisation and it was compliant with the eligibility criteria required for community development grants and included eligible costs associated with the running of the building. It further noted that a formal application for any potential future grant funding would be required when the grants programme reopened in Autumn 2021.

The Committee agreed the provision of a one off 'Bridging Support' to Southcity Resource and Development Centre for revenue costs associated with St Simons Hall, pro rata from the date of opening of the facility in 2020 to the current year end and an award in line with the agreed allocation model for existing grant holders for the 2021/22 financial year.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

Response from Department for Infrastructure – Provision of Lighting - Comber Greenway

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting held on 10th November, it had agreed that the Council write to the Department for Infrastructure to request that it prioritise the design, funding and completion of its public consultation regarding the installation of lighting on the Comber Greenway.

The Democratic Services Officer informed the Committee that a response had now been received from the Infrastructure Minister.

The Minister had stated that she was keen to see more people choosing to walk, wheel and cycle on the Greenways and she agreed that one of the ways to do this might be to provide lighting. She continued, however, that there was a number of factors to be considered before a decision could be taken in relation to lighting and this included both financial and environmental considerations.

She advised that the Department had completed a preliminary design for lighting of the Comber Greenway and it hoped to be in a position to carry out a public consultation on the proposed design in the spring.

The Minister had concluded by welcoming the ongoing discussion between officials around the future development and management of the Comber Greenway, stating that she recognised that both the Department and Belfast City Council needed to work as a partnership, to seek to remove the barriers for people who want to walk, wheel and cycle more and to improve the attractiveness of the Greenways as a community facility.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Urgent action to address invasive odour in Collin

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 1st February, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Michael Collins and seconded by Councillor Matt Collins, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“Council notes with alarm the invasive odour which has pervaded in the Collin area of West Belfast for several years.

This has caused extreme concern amongst residents, who have been expected to simply put up with this odour, with little or no action from the DAERA minister to address the issue.

The odour has been traced to the Mullaghglass landfill site in Collin. Immediate action must be taken to ensure this odour does not persist, and a comprehensive study should be carried out by DAERA to ensure the air quality in Collin is of a safe standard.

Council resolves to write to DAERA minister Edwin Poots to this end, urging him to assess and allay any concerns about air quality residents have because of this odour, and to take immediate action to eradicate this invasive smell coming from the Mullaghglass site.”

Councillor Michael Collins addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion and a number of other Members spoke in support of the motion.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed to write to the DAERA Minister seeking the Department take immediate action to eradicate the invasive smell coming from the Mullaghglass site.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Affordable Warmth Scheme update

(Mr. I. Harper, Building Control Manager, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 Belfast City Council has been engaged in a partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in the delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme (AWS) since 2014.

1.2 The scheme aims to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city by targeting those households that meet certain criteria, as identified by Ulster

University to provide home improvement measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation, replacement boilers and new double glazed windows. While it is a targeted scheme, self-referrals are also considered. To qualify for the scheme occupant's income must be below £20,000 (gross).

- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to give Members an update on the AWS, including the ongoing engagement with DfC at SOLACE level, and outline a request from DfC regarding the Service Level Agreement for 2020-2021.
- 1.4 In September, Members confirmed their commitment to the scheme but also the need for adequate funding to be provided. The Director of Planning and Building Control wrote to DfC confirming the level of surveys that could be provided with the current staffing resource.
- 1.5 Members also agreed to write to the Department requesting a meeting with the Minister for Communities to discuss the scheme. Following written request, DfC have replied confirming the ministers diary commitments mean it is not possible to arrange a meeting, but that David Polley, Director of Housing Supply Policy can meet with Members to discuss the scheme.
- 1.6 There have been ongoing communications between DfC and councils, both at SOLACE and senior management level.
- 1.7 DfC have requested that councils sign the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for 2020-2021 and have confirmed that further engagement will take place to finalise the SLA for 2021-2022.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider:

1. The offer from DfC for David Polley to address the Committee
2. The request from DfC to sign the Service Level Agreement for (in year) 2020-2021 and
 - a) – agree to sign the SLA with a caveat outlining the concerns around targeted ratio and funding or
 - b) - decline to sign the SLA and wait for a revised version for the next financial year 2021-2022 in which the outstanding issues are addressed to the satisfaction of the council, and

3. Note the ongoing work to agree a suitable Service Level Agreement for 2021-2022.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues and current position

Current position

- 3.1 An update report was provided to Members in September, at which point the DfC had set the target number of referrals at 44. The Service continues to work with only one member of AWS staff, supported by Building Control Business support staff to help with the workload, in particular the customer contact. The BC Service is not in a position to continue to subsidise the scheme with its own Business support staff moving forward given the workload related to their normal duties.
- 3.2 Approval was granted to recruit an AWS site officer post, although this will take a number of months to recruit and train. It is hoped that with two members of AWS staff, the suggested target of 30 referrals outlined by the DfC for 2021-2022 will be met.
- 3.3 Interviews with residents continue to be conducted remotely where possible by electronic means and on phones. Risk assessments have been carried out for any essential on-site work, including the requirement for PPE and maintaining social distancing. This is not easy with some of the most vulnerable and can mean additional engagement with family members or other contacts to establish if they meet the scheme criteria.
- 3.4 Below are the referrals submitted to NIHE (urgent only being provided up to 1st August)

<u>Month</u>	<u>Applications sent to NIHE</u>
April	1
May	9
June	8
July	6
August	11
September	26

October	24
November	24
December	17
January - up to 14/1/21	13
Total	139

- 3.5 In addition, 127 onward referrals have been made to other agencies and an increasing number of emails and calls about the scheme at this time of year are being handled. The service will continue to provide as many referrals as possible up to the target of 32.

Communications from DfC

- 3.6 On 11 December, DfC wrote to councils outlining a number of changes to the scheme. This included:

- Scheme eligibility criteria is increasing from £20,000 to £23,000, which is welcomed.
- Targeted approach: this is being discussed with DoF to look at a refreshed approach. The current 80/20 ratio is to be continue at this stage. Officers continue to inform DfC that this ratio is not achievable for BCC given the levels of self-referrals and needs identified, and needs to be altered in the future SLA. DfC and NIHE are accepting referrals provided within the current working arrangements and this will continue, pending further review work being carried out on the targeted approach. However, this is not reflected within the proposed SLA for 2020-2021.
- Referrals – the referral target has changed from the 44 confirmed in August, to 32 through to yearend. Continued in year changes to the referral targets make resourcing the scheme very difficult, and should be reconsidered as part of any future SLA. This new change would result in a reduction of income for councils on the payment per referral model. Following feedback from Councils DfC wrote a further letter on 22nd December outlining a method by which councils could request access for Covid related funding where their staffing costs were not met by the AWS funding. This does not affect BCC given the current resourcing level.

- While councils had requested additional flexibility in month-by-month referral provision, none was agreed.
- Budget for 2021-2022 – the planned budget is between £12m and £16m, with a suggested target referral rate of about 30. Again, stability in relation to referral targets is needed for resourcing.

SOLACE

3.7 Representatives of SOLACE met with the Deputy Permanent Secretary before Christmas to discuss the AWS and SOLACE discussed the matter further on 7th January 2021. As a result DfC have confirmed the following:

- A review of the targeted methodology is being carried out with Department of Finance (DoF), commissioning a study and engaging with councils.
- DfC are to undertake a study with DoF to look at the funding model, evaluate the value for money and consider alternatives. The potential for a 50/50 referral and flat rate basis is being considered.
- Commitment to consult with Councils on the proposed SLA for 2021-2022, with a meeting set up for early February.

3.8 SOLACE have emphasised that the grant support is the greatest difficulty for councils and must be adequate to cover the staffing costs incurred. Given we are nearing the new financial year, they have asked for the work to be undertaken with urgency.

3.9 The DfC also requested that BCC sign a Service Level Agreement for the last quarter of 2020-2021, based on a target referral rate of 32 for January – March. They have confirmed that discussions would take place to finalise the revised version for 2021-2022. The AW team is working to provide as many referrals as possible to 31st March 2021 in relation to the target. However, officers have concerns that the targeted ratio contained within the Agreement cannot be met, which has been communicated to DfC. The SLA does not deal with the funding issues previously raised. Given the work to be undertaken to revise the SLA for 2021-2022 it is suggested that, if members are minded to agree the 2020-2021 SLA, the response includes a caveat for those areas of concern. Alternatively, given this SLA is being proposed late in the financial year, consideration could be given to wait for the revised SLA for 2021-2022, which must ensure that the key areas outlined in the report are revised to the satisfaction of the Council.

- 3.10 The proposed SLA for 2021-2022 will be brought before members once it is provided by DfC, following the engagement with council officers and SOLACE.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.11 The AWS continues to operate the payment per referral model, but we await the review of the funding model. The referrals sent since 1st August are sufficient to cover the cost of the AWS Coordinator.
- 3.12 Confirmation of funding and referral rate for 2021-2022 is to be finalised, but officers will seek to ensure that the funding for 2021-2022 will be adequate to cover the staffing costs incurred, including the proposed new staff member.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.13 There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues.”

The Committee confirmed its ongoing commitment to the Affordable Warmth Scheme and commended the officers for continuing to deliver this scheme during the ongoing pandemic.

The Committee:

- agreed to invite the Director of Housing Supply Policy, Mr. D. Polley, from the DfC to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the scheme;
- agreed to sign the Service Level Agreement with a caveat outlining the concerns around targeted ratio and funding; and
- noted the ongoing work to agree a suitable Service Level Agreement for 2021-2022 and that further engagement would take place.

**Update on development of the Belfast City
Air Quality Action Plan 2021 - 2026**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The Committee will be aware that at its previous remote meeting of 12th January 2021, the Director of City Services provided an update paper to the Committee concerning progress with a range of ambient air quality projects that City and Neighbourhood Services Department staff are progressing. Amongst those projects is the development of

new Air Quality Action Plan for the city covering the period 2021-2026. The Committee is advised that Council's current Air Quality Action Plan concluded at the end of 2020.

1.2 During the meeting of 12th January 2021, the Director of City Services advised the Committee that a subsequent paper would be brought forward at the next meeting of the Committee, further outlining the development process for the new Action Plan and providing to Members an overview of the various outline actions that have been proposed by the Council's competent or relevant authority partners and other organisations represented on the Air Quality Action Plan Steering Group.

1.3 This paper serves therefore to present this information to the Committee, by way of a further update, to enable Members to consider how the Plan will be developed and the various outline actions that have been proposed to comprise the new Air Quality Action Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to

- Consider the proposed outline actions for inclusion within the new Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 for the city, provided in an Appendix available via mod.gov.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 The Committee will be aware that as a consequence of the various ambient air quality review and assessments, updating and screening assessments and progress report that have been completed for the Belfast City Council area, the Council has, to date, declared four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) across the city for exceedances of the air quality objectives for nitrogen dioxide, with a principal current focus on achieving and maintaining the annual mean objective for nitrogen dioxide of $40 \mu\text{g m}^{-3}$. Source apportionment studies conducted for the city in general and specifically for the AQMAs have revealed that the exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide objectives are principally as a consequence of road transport emissions.

3.2 The 'ribbon' style AQMAs encompass arterial road transport routes into, and out of the city, and therefore include the M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor, the Ormeau Road, the

Upper Newtownards Road and the area from Cromac Street to the junction with East Bridge Street and from East Bridge Street to the junction with the Ravenhill and Albertbridge Roads and Short Strand.

- 3.3 In accordance with the provisions of Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, once an AQMA has been declared, a council is required to develop an Air Quality Action Plan in pursuit of the relevant air quality objectives. The Action Plan is required to draw upon those actions that the council itself can take, as well as those from Competent Authority partners. Competent or Relevant Authorities are those defined in the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 and broadly include Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- 3.4 Accordingly, in seeking to develop a new 5-year Air Quality Action Plan for the city to address road transport emissions, the remaining nitrogen dioxide 'hot spots' within the AQMAs, and nitrogen dioxide air pollution generally across the city, the Council has sought to engage with the Department for Infrastructure Roads, Translink, Northern Ireland Railways, Sustrans, Belfast Harbour, the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Public Health Agency via the formation of an Air Quality Action Plan Steering Group. Steering Group Members have now provided a series of outline transport related actions that they are proposing to deliver over the anticipated 5-year lifespan of the new Action Plan.
- 3.5 The Committee is advised that the new Air Quality Action Plan will be developed by the Council's air quality staff in conjunction with our Steering Group partners. To that end, the Action Plan will be developed with regard to the requirements of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Local Air Quality Action Plan 2020 template. This template requires that an Action Plan should include a summary of ambient air quality within the local authority AQMA(s), along with an explanation of the public health and planning policy contexts, source apportionment studies for the AQMAs, an assessment of the required reductions and key priorities for the Action Plan. The Action Plan must also include an overview of the consultation and stakeholder engagement processes, together with details of the Air Quality Action Plan Steering Group.
- 3.6 With regard to the measures to be included within the new action plan, the plan must include a list of the actions that

comprise the plan, the responsible individual and departments or organisations that will deliver each action, the estimated cost of implementing each action (overall cost and cost to the local authority), the expected benefit of each action in terms of pollutant emission and / or concentration reductions, the timescale for implementation and how progress will be monitored.

- 3.7 Finally, the plan must also include details of any formal consultation processes that have been undertaken, together with a summary of responses to consultation and stakeholder engagement and an explanation of the reasons for not pursuing Action Plan measures. It is noted that at the meeting of 7th September 2020, the Committee agreed that consultation on the new action plan should include engagement with communities and the West Belfast Taxi Consortium.
- 3.8 Having received various outline action planning measures from our Competent Authority partners and other Steering Group members, the Committee is advised that the Council's air quality staff will now continue to work with these organisations and bodies to formalise the actions and to develop the new Action Plan in accordance with the requirements of the Defra Local Air Quality Action Plan 2020 template, to a point where the Action Plan can be consulted upon. It is proposed that in view of the continuing constraints imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic, community engagement around the new Action Plan might be delivered via the Council's Consultation Hub. This approach will however, be further explored with the Steering Group members so as to align to any public consultation exercises that individual organisations might wish to undertake on their actions. In addition, we have sought guidance from DAERA concerning any specific action plan consultation requirements.
- 3.9 The Committee is advised that a full list of outline actions has been provided at Appendix 1 available on modern.gov. By way of examples, however;
- 3.10 Translink have proposed introducing zero emission vehicles within Belfast, improving their bus fleet, decarbonising their rail network and vehicle fleet, promoting public transport, providing a Future Ticketing System and delivering the new Belfast Transport Hub.
- 3.11 Translink and the Department for Infrastructure have jointly proposed the second phase of the Belfast Rapid Transit system, bus and rail based park and ride interchanges, bus route improvements, further expansion of Park and Ride

facilities and improved walking and cycling connectivity to public transport interchanges.

- 3.12 Sustrans and the Department for Infrastructure have jointly proposed a bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland followed by a Bicycle Network Plan for Belfast, the construction of safe and protected cycling infrastructure and traffic management initiatives such as the introduction of 20mph speed limits, School Streets and low traffic neighbourhoods.
- 3.13 Sustrans, working with a range of partner organisations including the Public Health Agency, DfI, DAERA, Belfast City Council and Interreg, is proposing the delivery of a range of behavioural change and promoting travel alternatives programmes with schools, workplaces and communities.
- 3.14 The Department for Infrastructure have proposed blue and green infrastructure funding, measures to support a green recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic, development of a Multi-modal transport model, construction of a Lagan pedestrian and cycle bridge and further development of the ecarNI electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- 3.15 Belfast Harbour have proposed ambient air quality monitoring and modelling initiatives within the Belfast Harbour area, publishing a Harbour Air Quality Strategy, introducing low or zero carbon fuels, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, a car sharing scheme, clean vehicle incentives, smart traffic control, integrated commuter plans, cycle lanes, green corridors decarbonising port infrastructure, providing shore side power, decarbonising work and pilot boats and space heating, introducing zero carbon vessels and ship planning.
- 3.16 Belfast City Council has proposed a range of initiatives to reduce the air quality impacts of its fleet operations, including vehicle emissions testing, driver eco training and promoting the uptake of cleaner vehicle technologies and introducing electric vehicles and electric adaptations for refuse collection vehicles. In addition, our Planners have confirmed that the Council's Local Development Plan, Draft Plan Strategy 2035 contains a range of policy interventions to improve ambient air quality. Similarly, the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy and associated Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan also contain policies and actions for improving ambient air quality for the city. The Council has also highlighted its 'Just Eat' Belfast Bikes public bike hire scheme.

Financial and Resource Implications.

3.17 None

**Equality or Good Relations Implications /
Rural Needs Assessments.**

3.18 None.”

The Committee agreed the proposed actions for inclusion within the new Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 for the City available [here](#) and noted that the Members would be keen to see the following issues also considered within the Plan:

- more targeted consultation engagement with the communities living within the Air Quality Management Areas; and
- the Council focusing on the enforcement of smoke control zones and raising awareness of the impact of burning household fuels on indoor and outdoor air quality.

The Director of City Services also undertook to write to the Department for Infrastructure to highlight the following:

- keen to see it place a greater emphasis on the required infrastructure for cycle lanes;
- request that it give further consideration to the importance of safe areas around schools (air pollution exclusion zones).
- request that it give consideration to the creation of active travel hubs;
- give further exploration to Green Screening; and
- further consideration of the pedestrianisation agenda and the reallocation of road space.

DAERA - A Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The Committee is advised that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) have recently commenced a consultation exercise, in the form of a public discussion document, into a new Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland.

1.2 DAERA have stated that the purpose of the public discussion document is to provoke discussion towards policy options that could contribute to meeting the challenges associated with achieving outcomes 2, 4 and 12 of the Northern Ireland Civil Service ‘Outcomes Delivery Plan’, ‘we live and work sustainably - protecting the environment’, ‘we enjoy long, healthy, active lives’; and ‘we give our children and young people the best start in life’ respectively.

1.3 This report therefore serves to provide to Committee for consideration, proposed responses to the 29 questions that DAERA have posed throughout the seven thematic chapters of the Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland Public Discussion document.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1

- The Committee is requested to consider proposed responses to the 29 questions posed by DAERA as part of the public discussion process, summarised in [Appendix 1](#) to this report and detailed in full within [Appendix 2](#).
- The Committee is further requested to recommend that Appendix 1 and 2 responses be both submitted to DAERA by the Belfast City Council consultation deadline of 15th March 2021.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 In commencing a public discussion exercise into options for a new Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, DAERA have advised that clean air is vital for human health and for our natural environment but increasingly, research is showing that the effects of ambient air pollution on human health are more complex and widespread than previously thought.

3.2 To that end, DAERA have advised that within Northern Ireland, we face similar issues with ambient air pollution to the rest of the UK and Europe; most notably, concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) found in urban areas, arising principally from road traffic and particularly from diesel engined vehicles.

3.3 The Committee will be aware that the Council has declared four Air Quality Management Areas across the city encompassing major arterial road transport routes for exceedences of Air Quality Strategy objectives for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). The AQMAs cover the M1 Motorway / A12 Westlink corridor, the Ormeau Road, the Upper Newtownards Road and Cromac Street to the junction with East Bridge Street and then from East Bridge Street to the junction with the Ravenhill and Albertbridge Roads and Short Strand.

- 3.4 The Committee will also be aware that the Council has developed a series of Air Quality Action Plans for the city, in pursuit of the nitrogen dioxide air quality objectives, incorporating actions from our competent authority transport partners including the Department for Infrastructure, Translink, Northern Ireland Railways, Sustrans, the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association, etc. The Council has also included information on the actions that it can take to address transport emissions, including introduction of the Belfast Bikes public cycle hire scheme and 'greening' its own vehicle fleet, etc.
- 3.5 In addition to nitrogen dioxide issues in urban areas, DAERA have also highlighted that issues persist around emissions from household heating and from agriculture.
- 3.6 DAERA have advised that Northern Ireland has not had its own dedicated Clean Air Strategy before now and that the public discussion document has set forth a wide range of policy options that are based on research, examples of best practice elsewhere, and on the basis of the air quality problems that are facing Northern Ireland.
- 3.7 The public discussion document therefore incorporates a comprehensive review of current ambient air quality policy and legislation within Northern Ireland and invites views on possible solutions to take forward further improvements in ambient air quality.
- 3.8 Accordingly, the public discussion document incorporates 7 chapters and 29 specific questions covering the background to ambient air pollution issues, including; (i) the sources and effects of ambient air pollution; (ii) transport; (iii) household emissions; (iv) agriculture emissions; (v) industrial emissions; (vi) local air quality management and; (vii) communication.
- 3.9 The Committee is therefore advised that the public discussion document raises issues around the introduction of legally binding WHO targets for particulate matter, about further expanding the Northern Ireland air quality monitoring network, about discouraging the uptake of biomass and about linking noise, climate change and air quality action plans. In addition, the public discussion document asks about the introduction of low emission zones, vehicle charging cordons and the uptake of electric vehicles. With regard to domestic emissions, the discussion document asks about extending smoke control areas and controlling the fuels that can be supplied. The discussion document also asks about controlling ammonia emissions and emissions

from industry. Finally, the public discussion document poses questions around revising the local air quality management regime for Northern Ireland and about the creation of a Northern Ireland Air Quality Forum and better raising awareness of ambient air quality issues.

3.10 In developing responses to the various questions posed throughout the public discussion document, the Committee is advised that the views of relevant Council Departments and Operational Units have been sought and where obtained, those views have been incorporated into the responses provided at Appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

3.11 The Committee is advised that [Appendix 1](#) provides an overview of proposed responses to the public discussion document to assist in Committee consideration of this matter, whereas [Appendix 2](#) provides detailed responses to the public discussion document.

3.12 **Financial and Resource Implications.**

None

3.13 **Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessments.**

None.”

During discussion, Councillor Smyth tabled the following additions to the consultation response for consideration:

Q1

There should be legally binding targets for particulate matter, this has been detailed in previous motions to Council.

Q5

Whilst using the population figure of 10k as a threshold to trigger the requirement to monitor air quality might be more pertinent to other areas, there is a worry that unless there is monitoring outside of the 10k population then there is a risk of not capturing the impact and pollution caused by ammonia.

Q9

Note that Councils should be able to introduce Clean Air Zones and charge if necessary. Reflect a bolder vision for Belfast and the move toward pedestrianisation and reallocation of road space. Refer to the

Programme For Government (PFG) outcome re Modal shift as progressing this is key to addressing air pollution.

Q13

Highlight that they are parts of the City that are not under Smoke Control Orders and reinforce that there needs to be an understanding of legislation in relation to the enforcement of Smoke Control Orders. In terms of fuel poverty, note that support needs to be given to those residents wishing to move to alternative clean energy efficient fuels without exacerbating fuel poverty.

Following the proposed amendments to aforementioned questions, the Committee agreed to the following:

- to review the draft consultation response and proposed changes raised and to incorporate the points raised;
- to circulate the amended summary of the proposed Belfast City Council responses (Appendix 1) to all Committee Members in advance of the March Council meeting for final approval and agree that these amendments then be incorporated into the detailed response to DAERA (Appendix 2); and
- following ratification at the March Council meeting, both responses (Appendix 1 and 2), as amended, be submitted to DAERA by the consultation deadline of 15th March, 2021.

Belfast City Council response to the Department of Health's new "Mental Health Strategy, 2021-31, for Northern Ireland"

The Committee was advised that the Department of Health had developed its draft mental health strategy for Northern Ireland available [here](#). Following the pre-consultation exercise, the Department of Health had now developed its draft strategy which it was consulting on. The consultation had opened on 21st December, 2020 and was scheduled to close on Friday, 26th March, 2021 at 5.00 p.m.

Several Members of the Committee welcomed the draft Council response that had been prepared by Council officers. They referred to the importance of addressing mental health issues and noted that the pressures of the ongoing pandemic had further exasperated many of these problems.

The Director concurred and advised that, as with the pre-consultation response, the Council had made the case within its response that the new strategy, and the structures associated with it, needed to integrate and align with community planning structures to ensure that both regional and local impact could be maximised.

The Members were also advised that the recommendations contained in the 'Elephant in the Room' report that had been jointly prepared by the Belfast and NI Youth Forum be fully considered and further considered as part of the implementation plans for the strategy.

The Committee approved the draft consultation response available [here](#) and agreed that, subject to Council ratification, it be submitted by the 26th March deadline.

Partnership Funding 2021/22

The Committee was reminded that City and Neighbourhood Services worked in partnership with a number of organisations and some of this had developed through the provision of annual financial support to deliver against agreed outcomes.

Many of the partnership arrangements were historical and had been rolled on from year to year and were not as part of an open call or other funding processes. The Members were reminded that, in the context of the Belfast Agenda, it had previously been agreed that an independent review of these arrangements would be conducted to assess if they continued to deliver value. Completion of the review had been delayed as a result of the ongoing pandemic but the final report was expected in February 2021 and further engagement with the Members on the recommendations would take place in due course.

To ensure the continuity of service delivery for the organisations, it was recommended that funding support remained the same for 2021/22 as in 2020/21. This would give sufficient time for consideration and implementation of the review recommendations.

The Committee agreed the funding allocations to Belfast Hill Partnership, Lagan Valley Regional Park, Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI), Keep NI Beautiful (KNIB) and Mary Peters Trust based on the recommended levels provided in the report and to further consider the recommendations of the review of partnership funding arrangements at a future meeting.

Correspondence from Advice NI on The Equality Impact Assessment on the Draft Department for Communities (DfC) 2021/22 Budget

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that Welfare Reform Mitigation Funding was, in addition to wider financial support to the independent advice sector from DfC, allocated through local Councils as part of the wider DfC Community Support Programme. He then drew the Members' attention to correspondence received from Advice NI, which referred to the fact that the Equality Impact Assessment on the 2021/22 draft budget stated that the £1.5m regional Welfare Reform Mitigation Funding would no longer be available within the proposed DfC budget and would therefore not be available to Councils to support local service provision.

The Committee noted that, if the draft budget was to be agreed, it would result in £293,925.88 not being provided to Belfast City Council for it to help mitigate against the potential impacts of Welfare Reform and for enhanced service provision, as had been the case in 2020/21.

A number of Members expressed concern at this development and noted the importance of local advice services, particularly at this time given the hardships that many people faced as a result on the ongoing pandemic.

The Committee agreed to write to the Communities Minister to highlight the Committees concern in regard to the proposed £1.5m reduction in funding to the independent advice sector.

Operational Issues

Knockbreda Road entrance to Cherryfield Playing Fields

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the results of the resident survey carried out amongst households surrounding the currently closed Knockbreda Park pedestrian entrance to Cherryvale Playing Fields and to present options as to next steps.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. Note the results of the residents’ survey
- ii. Consider options and agree next steps.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 Following a request from Councillor Long, at People and Communities Committee on 3rd March 2020, the Committee agreed to commence a consultation process with the immediate neighbours and stakeholders regarding the potential re-opening of an entrance gate into Cherryvale Playing Fields from Knockbreda Park. An initial 100 surveys were posted to households within the immediate vicinity of the gate. (a copy of which is attached to the agenda at Appendix 1; Survey Questions – available via mod.gov)

3.2 This existing gate has been closed for 20+ years. It is Council Officers’ understanding the gate was previously closed due to concern from residents regarding anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the gate at the time. A recent report concerning ASB in the Playing Fields now shows a record of 12 incidents over a 24 month period.

- 3.3 At the People and Communities Committee meeting on 11 August 2020, Councillor De Faoite requested that officers arrange a site meeting to allow Elected Members the opportunity to meet with various user groups to discuss any relevant issues regarding the Playing Fields. A site meeting was held on the 3rd September 2020 and involved Elected Members, representatives from Friends of Cherryvale and various sports users of the facility. Belfast City Council Officers provided an update on works that were taking place within the Playing Fields. Officers also provided an update that 100 households within the immediate vicinity of the gate had been sent a questionnaire asking for their views concerning the potential re-opening of the gate.
- 3.4 At a further People and Communities Committee meeting, on 8th September 2020, Councillor Kelly requested the survey be widened to incorporate additional residents. Following discussion it was subsequently decided to extend the survey scope to a 400 metre radius (i.e. approximately within a 5 minute walk) from the gate. This is the distance Fields in Trust set as a standard to access a local park on foot. Extending the survey to include all households within a 400m radius of the gate resulted in a total of 1378 households being sent a survey to complete. Of those issued, 509 surveys were returned (36.9%).

Survey Results

- 3.5 An analysis of the responses was undertaken. Key findings from the survey responses include:
- 459 or 90.2% of all respondents stated that they use the playing fields with 50 respondents, or 9.8%, stating they do not use the facility.
 - The survey asked: 'Would you be in favour of the gate being opened during regular park opening times?' Over 89% of respondents who expressed a preference were in favour.
 - Respondents were offered the opportunity to comment on their answer.
 - Concerns were raised in relation to traffic management and parking issues and around potential ASB and noise/disturbance.
 - The positive comments in relation to the reopening of the gate related to improving access.

- It should be noted that 21 respondents who were in favour of reopening the gate also expressed concerns. Traffic management and parking were mentioned in 17 and 15 responses respectively. Concern around ASB issues was mentioned in five responses and potential for noise and disturbance was also mentioned five times. The suggestion for a trial period was mentioned twice.
- Of the houses closest to the playing fields who were in favour of reopening the gate (14 out of 21 houses), three made comments: one mentioned concerns around traffic management and parking; the other two referenced the benefits of easier access.
- Of those respondents who use the playing fields (459 people) 83% are in favour of the gate being reopened, with 9% not being in favour.
- Of those respondents who do not use the playing fields (50 people) 36% are in favour of the gate being reopened, with 12% not being in favour. The largest percentage of responses indicated no preference (44%).
- Two thirds of the responses from the houses closest to the gate are in favour of the reopening of the gate but as outlined in the summary document there are concerns expressed in the comments.

Options/Next steps

- 3.6 Considering the survey results, officers have identified two potential options for Members consideration:

Option 1:

Gate remains closed: the survey results overwhelmingly supported the re-opening of the gate. However, concerns have been expressed by both those in favour and those against reopening the additional pedestrian access. Respondents have cited issues in relation to traffic management and parking and the potential for increased ASB/noise and disturbance complaints.

Option 2:

Gate is re-opened: the majority of survey returns (89% of those indicating a preference) would support this option. However there are several factors to note:

- a. Although there is overwhelming support for the gate re-opening there were also concerns raised, in particular regarding traffic management, parking and concern for attracting ASB and noise/disturbance (due to accessing of the playing fields).

Officers have met with Road Service officials to discuss any implications on traffic, parking and crossings in regards to the gate. The Road Service have stated that no additional lighting is required. Parking restrictions lines would not be added prior to the gate opening; however, this would be monitored and if lines are required there would be no cost to the council. It may also be that a traffic island is required to assist in crossings; traffic lights have previously been requested by the residents and an assessment completed by the Road Service, however, the installation of traffic lights is on a waiting list. At present DfI see no immediate works required to be completed if the gate is opened for pedestrians but are of the opinion that regular assessments of the area would be required.

- b. To allow the re-opening, a new gate and path would need to be installed at an approximate cost of £7,500. This does not include any measures outside the playing fields' boundary and would be subject to a more detailed assessment.

It is likely these essential works ie installation of a new gate (replacing the old one in existence) and upgrading of the existing footpath (which may require clearing of vegetation in the area) will be considered as permitted development in line with the council carrying out its functions. However, if appropriate, a formal opinion can be obtained through a Certificate of Lawful Use or Development (CLUD).

If additional works were required in the future, such as the addition of new lighting to the footpath or widening of the footpath (to improve accessibility), it is likely that a full planning application would need to be submitted.

- c. Operational considerations: Officers suggest that any additional access gate would follow the current arrangements in place with our Park Warden team, who are responsible for opening and closing our parks. This team currently work on an annualised-hours basis which provides us with the flexibility to have these officers working for longer periods in the summer months. While this work pattern facilitates longer opening during the summer period, it means that shorter operating hours in the winter months

leads to earlier closure times for parks linked to dark nights. Our current staffing resource cannot facilitate extending the opening times of the city parks, however, in a recent committee report councillors were advised that officers are investigating this issue as part of our wider Parks Improvement Programme. In doing so, we are progressing two key initiatives to help inform future park management and opening arrangements namely:

- 24 hour pilot opening hours at Woodvale, Falls & Ormeau parks in Spring 2021
- A feasibility study to consider options, concept and pricing for the lighting of parks.

Until these works have been completed, and subsequently considered by Committee, it would be difficult for us to deviate from current Council policy in relation to park winter opening hours. Continuing this may help address ASB concerns, however they would also restrict access to the Playing Fields and there may be demand from clubs using the 3G pitch to open this gate outside normal hours.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.7 If the gate were to be re-opened, the capital cost to install a new gate and path has been approximated as £7,500. This cost has not been currently budgeted for.

Operational arrangements can be accommodated within existing budgets. Additional opening hours would incur additional costs.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.8 An equality and rural proofing screening is underway, in line with council's equality, good relations and rural needs requirements, to identify positive or adverse impacts of any decision to re-open the gate."

The Committee considered the report, during which a number of Members expressed concern at the potential road safety concerns should the gate be re-opened, following which it was:

Moved by Councillor Baker,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

“This Committee agrees in principle to the opening of the gate, subject to internal financing being secured. This agreement will also be subject to safe road crossing/road safety measures being considered and agreed in advance by the Department for Infrastructure and approved through a statutory public consultation.”

Amendment

Moved by Councillor De Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

“In order to adequately address the road safety concerns expressed in the survey responses, Belfast City Council will write to the Department for Infrastructure requesting that a pedestrian crossing adjacent to the Knockbreda Road and Ravenhill Road gates to Cherryvale be funded as part of the blue and green Infrastructure fund.

Pedestrian crossings at this location, along with the opening of the gate, would help to link pedestrian and cyclist routes from Cregagh Glen to the Lagan Gateway greenway, across the planned crossing on the A55, through Rosetta, Knockbreda Road, Cherryvale Playing Fields, Ravenhill Road, Ormeau Road, Sunnyside Street, Annadale Embankment, Governors Bridge, Stranmillis Embankment, Lockview Road to the Lagan Towpath.”

The Proposer of the motion advised that he was content to accept the amendment but the proposer of the amendment stated that he wished for it to be taken as a separate proposal and requested a recorded vote:

On a recorded vote, six Members voted for the proposal and twelve against and it was declared lost.

<u>For 6</u> Councillor De Faoite, Flynn, M. Kelly, McCusker, McReynolds and Smyth.	<u>Against 12</u> Alderman Rodgers, and Councillors Baker, Black, Bunting, Michael Collins, Corr, Garrett, Magee, McAteer, Newton, Pankhurst and Verner.
---	--

A further Member requested that a site visit to the location be organised with DfI representatives to enable further consideration of the road safety concerns.

The Proposer of the original Motion, Councillor Baker, advised that he was content to accept the aforementioned amendments, as proposed by Councillor De Faoite, and also acceded to the request to convene a site visit and the Committee unanimously agreed:

- in principle to the opening of the gate, as outlined in Option 2 of the report, subject to internal financing being secured;
- that the agreement would be subject to safe road crossing/road safety measures being agreed in advance by the DfI and approved through a statutory public consultation;

- that the Committee would write to the Infrastructure Minister to outline the position and to stress that, whilst the survey was positive, road safety concerns remained a major issue and request that to try and alleviate these concerns that a pedestrian crossing be installed at the location (adjacent to the Knockbreda Road and Ravenhill Road gates to Cherryvale) with the funding for the proposed crossing being sought from the blue and green Infrastructure fund; and
- to write to the DfI to request a site visit to the location to discuss and further consider the road safety concerns raised.

Requests for the use of Dixon Park by Bloomfield Gospel Hall

The Committee considered a report in relation to a request from Bloomfield Gospel Hall seeking permission to deliver their weekly Sunday evening services as a series of 'Gospel Drive-Ins' at Dixon Park each Sunday from 28th March to 29th August 2021, 6.45 p.m. – 7.45 p.m.

In addition to this request, they were also seeking permission to host their annual Gospel outreach event at Dixon Park during the month of June 2021. This would involve a gospel drive-in with local people attending in cars each day for a period of 4 weeks from 31st May to 25th June, 7.45 p.m. – 8.45 p.m. (Monday – Friday) and Sunday 6.45 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.

The Committee was advised that the event would be set up on the tarmac area at the rear end of the main carpark and would cause little or no disruption to other park users. The front carpark would remain open to members of the public.

The Committee granted approval to Bloomfield Gospel Hall to hold weekly Sunday evening services and a series of "Gospel Drive-Ins" at Dixon Park, subject to the completion of the appropriate Event Management Plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:

- resolve all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
- meet all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities;
- consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary; and
- adhere to Government Covid19 Regulations in place at the time of the event.

Motion: BCA licence renewal - Victoria Park

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider a report by the Belfast City Airport outlining its ongoing bird control**

management and to consider a request from Belfast City Airport (BCA) to gain access to Victoria Park to carry out pricking of greylag geese eggs. This is part of an ongoing control programme in line with their Wildlife Hazzard Assessment and the Civil Aviation Authority licensing requirements.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the report from Belfast City Airport on Bird Control Measures at Victoria Park;
- ii. Consider permissions requested to enter Victoria Park to facilitate the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under licence issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). This intervention to control birds in the flight path to the airport is a requirement of the airport's Civil Aviation Authority licence; and
- iii. Instruct officers to work with legal services to issue a relevant licence for a period of 3 years which will be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.

3.0 Main report

3.1 At the 6th of October meeting, the Committee considered a Notice of Motion and agreed to review permission to BCA to enter Victoria Park for the management of un-hatched eggs under licence from the NIEA.

3.2 It was noted that the ongoing control programme had significantly reduced the greylag goose population in the park and that the decision to grant permission was taken a number of years ago.

3.3 As such, officers were instructed to review the decision and produce a report for Councillors to consider options before the next confirmation of the permission is granted.

3.4 In response to officer request for detailed supporting information, the Airport has prepared a report which outlines their bird control programme over a number of years.

3.5 Table 1 presents an overview of ongoing bird control measures at Victoria Park: Source BCA report.

Species	Risk assessment	Existing management	Actions requested from BCC	Permissions sought from BCC
Greylag Goose	Medium	Use of signage at Victoria Park to reduce supplementary feeding. Control of population by egg 'pricking'.	Maintenance of signs in Victoria Park	Permission to continue 'pricking' eggs in Victoria Park under permit from NIEA (applied for and reviewed annually)
Mute Swan	Medium	Use of signage at Victoria Park to reduce supplementary feeding.	Maintenance of signs in Victoria Park	None
Mallard	Medium	Use of signage at Victoria Park to reduce supplementary feeding.	Maintenance of signs in Victoria Park	None
Lesser Black-backed Gull	High	Monitoring of breeding population. Surveys of feeding sites and flightlines (BCA)	BCC should investigate options to manage urban gulls within the planning system	None
Herring Gull	Medium	Monitoring of breeding population. Surveys of feeding sites and flightlines (BCA)	BCC should investigate options to manage urban gulls within the planning system	None
Black-headed Gull	Low	Monitoring of breeding population. Surveys of feeding sites and flightlines (BCA)	None	None
Grey Heron	Medium	Monitoring of the impact of structural	None	None

		pruning in 2018 on nesting		
Rook	Low	Control of new Rookery to prevent the formation of a large colony. Monitoring of recent pruning and some nest removal on nesting.	None	None

3.6 Key Species

Greylag Geese:

Committee is reminded that at its meetings in January 2010 and August 2011, the committee agreed a range of measures to control greylag geese numbers within Victoria Park including

- the erection of fencing to prevent access for the geese to safe breeding areas and easy access to and from the water.
- the planting of shrubs along parts of the lake to prevent the geese having easy access to and from the water.
- undertaking an awareness raising campaign to dissuade members of the public from feeding the geese/birds.
- the continuation of annual egg pricking of greylag geese under licence
- the monitoring of these measures to assess their effectiveness.

3.7 The control programme, aimed at making the site less attractive to geese, has been effective with a steady decline in numbers. It is worth noting that although the reduction in greylag overwintering, breeding and moulting at Victoria Park has been successful it has taken almost 15 years to achieve. The Airport note this situation could easily be reversed if greylag geese were allowed once again to rear young and reassert a lifelong association with the site. The control programme should also be considered within the context of significant local greylag geese increases, for example in North Down numbers increased from 150 in 2008 to almost 600 in 2019 (BCA Report).

3.8 Rooks:

Committee is reminded that at its meeting in January 2021 it acceded to a request from BCA to carry out works under licence, to remove old rook nests and habitat alterations at the North East corner of the park. After careful monitoring this season, if required, permission will be sought under delegated authority to undertake further work to discourage the rookery from establishing.

3.9 Overview

This Belfast City Airport bird control programme has been underway for a number of years and is underpinned by scientific surveys and research. Egg pricking is completed under licence from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and reviewed on an annual basis. The Airport continues to monitor the effectiveness of the programme and bird strike risk, further details are provided in the full report which is appended to the agenda.

3.10 Members are advised that the BCA control programme and associated interventions are a matter between the airport and the NIEA as the regulator and competent authority for the relevant licences. BCA must provide supporting documentation to outline their plans and provide the necessary evidence to demonstrate they have weighed all options and their preferred approach is measured (ie not extreme). It will then be the responsibility of the regulator to assess the application and grant any agreed licence.

3.11 The Belfast City Airport approach to Belfast City Council is to request continued access to Victoria Park to facilitate the ongoing control programme including the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under the NIEA granted licence.

3.12 If members are content, officers will work with legal services to issue a relevant licence for a period of 3 years which will be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.

3.13 To support the review, BCA will be required to submit an annual report outlining their Wildlife Control Management Plan (WCMP) noting recommendations based on the risk assessment made in the annual Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) and incorporating any new control methods as they become available.

- 3.14 Officers will review the submitted risk assessment and insurance certificates in line with procedure. The licence will include relevant conditions to ensure that health and safety measures are implemented, essential signage is assembled, one-way systems are established where necessary and other necessary arrangements are put in place.**

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.15 BCA will be responsible for all costs associated with the request.**

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.16 None.”**

At the request of a Member, the Director of Neighbourhood Services undertook to liaise with Belfast City Airport (BCA) to suggest that it consider publishing its ‘Bird Control for Air Safety in Belfast Report’ via its own media channels, as had been suggested that this might help inform the public in regard to the required actions and measures being taken.

The Director of Neighborhood Services also provided an update to the Members in regard to the progress in relation to permission granted to the Airport at the January 2020 meeting. He reminded the Members that the BCA had been granted permission by the Council to access Victoria Park to enable it to carry out works to ensure compliance with its risk assessment relating to Rooks. The Members were advised that, to date, BCA had concluded the works relating to the removal of an old rook nest and the pruning back of vegetation. BCA had not confirmed if it needed to exercise its request to remove any new nest foundations and the Director advised that he would keep the committee updated accordingly.

The Committee:

- granted the requested permissions to enter Victoria Park to facilitate the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under licence issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and noted that the intervention to control birds in the flight path to the airport was a requirement of the airport’s Civil Aviation Authority licence; and
- granted officers authority to liaise with legal services to issue a relevant licence for a period of 3 years which would be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.

Update on Responsible Dog Ownership

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The outcome of irresponsible behaviours of some dog owners has an impact on the presence of dog fouling in some of our public spaces in the City. The purpose of this report is to provide the update requested by Members on the work that is carried out by the Community Awareness Team and the Dog Warden Service to tackle the issue of dog fouling and responsible dog ownership since the last update in August 2019.

1.2 This report also updates members on the Notice of Motion of discussed at People and Communities Committee on 3 March 2020 which detailed that:

‘This Council notes:

- *the high number of complaints and the frustration of residents regarding dog fouling;*
- *that cleansing, signage and bins to address the issues come at considerable cost to ratepayers, as well as being a public health risk; and*
- *that other councils have piloted and adopted new methods for tackling persistent*
- *problems, notably DNA testing on dog fouling;*

The Council agrees, therefore, to undertake its own scoping exercise of DNA testing and to bring back recommendations on whether it is something that could be adopted for Belfast.’

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- Note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Dog fouling and irresponsible dog ownership go hand in hand and can impact the quality and amenity of our neighbourhoods. Clearly, whilst the majority of dog owners exercise responsible dog management, there are a small number of owners who have less regard for this and this can have an impact on areas in the city. This requires on going

re direction of our resources to address in terms of its removal from the streets, as well as providing a wide range of education and awareness programmes together with the use of fines where infringements are detected.

- 3.2 Councils are required to provide the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) with statistical information on a wide range of dog control service areas for example: dog licences, complaints regarding stray dogs, dog attacks and dog warden enforcement actions. This information is provided by Councils on a quarterly basis, collated and held by DAERA. It is then referred to by Councils and DAERA when providing responses to dog related information requests from the media, the public and animal welfare stakeholders. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/council-dog-summary-statistics>

- 3.3 The Dog Warden Service as part of their role deploy routine monitoring patrols, to detect dog fouling incidents, however, it is widely recognised that the problem of dog fouling cannot be addressed solely by enforcement intervention. Members will also be aware that an important role of the Dog wardens is carrying out other statutory investigative work related to attacks and complaints around this. Our dog wardens also respond to complaints for example straying, licencing issues, noise issues and how dogs are managed in open spaces. To encourage a change in behaviour, a wider programme supporting responsible dog ownership is an essential element of the Council's approach to reducing levels of dog fouling throughout the city. This report summarises the activities undertaken by the Community Awareness Team and the Dog Warden Service to address the issue of dog fouling.

Community Awareness

- 3.4 The Community Awareness Team have a project plan detailing a range of activities through educational, promotional and community based programmes scheduled throughout the course of each year, which aims to highlight the problems of dog fouling, unfortunately due to COVID 19 restrictions, these programmes were curtailed.

Dog Fouling Advertising Campaign

- 3.5 The latest advertising associated with the dog-fouling element of the council's Anti-Litter campaign ran in specific cycles from the w/c 9th June 2019 – 16 March 2020. A budget of £58,000 was allocated to marketing the anti-dog fouling message. The campaign utilises general activity throughout the whole of the council area, e.g bus T sides, commuter cards and radio. In addition, a targeted blitz was undertaken four geographical areas; North, South, East and West. This consists of newspaper advert, adshels, 48 sheets static and advan with the message 'Dog Wardens are patrolling in (e.g south) Belfast'.

In addition, all cleansing vehicles are branded with the current campaign graphic reinforcing the fine for dog fouling, this allows for a consistent campaign message being delivered into our neighbourhoods throughout the year.

Dog Fouling Campaign evaluation

- 3.6 Independent research undertaken by Cognisense in 2019 to evaluate the impact and awareness of the dog fouling campaign reported a very low incidence of individuals admitting to have allowed their dog to foul in the last six months. 70% of those asked said they had seen the campaign. The most prevalent area of recalled advertising was '£80 fine'. This level of ad recognition is well in excess of the relevant UK awareness norm predicated with the media deployed during this most recent campaign. Overall prompted awareness was greater than seen in 2017. The side of buses execution was particularly prominently recalled (85%) as the place the advertising was seen. Younger respondents were most likely to recognise the dog fouling campaign advertising.

Community Awareness

- 3.7 The Community Awareness Team have a project plan detailing a range of activities through educational, promotional and community based programmes scheduled throughout the course of each year, which aims to highlight the problems of dog fouling, unfortunately due to COVID 19 restrictions, these programmes were curtailed
- 3.8 In late 2019 the Community Awareness Team launched the Green Dog Walkers project, which is a non-confrontational, voluntary, UK wide scheme to change attitudes towards dog fouling. On signing, individuals pledge to commit to the principles of good dog ownership. The team has worked with Dog Warden Service to ensure compliance with licensing requirements this has resulted in a number of unlicensed dogs being identified. This team will continue to promote this scheme in the work plan for 2021/22.
- 3.9 The Community Awareness Team attend a number of events and supported community fun days , 46 (2019-2020) in our parks and open spaces, reinforcing the anti-fouling message, this has included the use of our animated character Scoop

Dogs which have been very successful at engaging the community and encouraging responsible dog ownership. The Team have worked with the Dog Trust supporting them at their microchipping promotion sessions throughout the city, and provide our community centres with a supply of dog bags for members of the public, to further broaden the reach of our support for our Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign.

- 3.10 In summer 2019 we offered 'litter game' sessions to community centre based summer schemes, this included dog fouling games to reinforce the dog fouling message and the consequence of noncompliance, 16 summer schemes participated in the project. We will continue to support the delivery of summer schemes in our community centres in 21/22. The Community Awareness Team provide our community centres with a supply of dog bags for members of the public to support our Responsible Dog Ownership Campaign.

Education provision

- 3.11 The risks and consequences of dog fouling is included in all our school's workshops and specific projects. Covid 19 restrictions have hugely impacted on the delivery of our school programme but in 2019-20 the Team undertook 267 school visits. We are developing new ways of delivering our schools offer and have recently delivered our Christmas Elf story, which includes the issue of dog fouling, digitally to all Belfast's Nursery and Preschools.
- 3.12 We will also be commencing a dog fouling advertising campaign in conjunction with Corporate Communications on 18th January 2021. The service is also liaising with Legal Services to look at the potential for using stencils on the footpath as an awareness raising exercise.

Dog Fouling Signage

- 3.13 We have continued the use of signage in areas where there appears to be an increase in the incidence of dog fouling in partnership with Open Spaces and Streetscene teams. The Community Awareness team are also working with local school communities to design banners to highlight the issue.

Community Outreach Activities

- 3.14 These activities were impacted by COVID 19, but it is anticipated that they re-commence in 2021.

Targeted Enforcement by The Dog Warden Service

3.15 This service was impacted by COVID 19 restrictions, but it was able to provide a presence in the City during lockdown and was fully recovered by August 2020.

3.16 The Dog Warden Service operates from 08.00 hours to 20.00 hours seven days a week and undertakes a range of legislative duties relating to dog control including stray dogs, dog attack investigations, dangerous dogs and dog fouling. The Team is organised on a geographical area basis to ensure that resources are targeted efficiently and effectively. This approach enhances Dog Wardens' local geographical knowledge of hot spot and problematic areas that can be targeted on a proactive basis, thus increasing opportunities to issue fixed penalty notices for dog fouling.

3.17 In order to enhance the patrols undertaken by the Dog Wardens, the following operational arrangements have been introduced:

- The Dog Control Manager and the Dog Wardens will liaise with the Area Cleansing management teams and other enforcement staff in their respective areas to discuss priority areas and hotspots.
- A structured area-working plan has recently been implemented to optimise resources to assist in improving targeted performance management. We are scheduling patrols most days and will undertake patrols at particular times, including early mornings and evenings when resources permit in response to complaints and/or information that identifies a 'hot spot'.
- There has been an increased focus on signage throughout the city with all of the signage being updated and located in areas where dog-fouling hotspots are identified by the Cleansing Management teams.

3.18 **Table showing Dog Enforcement statistics:**

Year	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	1.4.20- 15.12.20
Fixed Penalties issued- Fouling	140	162	82	54	101	2
Summons issued Fouling	33	30	17	13	4	0
Fixed Penalties issued-	581	599	384	387	328	13

Straying						
Summons issued- Straying	201	212	120	126	81	0
Fixed Penalties issued- No licence	383	399	338	341	244	14
Summons issued- no licence	120	215	180	175	116	0
Total Dog Licenses issued	13,229	12,474	11,872	11,819	11,519	7,290

Use of DNA to assist dog fouling detections

- 3.19 Members have requested that officers consider the potential use of DNA testing of dog foul to determine ownership of dogs involved in cases of dog fouling. There is currently no legal requirement for dogs to be DNA tested, which costs approximately £50 per dog. The cost of testing DNA is in excess of £70 per sample and in the absence of any statutory requirement for all dogs to be DNA tested, this would be ineffective without a comprehensive data base. DNA testing has been used successfully in private gated communities but is deemed impracticable and expensive unless it became a statutory requirement.

The Council have the option of writing to DAERA in respect of this approach as it would require a NI approach, the adoption of the necessary legislative framework and additional resource allocation to implement a system for management and monitoring that would need to be a cost not passed onto the rate payer.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.20 There are no additional financial implications associated with the programme of work already planned in the revenue budget aimed at reducing levels of dog fouling through behavioural change and enforcement as it is delivered within existing budgets.

**Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

3.21 There are no implications associated with this report.”

At the request of a Member, the Director of City Services undertook to investigate the reintroduction of ‘no dog fouling’ pavement stencils and to update the Member in due course.

The Committee noted the update in regard to responsible dog ownership.

Chairperson