

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 11th January, 2022

REMOTE MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson);
Councillors Baker, Black, Bunting, Michael Collins,
Corr, de Faoite, Flynn, Garrett, M. Kelly, Magee,
McAteer, McCusker, McReynolds, Mulholland, Newton,
Smyth and Verner.

Also attended: Councillor O'Hara.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mrs. C. Matthews, Director of Resources and Fleet;
Mrs. A. Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were recorded on behalf of Aldermen Copeland and McCoubrey.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th December were taken as read and signed as correct, subject to the amendment of the minute in relation to the New Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland – Pre Consultation Input to include the endorsement and submission of the final draft response to DAERA, as circulated to Members on 23rd December.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were recorded.

Mrs. A. Allen

The Members were informed that this would be the last meeting of the People and Communities Committee which would be attended by Mrs. Alison Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager, as she would be leaving the Council at the end of the month to take up the post of Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA).

The Chairperson and several other Members thanked the Officer for her valuable contribution during her time with the Council and wished her well in her new role.

The Officer thanked the Members for their kind remarks.

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 4 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 3 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 2022/23

(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 2022/2023.

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 15th February, 2022.

He referred to the cash limit for the People and Communities Committee for 2022/2023, as recommended by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 17th December, and outlined the next steps in the rate setting process leading to the setting of the district rate by Council at its meeting in February 2022.

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 15th February, 2022; and
- agreed a cash limit for the People and Communities Committee for 2020/21 of £87,423,434 and the individual service cash limits.

Verbal Update on Impact of Covid

The Director of City Services provided the Committee with an update on the most recent variant outbreak. She advised that, currently, all critical services were being delivered including bereavement services, waste collection, parks and street cleansing.

The Members noted that, whilst the number of staff absent due to Covid had risen, the figures fluctuated on a daily basis.

The Director reiterated that it was the Department's aim to ensure the delivery of all services was maintained but highlighted that, depending on the resources available, the quality of some of these services might be affected.

The Committee noted the update.

Resources and Fleet Update **(Waste Collections and Management)**

The Director of Director of Resources and Fleet provided the Committee with a comprehensive update on the following matters:

- The latest performance data on waste arisings and recycling, including the impact of Covid-19, and initiatives to enhance the city's recycling rate;
- Developments within the sphere of inter council / DAERA collaborative working;
- Arc21 Interim Residual Waste contracts developments;
- Developments with respect to Household Waste Recycling Centres;
- Bryson Recycling performance improvement measures; and
- The updated consultation response on the 'Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers'.

During discussion the Director addressed a number of queries in relation to Bryson House recycling figures and the laptop and carpet recycling schemes, following which the Committee:

- endorsed the response to the consultation on the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers and agreed its submission to DEARA by the 14th January deadline, subject to Council ratification;
- agreed to no longer ask people presenting at Council Recycling Facilities to show proof of their address;
- agreed to look at what trend data was available from the customer hub and to establish if there was any correlation with complaints recorded in regard to areas noted/recognised as problematic for access for bin collections and to report back on the findings in due course;
- agreed that the Director would liaise with Digital Services to ascertain if the Council's old laptops could be refurbished as part of the trial being undertaken at Ormeau Household Recycling Centre; and
- agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would give consideration to ensuring 'accessibility for all' for people presenting at the Council's Household Recycling Facilities.

Update on Strategic Cemetery and Crematorium Development

The Director of City Services provided the Members with an update in regard to the following matters:

- Update on Expression of Interest on New Cemetery Land; and
- Update on New Crematorium Development.

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and the recommendations from the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group meeting held on 13th December 2021 and agreed the recommendation to shortlist two sites for further detailed consideration under an Expression of Interest process for new Cemetery Land.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

Item referred back - Erection of Dual Language Street Sign at Clifton Street

(Ms. N. Largey, Divisional Solicitor, and 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 To consider the dual language street sign application for Clifton Street.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **consider the report and decide to approve or refuse the application based upon the updated survey results.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Background

3.1 The Clifton Street dual language street sign application was considered under the existing Street Naming and Numbering policy.

Policy:

3.2 For the Clifton Street application, based on the information taken from the electoral register, and site checks of commercial properties, 12 surveys were originally issued, to both residential and commercial properties. 10 were hand delivered. 2 survey forms were posted through Royal Mail as they could not be hand delivered due to no letter box or no one present.

3.3 On review of the processing of this application, it was noted that two occupiers who had signed the initial petition had not been surveyed as their properties were deemed to be vacant at the time officers carried out their physical inspection of the street. However, it now appears they are in fact occupied.

- 3.4 At the committee meeting on 9th November members agreed to survey these two occupiers and asked that a report be brought back to December committee.
- 3.5 Survey forms were hand delivered to these two properties, with an explanation on the survey to confirm the decision of committee, and that these surveys were being carried out without prejudice, pending ratification at December council meeting.
- 3.6 At December committee members agreed to defer considering the application until the deadline for the surveys to be returned had passed and the results finalised. The deadline has passed and of the two additional surveys, one survey form was returned, and one was not. These occupier's preferences are reflected in the revised percentage totals in the report.
- 3.7 In addition, following the agreement at the committee meeting on 9th November a survey form was also re-issued by post to the secretary of Belfast Orange Hall, a property on the street. This property was originally surveyed by post and was declared a non-return and therefore the occupiers were deemed not be in favour of a dual language street sign in accordance with the policy. This survey has since been returned and is reflected in the revised percentage totals.
- 3.8 Application details

English Name	Non-English Name	Location	Applicant	Persons surveyed
Clifton Street	Sráid Clifton	Between Carrick Hill, BT1 and Carlisle Circus, BT14	Carrick Hill Residents Association	14

- 3.9 The translation was authenticated by Queens University, the approved translator for Belfast City Council.

Results for survey carried out for Clifton Street

- 3.10 In accordance with the Council's policy for the erection of dual language street signs surveys of all persons appearing on the Electoral Register plus owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises carried out and the following responses were received.

- 3.11 A revised number of 14 surveys have now been issued in total, 12 hand delivered and 2 posted using Royal Mail. The revised results are:
- 9 occupiers (64.3%) were in favour of the erection of a second street nameplate
 - 1 occupier (7.1%) had no preference either way
 - 2 occupiers (14.3%) were not in favour of the erection of a second nameplate
 - 2 occupiers (14.3%) did not respond to the survey
- 3.12 The Council's policy on the erection of a second street nameplate establishes a threshold of two thirds (66.6%) of the occupiers on the street surveyed being in favour of the proposal is sufficient to erect a second street sign in a language other than English.
- 3.13 In this instance 64.3% of occupiers were in favour of erection of dual language street signs. The Committee does have discretion in exceptional circumstances to approve an application notwithstanding the fact that the threshold is not met. On 17th December officers wrote to the applicant to advise that the application does not meet the two thirds threshold and has been asked whether there are any exceptional circumstances which warrant departure from the policy. The applicant has responded to confirm that there are no exceptional circumstances in relation to this application. Members will be aware that a new street naming dual language policy is currently being consulted on and that the threshold under that policy would be met.

Provision of street signs

- 3.14 The practice on siting the street signs is to identify those that exist on the street, and these are either added to or replaced to reflect the street name in a second language, as approved. The position of the street signs on Clifton Street are as follows:
- Junction with North Queen Street – on metal railings
 - Junction of Westlink on-slip (north) – wall mounted to bridge
 - Junction of Westlink on-slip (south) – wall mounted to bridge
 - A sign on railings at the junction with Carlisle Circus was damaged and is not currently in place.
- 3.15 If Committee were minded to exercise its discretion to grant this application, as per standard practice the dual language street signs would be erected at the locations at which the current street signs are located. Committee will note that none of the existing street sign locations set out in paragraph 3.14 are on or immediately beside the Belfast Orange Hall building.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.16 There is a cost of approximately £450 to cover the cost of the manufacturing and erection of the dual language street signs in the current locations. The cost for these street signs has been allowed for in the current budget.

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

- 3.17 There are no direct equality/rural needs implications.”

Moved by Councillor Magee,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

“That the Committee agrees to use its discretion to approve the application for the erection of dual language street signs on the basis that, one participant had no preference either way, and if this response were to be excluded from the results, the threshold of two-thirds would be met, in addition, there was nothing specific in the current policy relating to an occupant stating no preference.”

A Member stated that she did not think it was appropriate for the Committee to use its discretion to approve the application, as it did not meet the requirements of the Council’s current street naming policy. She stated that the threshold had not been met and therefore there were no exceptional circumstances to support the application.

On a vote, twelve Members voted for the proposal and four against and it was declared carried.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Avian Influenza Waterworks Park

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

Avian Bird Flu is an issue across the UK, ROI and continental Europe. The disease has been identified in wild birds at six locations in Northern Ireland, including the Waterworks. DAERA and the Public Health Agency have updated advice to landowners and the general public to avoid contact with wild birds, and in particular dead and dying birds, bird faeces and practice good personal hygiene. This report provides an overview to members of the work undertaken by the Council in respect the outbreak of Avian Influenza (AI) in wild aquatic birds at the Waterworks.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to note this update.

3.0 Main report

UPDATE WATERWORKS PARK

- 3.1 Following confirmation by DAERA of the presence of Avian Influenza in wild birds at the Waterworks park, the Council carried out a risk assessment, with input from an avian expert in order to inform appropriate response measures. In addition to this, the Council liaised with both DAERA and PHA in order to ensure that our approach is in line with government advice. The Council is satisfied that it is, and has been meeting all of our obligations as landowner of the Waterworks in this scenario.**
- 3.2 In an effort to contain the spread of the AI and on advice from DAERA sick birds were not removed from the site. As part of our response to the outbreak we made provision for a vet to visit the site daily to monitor the birds and assess any sick birds that have been observed by our parks staff. If it is deemed necessary by the vet, the birds are euthanised on site.**
- 3.3 The Council has undertaken an audit of the birds on site, and ongoing monitoring of the site includes Council staff carrying out daily counts, and monitoring numbers of wild birds, in accordance with the recommendation from our risk assessment, and with advice from our avian expert.**
- 3.4 We have also taken additional steps to ensure the birds welfare needs are being met. This includes supplementary feeding as required, in recognition of the fact that the park was closed to the public and therefore they were not feeding the birds. In order to prevent any further spread of AI within and across sites, it was necessary to restrict public access to shield the public from dead and / or dying birds.**
- 3.5 The public were advised that if they encountered a bird that they suspect has come from a Council site they should contact the Council's Customer Hub in the first instance for advice. Signage was in place at all Council sites that have wild aquatic birds. This provides details of the Customer Hub and asks members of the public to refrain from feeding the birds.**
- 3.6 Our staff have and continue to work hard to implement the recommendations of our risk assessment and are working hard in the background to look after the welfare of the birds and prevent the spread of AI.**

- 3.7 The AI outbreak remains active and Council officers or our contracted agencies are unable to prevent or predict how the disease will impact the remaining resident bird population at the site, and currently we have no way of shielding or segregating the bird population from park users. Until the bird flu outbreak is brought under control and/or runs its course there remains a high possibility that birds at the park will continue to become ill and display symptoms, which we are aware has been distressing for members of the public.
- 3.8 Members will be aware that the Waterworks park remained closed over the holiday period and at the time of writing the report (4th January 2022) there had been no further reported bird deaths at the site and officers were making arrangements to liaise with our independent expert to update our risk assessment with a view to re-opening the park. A further update will be provided to members at the People and Communities meeting.

MANAGING AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

- 3.9 Council Officers have liaised with DAERA who have advised that they have activated emergency structures in response to the Avian Influenza outbreak. Their work has focussed on disease control/eradication primarily in the livestock sector. Their engagement re wildlife (wild aquatic birds) is for surveillance purposes. In terms of animal welfare DAERA takes the lead regarding farm animals, councils lead re companion animals, PSNI lead on wildlife crime but no agency has a specific role re the welfare of wildlife.
- 3.10 While no legal opinion has been taken there may be an understanding that on public land the landowner only takes responsibility for animal welfare if they feed/restrain/display or include them as part of their offering. It is recognised that public perception however may differ in respect of this.
- 3.11 DAERA have updated their advice to the public and landowners in respect of the handling of dead birds. The council disposes of all dead birds in accordance with DAERA and PHA advice and all Health & Safety risk assessments have been updated to reflect DAERA and PHA advice. Biosecurity measures are in place for staff handling dead birds and for any person or vehicle accessing and egressing the site. Further measures will be implemented when the park is re-opened.
- 3.12 The PHA's role is when a person is confirmed to have been exposed to a confirmed Avian Influenza case to put health surveillance in place. They have also provided the public guidance not to handle dead birds. PHA are engaged in the national risk assessment and the risk to public health re Avian Influenza as this is a UK wide programme. The risk to human health is very low and transmission from animals to

humans has never happened in Europe and has only occurred in small numbers in Asian regions where contact arrangements would differ e.g. wet markets, prolonged contact.

- 3.13 Avian Influenza has however got a high mortality rate – so early identification enables better outcomes for the individual. PHA will undertake a risk assessment when a lab confirmed AI case has been handled by an individual without suitable safeguards. In general, there has been no requirement to close parks in the UK on public health grounds – the emphasis is on not touching the birds, and if dead birds are awaiting collection to consider park management arrangements. Activities on the water do not have to be stopped unless there is visible evidence of significant faecal matter. Signage and access to good hand hygiene are the key messages.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 Operational arrangements can be accommodated within existing revenue budgets.

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

- 3.15 There is no identified equality impact, this will be continually reviewed.”

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that, as the Members were aware, since the aforementioned report had been circulated the Waterworks Parks had reopened to the public on 8th January.

Following a query, he confirmed that much had been learned from the outbreak and the response from both Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Public Health Agency (PHA). He advised that he was happy to share this with other statutory Partners and confirmed that a Council Risk Assessment was now in place in the event of another outbreak.

During discussion the lack of initial advice and assistance from DAERA was highlighted, along with the fact that no one agency appeared to have a statutory responsibility for the welfare of wildlife.

It was proposed by Councillor Flynn, seconded by Councillor McAteer and agreed that the Committee would write DAERA to express concern at its delay in providing assistance and advice to the Council during the Avian Influenza outbreak at the Waterworks Park and also to seek clarity as to what agency was responsible for the welfare of wildlife.

Operational

WRAP Better Recycling Campaign Grant Scheme

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that, on behalf of DAERA, WRAP was currently delivering the Better Recycling consumer behaviour change campaign to support DAERA's aims to normalise recycling behaviour, in an endeavor to increase household recycling rates to pre-pandemic levels.

He reported that WRAP had announced a grant scheme to support Councils to deliver additional coverage of the Better Recycling Campaign. Councils could apply for the funding at a rate of £350 per 10,000 households, this equated to approximately £5,425 for Belfast City Council and recipients were expected to provide match funding for the projects through costs incurred. The application had closed on the 15th December 2021.

The Members noted that the Better Recycling Campaign message complemented the Council's recycling message and therefore officers had applied for the grant. The application had included a proposal to use a combination of advertising formats to maximise coverage to households in Belfast and to target people during all aspects of their daily life. The Director provided a brief overview of the proposed campaign, which included six sheet panels at bus stops and outside local newsagents and convenience stores, online advertising and posts on the Council's various social media platforms.

The Committee noted that an application had been made to the WRAP Better Recycling Campaign Grant Scheme and that 'The Better Recycling Campaign' would run for two weeks, from 28th February – 13th March, 2022.

Belfast's Buzzing

The Committee was advised that, during the past year, Buglife had worked closely with several stakeholders, including Belfast City Council, the National Trust, the Belfast Hills Partnership, the Lagan Valley Regional Park and others to develop the Belfast's Buzzing project with the shared goal of creating and restoring wildflower-rich habitats across Belfast.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that it was anticipated that the two-year project would help to address the catastrophic decline in pollinating insects by significantly increasing the amount of connected wildflower-rich habitats across Belfast. The project aimed to promote insect pollinators in parks and open spaces as well as to inform, inspire and engage local communities in the recovery of nature within their local area. In partnership with Belfast City Council, and working in conjunction with landowners, schools, community groups and other NGOs, the project aimed to restore 15 hectares of publicly accessible sites for pollinators and to inspire landowners to restore a further 5-10 hectares of privately owned sites.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that potential sites for habitat restoration, creation and enhancement works had been identified, which included Council sites.

Belfast's Buzzing would aim to provide an interesting and fun opportunity for local people and communities to learn about the importance of pollinators and their habitats and to get involved in enhancing their local parks and open spaces.

The training and support provided by the project would also enable the Council to restore and enhance habitats and to manage sites in a sensitive manner for pollinators, aiding delivery of local biodiversity initiatives such as the 'City of Wildflowers' and the 'Rewilding our Wards' (Notice of Motion).

The Members noted that BugLife was in the final stages of submitting an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and was seeking support from the Council.

The Committee:

- granted authority for project work to occur on Council land and agreed that the Council would manage these project sites/locations for a period of ten years, maintaining their biodiversity value (for example: cut and lift wildflower meadows);
- agreed a £5,000 funding contribution to the project; and
- agreed that the Council would assist 'Buglife' in promoting Belfast's Buzzing across the City using the Council's various communication channels.

The Committee noted the provisional letter of support that had been provided to Heritage Lottery Fund.

Update of Education Around Responsible Dog Ownership

As the live webcast was not working for this agenda item, it was agreed that it would be deferred to the February meeting of the Committee.

Chairperson