



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Media Coverage
Date:	4 th August, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health and Environmental Services, Ext. 3260
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Relevant Background Information

Members agreed that a quarterly report on media coverage would be brought to Committee to keep Members up-to-date on current issues.

Key Issues

A report on media coverage for the period March – June, 2010 is attached.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to note the report.

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Council-generated Media Coverage

From March – June 2010, 69 press releases directly related to the work of the Department were issued.

The high number of press releases is due in some part to proactively highlighting our prosecutions for offences in food safety, underage cigarette sales, on-street drinking, noise pollution, littering, and dog control. These have been picked up very well by the media, particularly by the weekly papers, and highlight the Council's commitment to protecting the health and safety of the public, as well as carrying out its statutory duties under legislation.

Most recently the Council launched a new and updated anti-litter campaign on the theme of 'Littering - It's not a good look', which again is targeted at 18-35 year olds. This time however the focus is on self-awareness and image, to try to make people think about how littering reflects on them personally, rather than us simply telling them not to do it. The campaign was launched with the creation of a mini movie set in the grounds of City Hall and actors played out several 'littering scenarios' for passers-by. The launch itself was hugely successful and was picked up by key media, with radio interviews and coverage in the Press and online.

There was also good coverage of our 'Big Sweep' Challenge which is aimed at encouraging communities to organise clean-ups in their own area and compete for the best streets in the city. The Brighter Belfast awards were also launched with an awards ceremony planned for November.

The launch of CCTV in the university area, just before the St Patrick's Day celebrations, got widespread coverage in the media including daily and weekly newspaper coverage, TV and radio interviews and online articles. While this was a joint initiative the scheme was received very positively which reflected well on the Council's contribution to the scheme, and its efforts to improve the quality of life of residents across the city were recognised.

Events at this year's Waste Week proved a huge success and we got some positive coverage, particularly around the Movies with Glass event. This year we had a 'Unique Boutique' pop-up shop at Victoria Square as well as a charity car boot sale, both encouraging re-use of household goods. The car boot sale proved so successful that we are looking at the possibility of making this a more regular event, as it also highlights the Council's 'reduce, reuse, recycle' message. Also attracting positive media coverage was the Stitch and Style event (encouraging people to restyle and reuse clothes) which was held in St George's Market in March, building on the success of the previous events.

We also flagged up changes to our waste collection arrangements which means people can now dispose of food waste in their brown bins, and this was covered by the media. Uptake of this new service has also helped to boost the Council's recycling rate and therefore save both the Council and ratepayers money.

Other successful initiatives during this period have been:

- Launch of the 'Good Morning' project at City Hall (a telephone support service for vulnerable people) – the Belfast model that has been operating with great success was used as a blueprint to be rolled out to other parts of Northern Ireland
- Awards for winners of the council's 'Partners in Grime' competition – schoolchildren from across Belfast were invited to the Lord Mayor's parlour to receive prizes for taking part in the anti-litter competition
- Walk to Work Week
- Young People's Awards – annual awards-giving was held at the Waterfront Hall
- Launch of EPC (Energy Performance Certificates) campaign to make landlords/property owners aware of their obligations under the new legislation

Statistics

From March until June, there were 146 press enquiries directly related to the work of the Department. This accounts for just over a quarter (26%) of the total number of enquiries dealt with by the Media Relations team for the same period.

Other coverage

The Council has come in for criticism from 'Save Lennox' campaigners – a dog which was seized by our dog wardens on the basis that it was a proscribed breed and therefore illegal under the Dangerous Dogs legislation. While the Council has acted appropriately in this regard, and is obliged by law to have taken this action, there has been criticism of the Council's dog warden service and of individual officers, particularly on online forums such as Facebook, Twitter and youtube. The situation is currently under review by the Head of Service and Legal Services.

Weekly newspapers have carried several articles on alleygating and the positive benefits for communities.

The community safety wardens service continues to be highlighted in the Press with the overwhelming majority of coverage being extremely positive and reflecting well on the council. The murder of Seamus Fox in west Belfast brought the wardens into the spotlight regarding their role in communities and we issued an appropriate statement about our joint working with the PSNI and other agencies under the 'Safer City' agenda.

The Licensing Committee's decision to refuse an entertainments licence for Mynt nightclub based on evidence from the PSNI was picked up widely by the media and we issued an agreed statement.