



## Belfast City Council

**Report to:** Parks and Leisure Committee

**Subject:** **Routine Correspondence – Belfast Zoo**

**Date:** Thursday, 16th January, 2014

**Reporting Officer:** Barry Flynn, Democratic Services Officer, ext 6312

<b>1</b>	<b>Background Information</b>
1.1	The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 14th November, it had agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Tourism Minister, Mrs. A. Foster, MLA, requesting that consideration be given to providing central government support towards the costs associated with the operation and maintenance of the Belfast Zoo.
1.2	The Committee had noted that the political parties at the Assembly had urged the Minister with responsibility for the Environment, Mr. M. H. Durkan, M.L.A., to consider providing direct funding to avert the proposed closure of the Exploris aquarium in Portaferry, which was owned and managed by Ards Borough Council.
1.3	Such political support at the Assembly had been based on the view that the aquarium was considered to be a unique facility which was utilised by people across Northern Ireland and beyond. As such, the Belfast Zoo, given its unique and regional importance in terms of tourism, might be considered eligible for assistance which would assist the Council to offset its significant running costs.
<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Correspondence was sent to the Minister's office and a response was received on 20th December (appended herewith). Whilst the Minister acknowledges the Zoo's importance as a visitor attraction, she has suggested that the Council should seek central government support for the Zoo through the Tourist Board's funding schemes. Such schemes are based on competitive scoring and criteria
2.2	As such, the Minister has indicated that the Zoo, despite being a unique visitor attraction, would not be considered eligible for specialised financial assistance.
<b>2</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
2.1	None.

<b>3</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
3.1	None.

<b>4</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
4.1	The Committee is requested to note the receipt of the correspondence.

<b>5</b>	<b>Attachments</b>
5.1	Appendix 1