



<b>Subject:</b>	Review of the current data collection process for surveys for dual language street sign applications.
<b>Date:</b>	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2026
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<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>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</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<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"/>

1.0	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	At the SP&R meeting on 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2026 officers were asked to provide a report to review the data collection process for conducting surveys associated with dual language street sign applications and to consider alternatives to increase inclusiveness.
2.0	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	Members are asked to consider the process for data collection for conducting surveys in relation to dual language street sign applications and to agree that the current process for domestic properties utilising the electoral list is continued.
3.0	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Members are advised of the request by the SP&R Committee in March for a report to review how data relating to dual language street sign surveys is collected and to consider options to make the process more inclusive. Concerns were raised regarding occupants, not on the electoral roll, being unable to participate in street surveys, and individuals receiving two surveys for their household.
	<b><u>Purpose of Street Survey</u></b>
3.2	Both the legislation and policy regarding dual language street signage requires Council to have regard to the views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street.
3.3	The legislation states: <i>“In deciding whether and, if so, how to exercise its powers [to erect a nameplate expressing the name of the street in a language other than English] in relation to any street, a council shall have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street.”</i>
3.4	Specifically in relation to the policy it states, <i>“Where fifteen percent or more of the Occupiers of that street have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign, then such a sign may be erected, subject to the residual discretion of the Council”</i> . The policy further provides the following areas that may be taken into account when making this decision.
3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the views of the Occupiers of the street;</li> <li>(b) the results of the initial assessment for the application, including any identified potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs;</li> <li>(c) consideration of the local context of the application;</li> <li>(d) any other Council policies or strategies related to the application; and</li> <li>(e) all material considerations relating to the application</li> </ul>
	<b><u>Current Survey Process</u></b>
3.6	The dual language street signs policy requires officers to canvass “Occupiers” of a street to seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language.
3.7	In line with the policy “Occupiers” are any person whose name appears in the current Electoral Register (over the age of 18) plus the owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises, but not employees in such premises.
3.8	In addition, the policy requires that each survey should have a unique identifying number and that each survey response received by the Council for that application should be cross-referenced against that unique identifier. The policy indicates that Council may choose to audit certain responses to surveys.

3.9	<p>For each survey, officers will visit the electoral office to obtain information on the numbers of occupants residing in each domestic property for a specific street. Using this information surveys will be prepared, giving each survey a unique reference number. This process allows officers to record the surveys being issued to a property and then to correlate that data with those being returned. Residents must provide a name and address on the returned survey to be a valid response as this allows checking of the address and return against the unique identifier. Names are not currently collected from the electoral register for this process. The full register is published annually and the most up to date register is used to collect survey data.</p>
3.10	<p>Surveys have been conducted using the electoral list since 1998 when the first Belfast City Council policy was developed and adopted. However, the use of a unique identifier was introduced in the 2022 policy to make the process more robust. At least 7 of the other councils in Northern Ireland with a Dual Language Street Signs Policy use electoral register data for surveying domestic residents and the one council issues one survey per property.</p>
3.11	<p>Using the electoral register information as the basis for surveys is considered to be the most robust way of identifying the numbers of residents who reside on the street and linking those numbers to individual properties for survey purposes. It also allows all individuals (not just households) to be surveyed by providing robust information on how many adults live within each housing unit.</p>
3.12	<p>Domestic properties without residents on the electoral list will not receive any survey under the current process.</p>
3.13	<p>As there is no electoral register equivalent for Non-Domestic properties, they are provided with one survey per address/business. The Land and Property Services (LPS) 'Pointer' data set is currently used in to establish numbers and addresses for such surveys supplemented by on site checks if required.</p>
<p><b><u>Alternative Survey Options</u></b></p>	
<p><b>One survey per dwelling</b></p>	
3.14	<p>There are no alternative sources of data, officers have identified, that would allow occupant numbers within residential properties to be quantified and/or associated with a particular street.</p>
3.15	<p>The 'Pointer' address database contains the common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland. LPS maintains the database with help from local councils and Royal Mail and Belfast City Council have access to this data through the NIMA agreement.</p>
3.16	<p>A position could be taken whereby every domestic address on the 'Pointer' database is sent a single survey. This would be an alternative to using the electoral list but would mean that one survey is issued per property and residents as a collective within each property would get a single vote. This may cause discontent within such properties with differing views of occupants who would all be entitled to vote under the current process if registered on the electoral list.</p>
3.17	<p>As an example of how this change could impact survey numbers for a specific street, the following real case scenario is provided. A street recently surveyed which had 41 domestic property addresses on the 'Pointer' dataset would result in 41 surveys being issued under the proposal as opposed to the actual 83 surveys issued to 39 properties based on the electoral list. (Two properties had no residents on the electoral list).</p>

3.18	<p>Whilst this approach may prove to be more inclusive in relation to properties on a street receiving a survey, it risks excluding many more individuals in households where there is more than one adult. In the example provided 42 people would not be given a vote</p>
3.19	<p>Officers would also point out that whilst Pointer is the definitive address dataset for NI it will not be 100% accurate and some properties may still not get a survey if they are not on the list. This would require supplementation with onsite checks against Pointer.</p>
<p><b>The use of ratepayer or land registry information</b></p>	
3.20	<p>Councils do not currently have access to either of these datasets and for the reasons set out below consider information from both these sources would be of limited value in relation to conducting surveys.</p>
3.21	<p>Ratepayer information held by LPS relates solely to the individual who has responsibility or is nominated to pay property tax and would not be an indicator of residency or land ownership. It is understood that Council would require a data sharing agreement with LPS to access such information and a lawful basis under GDPR giving us authority to be a recipient of such data. As with the option for one survey per household above, this option limits a survey response to only one individual who may live within the property, with no guarantee that this is their primary residence.</p>
3.22	<p>In relation to land registry information LPS also hold the 'Land Registry' for Northern Ireland and this data would prove ownership but not residency or tenancy. Searches of the Land Registry have a cost associated with them and not all properties are registered requiring further searches on the Registry of Deeds. In addition, this work would be administratively burdensome with the data obtained being of limited use in the establishment of survey data relevant to street residency.</p>
<p><b>Supplementing Electoral Register information</b></p>	
3.23	<p>Officers could supplement the current process using the electoral list by offering a further single survey to any domestic dwelling where there are no residents on the electoral list. This would be in addition to sending surveys to all residents on the electoral list. For the street example above this would result in 2 additional surveys being issued, 1 each, to 2 properties being properties on the Pointer address list which had no occupants on the electoral list. There would be an additional administrative burden in the survey process if this was adopted. In addition, this approach would not provide equity as residents not on the electoral list would be treated differently, dependant on whether someone else in the same dwelling was on the list or not.</p>
<p><b><u>Conclusion</u></b></p>	
3.24	<p>The electoral list is used by at least 7 of the other Councils in NI with a Dual Language Street Signs policy, to conduct surveys of residents in relation to dual language street sign applications. It is the only mechanism by which the number of individual residing in a domestic property can be determined.</p>
3.25	<p>Moving to a process of providing one survey per property would mean a much lower number of surveys being issued. In the example provided 50% reduction from 83 to 41 and occupants within properties would have to agree a collective response.</p>
3.26	<p>Similarly, whilst moving to a process of supplementing the electoral register with an additional survey for houses with no one listed would ensure that all properties receive at least one survey, this would create further complexity in the process. It may lead to criticism from other residents not on the electoral list who would not get a survey due to the fact they reside in a property with others who are.</p>

3.27	<p>Other data sources i.e. ratepayer and land registry information are not currently readily available and are also not reliable indicator of residency. The electoral register is the only data source that can be used to verify the numbers of individuals who are resident of the street being surveyed.</p> <p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p>
3.28	<p>There are no direct financial or resource implications in relation to maintaining current survey process.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.29	None
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
4.1	None