

People and Communities Committee

Monday, 6th February, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and Councillors Austin, Corr,
Heading, Magennis and Newton.

Also attended: Councillor Boyle.

In attendance: Mr. N. Grimshaw, Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Assistant Director; and
Mrs. S Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Sandford and Councillors Copeland, Corr Johnston, Lyons and McCusker.

Deputation

Deputation from Higher Education Authorities

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. R. Feeney (Queen's University), Mr. D. Morrow (Ulster University), Mr. J. Woods (Belfast Metropolitan College) representing the Higher Education Authorities. Superintendent Jones was also in attendance representing Belfast City PSNI.

The Assistant Director provided the Committee with an update on the current work being undertaken by the Council. She reported that the Committee had considered a report on anti-social behaviour in a range of parks and open spaces across the City which had included:

- anti-social behaviour in the Holylands and around parks and open spaces across the city;
- the ongoing work in response to these issues; and
- the planned work to improve the response to these issues.

The Assistant Director advised that the report had been presented to the Committee following a Notice of Motion that had been submitted to the Council for consideration in respect of ongoing challenges within the Holylands area of Belfast, particularly at certain times of the year.

The officer reported that, during discussion, the Committee had recognised the importance of the Council working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to attempt to improve the response to these issues, hence why the meeting had been organised.

For Members information, the officer reported that a control strategy and operational plans were being developed by the PSNI and the Council for St Patrick's Day. The strategy and operational plans would focus on ensuring better co-ordination

of multi-agency efforts around St. Patrick's Day 2017, not just in the Holylands area but also across the City.

The officer then proceeded to outline the proposed operation plans as follows:

- to deliver a comprehensive and integrated communications approach across agencies, including promoting positive St. Patrick's Day event/activities;
- to reduce antisocial behaviour and minimise the potential for public disorder by:
 - reducing the number of people attending the Holylands area;
 - reducing the amount of alcohol being brought into the area/consumed in the area;
 - encouraging positive behaviour and challenging negative behaviour; and
 - to deliver proportionate and proactive multi-agency enforcement.
- to provide an effective and timely clean-up to all parts of the city;
- to reduce anti-social behaviour by preventing large crowds gathering to consume alcohol and other substances in parks and open spaces; and
- to deliver successful St Patrick's Day public celebratory events (parade and concert) designed to attract a family audience.

Mr. Morrow thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present. He advised that the institutions recognised that there were particular challenges in some residential areas of South Belfast, specifically the Holylands area. He highlighted that this area was home to both long-term residents, students and a more transient population, including newcomers to Northern Ireland, who often resided in rented accommodation.

The representative stated that as responsible institutions, the universities and colleges were committed to promoting community responsibility to its students and encouraging positive community relations throughout the City and he proceeded to outline the following measures taken:

- the institutions communicate regularly and robustly with all of its students in respect of student behaviour, personal safety, alcohol consumption and potential consequences of anti-social behaviour, such as university discipline, damage to career aspirations and travel opportunities in the future;
- the institutions work with Belfast City Council and the PSNI throughout the year and engage in intensive inter-agency planning and co-operation with Belfast City Council and the PSNI in advance of the most challenging periods;
- each institution has a visible presence of staff in the areas during these periods;
- each institution has clear disciplinary procedures in place;

Mr. Morrow then proceeded to provide the Committee with clarification regarding enforcement. He advised that, given that the Holylands area was a private residential area, the universities and colleges had no statutory powers to enforce the law. He stated that the institutions believed that clarity on the remit of the statutory agencies,

clarity on the responsibility for enforcement of the alcohol and noise by-laws in particular, and a commitment to providing the resources to do so would be an important step in tackling the anti-social behaviour in the Holylands area. He added that, where current legislation was found to be not working or not being enforced, a commitment was needed from the statutory bodies that they would implement new legislation and enforce it.

Superintendent Jones concurred but added that introducing new legislation was not straight forward. She then proceeded to outline the work undertaken with the Council throughout the year and she specifically referred to the inter-agency planning and co-operation with all the statutory agencies in advance of the most challenging periods.

Mr. Feeney highlighted that there was an increasing number of non-students and post-primary students travelling to events in the university area and it was noted that busloads of young people had been seen arriving on a previous St. Patrick's Day. He reiterated that increased enforcement and fit for purpose legislation might be the turning point in managing some of the issues faced in the Holylands area and help ensure that all those present in the area were clear on their personal responsibilities, that anti-social behaviour would not be tolerated and that there would be serious consequences.

Mr. Morrow concluded by advising that the universities and colleges were committed to working with all the statutory partners to protect and enhance community relations throughout the year and most importantly to ensure the welfare of all students.

Detailed discussion ensued, during which the representatives answered a number of questions.

The Committee was reminded that, at a meeting of the People and Communities Committee held on 8th November 2016, it had been agreed that the Director and Assistant Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and the Chairperson would undertake further engagement with the Higher Education Authorities and it was noted that a meeting would now be progressed and an update report would be submitted to a future meeting. In addition, it was requested that a breakdown of the following would be included in the report:

- the cost to the Council in terms of staffing / clean-up operation in the Holylands after St. Patrick's Day;
- the amount of money allocated to the Holylands from the South Belfast DPCSP; and
- the PSNI to provide details on the resources deployed during St. Patrick's Day.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending and they left the meeting.

Chairperson