

People and Communities Committee

Monday, 21st January, 2019

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nicholl (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland, Rodgers, Sandford; and
Councillors Black, Corr, Heading, Magennis,
Magee and McCusker.

Also attended: Councillor McGimpsey.

In attendance: Mrs. R. Crozier, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were recorded on behalf of Alderman McCoubrey and Councillor Baker, McReynolds, Newton and Pankhurst.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentations

The Front Row Union

In accordance with the Committee's decision of 9th October, it was reported that Mr. John McMurtry, Miss. Beth Cregan and Miss. Vicky Irwin, representing The Front Row Union (FRU), were in attendance to provide an overview of the organisation's work in regard to the Promotion and Development of Women in Sport.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed the deputation to the meeting.

Mr. McMurtry proceeded to outline the background to the organisation. He explained that the FRU provided coverage of rugby in Ireland via its website www.frontrowunion.com and through its various social media outlets. Under the headline coverage of Ulster Rugby and Irish Rugby, the organisation provided comprehensive media coverage of Women's Rugby, Club Rugby, U20 Rugby and Schools Rugby in Ireland. It was fully Media Accredited by the sport's governing body, World Rugby, and it promoted Irish male and female participation in World Rugby events.

The representative advised that the FRU was currently supporting three Elite Ulster Women Players by providing financial assistance, training equipment and individual development and welfare plans which included access to personal training facilities and

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sports therapy treatment. He advised that two of those players, Beth and Vicky, were in attendance and the third was currently away on Ireland 7s duties in Australia.

The representative advised that women in sport were generally underrepresented in media coverage, therefore, since 2010 it had either directly or indirectly, through clubs, provided financial assistance to every Ulster based Irish Women's International. This was particularly the case with Women's Rugby in Ulster and the rest of Ireland.

He explained that, as well as financial assistance, the FRU had also been able to offer development opportunities through media. It had sponsored two Elite Ulster Women's Players and an undergraduate journalism student as part of its media team for the recent coverage of the 2018 U20 World Championships in Narbonne and the 2018 HSBC Rugby World Sevens Series in Paris. This had been a particularly successful venture as one of the players was now a fully accredited photographer. The other player and the journalism student had also gained full media accreditation and had interviewed four current Women's Rugby World Championships and three Women's Sevens Olympic Champions, amongst others.

Mr. McMurtry advised that the FRU felt that it was important that today's youth understood the impact and influence of the media and how to use it to promote positive stories for their communities.

In terms of rugby, he detailed the expanding opportunities that existed for the Front Row Union Team as follows:

- the smooth transition of young players from underage rugby to senior rugby;
- to showcase the talents of older players who had recently taken up the sport;
- to challenge all the players through increased leadership responsibilities within the team environment; and
- to highlight areas of improvement in their individual and collective games.

He also detailed the many opportunities that existed for the players in both rugby and media as follows:

- International Club U18 7 a side tournament in Belfast;
- International Club U20 10 a side tournament in Belfast;
- Invitational International standard side (U23) to play International opposition throughout Ulster;
- Ireland Women's Home Six Nations – media coverage;
- Ireland U20 Home Six Nations - media coverage;
- World Rugby Women's Sevens Series – media coverage in Canada; and
- World Rugby Women's Sevens Series – media coverage in Paris.

Ms. Cregan and Ms. Irwin addressed the Committee and provided a brief overview of the many opportunities that they had received, through both rugby and media, as a result of their involvement with the FRU.

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Mr. McMurtry concluded by stating that the FRU was a progressive, forward thinking organisation, with a commitment to the promotion of women in sport. It was fully committed to supporting the development of women's rugby and it sought the assistance of the Council in delivering this vision. He suggested that, should the FRU secure International Tournaments, the Council could assist with the provision of facilities and with the promotion of events.

The deputation then answered a number of questions from the Members, during which several of the Members commended the work of the FRU and suggested that the FRU representatives liaise with the Council's Sports Development Unit to ascertain if any funding opportunities existed through the Council's Support for Sport Scheme.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

The Community Rescue Service

The Committee was advised that, in accordance with the decision of 4th September, Mr. Sean McCarry, Regional Commander and Miss. Sharon Gibson, Regional Fundraising Officer, representing the Community Rescue Service, were in attendance to provide an update on the voluntary work of the Community Rescue Service.

Mr. McCarry commenced by explaining that the service carried out search operations between the sea and the mountains in partnership with the police and emergency services. The majority of calls that the teams of volunteers dealt with concerned vulnerable people or emergency situations. He detailed that the organisation was:

- part of the UK Structure Activity Relationship (SAR);
- a member of the Association of Lowland Search and Rescue (ALSAR);
- a regional organisation; and
- made up of 10 operational units, with over 180 operational members and 16 boats.

Mr. McCarry explained that the service had been set up in 2007 when a need for a low-land rescue operations had been identified. Previously, it had been deemed too dangerous for a volunteer-led organisation to carry out searches for missing people and the security services had taken the lead.

He proceeded to outline examples of the many rescue calls that the service received. Explaining that some of the calls were for missing people suffering from dementia, but most concerned people who were in a very distressed or in a venerable state of mind due to mental health problems.

He then provided details in relation to the level of service that the organisation had provided, to date, which included:

- 2015 – 253 high risk missing person searches and emergency responses, with over 55,000 voluntary hours given;

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- 2016 – 271 high risk missing person searches and emergency responses, with over 58,300 voluntary hours given;
- 2017 – 289 high risk missing person searches and emergency responses, with over 62,000 voluntary hours given; and
- 2018 – 404 high risk missing person searches and emergency responses, with over 80,000 voluntary hours given.

As well as search operations, the organisation also provided a blood bike service to take vital supplies, including baby milk, around the country and also night-time safety patrols in the form of foot, bike and vehicle patrols around Belfast to assist people who might have been injured or felt vulnerable during a night out. Safety patrols commenced approximately five years ago with interventions on a nightly basis, with often more than fifty individuals per year having been rescued, these included patrols of the Lagan Weir and at concerts.

The representative then provided the Members with details in respect of some of the high profile search operations that the service had been involved in during the past twelve months. He reiterated that the service was an entirely voluntary-led organisation and praised the work of the many volunteers.

Mr McCarry concluded by advising the Committee that the Community Rescue Service had been filmed for three-part BBC documentary called The Search – Finding Northern Ireland’s Missing which was scheduled to be screened tomorrow evening, Tuesday 22nd January at 10.40pm. He stated that this documentary gave a detailed insight into the work of the service and he encouraged the Members and officers to publicise it amongst their colleagues.

A number of the Members praised and thanked the Community Rescue Service for its invaluable work in the community. Mr. McCarry then answered a number of questions from the Members and the representatives retired from the meeting.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would investigate if any funding opportunities existed through the Council’s current funding streams;
- (b) to investigate the current position regarding the transfer of ownership of the Lagan Lookout from the Department for Infrastructure to Belfast City Council; and
- (c) to circulate the presentation and information regarding the BBC documentary to all Elected Members.

TAMHI - Promoting Positive Mental Fitness Through Sport

In accordance with the Committee’s decision of 9th October, it was reported that Mr. Joe Donnelly, from TAMHI, was in attendance to provide an overview of the organisation’s work in regard to the power of sport to promote positive mental fitness.

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Mr. Donnelly commenced by advising that TAMHI stood for Tackling Awareness of Mental Health Issues. He detailed that the charity had been established in 2011 in memory of Thomas 'Tammy Tucker' McLaughlin who sadly had taken his own life in 2009.

The representative explained that TAMHI worked with sports groups to help them support the development of an infrastructure that would support positive mental fitness. He outlined the following key aims of promoting positive mental health in and through sport:

- to raise awareness within sport of the importance of positive mental fitness and how this could have an impact on physical health;
- to engage young people and young men in sport to reach out to those with mental health concerns;
- to raise awareness of the risks of self-harm and the importance of suicide prevention within sport;
- to highlight the importance of training with Governing Bodies, Mental Health Groups and clubs for their coaches and volunteers, to support them in spotting early signs of emotional difficulty and risk in current participants; and
- to create an environment where people could ask for help and support when needed.

The Committee was advised that TAMHI understood the importance of participation in sport and the positive contribution that it could make to an individual's welfare, this was especially relevant if their experience was one that reflected the many positive values of sport, to name but a few, fun, friendship, commitment, honesty, teamwork, fair competition and inclusion.

The representative then drew the Members' attention to a research study that TAMHI had undertaken in conjunction with the Ulster University that assessed if a mental health awareness programme enhanced wellbeing and reduced anxiety amongst footballers. He advised that twelve football clubs had been randomly selected and six weeks of intervention had been conducted. This had included two mental health sessions per week that had been developed by TAMHI and the following issues had been addressed: stress, bi-polar disorder, drug misuse, alcohol abuse, gambling, suicide awareness, resilience, the importance of mental fitness, bullying and the importance of asking for help. He reported that the research had demonstrated that intervention was an effective method of enhancing wellbeing and reducing anxiety. The implementation of the intervention, alongside football, had proved that, when combined, both improved mental and physical health.

Mr. Donnelly then advised the Committee of new programme 'Schools in the Community'. He explained that this programme was aimed at empowering young people to raise awareness of mental health through play. The project aimed to promote good relations, positive mental health and to tackle social issues such as bullying. He reported that the programme was aligned to LORIC (Leadership, Organisation, Resilience, Initiative and Communication) and it aimed to advance the skills in young people by making them stand out and support them in the delivery of programmes to their peers. Phase one was the delivery of the Mental Wealth Games and phase two was the ILM Youth Leaders Award Level two.

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The representative concluded his presentation by outlining the following challenges that TAMHI as an organisation faced:

- it was solely grant dependant;
- it had no protect life II – therefore no opportunity to tender for contracts to deliver services as the organisation currently had no PHA access;
- limited fundraising ability; and
- extremely limited staff resources.

He advised that, apart from himself, there was also two other positions, a Resilient Active Youth Post – 16 hours and ICT Support position – 6 hours. Funding for those two positions had expired in December 2018 and he was currently trying to keep the positions open until June 2019.

During questions, the representative confirmed that he currently accessed Council funding through the small grants programme, however, he was keen to investigate if more sustainable funding was available in order to ensure the long-term future sustainability of the organisation.

He stated that he would welcome the opportunity to explore with Council officers how the work of TAMHI might fit with the Council's Peace IV programme and he would also welcome the opportunity to meet with the Council's Commissioner for Resilience.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for his informative presentation and he left the meeting.

The Director of City Services undertook to liaise with other Council officers to ascertain of links could be established which would assist TAMHI in working with the Council to maximise its opportunities and to add value to its work.

Chairperson