



Subject:	Port Health update
Date:	7 March 2023
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director City Services
Contact Officer:	David Cuthbert, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
<i>After Committee Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>After Council Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Some time in the future</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Never</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: a) Provide a brief update on current Port Health operations; and b) to seek approval to sign a number of operational Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Council, Food Standards Agency and DAERA in respect of joint working arrangements.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: i) Note the update on Port Health operations ii) Agree to sign the draft Operational MOUs to clarify roles and responsibilities of BCC and DAERA for joint working arrangements.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Port Health operations 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 since the UK's exit from the European Union. Members will also be aware that 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 **Funding:** 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). Bids have been submitted by FSA and DAERA to Department of Finance for 2023/24 and FSA and DAERA have indicated they anticipate that these will be successful. It is also anticipated that a longer term financing model for the service will need to be considered and agreed following the final and agreed outcome of the recent UK/EU discussions

3.3 **Staffing:** To facilitate increased service levels, the Port Health team was expanded in late 2020, however recruitment and retention challenges prompted an interim review of staffing structure to rebalance the number of Environmental Health Officers required. This resulted in a small increase in support roles to offset a similar small reduction in EHO numbers. Recruitment campaigns have reduced the number of vacant posts. Staff wellbeing and health and safety is a key issue and improved welfare facilities on site, additional health and safety training and equipment have been provided.

3.4 **Facilities:** Belfast City Council's port health function continues to operate from the inspection facility at Corry Place, which is shared with DAERA for some inspections. To ensure the facility is fit for purpose to meet the required standards, DAERA invested in upgrades at the site, providing additional office accommodation, food storage facilities and security measures. An MOU to clarify DAERA responsibilities for these upgrades, together with the practical arrangements for managing use of the facility has been prepared.

3.5 **IT systems:** Officers are engaging with DAERA and 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.

3.6 **Facilitating joint service delivery – Memorandums of Understanding**

To clarify joint working arrangements, roles and responsibilities in a number of key areas related to food exports from NI and imports to NI, draft Memorandums of Understanding have been prepared. These include the following:

	Subject of MOU	Main contents/issues
1	Shared use of Point of Entry Facilities at Corry Place	Sets out roles and responsibilities for maintenance of upgraded equipment and facilities by DAERA, roles and responsibilities of Food Standards Agency as a Central Competent Authority, roles and responsibilities of Belfast City Council as the leaseholder for the site, and arrangements for joint working including cleaning, health and safety, security, and prioritisation of bookings.
2	Shared use of Point of Entry facilities at Corry Road (Dufferin)	Sets out roles and responsibilities for maintenance of the site by the main leaseholder (Border Force) and roles and responsibilities of users including DAERA, Food Standards Agency, and Belfast City Council, and arrangements for joint working, including cleaning, health and safety and prioritisation of bookings.
3	Use of contract services at Point of Entry facilities	Sets out the roles of responsibilities of contract services provided to Councils by DAERA in respect of Stevedores at inspection facilities, including loading/unloading, cleaning, health and safety etc.
4	DAERA Trade Export Certification programme – (trade certification, export health certificates and support health attestations)	<p>Sets out arrangements for certifications / attestations by Environmental Health Officers of Belfast City Council, on behalf of DAERA, for businesses within the council area who wish to export fish, eggs and related composite products, to ensure they meet food import requirements of other countries across the globe. The number of requests for attestations/certifications in Belfast is extremely low, and this is not expected to impact significantly on Council resources. Should this change a review of the MOU would be requested.</p> <p>This MOU was drafted in consultation with all 11 District Councils and has been approved by Environmental Health NI (EHNI) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executive and Senior Managers NI (SOLACE).</p>

3.7	<p>The draft MOUs above have been considered in detail to ensure that the contents support the Council in delivering its statutory functions, while ensuring all operational requirements are addressed to facilitate the Councils staff in carrying out their roles.</p> <p><u>Finance and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.8	<p>None</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.9	<p>None.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None