

Title of Report: Graffiti Removal Arrangements	Officer Presenting: Head of Environment Author: Head of Environment
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 To appraise Members of existing arrangements and programmes with regard to instances of graffiti across the Council district following a recent Notice of Motion adopted by Council with regard to this.

2 Background

- 2.1 Members had previously endorsed a Notice of Motion stating;

'This Council recognises the negative impact of unsightly graffiti in our public spaces, community areas and residential streets. Acknowledges that this vandalism is not acceptable in our City and District and should not go unchecked. Understands that pride in our place is vital for our wellbeing but also key to our tourism product and welcomes the actions of groups such as UVArts and supports the Peace IV Street Art concepts. Pledges to work autonomously or directly with organisations, property owners and the public to identify and facilitate the removal of graffiti and improvement of our neighbourhoods through the establishment of a dedicated task management team across the Councils relevant departments.'

- 2.2 In consideration of the above and Internal Officer Group was established to review existing arrangements and to consider how best to address the issues as detailed within the Motion.
- 2.3 The Officer group met directly with the Motion proposer, Cllr Shauna Cusack, in order to fully understand the context of the proposal and to detail arrangements as exist internally with regard to the issue.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Graffiti has many different formats and for some what appears to be graffiti and a blight is considered art by others. In the majority of instances graffiti is considered a form of vandalism and is, from a legal perspective, considered a form of criminal damage if it is erected without the prior consent of the property owner - regardless as to whether it's on private or public property.
- 3.2 More recently some forms of graffiti are gaining recognition as legitimate forms of art often referred to as street or urban art. The many forms of graffiti as described above can be evidenced at multiple locations across the City and District.
- 3.3 Council has over many years worked with and engaged numerous communities and organisations in addressing graffiti within their areas including taking forward community arts projects on a range of public and on occasion private spaces. These projects have a strong community focus and have been used to address areas blighted with unauthorised graffiti considered a blight or inappropriate or offensive to others.
- 3.4 Where unauthorised graffiti occurs on Council property the Property Maintenance team will arrange for its removal. Graffiti that is offensive, abusive, racist etc will be removed as soon as is possible to do so and following completion of a dynamic risk assessment. In the majority of instances graffiti will be addressed during planned maintenance tasks to include for example the repainting of external facades of buildings, bus shelters etc.
- 3.5 Budget cover is provided for within the general Property Maintenance budgets. Any request for graffiti removal outside of offensive or racist material etc is therefore considered in terms of the other budgetary pressures associated with this service including for example repairs to buildings, infrastructure, heating, electrical systems etc.
- 3.6 Where graffiti appears on property belonging to others it is for those organisations or private individuals to remove the material. Council have on occasion assisted with the immediate removal of offensive, abusive or racist material on non-Council property where there were delays with the organisation / individual responsible in removing the graffiti. **It must be noted that on these occasions Council will only obliterate or remove the offending material.**
- 3.7 Council has and will work jointly with other organisations and agencies including DFC, DFI, NIHE and other housing associations to remove graffiti as part of community Environmental Improvement Schemes. Additionally Council has and will on occasion provide paint to community organisations with community activists undertaking the graffiti removal where Council have been unable to intervene directly given the location of the material.

3.8 As detailed above Council has through the Business and Culture Directorate engaged with communities and organisations with regard to Community Arts projects. Presently the Directorate is undertaking a number of projects supported by the PEACE IV Programme under the theme of Children and Young People. These projects use art as a means of helping the children and young people reach their potential and contribute positively to their communities. Their aim is to reduce community division, sectarianism and racism, and enhance reconciliation through the medium of art. The following are examples of such projects:

Youth Street Art - Take Back The Street

Take Back The Streets, a PEACE IV programme in support of Youth19 and uses the medium of street art (Street Theatre and Circus, Graffiti Art, Street Dance, Parkour) to explore and discuss the following themes with approximately 300 young people: Borders in all their complexities; Identifying and selecting shared spaces; Explorations of both Art (idea and form, message and sign) and Street (spaces around us); Developing individual and collective messages; Researching street art for inspiration on how to best share message.

Youth Street Art - Graffiti Project

Youth Street Art Graffiti Project, a PEACE IV programme in support of Youth19, will work with 50 young people to look at graffiti as a form of projecting positive messaging around dedicated locations. This will be out to tender shortly and will be delivered in the Strabane area.

Intergenerational Programme

Officers are also scoping an Intergenerational Programme with the intention of rolling this out in identified areas of need. The team are awaiting approval for this project from the PEACE IV team.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 Graffiti removal is provided for within the general property maintenance budget with spend prioritised as detailed above. Should Members consider that a more structured approach to the issue is required then additional budget will need to be made available in terms of the Property Maintenance Section.
- 4.2 The Business and Culture Directorate will look to identify external sources of funding that can be used to support community art projects as identified above and will work with communities to develop up projects. Any direct intervention will also require additional budget provision.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are asked to consider the current approach in relation to the removal of graffiti and to provide direction to officers in relation to any change to the current service.

Background Papers