



Subject:	The Zoo – Q1 (Apr-June) Performance Update Report
Date:	11 August 2021
Reporting Officer:	Jacqui Wilson, Business Manager
Contact Officer:	Alyn Cairns, Zoo Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
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"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	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 this report is to provide Members with an update in regard to the Zoo performance during Q1 (Apr-June) of the 2021-22 financial year.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4 <sup>th</sup> May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Note the Zoo performance update report for the period April – June 2021.</li></ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>

3.1	<p>To ensure that City Growth and Regeneration Committee is regularly updated in regard to performance at the Zoo, Members are updated on a quarterly basis across the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visitor Services</li><li>• Education Services</li><li>• Animal Collection</li><li>• Marketing &amp; Events, and</li><li>• Financial performance.</li></ul>
3.2	<p><b><u>Visitor Services</u></b></p> <p>The zoo remained closed to the public at the start of Q1 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and reopened on 30 April as an outdoor attraction only. A takeaway catering service, operated by franchise partner, USEL, was provided in the zoo's small Treetop Café located the top of the zoo. Indoor animal houses (excluding the Rainforest House) reopened to the public on 24 May.</p>
3.3	<p>The zoo has implemented a range of health and safety measures in line with Covid-19 requirements including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daily capacity on visitor numbers (2475)</li><li>• Essential online booking</li><li>• Recommended one-way system signposted around the zoo</li><li>• Safety signage and floor markings highlighting requirement for social distancing and hand hygiene</li><li>• Protective screens in place at staff contact points</li><li>• Advise wearing of face coverings in indoor public areas e.g. animal houses</li></ul>
3.4	<p>Several zoo initiatives remained unavailable during Q1 due to health and safety requirements. These included keeper talks, animal feeding experiences, keeper experiences, education services, Friends of the Zoo volunteering and indoor hospitality.</p>
3.5	<p>Upon reopening at the end of April, the zoo saw significant visitor demand with the majority of weekends throughout May and June being fully booked. During Q1 the zoo welcomed 84k visitors over the two-month period it was open. This is an increase of 54% compared to average number of visitors (May-June) since 2014. This is further impressive due to the daily capacity in place.</p>

3.6	<p>The requirement of advance booking has helped with increased visitor demand, as people are planning in advance and are committed to visiting the zoo on their selected date. The zoo intends to keep this, in at least some form, even when Covid-19 restrictions are reduced or removed in future.</p>
3.7	<p><b><u>Education Services</u></b></p> <p>The zoo has a small education team with two staff members. Due to limited staff resources and the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, a normal education service was not available during Q1. School groups were accommodated on a reduced basis with self-guided visits only available.</p>
3.8	<p><b><u>Animal Collection / Welfare</u></b></p> <p>The zoo celebrated the birth of five Fijian banded baby iguanas which hatched in early January, marking the first new addition to the zoo of 2021. The iguanas' arrival is particularly special as they are a critically endangered species and a welcome addition to the European Breeding Programme. The Fijian banded iguana is found on several of the Fiji Islands. This stunning species faces a very uncertain future due to habitat destruction, illegal trade, and competition from introduced evasive species. This is a great achievement in such a short space of time as this species is difficult to breed. Providing the right breeding conditions has been crucial for the animal care team.</p>
3.9	<p>In September 1984 Belfast Zoo proudly unveiled its most exciting exhibit area of the time: namely an aquatic habitat featuring underwater viewing that houses sealions and penguins. This exhibit affords visitors a fascinating view of sealions swimming and penguins "flying" underwater. It was the first pool in Britain to have underwater viewing. In 1985 the Californian Marine Mammal Rehabilitation Centre offered Belfast Zoo three California sealions, two of which had lost their sight. These animals lived and bred successfully at the zoo for many years and today our current sealion group and habitat is still one of the most popular areas in the zoo.</p>
3.10	<p>In 2021, a health and safety refurbishment of Belfast Zoo's sea lion pool within the aquatic habitat was completed with fresh water being changed to saline water. Research has shown that this kind of system enhances the welfare of the animals as it provides a more natural environment. The underwater viewing area of the sealions had been closed before the refurbishment. An upgraded water treatment system was installed and has vastly improved general water quality and energy efficiency. It provides a much more enhanced</p>

visual experience through the underwater viewing which was reopened at the delight of our visitors with lots of positive comments being generated on our social media.

3.11

Zoo visitors were fortunate to view the live birth of a giraffe calf, Ballysheen, at the end of May.

3.12

**Births**

Animal	Number
Mammals	1
Birds	0
Reptiles	3

3.13

**Deaths**

	Natural Causes	Medical	Accidental
Mammals	3	1	0
Birds	1	0	0
Reptiles	0	0	0

3.14

<b>Transfers In (from other facilities)</b>	
Animal	Number
Mammals	0
Birds	0
Reptiles	0

3.15

<b>Transfers Out (to other facilities)</b>	
Animal	Number
Mammals	0
Birds	0
Reptiles	0

\*This does not include amphibians, colony species and invertebrates.

\*\*This does not include neonatal deaths - animal deaths up to 30 days old.

3.16

**Marketing & Events**

Marketing focus during Q1 was heavily focused on generating awareness that the zoo was 'Now Open' following a sustained period of closure due to the pandemic. The relevant health and safety measures in place supported this key message which were communicated through the zoo's website, social media channels and e-newsletters.

3.17

The zoo was accredited as 'Good to Go' through the UK-wide industry scheme for tourism and hospitality businesses.

3.18	The zoo promoted its new Changing Places facility for visitors with disabilities and reopened its sea lion viewing window which was closed to the public for several years.
3.19	The zoo launched its Amazon Wish List which allows supporters to purchase and donate enrichment items which are posted directly to the zoo. This was a huge success and generated items valued at over £1k within a matter of weeks.
3.20	The zoo welcomed several babies during Q1 including the birth of a giraffe calf, Ballysheen, in front of hundreds of visitors, a critically endangered bongo and six Madagascar tree boas. Baby news is communicated through the zoo's digital channels and is always well received by zoo supporters. An increase in visitor numbers followed the news of the giraffe calf.
3.21	The zoo's marketing capacity has been reduced by 50% this year following postponement of industrial placements across the Council, leaving just one staff member in post. The zoo's annual Photography Competition did not take place as normal and no events took place during Q1 due to the focus on operational recovery.
3.22	The zoo currently has over 60k followers on Facebook, over 18k on Instagram, over 7k on Twitter and over 1k on YouTube.
3.23	The zoo is rated 4/5 on TripAdvisor and is rated #3 on things to do in Newtownabbey.
	<b><u>Financial performance</u></b>
3.24	At the end of Q1 income was £997k which was £245k above budgeted income.
3.25	Income has been generated primarily through admission, followed by retail, key commercial products and franchise concessions. Several commercial products including animal experiences/ Keeper for a Day/ birthday parties have been unavailable due to Covid-19 restrictions and have not generated income.
3.26	Retail income was £205k which was £66k above budget. Retail as a % of income has increased from around 20% to 26% which is understandable considering other commercial products haven't been on sale.
3.27	Income from membership has been positive, generating £23k income.

3.28	No catering commissions have been received yet for this financial year, as the commission threshold has not been met. However, the zoo's photography commission has seen increased demand and generated over £5k income for the zoo in Q1.
3.29	Zoo net expenditure at the end of Q1 is £241k. This is lower than the budget by £309k as the Zoo continues to work hard to reduce costs where possible. Net expenditure for the same period last year was £563k.
3.30	Cost saving measures include staff furlough reduction in marketing spend and continued efficiencies in animal feeds, all of which contributed to this positive position.
3.31	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>The net expenditure at Q1 is £309k under budget. The zoo has reduced expenditure where possible while closed to the public and recovery, and customer demand has increased income in comparison to recent years.</p> <p>Currently the zoo is forecasting to be under budget by approximately £120k by year end.</p>
3.32	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	<p><b>Appendices – Documents attached</b></p> <p>None.</p>