



Belfast City Council

Report to: Health and Environmental Services Committee

Subject: **Future Alleygates Projects – Community Consultation**

Date: 3rd February 2010

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Relevant Background Information

Introduction

At its meeting on 18th January, the Committee was advised that funding had still not been secured for the capital costs of rolling out an alleygating scheme across the City but that, to ensure that gates could be erected as quickly as possible after the receipt of funding, the Community Safety Team intended to carry out house-to-house surveys and to make applications to the Roads Service for Road Traffic Orders to be made. However, the Committee requested more detailed information on the areas that would be included in this exercise and the rationale for such prioritisation.

Committee Decisions on a Citywide Scheme

Since the pilot scheme was completed in 2008, the Council has continued to receive requests for further gates and has maintained a register of interest covering over 200 locations. The Committee has previously received reports on proposals for the phased roll out of a citywide scheme which would be implemented once funding becomes available.

At an early stage it was recognised that demand would be likely to outstrip available resources. Therefore it was agreed that a robust selection process should be developed to help prioritise potential areas for gating. Deloitte was then engaged to develop prioritisation criteria and, at its meeting on 6 May 2009, the Committee agreed to distribute the potential Council capital funding package of £500,000 (not yet approved) equally across the city (north, south, east and west) using the prioritisation process recommended by Deloitte. This process recommended that, given the limited resources available, the criteria should be applied to those streets noted on the register of interest at that time, as to go out to open call would unrealistically raise community expectations. These decisions were taken following party group briefings and a number of Committee meetings after it was referred back from Council. However, after a number of minor adjustments, the decision was ratified by the Council on 1 June 2009.

The Committee also supported the development of a proposal to the Council's Capital Programme for £500,000 and wrote to the Ministers responsible for Criminal Justice, Roads and Social Development regarding the necessity for a regional funding package(s). Unfortunately significant funding has not yet been agreed, however a report on the capital project is to be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in March and it is hoped that the Minister for Criminal Justice will announce a Northern Ireland Wide Scheme in the near future.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 5th May, 2009 agreed the term contract for the provision and installation of alleygates for a three year period. This was to enable expedient erection of gates once funding is made available.

In addition, to offer communities the alternative of installing privately financed gates, until such time as funding is in place, the Committee agreed to cover insurance, liability and maintenance costs for gates that meet Council standards (most recent decision: 4 November 2009). At its meeting on 2 December 2009, Committee also agreed to take advantage of one off external funding opportunities to install gates in Belfast as they arise, the first being DSD funding for gates in Cooke Court.

Lastly, at its meeting on 18th January, the Committee noted that, in the absence of confirmed funding, consultation should begin in areas identified through the application of the Deloitte prioritisation criteria. It is intended that this will ensure the lengthy legal process laid down by the Roads Service to secure the necessary Road Traffic Orders would be expedited so that gates could be erected with a minimum of delay once funding becomes available. However, it was also recognised that a communications plan would be essential to help manage expectations.

Key Issues

Belfast City Council Funded Programme

The register of interest for alleygates includes over 200 locations which would amount to over 500 gates and would cost over £2 million. Therefore, if approved, the Council's Capital Programme funding for alleygates would not even cover the installation of all the gates in locations listed on the register. Prices of gates vary, however, depending on the price of steel, it is likely that £500,000 would pay for approximately 120 -130 gates (average 50-55 streets). Hence the need to apply the prioritisation criteria already agreed by Committee.

The Deloitte Criteria have been applied to the list of streets held at the time of the Council decision and the highest priority streets in North, South, East and West of the City have been identified. These are listed in Appendix 1. Note that a higher number of streets than is likely to be gated within the funding limitations is included, as some streets may not be physically suitable for gating or there may not be sufficient support from local communities. Each area, except North Belfast has a total of 30 - 31 'potential gates' identified around which to base the consultation. However North Belfast has 37 'potential gates' identified as this is considered to be the most efficient use of expenditure given the groupings of streets that require gating to 'complete' an area. The alternative would be to allocate each area 32 'potential gates', however this would not be considered to be such an efficient use of resources.

Appendix 3 details information to show some of the physical considerations that have to be taken into account in determining if an alleygate can be installed in a particular area.

In the likely event that funding is secured from the other sources, the Council will be required to incorporate the specific conditions of funding set by the funding body. Discussions are ongoing for example with the NIO with regard to their regional scheme and also with NIHE in relation to funding for gates in areas with high HMO density such as the Holyland (which, it should be noted, would be one of the next highest ranking areas for gating in South Belfast under the Deloitte scheme). Therefore it may not be possible to apply exactly the same process and stipulations to the selection of streets as for the Council funded scheme. In particular it is likely that the NIO will require need to be evidenced on a city-wide basis. Moreover, during the party group briefings held in March 2009, Councillors also expressed a desire that there should be opportunities for new areas, not currently included on the register of interest, to be considered should further funding become available. Therefore the number of streets on the register is likely to increase.

To facilitate any future Citywide application, it is proposed to apply an additional analysis tool used by the Jill Dando Institute for Crime Science at UCL, as recommended by the Community Safety Crime Analyst; The **Vulnerable Localities Index (VLI)**. The VLI uses 6 indicators to identify communities at risk of crime and antisocial behaviour and assigns a score to each super output area. Areas with a score higher than 200 are considered at highest risk although the Vulnerable Localities Index allows the ranking of each super output area. The indicators used in this index are as follows:

- Crime-based indicators - burglary to a dwelling and criminal damage to a dwelling;
- Deprivation variables - income deprivation and employment deprivation; and
- Demographical Information – e.g. Educational Attainment & the population of young people

With the assistance of our crime analyst we have applied the VLI to Output Areas (OA) as each OA has roughly the same population and number of households allowing for easier comparison. In total there are 913 Output Areas (OA) in Belfast, of which 41 have a VLI higher than 200. These are the areas at highest risk from disorder and fear of crime. This means that less than 5% are at high risk (*for more information about the Vulnerable Localities Index see Appendix 2*).

The application of the Vulnerable Localities Index allows us to impartially identify parts of the city which most need community safety interventions. It is recommended that rather than hold an open call which will raise public expectation to an unmanageable level and can only be answered by communities with adequate capacity; we identify streets with highest need that would be suitable for Alleygating initially using the VLI. Having done so a further assessment, using the criteria identified by Deloitte that have not been applied in the VLI e.g. physical suitability, housing tenure and community capacity, will be undertaken as well as consultation with elected representatives of the areas. Finally, recommendations would then be brought before Committee for final approval.

It is considered that through the above process available resources would be targeted to areas of need and where there is evident community support for this approach. Should Committee agree that this process should be applied, a further report will be brought to a future meeting showing the outcome of the process, assuming a further £500,000 will be made available for gating. This will then enable further consultation to take place in advance of external funding, again to expedite the process.

Resource Implications

Financial

Revenue costs to support community consultation have been included in this year's revenue estimates. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is to receive a report on the proposed alleygating capital scheme of £500,000 within the next few months.

Human Resources

Gavin Bell, Community Safety Project Officer, will manage the consultation process in line with his current role and responsibilities.

Asset and Other Implications

None at this stage

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- Notes the prioritised list of streets for gating under the proposed Council Capital Programme (still to be agreed) in which consultation will commence immediately; and
- Agrees that, for further externally funded programmes, potential areas for gating should be identified using the Vulnerable Localities Index, the Deloitte criteria and consultation with Elected Members and that a further report will be brought to a future meeting showing the outcome of this process, assuming a further £500,000 will be made available.

Decision Tracking

The Head of Environmental Health will report back to Committee on the status of the consultations and any further funding by the end of June, 2010.

Key to Abbreviations

UCL – University College London
NIO- Northern Ireland Office
VLI – Vulnerable Localities Index
SOA – Super Output Area
OA – Output Area

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Proposed Prioritised Gate Locations from register of interest using BCC Capital Programme funding

Appendix 2 – Applying the VLI in Belfast

Appendix 3 – Information on how to determine if an alleygate can be installed