



Department for  
**Social  
Development**

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From: The Minister

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES			
18 APR 2012			
SP & R	P & L	HOUSING	AUDIT
H & ES	TP	GR	COUNCIL
LIC	DEVEL	TRAN	
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Mr Henry Downey  
Democratic Services Officer  
Chief Executive's Department  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
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Our ref: COR/215/2012

16 April 2012

Dear Mr Downey

Thank you for your letter of 13 March inviting me to comment on the motion passed by Belfast City Council on 1 March 2012 concerning public safety at Laganside and the promotion of cheap alcohol.

Firstly, I should be grateful if you would advise the Council that I and my Department share its expression of support for the family and friends of the late Joby Murphy. I have visited Joby's father, Mr Joseph Murphy, to hear his concerns and views concerning the important matters raised in the Council's motion.

With regard to the provision of a safe environment along the riverfront at Laganside my Department has completed a health and safety review, as referred to in the motion, and published the review report completed by RPS consultants. A copy of the report is attached. This audit was scheduled for later this year but I requested that it should be carried out immediately following the tragic incident at the Lagan Weir.

My purpose in publishing the report was to reassure those members of the public who use the footbridge that my Department's safety measures in the area fully comply with current bridge design and safety codes and the public can use the bridge with confidence. The report has confirmed this.

One of the central issues of public concern was whether lifebuoys should be stationed on the footbridge itself as a potential rescue measure. The report drawing from guidance issued by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the views of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, clearly states that the stationing of lifebuoys on the bridge itself is not an appropriate location.



The audit has made several recommendations regarding further preventative measures to reduce the risk of deliberate entry into the water all of which are of medium to low priority. My Department accepts these recommendations and is currently implementing them.

In all of this we must not lose sight of the risks posed to our young people by irresponsible drink promotions and I welcome the Council's expression of opposition to such practices. My Department is committed to banning these promotions for once and for all. For example, a ban on promotions in supermarkets offering 8 bottles of beer for the price of 6, and promotions in pubs and clubs that offer unlimited drink for a fixed price, for example, all you can drink for £20. My Department is also working with the drinks trade to develop a code of practice on drink promotions. The draft code seeks to end irresponsible promotions which encourage excessive consumption of alcohol, such as serving alcohol in large measures, promotions encouraging specific groups to drink for free or at a discount 'half price drinks for under 25s'. My department has also launched a public consultation on the introduction of regulations to ban certain irresponsible drinks promotions. The consultation period runs for 8 weeks from 12 March to 7 May 2012 and we look forward to receiving the Council's response to the consultation.

Finally, my Department is committed to ensuring that the area around the Lagan Weir is a safe environment for all those who use it as part of their daily commute or going to or from the many attractions in the area. The River Manager and Operational Staff at the Lagan Weir will continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, PSNI and Belfast Harbour Commissioners to maintain a safe environment along the River Lagan.

I trust that the findings of the health and safety review will reassure Belfast City Council that my Department is fully discharging its obligations in respect of public safety at the Lagan Weir. If there are matters about which the Council requires further clarification my Department would be happy to provide this.

Yours sincerely

Nelson M'Cauleland

**NELSON McCAUSLAND MLA**  
**Minister for Social Development**