

North Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 24th November, 2021

NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Murphy (In the Chair);
Councillors Bradley, Cobain, Ferguson, Magee, Maskey,
McAllister and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mrs. M. Higgins, Lead Officer – Community Provision;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. E. Mullan, Lead Officer, Open Spaces;
Mr. D. Salters, Open Spaces Area Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for the inability to attend were reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor McCullough, and from Councillor Pankhurst.

Nomination of Chairperson for the meeting

It was agreed that Councillor Murphy would chair the meeting in the absence of the Chairperson.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 25th August, 2021 were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Presentations

Open Spaces and Street Scene

Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager, provided the Working Group with an overview of the work of the Open Spaces and Streetscene (OSS) service. He explained that the service had been created in 2019, with the merging of the former Parks and Street Cleansing sections. He explained the services that they provided which included street sweeping, bin collections, entry clearing, graffiti, litter, recycling, the maintenance of parks, open spaces and playgrounds.

The Members were advised that Council staff had issued 2,500 Fixed Penalty Notices for littering and dog fouling offences, emptied over 9 million wheelie bins, carried out 38,500 bulky waste collections and that over 4,787 streets were cleaned across the city per week.

He outlined a number of challenges that the OSS Service faced, including the creation of multi-tasking teams, new assets, the implementation of the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS). He outlined that the Covid-19 pandemic had added a number of pressures on the service, particularly in terms of ensuring staff safety through social distancing, such as reduced staff access to vehicles, staff being redesignated to other key service areas and the impact of staff sickness absence. He explained that, cumulatively, the service had, at times, been operating at a reduction of 35-40% capacity. He advised the Working Group that that had invariably led to a drop in service and he apologised on behalf of the section for that.

The Working Group was advised that new routes for street cleansing were currently being examined for an improved service. The Neighbourhood Services Manager also advised the Members that further staff recruitment was underway and that, by March 2022, they would have a full complement of 400 staff in full time employment, this would include 100 staff evenly spread throughout the north area.

During discussion several of the Members raised ongoing issues regarding hotspots for littering and the need for additional bins, including recycling facilities, across the City's parks and public spaces. The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that in the near future a trial would be taking place on the introduction of litter bins with sensors and noted that it was anticipated that this would help provide more information to enable officers to identify where additional bins needed to be located.

A Member referred to the lack of sweepers operating in the Castle Area and queried if this was a result of available drivers or if the frequency of cleans needed to be reviewed.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that currently permanent staff were being recruited and he confirmed that maintaining adequate staffing resources was an ongoing issue. He reported that the upskilling of existing staff was being progressed through a Driver Academy that had recently been established within the Council, in which 20 staff were currently training for their Category C licence.

During further discussion, Members discussed the Waterworks and the Forth Meadow Community Greenway, highlighting that a full complement of staff was needed on a daily basis to maintain standards.

The Working Group commended the work of the Open Spaces and Streetscene service and noted the information which had been provided.

Alleyway Transformation

The Neighbourhood Services Manager reminded the Members that the delivery of a number of pilot alleyway transformation schemes throughout the city had been agreed by the People and Communities Committee. It had also been agreed at the October meeting of the Council that the final area selection, number of pilots and the detail of intervention would be delegated to the Area Working Groups (subject to a final decision by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee) who would be asked to adopt a flexible approach as to how the funding was allocated.

He reminded the Members that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) had agreed that in order to test the processes required to deliver an alleyway transformation scheme that a number of pilot projects would be initiated, to develop a framework which would be used for

a larger programme, and be a path-finding exercise, for other councils as a recognised method to access the DfI monies.

Successful pilot projects would involve the community receiving a `Starter Pack` of materials and information to support the regeneration of alleyways and to deliver a transformation project. The pack would include the following contents/information:

- Plants, planters, soil / compost, seats;
- Planting / growing / basic wooden planter and willow plant support (trellis) workshops to develop community capacity for the longevity of the project;
- Signposting information directing communities to other departments and agencies for issues not within the remit or responsibility of the Council;
- Signposting information directing communities to funding opportunities they could avail of to further develop and maintain the area after Council / DfI funding had been utilized; and
- Legal information in regard to liabilities and ownership of alleyways.

He then proceeded to provide the Members with an overview regarding the possible identification of sites by the Area Outreach teams and Elected Representatives and drew their attention to the proposed matrix for assessing the eligibility of the potential schemes and the next steps following the selection of sites by the Area Working group.

He advised that, as previously agreed, a proforma had been circulated to the Members seeking input into the identification of gate locations as well as locations suitable for alleyway transformation. He drew the Members' attention to the collated returns for the North AWG, which included sites identified by the area outreach team.

At the People and Communities Committee it had been agreed that up to five sites (per quadrant of the city) would be the limit for the pilot. It was suggested that the five sites that scored the highest be considered for the pilot. Once scoring had been completed, the ranked list of sites would then be reported back to the respective AWGs.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that, following approval, officers would begin the process of drawing down the monies from DfI for the top five ranked sites. The learnings from the pilot projects would then be used to inform further bids into £1-2 million fund and it was suggested that those alleyways that were not chosen for this pilot would be completed as part of future phases of this scheme.

He then detailed the key stages of the alleygating process and indicative timescales, as follows

- Month 1 – Regulatory and Community Consultation Commenced
- Month 3 – Regulatory Consultation Completed
- Month 4 – Community Consultation Completed
- Month 5 – Legal Preparation
- Month 7/8 – Notice of Intention Advertised
- Month 8/9 – Clarification of Objections
- Month 9 – People & Communities Committee Consideration of Traffic Regulation Order
- Month 10 – Full Council Approval of Traffic Regulation Order
- Month 10 – Gates Ordered
- Month 12 – Gates Manufactured and Installation Commenced

The Members were asked to note this process would only commence when the final list of locations to be gated had been agreed by the Council.

The Members discussed at length the number of unadopted alleyways throughout the City and the huge volume of work and funding that would be required to progress the required works.

Several Member reiterated the resources and funding that would be required and emphasised the enormity of the issue. Officers were asked to investigate if the Council could link in with other transformation funding opportunities available through other channels.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that a report on the issue of unadopted alleyways, including consideration of all funding options, was currently being prepared for the January meeting of the People and Communities Committee and highlighted that there was a need to address and progress works to those alleyways that posed the most risk.

The Working Group:

- agreed the matrix for the scoring and assessment of pilot sites;
- agreed the proposed sites for alleyway transformation programmes for the NAWG moving forward;
- agreed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee delegate authority to officers, via the outreach team, to assess the sites against the scoring matrix and to rank them in order of highest score; and
- noted the timeline for the key stages of the alleygating process and the indicative timescales provided.

Community Infrastructure Update

The Working Group considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the proposed Community Infrastructure Pilot including the methodology and resources outlined.

Members are asked to consider the information that is provided in relation to potential areas that could be included within the pilot programme and recommend 2 areas within north Belfast.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the detail of the proposed Community Infrastructure Pilot and agree 2 areas within north Belfast that will be included in the project.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 In June 2021 Council granted approval for officers to develop a pilot approach to addressing weak community infrastructure in 4

areas across the city. Officers have been developing the framework for this approach and are seeking approval to develop the project as outlined.

- 3.2 Community infrastructure is commonly defined as a complex system of facilities, programmes, and social networks that aims to improve people's quality of life. These services, networks and physical assets work in tandem to form the foundation of a strong neighbourhood. This pilot initiative will seek to use a new methodology to support identified communities with low community infrastructure.
- 3.3 In Summer/Autumn 21 Council facilitated engagement to update the community plan for Belfast, the Belfast Agenda. The need to build community infrastructure within certain parts of the city has been identified as a priority and is likely to appear as a key commitment in the refreshed Belfast Agenda plan which will be produced in March 2022.
- 3.4 Recent experience shows that communities require support and resources from a range of services within Council. The development of the community infrastructure pilot will be an opportunity to take an integrated approach to identifying and responding to area needs.
- 3.5 In addition, there are a range of other agencies and organisations who provide considerable support for communities to develop and build strong community infrastructure. These include Department for Communities, NIHE, NICVA and large CVS organisations, especially those funded through BCC Capacity Building Funding. The pilot will engage with relevant partners to ensure complementarity and added value.

Methodology

- 3.6 Members agreed that Area Working Groups (AWGs) would play an important role in the identification of pilot areas within each area of the city. Initial engagement with AWGs has highlighted that it will be difficult to limit the project to 1 area in each of the 4 geographies of the city. Some members have also highlighted the need to work with communities of interest as well as defined geographic areas. Based on this feedback officers are proposing that the pilot will work with 8 areas/communities of interest. Communities of interest that have been identified in specific geographic areas will be highlighted in the area summary.
- 3.7 Phase 1 of the programme will focus on the identification of areas and development of an agreed methodology. Delivery within communities will be on a two year basis from April 2022 – March 2024 with ongoing and final review to assess impact.
- 3.8 An overall framework will underpin the approach in all identified areas. This will ensure consistency whilst enabling the development of local responses. The framework will be

underpinned by a co-design process which will gather stakeholder information about local issues and develop agreed responses which will be captured in a two year action plan for each area.

- 3.9 The action plan will be produced through a co-design process and there will be a finance of £15,000 per annum to support delivery of the action plan. This allocation will not be a grant payment but will be allocated for the delivery of specified actions by an identified lead. In most cases this will be a community & voluntary sector organisation but in cases where there is not capacity to deliver on identified actions council officers may act as lead if agreed through the co-design process.
- 3.10 Members should note that this funding allocation will be for revenue rather than capital funding.
- 3.11 Given Council's ambition that this approach will create an opportunity to review the way in which we resource and support areas/communities which have weak community infrastructure, officers have identified the need to secure external technical support to assist in the development of an agreed methodology that will identify and contribute to changed outcomes for these communities. This resource will identify best practise in other similar initiatives and assist in developing a delivery, reporting and evaluation framework.
- 3.12 To enhance the impact of this project and in recognition of potential linkages with the Belfast Agenda it is recommended that an Advisory Group for the Project is established. It is recommended that this should have representation from relevant stakeholders including but not limited to; Chair of 4 x area working groups, DfC, 2 representatives from VCSE panel, 1 representative from CPP/Living Here Board, NICVA, NIHE and relevant BCC staff. This Advisory Group will have oversight of the overall project delivery and will provide updates to the People & Communities committee and Living Here Board.
- 3.13 Area teams within Belfast City Council community provision will support development of local approaches and updates from these will be provided to the Advisory Group.
- 3.14 Council officers will attend November/December AWG meetings to provide an overview of existing Council resources at a citywide and area level. This will include:
- Mapping of existing BCC grant funding and council facilities
 - Information on existing interventions (i.e. Neighbourhood Renewal, Urban Villages)
 - Indicators of need i.e. multiple deprivation and qualitative feedback

Officers suggest that the following selection criteria are used when identifying an area:

- **limited access to funding**
- **limited access to community facilities**
- **lower access to services/engagement with Council**
- **evidence of need/inequalities/deprivation**
- **limited linkage with other initiatives particularly Neighbourhood Renewal, Urban Villages and Communities in Transition (CIT)**
- **No more than 1 pilot in every DEA**

3.15 Officers have carried out an initial assessment on those areas that could benefit from the project. Members are asked to consider the information in Appendix 1 (Area Summary) and agree two recommended areas that will be included in the community infrastructure pilot in north Belfast.

3.16 Financial and Resource Implications

All financial resources outlined in this report can be delivered through existing budgets. Existing human resource will be used to deliver the programme.

3.17 Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment

This programme seeks to address issues of inequality by developing community infrastructure, programme delivery will seek to have a positive impact on good relations and rural needs.”

Several of the Members referred to communities of interest and diversity across the City and the need to do more for inclusion.

The Lead Officer, Community Provision, Mrs. M Higgins, assured the Members that work was ongoing with BAME communities in the City and suggested that officers could link in with the Shared City Partnership through the Good Relations Action Plan to further develop this work. In addition, it was noted that officers were keen to progress this work through locality area working.

Discussion ensued, during which it was noted that resources and funding were needed to progress work with minority communities and it was agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Working Group that would give consideration as to how to progress work with Communities of Interest across the City.

The Members noted the Community Infrastructure Pilot and agreed the following two areas (ranked as 1 and 2 in appendix 1) as the areas within north Belfast to be included in the project:

- **1 - Mid Antrim Road (Limestone/Glandore) (Oldpark); and**
- **2 - Lower Shore Road (Castle)**

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) BCC and
Belfast Cavehill Mountainbikers' Club –
People and Communities Report**

The Working Group noted that the People and Communities Committee, at its meeting on 9th November, had agreed terms of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Belfast City Council and the Cavehill Mountainbikers Club in respect of the pilot use of a mountain bike trail in Cave Hill Country Park available [here](#).

The Members noted the pilot and suggested that at the end of the pilot period the consultation needed to be widened out to other areas within the Park.

Noted.

Organisation of Future Presentations

The Working Group agreed that officers, in liaison with the Chairperson, would agree the timeline for future presentations to the Working Group.

Chairperson