



Subject:	Dual Language Street Signs Policy Public Consultation and EQIA
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive

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

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to update the SP&R Committee on the results of the public consultation to the proposed changes to the council's Dual Language Street Signs Policy and the conclusions reached in the accompanying EQIA.</p> <p>A report on the consultation is attached as Appendix 1 and the EQIA final decision report is attached as Appendix 2.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that Members:</p> <p>(i) note the results of the public consultation and EQIA as laid out below.</p>

	(ii) note that officers are currently reviewing the operational process of how the proposed policy would work in practice with a view to establishing an indicative date for the policy to go live, if approved.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The public consultation opened online on the Your Say Belfast platform on 22 November 2021 and closed on 28 February 2022. The survey was available in both the English and Irish languages.</p> <p>There was a total of 4.4k visits to the consultation page and 1,078 written responses (785 in the English language version and 293 in the Irish language version).</p> <p>Officers arranged four online public information sessions, which had a total of 4 attendees.</p> <p>Each political party in the council was offered a briefing session and all attended apart from People Before Profit.</p> <p>Information sessions were held for stakeholder groups, which included Irish language groups and academia, the Ulster Scots Agency and the council's Equality Forum, Migrant Forum and Disability Advisory Panel.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Consultation Survey</u></p> <p>The consultation survey focused on five proposed changes to the Dual Language Street Signs policy. For four of the five questions, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposed changes, and they could comment if they wished. For the remaining proposed change relating to the operation of the council's residual discretion, respondents were asked to comment. Respondents were also asked to comment on any aspect of the proposed policy that had not been addressed by the preceding questions.</p> <p>The survey also gave respondents the option to comment on the draft Equality Impact Assessment running concurrently with the consultation and on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Monitoring data of the online consultation responses</u></p> <p>Gender: Of the 854 respondents who responded to this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified as male: 64.4% (550) • Identified as female: 32.1% (274)

- Preferred not to say: 3.5% (30)

Community background: Of the 786 respondents who answered this question:

- Protestant community background: 37.8% (297)
- Catholic community background: 35.1% (276)
- Neither Protestant nor Catholic: 27.1% (213)

National Identity: Of the 793 respondents who answered this question:

- Identified as Irish: 43% (341)
- Identified as British: 33.4% (265)
- Identified as Northern Irish: 19.9% (158)
- Identified as “other”: 3.3% (26)
- Identified as English: 0.4 (3)

Postcodes: Responses were received from each postcode in Belfast. The largest number of responses came from North and West Belfast.

3.4

Survey responses

The combined total of responses from the English language version of the survey and the Irish language version were in favour of the four of the five proposed changes to the policy where respondents were asked to express agreement or disagreement, as can be seen below:

Proposed Change	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Change to application method (removal of 1/3 petition and specifying that occupier/s of the street, Elected Member for DEA or developer may apply)	59.0%	0.9%	40.1%
Change to threshold for further consideration of the application (2/3 to 15%)	58.7%	0.6%	40.7%
Change to how non-responses are classified (no longer counted as against)	62.0%	3%	35.0%
Change to introduce an equality assessment for each application	56.0%	13.3%	30.7%

For the remaining question relating to the operation of the council's residual discretion, respondents were asked if they had any comments, which were categorised and analysed by officers.

3.5

Written comments and sentiment summary

Officers categorised written comments in the English language version of the survey as being positive, negative, mixed or neutral, which allowed a 'sentiment summary' to be produced for each question. The sentiment summary for all questions apart from that on residual discretion was predominantly negative as can be seen in the table below.

Proposed Change	Sentiment summary
Change to application method (removal of 1/3 petition and specifying that occupier/s of the street, Elected Member for DEA or developer may apply)	Negative: 68.8%, Positive 26.7%, Neutral: 3.5%, Mixed: 1%
Change to threshold for further consideration of the application (2/3 to 15%)	Negative: 68.7%, Positive 25.7%, Neutral: 5%, Mixed: 0.6%
Change to how non-responses are classified (no longer counted as against)	Negative: 60.4%, Positive 31.4%, Neutral: 7.1%, Mixed: 1.1%
Change to introduce an equality assessment for each application	Negative: 50.5%, Positive 28.1%, Neutral: 19.6%, Mixed: 1.8%
Explanation of residual discretion	Negative: 49.6% negative, Positive 12.1%, Neutral 35.3%, Mixed: 3%

Officers analysed the written comments to determine themes in responses. The findings from this were that those who were broadly opposed to the proposed changes commented negatively on the cost and how the outworking of the proposed policy might be forced on communities by a minority, thereby causing division or tension.

Those in favour of the proposed policy commented positively on how this would enhance the visibility of the Irish language and promote equality and inclusion. Respondents also noted how the proposed policy would be in keeping with best practice under the UN Special Rapporteur guidance.

3.6

Other submissions

Sinn Fein submitted a total of 1,081 identical hard copy responses and An Dream Dearg submitted a total of 274 identical hard copy responses. These coordinated submissions were in favour of the proposed changes to the policy.

	<p>A written response was submitted by the Committee for the Administration of Justice welcoming the proposed policy but questioning how it interacted with the council’s Equality Scheme.</p> <p>Responses were also submitted by Conradh na Gaeilge, An Droichead, Glór na Móna, Ionad Uibh Eachach and Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain. The content of these were largely the same with each being in favour of the proposed changes.</p>
3.7	<p><u>EQIA findings</u></p> <p>The Final Decision Report of the EQIA consultants has found that “while the consultation has revealed a lack of consensus with regard to the proposed changes to the policy, and indeed has identified a strong division of opinion, there is nothing inherent in the feedback received to suggest that, at this time, the proposed changes should not now be adopted - but on the understanding that the policy should be subject to rigorous review after a period of two years.”</p> <p>With regard to the policy potentially disrupting good relations, the EQIA report states that “sufficient and proportionate checks and balances have been incorporated within the application process to minimise this risk.”</p>
3.8	<p><u>Next steps</u></p> <p>Subject to Member agreement, a revised policy incorporating the proposed changes will be drafted and presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.</p> <p>Officers are reviewing the operational processes required to ensure the proposed policy works in practice with a view to establishing an indicative date for the policy to go live, if approved.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>As agreed previously, given the potential for increased numbers of applications the council will deal with no more than 5 in any given month. If numbers are excessive, they will be held in a queue and dealt with in the order in which they have been received. This will also be managed in the context of the existing staffing resource and the established annual budget for street signage. A report will be submitted to a future meeting outlining the new procedure emanating from the revised policy, and the options for increasing the number of applications which could be processed on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Assessing each application for any Section 75 implications will have resource implications for Building Control, the Place & Economy Policy team, the Good Relations Unit and also the Equality & Diversity Unit.</p>

	<p>An external consultant has been employed to assist with elements relating to the consultation, EQIA and the revised procedure. It is proposed that these consultants will undertake an initial review of the application and screening process for applications after the first 6 months of implementation.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>A final decision EQIA report is attached to this report as Appendix 2. The EQIA consultants will be available to provide ongoing equality advice for a period of up to a year.</p> <p>Each application for a dual language street sign will be assessed at an initial stage for any adverse impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. The revised procedure is being finalised and will be brought as part of the further report outlined in 3.9.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Consultation Report</p> <p>Appendix 2 – EQIA Final Decision Report</p>