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**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**

28th June 2024

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 28th June, 2024.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

5. **Safer Neighbourhood Officers - City Centre (Pages 1 - 4)**

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Agenda Item

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE



Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Safer Neighbourhood Officers – City Centre
Date:	28 th June 2024
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Operational Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Pól Hamilton, Lead Officer – Community Safety

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise members on the following matters;

	Recruitment of 2 additional Safer Neighbourhood Officers to work as part of the existing team within the Community Safety Unit (CSU) until 31 st March 2025
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are also asked to: Approve the recruitment of 2 additional Safer Neighbourhood Officers (SNOs) until 31 st March 2025
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> Following ongoing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), crime and vulnerability issues within the city centre, including several high-profile incidents, the most recent posted on social media on Friday 21 st June, which received almost 1 million views, an emergency meeting was held on Tuesday 25 th June.
3.2	The Lord Mayor and Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, alongside directors within City and Neighbourhood Departments met with representatives of the business community from Belfast City Centre to discuss ongoing issues and concerns linked to ASB, crime and vulnerability issues.
3.3	The discussion focused on several actions required to assist in addressing the complex issues presenting themselves within the city centre, alongside ongoing work by teams operating in the city centre from Belfast City Council, Police, community & voluntary organisations and the business community.
3.4	One action discussed was the recruitment of additional Safer Neighbourhood Officers to increase the footprint and profile within the city centre.
3.5	The Safer Neighbourhood Officers (SNOs) have been in operation since April 2013. The SNOs are a frontline engagement & enforcement service whose primary role is to help address issues of community safety concern and associated Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing a BCC presence through deployment of high visibility foot patrols • offering guidance, support, and advice on community safety issues • challenging low-level anti-social behaviour • enforcing laws relating to on-street drinking and environmental crime • helping to reduce crime and fear of crime
3.6	The SNOs have experience in engaging with vulnerable people in the City Centre and have training in de-escalation techniques, conflict management and first aid. Officers regularly work alongside outreach teams and the PSNI to refer high risk individuals to specialist services whilst reducing problematic behaviours in order to provide reassurance to members of the public and businesses. SNOs are also trained to administer Naloxone to revive individuals suffering from an opioid overdose and remove inappropriately discarded sharps from across the city daily. They are also an integral part of the Complex Lives programme.
3.7	The SNO's over the past number of weeks have seen an escalation in a range of issues within the city centre where they have had to intervene with on-street drinking, vulnerable

	<p>people in risk taking behaviour, administer naloxone to several people, tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and the removal of inappropriate sharps.</p>
3.8	<p>Belfast City Council have received supportive statements from:</p> <p>PSNI <i>“The SNOS provide an invaluable service to Belfast City Centre and are regarded as one of the PSNI’s key partners in ensuring the City Centre is safe and prosperous. The enhanced footprint provided by SNOS in the run up to Christmas 2023 was welcomed by Police and certainly made the City Centre feel and indeed look safer – a sentiment which has been shared by many retail partners.</i></p> <p><i>The SNOS are committed to safeguarding and signposting the most vulnerable in our society and often work in collaboration with City Centre Police around this – their enhanced presence in the run up to Christmas certainly did ensure that many of our community with addiction issues were given additional support during what can be a difficult time of the year.</i></p> <p><i>Ultimately, the City Centre is unique and at times, complex location to Police – the support provided by the SNOS is invaluable and City Centre Police look forward to building on this evolving relationship.”</i></p>
3.9	<p>EXTERN <i>“Our outreach team work closely with the SNO staff. We work together when a service user is under the influence and is at risk of participating in anti-social behaviour to deescalate and make safe the situation. Staff work together supporting each other’s services daily for positive support of our service users. Such is the relationship when we put the call out in December the SNOs swiftly attended and were first on the scene at an incident where one of our staff had been assaulted.”</i></p>
3.10	<p>Complex Lives Manager <i>The Christmas period is a difficult time for the individuals known to Complex Lives, it can be a time of hardship and loneliness with many seeking comfort from one another in the City Centre. This inevitably brings challenges to those services managing risk and safety in the area and therefore the enhanced presence of the Safer Neighbourhood Officers has been a vital and valuable resource. The SNOs are a compassionate and knowledgeable team who have not only taken the time to get to know our individuals but as a consequence have been instrumental, as part of the wider Complex Lives Multi-disciplinary Team, to improve the health and wellbeing and accommodation solutions for the most chronically homeless in Belfast. Working together as one larger team the communication between the Outreach Services in Belfast has improved greatly.</i></p>
3.11	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> Additional Safer Neighbourhood Officers (SNOs) until 31st March 2025 at a cost of £34,088 per post, x 2 posts = £68,175. Posts to be funded from departmental underspend and/or realignment of specified reserves.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
4.1	<p>None</p>

