



Belfast City Council

Report to	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Realignment of Pest Control, Dog Control, Animal Welfare and Public Health and Housing Sections within the Health and Environmental Services Department
Date:	6 March 2013
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Director of Health and Environmental Services, ext 3260
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Public Health Unit is one of five units within the Department's Environmental Health Service. It comprises several front line Environmental Health functions including Housing, Pest Control, Dog Control and Animal Welfare. It also delivers the Council's Home Safety Check scheme and manages the Council's city wide fuel stamps project.
1.2	In January of this year the Unit's Manager indicated he would be retiring at the end of May 2013. This forthcoming change provided an opportunity to review the current structure and reporting lines and the Director therefore tasked the Head of Environmental Health to consider the optimal service delivery model going forward for these functions.
1.3	There are currently several drivers for rationalising elements of front line service delivery. These include the continuing development of a more joined up neighbourhood working approach to align with the needs of area working to improve service delivery, the need to make operational improvements around the customer interface processes within the department and, on a more strategic note, the advent of Local Government Reform, along with the introduction of additional powers such as Community Planning, as well as the transfer of functions.
1.4	Housing, Home Safety and Environmental Protection It is clear that there are many synergies between the operational work of the Service's Housing Section and its Environmental Protection Unit (EPU). The Head of Environmental Health has therefore proposed that the Housing and Home Safety functions should be realigned with those functions currently performed by the EPU, such as noise and environmental (for example, air and contaminated land complaints) requests for service. Already a close working relationship exists between and across the Housing and EPU Sections and this proposal will therefore bring many of the core residential focused Environmental Health functions within a single unit.
1.5	Due to the existing service structure this transition would only require a minor change in reporting lines and it is therefore anticipated that the alignment of the Housing unit with EPU would be a relatively smooth operational transition and should be effective from 1 April 2013.

	Pest Control, Dog Control, Animal Welfare and Street Cleansing
1.6	Members are already committed to a greater emphasis on Customer Focus and a desire for a more co-ordinated and joined up service delivery on the ground. Already a close working relationship exists between Cleansing Services and the Dog Control Section and many Elected Members associate the two together.
1.7	The Heads of Environmental Health and Cleansing Services therefore met to discuss the potential transfer, to Cleansing Services, of Dog Control, Pest Control and Animal Welfare and agreed, in principal, a way forward. As there is no increase in cost or head count associated with these changes, Committee approval is not required. However, it is important that the Committee is kept abreast of the impending changes.
1.8	The Heads of Cleansing Services and Environmental Health have briefed the managers, officers and Trade Unions on the proposed changes and a small team of officers from both services has been convened and is taking forward the practical implementation of the changeover. There is an expectation that the new reporting lines will be operational on 1 April 2013 with the relocation of the relevant back office and administrative staff to be completed before the end of May 2013.
1.9	The Director believes that these changes will be a significant step in the continuing review and rationalisation of the work of the department around the priority of providing customer focused services to the community and better area delivery.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The manager of the Environmental Health Service's Public Health Unit is leaving the Council on 31 May 2013. This provides an opportunity to review the functions of this Unit with a view to rationalising service delivery and aligning services in a more co-ordinated way.
2.2	It is proposed to align the Housing and Home Safety functions along with those functions delivered by the EPU. In practical terms this will involve little more than a change in reporting lines but should assist in the delivery of a more joined up approach.
2.3	The Heads of Cleansing Services and Environmental Health Services have agreed that Dog Control and Pest Control, including Animal Welfare, should transfer to Cleansing Services. Agreed processes have been followed to bring about these changes. A small officer working group has been established to take forward the practical implications of the transition.
2.4	It is proposed to have the reporting lines in place by 1 April 2013 with the relocation of relevant administrative staff completed before the end of May. The relevant staff and Trade Unions have been briefed on the changes and will continue to be consulted with as the transfer progresses.
2.5	It is anticipated that the changes will provide a more customer focused approach to service delivery and will be consistent with the aspiration of Local Government Reform.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	There are minimal costs associated with this alignment such as some office associated equipment costs with the move of some staff to Lanyon.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None

5	Recommendations
	The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	EPU – Environmental Protection Unit CMT – Corporate Management Team