



<b>Subject:</b>	Port Health update
<b>Date:</b>	6 May 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Siobhan Toland, Director City Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	David Cuthbert, City Protection Manager

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒ N

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒ X

No

☐

1.0	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide a Members with an update on the Council's Port Health operations and transition plans for moving to a new purpose built product inspection facility at Dargan Drive in July 2025.
2.0	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	Members are asked to note the report
3.0	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<b>Port Health operations:</b> Members will be aware that Belfast City Council's Port Health service have been working jointly with DAERA at Belfast Port for many years, and this has continued in an enhanced form since the UK's exit from the European Union. Since the beginning of 2021, the Port Health function services an increased volume of food consignments entering via Belfast Port, ensuring that food is fit and safe to eat.
3.2	<b>Legislative Change:</b> Following publication of the Windsor Framework Agreement by the UK/EU, new arrangements for food and other products entering NI ports commenced from 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2023, including under Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS) and the Northern Ireland Plant Health Label (NIPHL) scheme.
3.3	BCC Port Health undertakes official controls on certain food products (including fish and fish products, high risk food not of animal origin, organic products and plastic kitchenware on consignments that may be at risk of entering the EU (red lane). In the main the Windsor Framework has not resulted in significant direct impacts on BCC operation and work volumes have remained generally steady over the past 4 years.
3.4	The Windsor Framework has been implemented in phases, and the latest phase sees delivery of newly constructed inspection facilities at NI Ports by July 2025. This programme of work has been led by DEFRA in consultation with key delivery stakeholders, including DAERA, Food Standards Agency, Border Force and the relevant NI Councils. Forthcoming changes to labelling requirements for goods moving under the NIRMS scheme are also due to be introduced within the next few months, together with updated arrangements for pet travel and post and parcels. This work is being led by DEFRA and DAERA.
3.5	Some uncertainties remain in areas where UK Government ministers have yet to provide direction, however we are aware that discussions between the UK Government and the EU are continuing.

3.6	<p><b>Funding:</b> The service is currently funded on an annual basis via the Central Competent Authorities for the respective food policy areas (Food Standards Agency for fish, high risk food and plastics/kitchenware from China/Hong Kong and DAERA for organic products and Illegal Unreported and Unregulated Fishing). Officers have submitted details (of the Councils requirements to retain our current staffing resource assigned to this work) to the relevant central competent authorities (FSA and DAERA) for the 2025/6 year and we anticipate that these will be successful.</p>
3.7	<p>The Council has been advocating for a longer term sustainable funding model for these services. Whilst the Council has been engaged in assessing requirements over a longer term period, no confirmation of a longer term funding period, or how uncertainties in future work volumes might be addressed has yet been received. It anticipated that as UK/EU discussions progress, further clarity over future arrangements and funding models will emerge.</p>
3.8	<p><b>Staffing:</b> To facilitate increased service levels, the Port Health team was expanded in late 2020, however recruitment and retention challenges have existed throughout the past 4 years. Whilst a number of recruitment campaigns have reduced the number of vacant posts and have supported stability, a small number of Environmental Health Officer posts remain unfilled. This continues to create a risk should existing staff leave to take up posts elsewhere.</p>
3.9	<p><b>IT systems:</b> Officers are engaging with DAERA, FSA and DEFRA on emerging developments at regional, national and global levels, to ensure that IT systems used by the Council are fit for purpose and effectively integrated to ensure a more efficient and streamlined approach. To facilitate this work, DAERA have been developing and enhancing the system used by Port stakeholder including Councils, to address Council needs. This will support closer joint working on the shared Port sites, while increasing efficiency of processes.</p>
3.10	<p><b>New inspection facility:</b> A new SPS Product Inspection Facility on Dargan Drive is scheduled for operational readiness in summer of 2025 and construction is occurring at pace under the direction of DEFRA. Finalised timelines will be confirmed in the coming weeks – operational readiness is planned for 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025, however this could be subject to change depending on delivery of key milestones in handover of the site to DAERA, and finalisation of site processes, procedures, risk assessments and site inductions for all staff.</p>
3.11	<p>DAERA will act as the site operator leading on facilities management. Users of the site will include DAERA Veterinary Service and Animal Health Group and Plant Health, Belfast City Council Port Health, and Border Force. All users will move operations to the new site from day 1.</p>
3.12	<p>A joint Memorandum of Understanding is being prepared for agreement of all site users – this will set out the roles responsibilities and procedures for management and operation of the facility. This is currently being developed with input from officers across the Council, including</p>

	<p>Port Health, Legal Services, Corporate Health and Safety, Digital Services, and Finance. It is envisaged this will secure continuation of the arrangements that operate at the temporary facilities at Belfast Port.</p>
3.13	<p><b>Current facility at Corry Place:</b> Belfast City Council's Port Health service continues to operate from the existing inspection facility at Corry Place, which is shared with DAERA for some inspections. The majority of Council inspections are undertaken at Corry Place with some additional inspections at a Temporary SPS Inspection Facility currently operated by DAERA on Duncrue Street.</p>
3.14	<p>Following construction of the new permanent facility in summer 2025, the Council will retain the inspection facility at 5 Corry Place as an operational contingency to support transition for a short period. During this period consideration will be given to the most appropriate options for retention or disposal of the site as a Council asset (currently leased from Belfast Harbour Commissioners).</p>
3.15	<p><b>Consumer Product Safety – Ports and Borders Programme</b></p> <p>The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) is responsible for developing national capacity for product safety to manage risks related to consumer product safety across the UK. The objective of the OPSS Ports and Borders Programme is to strengthen the UK's market surveillance activities to the interception of unsafe imported goods at ports using risk and intelligence led approach in a way that minimises disruption to trade in compliant goods. The programme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide effective deterrent to prevent importers from importing unsafe goods;</li> <li>• build capability to respond to national threats related to imported goods;</li> <li>• be able to demonstrate the adequacy of this approach to trade partners and meet our obligations under relevant trade agreements. This is primarily in relation to imports into GB, including goods imported from the EU which may be non-qualifying goods moving via Northern Ireland.</li> </ul>
3.16	<p><b><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>32 Fixed term contract posts are included in the Port Health structure (of which 27 are filled) for delivering this function. Funding for these posts is provided on an annual basis from UK Government via both the Food Standards Agency and DAERA</p>
3.17	<p>To support the Councils work on Consumer product safety, Belfast City Council has received funding from OPSS for the past 5 years; funding for this programme in 2025/26 has been confirmed at £135k.</p>

3.18	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></b> None.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
4.1	None