



<b>Subject:</b>	Update on dual language street signs
<b>Date:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> March 2023
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal & Civic Services Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager

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

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	This report is a further update to members on the dual language street signs applications.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note the contents of the report.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
	<u>Key Issues</u>
	<b><u>Applicants and current status</u></b>
3.1	The total number of live requests for dual language street signs received as of 22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2023 is 458.

3.2	The first dual language street sign under the new policy was agreed by P&C Committee on the 7 <sup>th</sup> February and ratified by Council on 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2023, with a further 3 street signs agreed at P&C Committee on 7 <sup>th</sup> March.
3.3	There are currently 4 applications due to go to P&C Committee in April, subject to the results of the surveys. Officers expect that number to increase at future meetings once there is a full complement of staff in place.
3.4	The third member notification for the next 10 streets was issued on 24 <sup>th</sup> February and a further list will be issued at the end of March. Officers will review the frequency and number of applications on these lists once there is a full complement of staff.
3.5	Initial assessments to check for any potential adverse impacts on the grounds of equality or good relations were carried out on a further 20 streets on 28 <sup>th</sup> February 2023 and a further session for 20 streets is scheduled for the first week in April 2023. These assessments involve officers from across the council including Good Relations, Equality and Diversity Unit, Place and Economy and Building Control and include significant preparatory work and for decisions made to be fully documented.
3.6	<p><b><u>Workloads</u></b></p> <p>Survey work is the most labour-intensive part of the process. Analysis of the surveys carried out before the adoption of the new policy identified an average of 43 surveys per street. This was due to the fact that requests tended to be for smaller streets due to the requirement to get a third of residents to sign the initial request. As there is no longer a requirement to provide the initial petition, applications for larger streets have increased significantly. Currently the average surveys per street is 116, which is significant additional workload per street.</p> <p><b><u>Timeframe for the process</u></b></p>
3.7	Measures are in place to ensure that each stage of the process is progressing in a consistent manner, and bottlenecks are avoided. As many of the tasks as possible are being done in parallel to shorten the overall timeframe from application submitted to consideration by committee. However, given the multiple stages of the process and set timeframes, it does take at least 4 months to get through the process, from when we start to process an application through to reaching decisions and have the signs erected. Timeframes for each

application also vary due to the specific circumstances for each application. For example, the number of occupiers and therefore the numbers of surveys to be carried out. This makes it difficult to confirm a set number of surveys that will be processed in any month, but numbers will increase as resourcing is fully completed.

- 3.8 Officers also intend to reduce the time period for responding to the survey from the current 30 days to 14 days. While this would reduce the overall processing time for each application, it may not impact on the number of applications processed as the staffing resources to administer the process remain the same. However officers are keen to explore all possible options for reducing application processing times.

### **Translations**

- 3.9 Officers met with Queens University (QUB) in February regarding the translation of street names. QUB confirmed that additional staffing resource will be in place in March and May and will have a focus on carrying out the necessary research to provide the translations that we require.

- 3.10 The full list of 458 streets applied for has been provided to QUB, and we have agreed operational arrangements to ensure that we can progress applications in the order received and processed.

- 3.11 Some translations are more complex and where there is a delay in receiving these, surveys and Committee reports will be progressed without the translations seeking delegation to the Director to agree the translated street name once it is available.

### **Electoral Office**

- 3.12 The electoral register available at the Electoral Office is used to confirm that the applicant is a resident of the street, and also to identify the number of people who will be surveyed.

- 3.13 The current procedure is to arrange appointments with the Electoral Office and inform them of which streets are required for viewing. These are then provided to staff to view during the appointment.

3.14	<p>Discussions have previously taken place with the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) to look at easier ways of getting access to the register and reducing the time taken and the need for appointments to be made. This was done in conjunction with other local councils, through the Chair of Building Control Northern Ireland. In June 2021 the CEO confirmed that having liaised with her legal representatives, they were not aware of any other way to inspect the register except under supervision, in the current practice. Therefore, a data sharing agreement cannot be used. It was also confirmed that while the legislation permits the sale of the register to government departments, this does not apply to councils.</p>
3.15	<p>Building Control also sought the advice of the Council’s legal services when having these discussions, who agreed with the legal advice provided to the CEO.</p>
	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p>
3.16	<p>In December, three additional staff members were recruited on a temporary basis to deal with the volume of applications received. However, as two of these posts were from within the existing team, the process for backfilling and covering their duties is still ongoing. While they are being trained and are processing dual language street sign applications, there are also other duties in their substantive posts to be undertaken. This includes processing property certificate applications, a key part of the conveyancing process, and the provision of street naming and numbering, which are important in terms of house sales progressing and allowing new homeowners to set up their utilities and amend address critical documentation. When these staff members are fully released to their new roles and training completed, this will allow for an increase in the number of applications being processed.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.17	<p>The process for carrying out initial assessments on the ground of equality and good relations is in place. Where adverse impacts are identified, a further screening will take place and finding presented to Members. This work has been developed working with colleagues in our Equality &amp; Diversity Unit together with an external consultant.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	None