

<b>Causeway Coast and Glens Bonfire Framework</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> May 2017</b>
<b>To: Leisure &amp; Development Committee For Information</b>	

<b>Linkage to Corporate Strategy</b>	
<b>Strategic Themes</b>	Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities
<b>Outcome</b>	Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Head of Community & Culture Good Relations Manager
<b>Cost: (If applicable)</b>	n/a

**The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update in relation to the progress of the development of the Interagency Bonfire Framework being facilitated through the Good Relations Programme.**

### **Background**

In 2014, the Good Relations audit identified a need for a positive proactive approach to dealing with emerging Good Relations issues throughout the Causeway Coast and Glen's area.

The audit highlighted a need to develop collaborative approaches to monitor potential challenges in terms of shared and safe space and cultural expression, in order to identify issues early and work together with local stakeholders to find mutually beneficial solutions.

Thus far, the Good Relations programme has facilitated an interagency partnership approach through the establishment of a Safer Bonfire working group involving relevant statutory agencies.

Stakeholders who participate in the interagency group include: Council – representation by both Good Relations and Environmental Services; Police Service for Northern Ireland, NI Housing Executive, NI Fire & Rescue Service and more recently the NI Environmental Agency.

The overall purpose of the group is to promote safer, stronger and healthier communities while ensuring that both the natural and built environment is safe, respected and valued. Specifically the group seeks to address both environmental, community safety and good relations issues which from time to time are associated with bonfires.

### **Identified need**

The group recognise the need to develop an interagency bonfire management framework that would assist in the celebration of cultural identity respectfully, whilst promoting safer, stronger and healthier communities, ensuring that both the natural and built environment is safe, respected and valued.

The process provides an opportunity for statutory bodies to create a baseline, reach agreement on the partners' respective roles and responsibilities, and develop an agreed approach in terms of working with communities on bonfires.

The desired outcome associated with the initiative is improved relationships between local communities, Council and other key partners resulting in safer bonfires for all.

## **Progress to Date**

A number of activities have been undertaken as part of the process to develop a framework.

These have included:

- Surveys of all public agencies and elected representatives;
- Interviews and meetings with both key public agencies and local community groupings;
- Councillor workshop;
- Community meetings with representatives from local groups including bonfire builders;
- Site visits to The Folly in Armagh and Randalstown bonfire initiatives to consider current good practice;
- The compilation of a draft framework, currently under consideration by potential delivery partners.

## **Areas of Agreement**

Feedback from community representatives and public agencies has resulted in a number of potential areas of agreement to be further developed, namely:

- Local leadership by individuals and community based organisations is critical in helping to move an area away from problematic bonfire issues to a place where the bonfire was well managed;
- The recognition of current good practice by local communities in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area, led by local communities;
- That there should be no tyres or other toxic materials on bonfires;
- That there should be no flags, emblems or posters that could be construed as hate-related, caveated with the recognition that achieving that may take longer;
- Local communities need support to improve their bonfire management which may include additional resources, support for training, provision of health and safety materials/equipment and support for the collection of unwanted materials;
- Public agencies should be consistent in their approach to both providing support and when necessary, enforcement (particularly in relation to fly-tipping and collecting toxic materials);
- Long-term support is important on issues such as environmental schemes, building relationships with, and the capacity of young people involved in bonfire management. Of particular note is the need to raise awareness among the young people themselves, and the wider community, on the health impact of burning tyres and toxic materials.

At the councillor workshop held on the 16<sup>th</sup> March, Members supported, in principle, the following:

- 1) To work pro-actively with other public agency partners and local communities towards respectful, legal, safe, environmentally sound and positive bonfires as cultural or historical expressions;
- 2) To facilitate the safest possible siting of bonfires to minimise risk to people, property and land;
- 3) To work to discontinue the use of negative and harmful health-related materials on bonfires including tyres;
- 4) To encourage innovative approaches including the design and management of the safest possible bonfires, and support communities if they wish to explore alternatives to a bonfire;

- 5) To work to reduce and discontinue use of symbols, materials, posters or material that could be harmful to good relations;
- 6) To be open to further support to local communities through the availability of appropriate resources and the development of relevant skills.

### **Ongoing community engagement**

The consultation highlighted that ongoing Community engagement is a priority and is vital for the successful development and agreement of the bonfire framework.

As part of the good relations action plan, there are a number of initiatives specifically aimed at engaging with communities to build positive relations and provide support to help build capacity to encourage more positive promotion of cultural identity.

Good Relations, working alongside Environmental Services, have been engaging with local communities to consider how existing celebrations of culture can be delivered in a safer environment for both participants and the wider community.

Council's Good Relations action plan has a variety of projects specifically aimed to engage with key influencers within communities, as well as those who are involved with building bonfires. These include projects targeting bonfire builders on issues of safety and bonfire management, understanding and promoting positive expressions of culture, building positive relations and peer leadership, to name but a few. Council will also continue to facilitate the interagency bonfire group

The programmes are as follows:

This programme aims to engage specially with cultural and heritage groups such as bands, cultural institutions and minority language groups to help develop their capacity to engage positively with wider society on their cultural identity.

### **Draft Framework**

A draft framework has been produced and is being considered by those public agencies who are key stakeholders and partners.

Feedback from the initial consultation with communities affirmed that the framework is an ongoing, longer term process that will require continuous engagement with local communities in order to embed the principles into practice.

### **Considerations for Council**

Council has been asked to consider the following in terms of its role in assisting the implementation of the framework in the short to medium term:

- How Council should take forward the issue of resourcing and support toward respectful, legal, safe, environmentally sound and positive bonfires as cultural or historical expressions, if at all
- Whether Council should support an environmental project at a bonfire location every summer.
- How best to support officers to carry out the Council's enforcement role through Environmental Services.
- The need to prioritise an initial pre-summer education initiative around the harmful impact of burning tyres on bonfires.
- The continuation of engagement with bonfire builders to build relations and capacity.

A draft protocol is attached in Annex A for information purposes, and is subject to amendment by all partners prior to being brought back to Council for consideration. Alongside this process,

officers continue to work alongside partners, bonfire builders and community leaders to improve the environment surrounding bonfire sites across the Borough.