



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Health and Environmental Services Committee
Subject:	Policy on Street Naming and Numbering Policy of Properties
Date:	8th February, 2012
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Martin, Head of Building Control, ext. 2450
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will recall that, at your meeting on 5th December, a question was raised in relation to the methodology used in deciding on the erection of dual language street signs. A Member highlighted the possibility of amending the existing policy to provide that, in future, two-thirds of those residents who had returned a survey form, and not of those which had been surveyed, should be in favour of erecting a second street sign in a language other than English.
1.2	The Director informed Members that a report setting out the Council's current policy would be brought before the Committee, to enable consideration to be given to any changes which the Committee may deem appropriate.
1.3	The power for the Council to name streets is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995. This includes a provision to erect a name plate that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• shall express the name of the Street in English, and• may express the name in any other language.
1.4	This is commonly known as dual language street naming and whilst the vast majority of the signs are expressed in Irish, it does not preclude any other language from being taken into consideration. For the purposes of the statutory provision the English name is the version used both in the address of any person residing in the street and in the description of the land.
1.5	A Council, in deciding to exercise its powers in relation to dual language street signs, shall have regard to any views expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street. Council Policy
1.6	The Council approved a dual language street signs policy on 1 st April 1996 and this policy was subsequently incorporated into the Street Naming and Building Numbering Policy and approved on 4 th February 2009. A copy of the current policy is attached as Appendix 1.

1.7	In addition to dual language signs, the current policy covers a variety of issues in connection with the erection of signs, types of signs and naming and renaming of streets, however this report only covers dual language issues.
1.8	<p>The current policy for seeking and assessing the views of occupiers and the criteria to be applied in deciding whether to erect a street sign in a language other than English is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. only applications supported by a petition representing not less than 1/3 of the people appearing on the Electoral Register of the street for which the application is being made will be progressed. ii. the Building Control Service will carry out a postal survey seeking the opinion of all persons appearing on the electoral role of the street. The survey letter is designed to make the expression of views as simple as possible and a pre paid envelope is supplied. A copy of the letter is attached as Appendix 2. The Council also informs persons in that letter of the translation that is being recommended. This translation is authenticated by Queens University Belfast. iii. where 2/3 or more of the occupiers appearing on the Electoral Register have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign then a report is brought to Committee detailing the results of the survey. Persons not replying are deemed not to be in favour of the proposal. iv. the Committee can then decide on the basis of the report and such recommendation will go to Council for ratification. v. the Service will be responsible for the erection and maintenance of any signs. <p>History of Dual Language Street Sign Applications</p>
1.9	<p>Since applications were first received in 1998 a total of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 applications for Ulster Scots signs have been received • 143 applications for Irish signs have been received • 3 Ulster Scots applications have been approved • 111 Irish applications have been approved <p>Therefore 75% of Ulster Scots applications and 77% of Irish applications have been approved.</p>
1.10	<p>The decision to proceed based on a 2/3 majority as opposed to a simple majority was the subject of debate at the last discussions the Committee had on the policy on 11th June 2007 and was taken as representing the substantive viewpoint of the occupiers. The issue of persons not replying being deemed as not to be in favour of the proposal was also the subject at that meeting.</p> <p>Member Nominations</p>
1.11	<p>Following discussion at the Committee meeting on 11th June 2007 about the initial 'petition' requirements (point (i) above), a pilot was carried out whereby the postal survey could also be initiated by any Elected Member requesting the erection of a dual language sign.</p>

1.12	<p>The results of the pilot were reported to Committee on 3rd September 2008 and showed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a total of 12 Irish dual language applications were received which included 8 from Councillors and 4 from community groups. • a total of 3 applications from Councillors were approved and all 4 from the community groups were approved. • the remaining 5 applications from Councillors were left pending until they were subsequently approved in February 2009.
1.13	<p>However, after discussion, the Committee agreed to revert to the policy of 1st April 1996, which requires the submission of a petition representing not less than one third of people appearing on the electoral register for the street for which the application is made, prior to a survey being progressed.</p>
	<p>Policy in Other Council Areas outside Belfast</p>
1.14	<p>The Service carried out a telephone survey of all 25 Councils requesting details of their current policies regarding this issue. Their full response is contained in Appendix 3.</p>
	<p>In summary:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23 Councils responded • 2 did not respond • 14 Councils have a dual language policy and 9 do not • 3 use a straight majority of the surveys returned • 4 use 2/3 majority of the surveys returned • 2 use a 2/3 majority of the surveys issued • The remaining Councils were either unsure or considered each application individually.
1.15	<p>The Councils were unable to give breakdowns over a defined time period so the results are in relation to all applications received since the inception of the legislation. In relation to numbers of applications for dual language signs, with the exception of Limavady Borough Council, Magherafelt District Council, Moyle District Council and Newry & Mourne City Council, numbers were in single figures or nil.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The legislation authorises the Council to name streets. For statutory purposes the name shall be in English and a dual language translation may be erected in addition. In doing so the Council shall take into account opinions of residents or occupiers of the street.</p>
2.2	<p>The Council has a Policy as to how it carries out this function that was most recently agreed on 4th February 2009.</p>
	<p>Options Open to Members</p>
2.3	<p>In discussing the issue of establishing resident and occupiers views in relation to reaching a decision the following options are open to Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 1 - which is currently the policy <p>Consent of the majority of residents/occupiers by a 2/3 weighted majority supporting the application where a non reply is taken as not supporting the proposal, or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 2 <p>Consent of the majority of residents/occupiers by a simple majority supporting the application where a non reply is taken as not supporting the proposal, or</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 3 Consent of persons responding to the application by a 2/3 weighted majority where a non reply is disregarded i.e.; neither supporting, nor objecting • Option 4 Consent of persons responding to the application by a simple majority where a non reply is disregarded i.e.; neither supporting, nor objecting • Option 5 Consent of persons responding to the application by any other means proposed at the meeting.
2.4	If Members decide to adopt any other option than Option 1 or indeed wish to amend any other provision in the Policy, the Head of Building Control will bring the amended Policy back to Committee at the next available date for consideration. This will then be ratified by Council. Any proposed Policy would also be submitted to the Council's Good Relations Consultation Forum and be subject to an Equality Consideration process before being resubmitted to Committee.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>Financial Any decision to depart from the current policy may have financial implications, such as supply and erection costs that are not currently budgeted for in the incoming financial year.</p>
3.2	<p>Human Resources Any decision to depart from the current policy may have resource implications that are not currently budgeted for in the incoming financial year; however these should be accommodated in the existing staffing structure.</p>
3.2	<p>Assets and Other Implications There are no assets or other implications with this proposed initiative.</p>

4	Equality Implications
4.1	Any recommendations arising will be consulted on with the Good Relations Unit to see if there are any equality implications.

5	Recommendation
5.1	Members are requested to consider the report and decide if they wish to reaffirm the existing policy or request that it be amended and brought back to Committee for further discussion and approval.

6	Decision Tracking
The Head of Building Control will be responsible for any actions decided at Committee.	

7	Documents Attached
Appendix 1. Street Naming & Buildings Numbering Policy Appendix 2. Letter regarding application to residents and occupiers Appendix 3. Matrix indicating responses by Councils outside Belfast	