



Subject:	Public Awareness Campaign on the Responsible use of Fireworks
Date:	24 January 2020
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director, City & Neighbourhood Services Department
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<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	<p>At the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 22 November 2019, the following issue was raised by Councillor Long:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To actively promote a public awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks – including specific information on the legal consequence of misuse; the impact of fireworks on vulnerable people and animal welfare; and precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks.• To write to the UK Government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays• To encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display

1.2	The Committee agreed that a report would be brought back before the Committee regarding a public awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks and how this could be facilitated, resourced and managed.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to approve the following actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Council officers to request a meeting with the Department of Justice with a view to asking it to lead on a high profile public awareness campaign in 2020 highlighting the impact of fireworks on vulnerable people and animals and promoting the use of low noise fireworks. 2. Council to write to the Office for Product Safety and Standards at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, requesting it to consider amending the current legislation to limit the noise level emitted by fireworks to 90db.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The House of Commons Petitions Committee recently published a report on fireworks (Appendix 1). The report highlighted evidence that petitions calling for greater restrictions on sales and use of fireworks had been motivated by justified concerns. It suggested in many cases there were substantial adverse effects, for example on people with a wide range of health conditions and disabilities. Also distressing effects on people with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the report suggested animals could suffer serious and long-term effects.</p>
3.2	<p>The Petitions Committee looked closely at the proposal to ban sales and use of fireworks by the public but was not persuaded to recommend this course of action at this time. The Committee expressed concern that a ban could have consequences for competently-run, voluntary, community displays, which use fireworks to raise funds for local good causes. In many cases these community displays have widespread local support and increase community cohesion.</p>
3.3	<p>Some of the recommendations in the report are already in place in Northern Ireland as it has the strictest controls on fireworks in the UK. The Department of Justice Firearms and Explosives Branch oversees the legislation. Currently in Northern Ireland possession of</p>

	<p>fireworks without a license (with the exception of indoor fireworks or sparklers) is an offence and the supply of licensed fireworks is age restricted to those over 18 years of age.</p>
3.4	<p>Council officers work on an agency basis with the Department of Justice to regulate the safe supply, use and storage of fireworks and to ensure that public fireworks displays in the city are safe to attend. Fireworks sold in Northern Ireland must comply with the requirements of the Pyrotechnic Articles Safety Regulations 2015. These regulations, which implement two EU Directives, set out the essential safety requirements which must be met before pyrotechnic articles can be placed on the UK market. The purpose of the legislation is to protect consumers and individuals from unsafe pyrotechnic articles and they limit the noise levels emitted by fireworks to 120 decibels. This is a European safety standard but given the concerns expressed in the Petition Committee report and by Cllr Long it is recommended that the Council writes to the Department for Business, Industry and Industrial Strategy, asking it to consider amending the regulations to reduce the maximum permissible noise limit emitted by fireworks to 90 decibels. By way of comparison a car door slamming is approximately 97 decibels; a thunderclap approximately 120 decibels and a shotgun firing approximately 150 decibels.</p>
3.5	<p>There has been a move by some of the large supermarkets to sell low noise fireworks, concentrating on the colours and effects rather than the noise. However these supermarkets do not appear to sell fireworks from their stores in NI, possibly because of the requirement for the purchaser to have a licence and also the requirement for the company to be registered to sell explosives. Sainsbury's banned the sale of all fireworks from its stores across the UK in October last year.</p>
3.6	<p>Over the years there have been a number of firework safety campaigns organised by various government departments and the emergency services, with key public messages being promoted in the run up to Halloween. Belfast City Council, through its Environmental Health Service has supported these campaigns and there has been a downward trend in complaints, with fewer fireworks complaints being reported to the Department of Justice during 2018-2019.</p>
3.7	<p>Having said that, more can be done to raise public awareness of the negative impact caused by inconsiderate use and misuse of fireworks. Council officers will seek to meet with the Department of Justice to discuss the negative impact fireworks can have on vulnerable individuals and animals and to consider opportunities for a high profile public</p>

	<p>awareness campaign in 2020, promoting low noise fireworks and key messages for preventing misuse. Officers will also recommend that the firework safety code on nidirect (https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/fireworks) is updated to encourage the purchase of low noise fireworks. Officers will propose that the Department of Justice leads the public awareness campaign with support from local councils, the emergency services and other relevant stakeholders.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.8 The Council’s contribution to any future public awareness campaign will be met within existing budgets.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>3.9 None.</p>
4.0	Appendices- Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – The House of Commons Petition Committee Report on Fireworks, November 2019