



<b>Subject:</b>	ParkLife Education Programme - Evaluation
<b>Date:</b>	5 December 2017
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
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<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	The purpose of the report is to update Members on the ParkLife Education Programme and in particular, present an evaluation undertaken of the Programme by Queen's University Belfast, for their consideration and agreement.
<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 and the ongoing success of the ParkLife Education Programme;</li><li>▪ consider and endorse the ParkLife Evaluation report including key findings and recommendations; and</li><li>▪ support the related publicity.</li></ul>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p data-bbox="272 226 421 255"><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p data-bbox="272 293 1469 577">The ParkLife Education Programme uses and promotes the Council's parks and open spaces as a resource for outdoor learning. The Programme has been in operation since 2007 and is delivered under contract, by Ulster Wildlife, along with Council staff. In 2016, Belfast Healthy Cities awarded the Programme a 'Highly Commended' in the Healthy Living category which focuses on initiatives that encourage and enable people of all ages to live healthier lives and actively participate in society.</p> <p data-bbox="272 645 1362 725">The Programme has three main elements: schools, Saturday Clubs and community groups:</p> <ul data-bbox="272 745 1465 1128" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="272 745 1465 927">▪ Supervised sessions are provided to 42 no. primary schools in Belfast whereby children walk to their local park where they learn about nature, the environment, parks' heritage and lots more. The Programme has direct links to the Curriculum and is delivered to Key Stage 2 children;</li> <li data-bbox="272 947 1362 1028">▪ Saturday Clubs take place on a monthly basis in 6 no. parks across the city and children along with their families take part in themed activities; and</li> <li data-bbox="272 1048 1406 1128">▪ Educational sessions are held with 10 no. community groups in their local park with activities tailored to suit the needs and abilities of each group.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="272 1196 1426 1532">It was considered an opportune time to examine the effectiveness of the Programme in order to establish an evidence base for the benefits of outdoor learning as well as help guide our approach in the future delivery of the Programme. Queens University Belfast was commissioned as external evaluators to examine the school element of the Programme. The evaluation was designed to investigate the stated Primary and Secondary outcomes of the Programme. The Primary outcomes were that as a result of taking part in the Programme, the children will:</p> <ul data-bbox="272 1552 1078 1682" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="272 1552 1078 1585">▪ spend more time engaging with nature in their local parks;</li> <li data-bbox="272 1606 916 1639">▪ have learned more about their local park; and</li> <li data-bbox="272 1659 708 1693">▪ be more connected to nature.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="272 1704 1370 1785">The Secondary outcomes were that, as a result of taking part in the Programme, the children will:</p> <ul data-bbox="272 1805 1422 1935" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="272 1805 1422 1839">▪ have more positive attitudes towards and awareness of environmental sustainability;</li> <li data-bbox="272 1859 1023 1892">▪ have more positive attitudes to learning outdoors; and</li> <li data-bbox="272 1912 863 1946">▪ rate their health and well-being as higher.</li> </ul>

### Key Findings

- 3.2 The evaluation was undertaken between September 2016 and June 2017 in eight schools and comprised the completion of two on-line questionnaires. A total of 154 children completed the questionnaire before they took part in the Programme and a total of 143 children completed the questionnaire, after they had finished the Programme.
- 3.3 The findings indicated that the ParkLife Education Programme had a positive impact for all of the Programme outcomes measured and was a positive experience for the children who attended it. In summary, the post programme questionnaire indicated that the children:
- had a higher frequency of visits to their local park, were going there to enjoy nature and more of them mentioned outdoor/nature activities as their favourite activities outside of school;
  - had an increase in learning from the knowledge based questions which were designed to test the main knowledge content of the Programme;
  - were more positive about their connection and enjoyment of nature;
  - had more positive attitudes to environmental sustainability;
  - had more positive attitudes to learning outdoors and approximately 50% responses included being happy, good, fun loved/liked it and were excited;
  - felt that the Programme had a beneficial effect on their health and well-being in that they were more positive about their energy levels, how they felt and their ability to pay attention in school;
  - enjoyed learning outdoors (93%), the Programme was fun; and
  - when asked for ideas on how they would teach outdoors, their responses reflected how the ParkLife Education programme is currently taught.
- A copy of the evaluation report is included in Appendix A.

### Recommendations

- 3.4 Based on the findings presented, the report recommends that:
- learning outdoors through the ParkLife Education Programme is a very positive experience for children and should be regarded as an example of good practice;
  - the Programme should continue to be delivered in its current model so that many more children can participate and benefit from it; and
  - the Council should consider sharing their learning from the Programme and the report with other Councils and organisations.
- In relation to future research, the report recommends that:
- this evaluation should be repeated at a later date to increase the sample size, to

	<p>examine the Programme in more depth, build a larger evidence base and take into account potential further outcomes not previously considered; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a qualitative study such as focus groups, with the children should be incorporated in the evaluation to enable a deeper analysis of their understanding of the Programme and its impact on them.</li> </ul>
3.5	<p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>Given the noteworthy findings from this evaluation, it is important that the ParkLife Education Programme continues in its current format and that its value and significance is communicated widely, as good practice. Publicity for the report is scheduled to take place in January 2018 and the report will be circulated to relevant organisations.</p>
3.6	<p>Whilst the evaluation provides a good baseline for demonstrating the cognitive, psychological and behavioural benefits of outdoor learning, it is important that a follow-up evaluation is completed to allow a much deeper investigation into the impact of the Programme as well as strengthening this evidence base. If Members agree to this recommendation, the evaluation could be scheduled to take place in the 2018/19 academic year.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The annual budget for the ParkLife Education Programme is £80,000. The cost of a subsequent evaluation of the Programme is approximately £3,000 and can be accommodated from within existing budgets. The Programme is managed by the Open Spaces &amp; Active Living Unit.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>There are no known equality and good relation implications.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1: Report for Belfast City Council: An Evaluation of the ParkLife Education Programme by Queen’s University Belfast