

TRADITIONAL BONFIRES	6th September 2016
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE	
FOR INFORMATION	

Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)	
Strategic Theme	Resilient, Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	Improved Bonfire Safety
Lead Officer	Bryan Edgar
Cost: (If applicable)	-

Across Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council there are 29 sites on which traditional 11th July bonfires are built of which 8 are on a Council-owned/controlled property. It should be noted that there were 25 bonfires in 2016, four sites having alternative celebrations. The remaining 17 are either on publicly owned land, Northern Ireland Housing Executive (13), Transport NI (2) or private ground (4).

During the period 1st April 2016 to present a total of 29 complaints were recorded by the Directorate covering 10 individual sites. 4 complaints remain under investigation. During the bonfire building season officers from both Health and Built Environment Section together with Good Relations, colleagues from Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service engaged with local communities and bonfire builders in an attempt to ensure that they remain as safe as possible, cause minimum damage to the environment by reducing the use of unsuitable materials and minimizing fly tipping. A number of measures were deployed including the use of temporary site fencing, skips and signage together with local negotiations with respect to the removal of tyres and other unsuitable items.

In Coleraine an OCN Accredited Public Event Management training course was delivered over 6 sessions with input from various statutory agencies to encourage event safety around the 11th celebrations in addition to environmental awareness. Of the 11 individuals who participated in the training, 9 individuals have successfully progressed to receiving their full OCN Level 2 Award and 2 individuals due to sporadic attendance will receive recognition of their participation in 4 elements of the course. Of the 9 individuals who have achieved accreditation 4 had previously successfully received accreditation at level one illustrating a high commitment to the programme.

Representatives from Statutory organisations including PSNI, NIHE and CC&G Borough Council attended the training and were enabled to engage directly with community representatives and volunteers to build capacity and enhance dialogue

opportunities on culture related health and well-being issues. In addition there were representatives present from the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and this impacted positively on programme delivery as it brought home to participants the immediate physical danger of bonfires as opposed to long term health impacts which have been the previous focus. The programme took place over 6 weeks running consecutively from 30th May to 4th July 2016 with the following outcomes identified:

- more confident community with the skills to build positive relationships within their own community
- Community engaging with representatives from statutory organisations
- raised capacity to interpret cultural identity as a means to education and social esteem
- Promotion of economic prosperity by increasing the skills base and future employability within marginalised communities.
- development of exemplar community organisations and the dissemination of best practice to communities
- Creative and innovative approaches to dealing with contentious issues.

The tutor conducted a dialogue with course participants as to future training and project development. Everyone indicated their willingness to continue to attend training and to work with statutory organisations to improve their bonfire site and bonfire festival celebration. They also indicated a willingness to participate in a wider variety of training linked to employability skills and community development.

One limitation of the project which was identified was the need to get the message of 'safer bonfires' out to the wider community. Learners felt that they had a good grasp of the health and management issues attached to the bonfire site. However, the wider community including not those who attend the bonfire, those who donate materials and the parents of children and young people who are attracted to play around the bonfire are still largely ignorant of the risks and suitability of many of the materials being left at the site.

A suggestion that has been put forward to develop the project further is to access funding next year not only to continue to raise capacity through training but also to work with a cartoonist or local artist to develop a range of eye-catching leaflets and social media to highlight the messages of safety and public health.

Throughout the bonfire building season and following the 11th July events, council officers responded to complaints as received and on each occasion attempted to resolve through negotiation with limited success.

All sites under Council control have since been cleared of debris and where possible scrap metal salvaged. The cost of clearance and repairs including labour and disposal charges is £25,000.00.