

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 18th October, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Copeland);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Armitage, Austin, Beattie, Corr, Garrett,
Heading, Magennis, Newton and McReynolds.

Also attended: Alderman Spence and Councillor Attwood.

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

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Nicholl and Milne.

Anti-social Behaviour in Parks and Open Spaces

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Superintendent Murdie, Kathy Latcham, Senior Crime Prevention Officer, and Dan Kelly, Neighbourhood Inspector for West Belfast, representing Belfast City PSNI.

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 Further to discussion at the People and Communities Committee meeting on 10 October 2017 on anti-social behaviour taking place in parks and open spaces in Belfast, the purpose of this report is to update Members on:

1.2

- **The anti-social behaviour context in parks and open spaces across the city**
- **The ongoing work in response to these issues**
- **The planned work to improve the response to these issues**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of the report.

2.2 Members are also asked to note the progress to date and endorse the future work planned to address these issues more effectively.

3.0 The Anti-Social Behaviour Context

3.1 Background

3.2 Members will be aware that anti-social behaviour remains an issue of concern for communities in Belfast.

3.3 Anti-social behaviour is defined as ‘acting in a manner that has caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household as the perpetrator’.

3.4 Anti-social behaviour in Belfast has increased by just over 5% comparing the April – August 2016 and April – August 2017 period.

3.5 However, this is lower than the Northern Ireland average which is a 7% increase in the same period.

3.6 Members will be very aware that anti-social behaviour can have seriously negative impacts on the quality of life of individuals, families and communities.

3.7 Anti-Social Behaviour in Parks/Open Spaces

3.8 Members will recall previous reports to People and Communities Committee (most recently in November 2016) updating Members on increasing concern about anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces across the city.

3.9 Members will also recall that anti-social behaviour in parks and open spaces has been a significant focus for Council resources (both staff and financial) in recent years.

3.10 An additional concern in respect of parks and open spaces is the growth of a large group of young people who are transient in nature (anything from 50 – 150 young people at a time), who move across parks and open spaces in the city. This group can be under the influence of alcohol and drugs and are often determined to remain detached from existing structured youth provision in their own communities.

3.11 Members should be aware that many of the negative behaviours taking place in parks/open spaces are not anti-social behaviour, but are criminal in nature and often serious.

3.12 Anti-social behaviour is often under reported by members of the public and this can be particularly relevant in relation to anti-social behaviour in parks/open spaces.

3.13 However, anti-social behaviour is sometimes witnessed by Council Officers in parks/open spaces and often there is physical evidence of the anti-social behaviour.

3.14 Anti-social behaviour affects most parks/open spaces at difference times in a sporadic way, but there are a number of parks/open spaces that are subject to persistent anti-social behaviour.

3.15 Reported Anti-Social Behaviour

3.16 A review of reports from members of the public to Council regarding anti-social behaviour in parks/open spaces along with anti-social behaviour witnessed by Council Officers has identified the following parks/open spaces as having issues with persistent anti-social behaviour.

3.17 Please note figures provided below are for the current financial year to date. Please also note that the list below only represents the parks/open spaces with the highest numbers of reports of anti-social behaviour. Reports of anti-social behaviour are received for other parks/open spaces across the city but at a much lower level.

3.18

Park/Open Space	Area	Reported Ant-Social Behaviour Incidents
Woodvale	North	41
Grove Playing Fields	North	25
Cavehill	North	23
North Queen Street Playground	North	15

3.19 Repairs at Parks/Open Spaces

3.20 As indicated above, anti-social behaviour is often reported. Officers have therefore reviewed requisitions for repairs at parks/open spaces as a result of vandalism, criminal damage or arson. The list below provides details on those parks/open spaces with the most repairs needed (in descending order of cost of repairs for this financial year with highest costs at the top) along with an assessment of the frequency of issues (based on requisitions for repairs):

3.21

Park/Open Space	Area	Reason Repairs Needed	Frequency
Musgrave Park	South	Arson/Criminal Damage	Unpredictable
Falls Park/City Cemetery	West	Arson/Criminal Damage/Burglary	Persistent
Marrowbone	North	Criminal Damage	Persistent
White Rise	West	Criminal Damage	Persistent
Dunville	West	Arson	Unpredictable
Sally Gardens	West	Criminal Damage	Unpredictable
Ligoniel	North	Criminal Damage	Unpredictable
Lenadoon	West	Arson	Unpredictable
Whiterock	West	Criminal Damage	Unpredictable

3.22 **Member Feedback**

3.23 **Elected Members engage regularly with Officers articulating concerns about anti-social behaviour in parks/open spaces. Officers have reviewed their Elected Members contact on this issue and the following parks/open spaces present most frequently as of concern:**

3.24

Park/Open Space	Area
Falls Park/City Cemetery	West
Marrowbone	North
Lagan Walkway	South/East
Orangefield	East
White Rise	West
Girdwood	North
Dunmurry Halt	West
Grove Playing Fields	North

3.25 **Serious Anti-Social Behaviour and Criminality**

3.26 **Two of the parks/open spaces detailed above are affected by serious anti-social behaviour and criminality (as opposed to lower level anti-social behaviour. They are Falls Park/City Cemetery and Marrowbone Park.**

3.27 **A small number of other parks/open spaces are less affected by anti-social behaviour but more affected by criminality. These are Botanic Park, Ormeau Park and Lagan Meadows.**

3.28 PSNI will attend the meeting to update Members on the parks/open spaces most affected by serious anti-social behaviour and crime as reported directly to them.

3.29 The ongoing work in response to these issues

3.30 'One Council' Approach

3.31 Further to reports considered by Committee previously collaborative work between Parks, Community Safety and (D)PCSP (Policing and Community Safety Partnership) teams has been ongoing. Additionally, with those teams now being within the City and Neighbourhood Services Department the effectiveness of a 'one Council' response to anti-social behaviour is improving. Ongoing work includes:

- Joint planning and ongoing 'one Council' front line responses to community safety issues in all parks and open spaces detailed above.
- Fortnightly operational planning meetings to monitor ongoing concerns and allocate responses
- Joint visible reassurance patrols of Council Officers and when required PSNI
- Proactive visits to off licenses around parks/open spaces to give advice and guidance on consequences of selling alcohol to minors
- Ongoing delivery of programming to support positive and legitimate use of the parks/open spaces
- Delivery of positive diversionary activities in partnership with (D)PCSP's
- Partnerships developed with local youth providers and (D)PCSP supported detached youth work to address anti-social behaviour in priority parks/open spaces
- Council and (D)PCSP investment in community infrastructure around parks and open spaces to encourage participation and sustainability
- Ongoing delivery of proactive work on social media and through schools to promote parental responsibility as well as reinforcing the expectation that young people using the parks/open spaces should do so in a responsible manner
- Joint procurement and deployment of mobile/redeployable CCTV solutions

- 3.32 The planned work to improve the response to these issues**
- 3.33** Members will be aware that resolving anti-social behaviour is complex and requires the input of a range of statutory, community and voluntary partners.
- 3.34** Council is committed to playing its part and it is recognised that significant effort has gone in to developing the 'one Council' and partnership approach to addressing anti-social behaviour across the city. However, challenges remain in improving the effectiveness of our efforts to address these issues. The remaining challenges have informed the focus of our business improvement going forward. They are:
- 3.35 Operational Demand v Availability of Resource**
- 3.36** It is recognised there is significant demand from across the city for Council to provide a front line and operational response to address anti-social behaviour. Members will be aware however, that the available citywide Council front line resource currently stands at:
- 7 Safer Neighbourhood Officers (SNO's) whose main focus is working at community level to address low level anti-social behaviour. The working patterns of SNO's are Mon – Thurs 2pm – 10pm (7 SNO's), Fri/Sat 4.30pm – Midnight (3/4 SNO's)
 - 24 Park Wardens with part focus of job on addressing community safety issues within parks. Park Wardens work a shift pattern providing cover throughout the day from morning to park closing. For the autumn/winter period this means that Park Wardens are not available from within their normal shift pattern for evening work.
 - 20 casual Alcohol Enforcement Officers (AEO's) who can be deployed to support SNO's and Park Wardens at key dates and events, but this carries an additional financial cost.
- 3.37** Operational demand for front line Council resource, even only within parks/open space, exceeds the core available resource at present (Park Wardens and SNO's). Evidence of need (both recorded incidents and anecdotal input from Elected Members and communities) informs the areas of focus and this is subject to ongoing update.

3.38 Business Improvement

- Explore the short term opportunities for flexible working between SNO's and Park Wardens to meet the citywide demand at evenings and weekends.
- Additional deployment of Alcohol Enforcement Officers to support SNO's and Park Wardens at weekends and during school holidays

3.39 Council Role v PSNI Role

3.40 Partnership working between Council and PSNI in providing front line services to tackle anti-social behaviour is intrinsic to how both organisations work. Joint Council and PSNI operations are taking place most weekends and school holidays particularly focussed on parks/open spaces.

3.41 Core to successful joint working is clarity on the individual roles and responsibilities of each organisation. For example:

- The remit of SNO's, Park Wardens and Alcohol Enforcement Officers (AEO's) is specified in their job descriptions are dealing with low level noise, nuisance or anti-social behaviour where it is safe to do so
- SNO's, Park Wardens and AEO's are not recruited for or trained to deal with more serious nuisance or anti-social behaviour
- These Officers do not have any supplementary powers (as PSNI do) should an individual be obstructive.
- The remit of PSNI is to address more serious nuisance or anti-social behaviour, criminality and public order situations.

3.42 Members should note that there have been a number of health and safety incidents where Safer Neighbourhood Officers, Parks Wardens or AEO's have inadvertently found themselves presented with more serious anti-social or criminality. This has resulted in Officers having missiles thrown directly at them and their vehicles and weapons drawn at them. Public order consideration present themselves frequently when large groups of young people are involved often under the influence of drugs and alcohol and Officers are frequently subjected to verbal abuse.

3.43 Business Improvement

- Guidance to be provided to Elected Members and Communities on roles and responsibilities of Council and PSNI
- More joint operational planning between Council and PSNI to reduce duplication of and maximise efforts
- Further exploration of how to maximise the Council roles in supporting this work as part of the City and Neighbourhoods Department Change Programme

3.44 CCTV Options

3.45 CCTV can be a useful tool; however, as a standalone resource it is not effective in dealing with and addressing crime and anti-social behaviour.

3.46 Mobile/Redeployable CCTV and Body Worn Cameras are now available for use by Council, and PSNI can deploy Evidence Gathering Teams (EGT) when the evidence of need is established.

3.47 CCTV solutions are being used on an ongoing basis at weekends and school holidays and any evidence of offences gathered is being passed to PSNI for action.

3.48 Business Improvement

- Continued provision of Council procured mobile/redeployable CCTV solutions and PSNI Evidence Gathering Teams (EGT) in hot spot areas and at high risk times
- Continued use of Body Worn Cameras for Council Officers in hot spot areas at high risk times

3.49 Role of Education Authority and other Youth Providers

3.50 Crime and anti-social behaviour in parks/open spaces can often be driven by alcohol and drug use among young people. The young people in question are often transient in nature and move in large groups between parks and open spaces and are largely detached from more structured youth provision.

3.51 Most youth providers (including the Education Authority) will not work directly with a young person under the influence of alcohol or drugs and this presents a challenge in respect of meaningful engagement with this group with a view to meeting their needs and changing their negative behaviours.

3.52 Business Improvement

- A review of the specific needs of this group of young people by Belfast PCSP (detached, transient and sometimes under the influence of alcohol/drugs) has identified the need to establish Youth Provider Networks in each part of the city to improve communication, reduce duplication and improve effectiveness. A Youth Provider Network is already well established in East Belfast, with the network in West Belfast in development. Further networks will be developed as needed by District Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.
- The Education Authority is in the process of establishing Local Advisory Groups (LAG's) to inform the future of youth provision in the city. Council Officers will participate in these groups with a view to influencing the Education Authority to improve how they meet the needs of this specific group of young people as well as the needs of young people generally.

3.53 Legislative Review

3.54 Further to Council's consideration of a Notice of Motion expressing concern about the effectiveness of legislation and bye-laws designed to tackle on street drinking, Council requested that the Department of Justice and Department for Communities commence a review of the effectiveness of the existing legal framework. This review should also consider additional powers which could complement or enhance those currently available in Northern Ireland. That review is underway with the proactive support of Council Officers.

3.55 Business Improvement

- Ongoing delivery of the review of the effectiveness of existing legislation and bye-laws and report back to Committee on recommendations
- Meantime exploration of how far the parameters of existing legislation and bye-laws can be used to alleviate the issue

3.56 Focused Area Based Approaches

3.57 Taking in to account Member concern and the serious level of anti-social behaviour/criminality taking place in and around Falls Park/City Cemetery and Marrowbone Park the following is proposed:

- **A focussed area based approach should be the agreed way forward fully integrating the contributions of all relevant partners (Council, other statutory agencies and community/voluntary partners)**
- **The learning from the locality pilots would be incorporated to improve effectiveness**
- **The approach would be holistic in nature recognising the complexity of the issue**
- **Opportunities for physical and social regeneration to support effectiveness would be included**
- **Opportunities to improve wider education, health and employment outcomes in the areas would be included**
- **The risk of displacement of the issues would be minimised as potential for displacement to other parks/open spaces in the area would be taken in to account**
- **An agreed and integrated action plan would be developed for each area identifying accountable lead partners and resources needed**
- **Regular reporting on the plans would take place through the relevant Area Working Groups.”**

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services outlined the principle aspects of the report. He stated that vandalism and antisocial behaviour was a citywide problem which was an ongoing concern for both the Council and the PSNI. He advised that there had been a 5.8% increase throughout the City in incidents of antisocial behaviour and he drew the Members' attention to the specific trends that had been identified.

The Director advised that it would be pointless to try and target individual areas and not the wider problem, he added that as many of the incidents involved criminality the Council's response was often limited. He continued that, whilst officers recognised the importance of the Council working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to attempt to improve the overall response to the weekly antisocial behaviour incidents, there was also ongoing inter-agency planning in advance of other challenging events/periods, for example, St Patricks Day, Freshers Week and Halloween. The Director also advised that reviewing the effectiveness of the existing bye-laws and legislation was an ongoing piece of work but added that introducing new legislation was not straight forward.

At this stage in proceedings Superintendent Murdie addressed the Committee. He commenced by providing the Committee with a detailed breakdown of the various statistics in incidents of antisocial behaviour and stated that this was to give the Committee some perspective in regard to the level of incidents across the City. He highlighted that antisocial behaviour was a citywide problem but there was, at present, particular issues in the south of the City. He concurred with the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services that a co-ordinated Council and PSNI approach would be

essential to try and tackle the many issues and he welcomed the important role that the Council played.

The Police Officer specifically referred to the joint PSNI and Council operations that took place most weekends and during school holidays to try and tackle issues of antisocial behaviour. He advised that crime and anti-social behaviour in the parks/open spaces was often driven by alcohol and drug use amongst young people. The young people in question were often transient in nature and moved in large groups between parks and open spaces, this was fuelled with the use of social media. He stated that the PSNI, whilst trying to address these incidents, was also trying to be proactive in its approach, explaining that it was keen not to criminalise young people.

Superintendent Murdie concluded by advising that the Police would continue to monitor reports of antisocial behaviour and respond appropriately. This would include focusing patrols in certain areas at particular times. He continued that, in order to address the problem long-term, a collective strategic approach would be required. This would not just require the PSNI and the Council coming together but liaison would also be required with all the statutory agencies but particularly the Education Authority to establish what youth services and community provision could be made available for the City's young people.

A Member requested clarification in respect of the figures presented for west Belfast and expressed concern that the statistics did not reflect accurately the extent of antisocial activity which had occurred in this area. The Member also suggested that the method of capturing the number of incidents within these areas might be re-assessed and that additional staffing resources in the form of park attendants could be made available to address the matter.

Detailed discussion ensued, during which the representatives answered a number of questions and highlighted the following key issues:

- the need for statutory authorities to work together and also to establish if better youth provision could be made available;
- young people using social media to organise meetings in Belfast that escalated to incidents of anti-social behaviour and disturbances;
- specific discussion in relation to the ongoing vandalism of the Fall Park/City Cemetery;
- the previous use of park attendants in Dunville Park and whether this model could be replicated;
- the responsibility of parents and guardians to know the whereabouts of their children;
- the effect a criminal record could have on young people in terms of travel, education and employment opportunities in the future;
- the need to review the existing bye-law legislation to enable the seizure of alcohol;
- the cost of vandalism to the Council in repairing/replacing park equipment;
- many parks becoming 'no go zones' and whether the better animation of these spaces would encourage greater 'normal usage';
- the financial and resource constraints of the Council and the PSNI;
- the Education Authority cut backs that had affected youth service provision and the lack of a sitting Northern Ireland Assembly to address these issues;

- the installation of additional CCTV and lighting, though it was suggested that the cost could be prohibitive; and
- noted that the Active Communities report was being progressed through the Area Working Groups.

Following consideration, the Committee:

- agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would consider the implementation of additional preventative measures to the Council's Parks, including the feasibility of staffing resources. The report would include projected expenditure, resource requirements and detail clearly any financial impact on the Council's existing budgets;
- agreed that an antisocial behavioural update report, which would include details in respect of incidents and any associated costs, be submitted to the People and Communities Committee on quarterly basis;
- noted that consideration would be given at the various Area Working Groups as to how the parks and open spaces could be better animated which might help act as deterrent to vandalism; and
- agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing clarification around the raising of items at a meeting.

Retirement of Councillor Austin

It was reported that this would be Councillor Austin's last meeting as she would be retiring from the Council in the near future.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Members, thanked Councillor Austin for her contribution to the work of the People and Communities Committee during her time on the Council and wished her well in her retirement.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending and the meeting concluded.

Chairperson