

<b>Report on</b>	Environmental Health Planning Comments
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> November 2018
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Fiona McClements
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Fiona McClements

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b> If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	X

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on Environmental Health consultation responses to the Planning department following concerns raised about response times.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	In 2017/18 Belfast City Council received the most planning applications (1,808) followed by Newry & Mourne (1,570), Mid Ulster (1,415) and Antrim, Banbridge and Craigavon (1,331). These 4 Councils received 47.4% of all applications received across Northern Ireland, which was similar to the position a year earlier. For comparison Antrim & Newtownabbey received 730, Derry City & Strabane 866 and Mid & East Antrim 891.
2.2	Environmental Health are not a Statutory Consultee and are not requested to provide comment on all these applications. However, Environmental Health responded to 589 planning consultations between the start of April 2017 and the end of March 2018. These included responses on Wind Farms, Gas to the West, Coalisland Racing Circuit, numerous engineering works, solar farms, anaerobic digesters, pubs/ clubs, housing developments, hot food takeaways, pig units (low protein diets), and poultry units. The Service has also recently had to attend and give evidence at a Public Inquiry on the Lough Neagh Sand Dredging (June 2018), and at a planning appeal (July 2018) with regard to the location of an intensive pig unit.
2.3	As can be seen from the list above, many of these involve complex matters relating primarily to noise, but also to odours, air pollution and contaminated land. These responses were compiled by a total of five staff who do not work full time in this area of work but also have numerous other functions to attend to in the course of their work.
2.4	Prior to the review of Public Administration in April 2015 Specialist Environmental Protection Services were provided through staff employed by Northern and Southern Group Systems. These staff provided additional support to Environmental Health departments and were called upon to deal with some of the more complex and time consuming applications. After April 2015, these services were accessed through a Service Level Agreement to the former Northern Group Specialist, who was an employee of Mid & East Antrim. The member of staff resigned in October 2016. The remaining contributing Councils to the SLA have since put in place their own arrangements to deal with this gap in service. In MUDC, this gap in provision has been absorbed by existing EHO's in addition to their previous workloads which has resulted in longer response times.

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Following concerns raised by Members about the response time to planning consultations by Environmental Health, a meeting was convened in August 2018 to try to address this matter. Given the workload noted it was felt that responding to the current level of consultations was unsustainable at the current staffing levels.</p> <p>In an effort to address the waiting list and manage the workload of existing staff a number of suggestions were made. The following items were agreed upon:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Priority should be given to industrial and commercial applications</li> <li>2. There should be a reduction in planning consultations referred onto Environmental Health for comment. Some of the less complex applications such as those for most single dwelling should not be sent to Environmental Health for comment but rely on EH provided standard comments.</li> <li>3. Standard comments to be provided to Planning department for a range of developments greater than 150m from sensitive receptors, for example <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henhouses</li> <li>• Residential developments</li> <li>• Anaerobic digesters</li> <li>• Agricultural applications</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. A concerted effort should be made to address the then current backlog during the remaining summer months. This has been done and the outstanding consultations list has been reduced.</li> <li>5. Some of the consultations referred to Environmental Health may relate to extremely complex plans that will entail a significant input from Environmental Health with regard to time. This may include significant research, and multiple consultations for a single plan. It was agreed that plans of this nature would be referred back to the Environmental Health Head of Service with an estimate of the likely time spend that such a consultation may involve with a view to exploring outsourcing arrangements .</li> <li>6. A business case for a Specialist Environmental Health Officer to be shared between the Environmental Protection Section and the Planning Department was prepared and pursued. The post would cover many of the functions previously carried out by the Specialist Group EHO and would provide planners with technical advice on more complex Environmental Health issues with regard to the planning process. The Specialist Officer would also attend Planning Appeals, Public Inquiries and provide assistance to Planning Enforcement where appropriate. The post has since been advertised internally for a secondment period of 12 months and may be extended.</li> </ol>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
4.1	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial: There is no direct financial cost to the Council with regard to most of the above measures. However, there will be the cost for 12 months of a Specialist EHO at PO4, which may be extended.</p> <p>Human: Additional staff</p>

	Risk Management: N/A
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None
	Rural Needs Implications: None
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	It is recommended that the above measures are noted by Members.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
	None