

December 12th, 2017

Notice Of Meeting

You are requested to attend the meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 13th December 2017** at **6:00 pm** in **Downshire Civic Centre**.

Agenda

1.0 Apologies and Chairperson's Remarks

2.0 Declarations of Interest

3.0 Presentation by John Kremer: Independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses - The Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park (October 22 - December 19 2014)

Verbal report.

4.0 Consideration of the Report on the Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park - Consideration of Independent Qualitative Analysis of Consultation Responses (copy attached)

📎 *Report on McCreesh Park.pdf*

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Invitees

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| Report to: | Special Council meeting |
| Date of Meeting: | 13 December 2017 |
| Subject: | The Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park - Consideration of Independent Qualitative Analysis of Consultation Responses |
| Reporting Officer (Including Job Title): | Liam Hannaway, Chief Executive |
| Contact Officer (Including Job Title): | Colin Moffett, Head of Corporate Policy |

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| Decisions required: | |
| <p>Elected Members are asked to note the report and consider the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses (October 22 – December 19 2014) regarding the naming of Raymond McCreesh Park (Appendix 1), give consideration to the three options therein, and to agree to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To proceed with option three outlined within the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses i.e. Review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park in line with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas; and that The Council's Play Strategy recommendation regarding consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one be re-timetabled from year 2 to year 1, which we aim to complete by 31 March 2018. | |
| 1.0 | Purpose and Background: |
| 1.1 | <p>On 30 June 2016 Council received correspondence from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland advising that, at its meeting of 29 June 2016, it had decided to rescind its earlier decision of May 2015, by which it accepted the Council's decision to retain the name of the park and to close its investigation.</p> <p>The Commission advised that it now considered the Council had not fully complied with its earlier recommendations, specifically in relation to the transparency of its decision making.</p> <p>The Commission recommended that the Council should debate in public the question of whether it should retain the name of the park, vote on it and maintain an adequate record of decision making. It also recommended that Councillors should be provided in advance with a qualitative analysis of the responses provided during the previous consultation process.</p> |
| 1.2 | A chronology of significant issues and actions undertaken by Council during the period 30 June 2016 to 31 October 2017 is outlined within Appendix 2. |
| 1.3 | <p>As detailed in the chronology in Appendix 2, John Kremer was commissioned to prepare a qualitative analysis of consultation responses.</p> <p>The independent analysis of consultation responses was presented at a meeting of the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 22 May 2017.</p> <p>In addition to analysing the content of the responses, three possible options for future action</p> |

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| | <p>were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Retain the name Raymond McCreesh Park II. Change to a neutral name III. Review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park in line with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas <p>While some members of the Reference Group expressed preference for Options 1 and 2, following discussion, the Reference Group agreed to explore further Option 3, in line with implementation of the Council's Play Strategy.</p> |
| 1.4 | Notwithstanding the Reference Group's recommended action, the Council has not taken a corporate position with regard to the proposed options, and the purpose of the Special Council meeting is to consider the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses and agree a way forward. |
| 2.0 | Key issues: |
| 2.1 | <p>As noted in the chronology in appendix 2, the Council's Play Strategy recommendations have specific relevance to the matter under consideration, wherein the outworking of these may have the effect of rendering the process of reviewing the park's name to be unnecessary.</p> <p>For information, the Council's Play Strategy and associated recommendations was considered by the Council's Active and Healthy Communities Committee on 23 January 2017 and adopted at the monthly council meeting on 6 February 2017. The development of the Play Strategy for the entire district involved carrying out a review of all existing play facilities [167 parks in total] and to provide a rating for each one.</p> <p>The review process identified Raymond McCreesh Park to have a low play value (score of 86). The review also considered that the park crossed over the play provision area of the nearby Barcroft Community Centre which had a higher play value (score of 110). In light of the duplication of provision, the review recommended that the Council should consult further with the local communities with a view to identifying a single location for fixed play and to consolidate the two sites into one.</p> |
| 2.2 | <p>Consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one is currently timetabled within year 2 of the Play Strategy Recommendations, which is anticipated to begin from April 2018.</p> <p>However, to actively progress option three outlined within the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses i.e. to review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park in line with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas, it is also proposed that the Council's Play Strategy recommendation regarding consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one, be re-timetabled from year 2 to year 1, which we aim to complete by 31 March 2018.</p> <p>It must be acknowledged that re-timetabling this consultation from year 2 to year 1 will have an impact upon implementation of the agreed year 1 timetabled initiatives, which will require an amended timeline of actions being tabled for consideration and agreement at the Active and Healthy Communities meeting on 22 January 2018.</p> |
| 3.0 | Recommendations: |
| 3.1 | Members are asked to note the report and consider the independent qualitative analysis of |

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| | <p>consultation responses (October 22 – December 19 2014) regarding the naming of Raymond McCreesh Park (Appendix 1), give consideration to the three options therein, and to agree to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To proceed with option three outlined within the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses i.e. Review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park in line with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas; and that • The Council's Play Strategy recommendation regarding consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one be re-timetabled from year 2 to year 1, which we aim to complete by 31 March 2018. |
| 4.0 | Resource implications |
| 4.1 | <p>As noted in section 2.2 the proposal to re-timetable consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre, from two to one, from year 2 to year 1 will have an impact upon implementation of the agreed year 1 timetabled initiatives.</p> <p>There is potential a rescheduled timeline of actions may require additional financial and physical resources to ensure delivery of the agreed recommendations being tabled for consideration and agreement at the Active and Healthy Communities meeting on 22 January 2018.</p> |
| 5.0 | Equality and good relations implications: |
| 5.1 | Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Equality Scheme requires Council in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard towards the desirability of promoting good relations. |
| 5.2 | <p>As outlined in section 1.1 of this report, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland recommended that the Council should debate in public the question of whether it should retain the name of Raymond McCreesh Park, vote on it and maintain an adequate record of decision making. It also recommended that Councillors should be provided in advance with a qualitative analysis of the responses provided during the previous consultation process.</p> <p>Appendix 2 demonstrates Council's consideration and actions taken in response to these recommendations between the date of the ECNI decision of 30 June 2016 until 31 October 2017. The chronology confirms that the Council has completed the first stage of the process recommended by the Equality Commission prior to any future decision on the name of this play park i.e. preparation of a qualitative analysis (appendix 1). The qualitative analysis was completed on 17 May 2017 and considered by the Council's Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group on 22 May 2017.</p> <p>While it had originally been anticipated by the Council that the preparation of an independent qualitative analysis might be concluded in sufficient time to enable a final decision by the Council in early 2017, the process was delayed by an inability to identify and retain a suitably qualified consultant who was available to undertake the task. In addition, the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group became aware in early 2017 of the relevance and possible significance of the implementation of the Council's Play Strategy, which was being carried out entirely independently of the consideration of the name of Raymond McCreesh Park.</p> |

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| 5.3 | <p>As noted, the recommendation is that Elected Members consider the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses (October 22 – December 19 2014) regarding the naming of Raymond McCreesh Park (Appendix 1), give consideration to the three options therein, and agree to proceed with option three outlined within the independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses i.e. Review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park in line with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas.</p> <p>This proposal is based upon the view that rather than engaging on a public decision-making process on the name of the park which may itself impact adversely upon good relations within the district, the Council should await the outcome of the re-timetabled Play Strategy recommendation regarding consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one, which we aim to complete by 31 March 2018.</p> |
| 6.0 | Appendices |
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Independent qualitative analysis of consultation responses (October 22 – December 19 2014) re: The Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park 2. Chronology of significant issues 30 June 2016 – 31 October 2017 |

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

The Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park

An Independent Qualitative Analysis of Consultation Responses
(October 22nd – December 19th 2014)

Background

While the history to the renaming of the park has been well rehearsed, it may help to place the present analysis in context by outlining a chronology of key events to date.

In brief, further to the unauthorised placement of a sign entitled 'Raymond McCreesh Park' at Patrick Street Play Park in early 2001, and subsequent to community consultation within the Daisy Hill Ward, in April 2001 the Council agreed to the renaming of the park after Raymond McCreesh.

In 2008 the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was in correspondence with the Council regarding its policy on the naming of public spaces, and in 2009, and further to a Section 75 complaint, the Council agreed to undertake an EQIA on the naming of Raymond McCreesh Park.

Informed by the outcome of the EQIA and associated public consultation, in 2012 the Council agreed to uphold the decision to grant the application for renaming Patrick Street Play Area, while nevertheless acknowledging that this decision could have the potential to adversely impact on good relations across the Council area.

In 2014 the Equality Commission carried out a formal investigation under Section 75 (para. 11), with a particular focus on the naming of the park. The investigation concluded by recommending that the Council should review its decision to rename the park in a transparent manner, and, more generally, should review its policy on naming Council facilities.

Subsequent to this ruling, the Council agreed to review its decision by way of a new public consultation, and further agreed that this should be completed before the transition to the new council in April 2015.

The public call for written submissions was made on October 22nd 2014, with a closing date for responses of December 19th. Consultees were encouraged to respond in whichever way they chose, including either by correspondence (e.g. letter or email) or by the completion of a standard template. This template contained questions on the decision to name the park along with Section 75 considerations including equality of opportunity and good relations issues, perceived adverse impacts and potential mitigating measures.

Along with advertisements in six local newspapers, a news release and consultation document were also placed on the Council website and Facebook page, and all groups and organisations on the Council's Section 75 consultation list were contacted electronically.

In total, the Council received the following responses by the closing date:

- 121 completed template responses;
- 53 individual letters, emails etc.;
- 2 petitions (1 including 2,942 signatories, 1 including 108 signatories)

In June 2016, the Council received correspondence from the Equality Commission recommending that the new Council should debate and vote on the issue of the naming of the park in a public and

properly recorded manner, and that elected members should be provided with a qualitative analysis of the written consultation responses prior to that debate.

To aid impartiality, in October 2016 the Council agreed to commission an independent consultant to undertake this qualitative analysis of the consultation responses, and to use this analysis to present options as to how best to proceed.

Methodology

This analysis rests exclusively on the written responses received and recorded during the period October 22nd to December 19th 2014. In the spirit of a qualitative analysis, it attempts to avoid weighting by the quantity of responses received, paying greater attention to the content or quality of these responses.

This approach is in keeping with the Equality Commission's previous guidance on the interpretation of data within Section 75. Specifically, in a letter to Strabane District Council (29/7/2011), the Commission acknowledged that while a highly structured approach to decision-making may not always be possible, the gathering of data (for example during consultation) should not be considered as a referendum where the views of a majority of consultees is counted as votes to determine a particular outcome. In other words, consultation should not be regarded as a head count but as a due consideration of the merits of all available information.

Technically, the present qualitative analysis has been informed by an approach known as Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)¹. This aims to explore the richness of data by considering issues that are of significance to respondents themselves, irrespective of the actual number of those holding particular views.

Over many years, grounded theory has been used to develop various qualitative procedures that each aspire to use the data to 'ground' the analysis. In other words, the researcher endeavours not to allow preconceived ideas, hypotheses or theories to bias or cloud any interpretation of the data but instead to allow these to emerge as themes from a thorough examination of the information provided. This approach has been adopted here for interpreting the 176 written responses that the Council received with regard to the naming of the park.

Data

As previously mentioned, the data comprised of three primary types, completed templates (n = 121), personal correspondence (e.g. letters and emails) (n = 53) and signed petitions (n = 2). To establish the basis for the qualitative analysis, initially it may be useful to consider the nature of the available data in a little more detail.

Template Responses:

Of the 121 returns, six were organisational responses² (5%) and 115 were from individuals (95%).

120 opposed the Council decision and one individual response agreed.

¹ Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

² 2 Organisational responses were identical.

A further breakdown of the responses indicated that:

- 9 returned templates were blank, with no comments except one answer to the question on the Council's naming decision;
- 12 respondents had indicated that they were unwilling to allow their views to be made public and so only their decision on the Council's naming was available;
- 17 individually-completed templates were copies of an organisational return;
- 4 individually-completed templates were identical;
- Redacting of sensitive information to protect confidentiality in several returns restricted interpretation considerably; for example, 2 had all information blanked.

In summary, 43 returns (36%) contained no additional or available information leaving 78 unique template responses (64% of the original sample); these formed the basis of the qualitative analysis

Letters, emails etc.:

Of the 53 items of correspondence received, eight were organisational responses (15%) and 45 were from individuals (85%).

One organisational response supported the Council decision while the remainder opposed the decision.

One letter was a copy of an organisational template response and three merely recorded their response to the Council decision, leaving 49 available for analysis (92% of original sample)

Petitions:

Two petitions were received, one including 2,942 signatories, and one 108 signatories.

Both petitions strongly endorsed the Council's decision.

Analysis

In keeping with grounded theory, the researcher initially read through the submissions on a number of occasions before endeavouring to categorise their content on the basis of key themes contained within the data set.

This was not always straightforward as a number of themes may have been characterised within some lengthy returns, extending to several typed pages, while others may have included sparse comment, including only a few short sentences. Further, the overlap between themes was often significant but it was decided to err on the side of over-inclusion to ensure all contributions could be acknowledged.

The first and most obvious point to draw from the analysis is that, with the exception of the two petitions and a very small number of respondents (2), the overwhelming sentiment contained within the returns indicates strong levels of disapproval with the Council's decision on the naming of the park.

This is reflected in both individual and organisational responses, and, even allowing for some duplication and co-ordination of returns, it would be impossible not to be struck by the significant emotion that this issue has evoked among respondents.

This expression of sentiment is true not only among current residents of the District but also visitors and former residents (from as far afield as Canada).

While a number of respondents expressed their views in a dispassionate and objective manner, others relied on emotive and often passionate language to articulate their concerns, including words such as 'hurtful', 'insulting', 'appalling', 'obscene', 'offensive', 'disgusting' and 'disgraceful'. While these emotional expressions cannot be ignored, the following thematic summary has drawn principally on those returns which included matters of substance. Direct quotes have been included to characterise the type of response associated with each theme but are used only to exemplify and not as an exhaustive list.

Themes

A Fitting Tribute: For those who supported the decision of the Council to rename the park, reference was made to the close association between Raymond McCreesh and the local community, and the need to commemorate the sacrifice that had been made in an appropriate manner. The naming of the play park was seen as due recognition.

- 'It is of historic value that a park is named after a member of the community.'
- 'Raymond McCreesh went to school, socialised and worked in Newry up to the time he went to prison and ultimately made the huge sacrifice of dying on hunger strike for his beliefs.'
- 'Newry and Mourne Council have a duty to reflect the views and ideas of all its Citizens, including the views of the Republican community which currently makes up a majority within the council area. That should include the naming of places and buildings after Irish republicans.'
- 'I endorse the view that in the year of the 20th anniversary of Raymond's death, 2001, it was entirely correct and fitting to name the park after Raymond. I believe there is a direct correlation between the idea of Raymond's comrade, Bobby Sands, who said, "let our revenge be the laughter of our children" and the naming of the park.'

Precedent: It was further argued that if the Council decided to change the name then this would establish a precedent for reviewing the names of many other buildings, thoroughfares and facilities across the District and in particular those with names that could be regarded as politically sensitive or non-neutral.

- 'The logic of changing the name of the park would require the changing of many names within the Newry and Mourne area which could be seen as controversial.'

A Community Decision: The extensive consultation, and widespread agreement within the local community, were cited as reasons for maintaining that the decision not to change the name should continue to rest primarily with the local community.

- 'It is a matter that the community should decide upon. It is their park.'
- '... the democratic decision of the people of the area be protected and adhered to.'
- 'Newry and Mourne Council have a duty to reflect the views and ideas of all its citizens, including the views of the Republican community which currently makes up a majority within the Council area.'

Divisive: Across a majority of responses that opposed the decision, this was probably the most consistent theme. A significant number of respondents made direct reference to their belief that the

name of the park served to create and indeed widen divisions locally, as well as within the District as a whole and even beyond. Typically, this was described as both regrettable and avoidable.

- 'This serves no purpose other than to divide our community further and glorify terrorism.' 'This decision is divisive.'
- 'I personally find this renaming to be both offensive and divisive. In my opinion no good can come of it.'
- 'A community that is diverse and vibrant is a thriving community. Make Newry welcoming to all.'
- 'Whatever title the Council decides for the park must not cause offence or marginalise a section of the population and should reflect the shared nature of the park and all public spaces in Northern Ireland.'

A Cold House: Allied with related themes (see Exclusive and Alienation of Minority Community below), it was further argued that the name of the park specifically created a chill factor for those from the Protestant / Unionist community. Often this sentiment extended not only to use of the park itself but also more widely to a perception of the Council and its functions in general.

- 'When passing the park with my child who wants to know why we don't stop to play there, my only answer is that we are not welcome due the Council's naming decision.'
- 'It creates a cold house effect for Protestants to seek employment with the Council.'
- 'I believe the Council's decision has resulted in the facility becoming a 'cold house' for members of the local protestant/Unionist communities.'
- 'NMDC is now seen as a 'cold house' for Protestants.'
- 'The proposed name can only reinforce the notion, widely held, that Newry is a cold house for Protestants/Unionists, which is how I strongly feel.'
- 'Newry is a mixed community where public spaces should be areas where all are welcome and comfortable to frequent, not offensive and uncomfortable.'

Inappropriate: A number of respondents articulated a specific view that the name itself was inappropriate given its historical associations. These were separate from those that made specific reference to the facility being a children's play park (see Adverse Impact on Young People below).

- 'It is totally inappropriate to have the Council name a public park in memory of Raymond McCreesh.'
- 'As he was a terrorist I just don't think a name for the park should honour such a person.'
- 'Completely unsuitable name for a community facility.'
- 'Please give this park an honourable name that we can all be proud of.'

Hurt and Anger: This sense of hurt was a strong theme running through a significant number of responses, and often this was accompanied by an expression of anger that the decision remained as a constant reminder of that hurt. A number made reference to personal hurt experienced by family members during the Troubles, and the ongoing difficulties that they encountered. Overall, these returns tended to be characterised by the most emotional expressions and evocative language.

- 'A great deal of hurt and anger was caused to the families of victims of republican terrorism through the decision to proceed with the name of Raymond McCreesh Park.'

- 'The victims of violence carried out by individuals such as Raymond McCreesh have suffered enough.'
- 'A very adverse impact on the many families in the district who lost loved ones.'
- 'I know that for people still living with the impact of acts carried out by Raymond McCreesh – or any terrorist – this decision is just like putting two fingers up at them and their families.'
- 'Council's decision is insulting to all the victims of terror and is a snub to large sections of the community.'
- 'Impact on families whose loved ones McCreesh murdered. Insult to Unionists.'
- 'It is clear from the overwhelming public outcry against the naming of this park that many people have been offended, insulted and alienated by this decision from the Council.'
- 'It is insulting to people and especially those who lost friends and loved ones at the hands of IRA terrorists.'
- 'Totally and utterly disgraceful.'
- 'This decision has devastated many victims and caused re-traumatism.'
- 'The decision caused a great deal of hurt and anger to the families of victims of terrorist violence and also served to severely damage community relations within the District.'

Reputation: A common theme in several of the more substantive responses, and especially returns from organisations, was that the decision may have had an adverse impact on the reputation and standing of the Council, both locally and further afield. Its reputation was typically characterised as tarnished by the handling of the decision, creating an image of a partisan organisation.

- 'The decision was an extremely regrettable and unacceptable action which has tarnished the reputation of the Council locally, nationally and internationally.'
- 'This does not impact only on people living around the park. It impacts on everyone who knows about it and it does not rebound to the credit of the Council.'
- 'We as a society need healing and this decision has caused further division and damaged the reputation of Newry and Mourne Council.'
- 'The Council should apologise to the Unionist/Protestant community for the hurt and trauma caused.'
- 'The Council need to be seen to represent all the community not one section.'
- 'My message to Newry and Mourne Council – stop living in the past and embrace the new Northern Ireland, a Northern Ireland for all.'
- 'Newry will highlight itself as a sectarian Republican ghetto by naming the park after a terrorist.'

Exclusive: The name of the play park was described by many respondents as marking territory exclusively for one community. This theme clearly cuts across a number of related concerns but was articulated as a distinct issue in a number of returns.

- 'Members from a perceived unionist background may feel intimidated or unable to use the park as a result of this name and it could therefore be used as a demarcation of territory.'
- 'The very name makes it evident that in no way is this park intended for cross-community use.'
- 'By naming a park after a Republican terrorist ensures that only one side of the community will use the park.'

- 'It is a great disrespect to the PUL community and makes this park a 'no go' area for any people from the PUL community.'
- 'Members of protestant community are in effect excluded from this park due to name.'
- 'People who need the park will be unable to use it because of its association.'

Denial of Equality of Opportunity: A number of respondents made specific reference to equality or equality of opportunity, including raising the possibility that the action of renaming the park could possibly be construed as unlawful, by denying members of one community fair and reasonable access to a Council facility.

- 'The decision Resulted in a very serious failure on behalf of the Council to promote equality of opportunity to all of its citizens.'
- 'It does not promote equality of opportunity for those that are Protestant, Unionist or Loyalist in their religion and politics.'
- 'What has the naming of a playground got to do with equal opportunity?'
- 'Equality issues should be resolved by respecting the equal rights of everyone.'
- 'Where is the equality for Unionists or do we not matter?'
- 'Newry and Mourne needs to stop discriminating against Protestants and particularly innocent victims.'

Alienation of Minority Community: A considerable number of returns referenced how the decision was perceived to marginalise or alienate the Protestant/Unionist minority within the Council area. A small number of replies went beyond to suggest the possibility of a motive behind the renaming of the park, with a suggestion that this action represented one element of a wider conspiracy targeting and marginalising the Protestant/Unionist community within the District.

- 'This proposal also plays a role in marginalising minority communities, in particular the Protestant/Unionist community.'
- 'Message – Unionists and Protestants not wanted in Newry and Mourne.'
- 'A poor decision which alienates the Protestant minority living in Newry.'
- 'Fostering a culture of accommodation of difference and not imposing majority rule, can create a powerful symbolic example of how minorities are treated – a position which demonstrates an open, welcoming and inclusive council area for all minorities now and in the future.'
- 'This is a Council owned facility which is open to everyone to avail of and therefore should not be given a name that would alienate any member of the community.'
- 'I do not believe the Council wants good relations with the Unionist community. Their only motivation is to work towards a united Ireland.'
- 'Would not be used by Protestants – maybe that is what the Council wants – no Protestants.'

Adverse Impact on Young People: The impact of the decision on naming on the children and young people who used the park emerged as a strong theme in a number of replies, and in particular those from individuals.

- 'Accepting the policy ... sends out entirely the wrong message to the next generation.'

- 'Children's play parks should not be named after terrorists.'
- 'His name sets a bad example to young impressionable children at a time when we are trying to move away from the dark years of fear and terror brought about by the IRA.'
- 'Children should not be brought up in a world where parents/adults are still stuck in the times of old.'
- 'On the question of equality, where is the equality for the children.'
- 'To approve this proposal will legitimise violence as an acceptable course of action in the minds of young people who use the park.'
- 'Change the name to something more fitting for childhood.'
- 'As a mother I am offended that a children's play park should be named after a terrorist.'
- 'I think it is sick to name a children's play park after an IRA murderer. This should be a neutral site for all members of the community.'

Consistency: The decision to name the park was described as being inconsistent with the Council's adopted policy of not naming buildings, facilities or rooms after an individual except in exceptional circumstances.

- '...opposes the naming of public spaces after people associated with the violence of the Troubles, whatever their background or political affiliation.'
- 'As a consequence of taking the decision, the Council has also breached its set policy of not naming a Council building, facility or room after an individual.'

Neutrality: When asked to suggest mitigating measures, the most frequent response was either to revert to the original name (Patrick Street) or to adopt another name that was neutral and non-political.

- 'What one side of our community holds dear, the other side finds offensive, I state again, surely it is not beyond us to find a name which is neutral – even in Irish – that everyone can be content with.'
- 'Rename the park with a non-political religious name.'
- 'Rename park to a neutral title.'
- 'The play park should be named independently and not after an individual who terrorised the Protestant community.'
- 'The play park should be named after a neutral entity and not after a divisive individual who terrorised the Protestant community.'

Harming Good Relations: A significant theme that characterised a large number of replies concerned the damage that the decision to rename the park had inflicted on good relations within the Council area. This was often described as regrettable in light of the tangible progress that had been made over recent years, and set against local as well as regional initiatives designed to grow shared spaces and encourage cross community activity.

- 'The Council's actions have set good relations back rather than improve them.'

- 'Both the initial decision to name the facility and the Council's persistence with the decision has had and continues to have an adverse impact upon good relations not just in the Newry and Mourne District area but across Northern Ireland.'
- '... welcomes the review of that decision and hope that the Council will see sense and provide a new name that does not damage community relations or equality.'
- 'Good relations in Newry and Mourne have improved dramatically since 1998'
- 'Let's focus on what binds us together, not drives us apart and causes more hurt.'
- 'The naming is detrimental to good relations, not only in the area that the park is situated in but throughout the District.' The decision has completely soured community relations.'
- 'This decision is a case book example of failure to promote good relations.'
- 'It is having a corrosive effect on community relations.'
- 'Good relations cannot be promoted through intolerance and lack of respect for all members of the community.'

Conclusion

At this stage there is probably little merit in simply regurgitating the findings yet again. In many respects, they speak for themselves. On the one hand there are those who regard the naming of the park by the local community as an appropriate tribute to an individual who continues to occupy a significant place in that community through his actions. On the other hand there are those who regard the name of the park as offensive and divisive, and potentially creating not only an obstacle to the promotion of good relations but also the denial of equality of opportunity for those seeking to access a Council facility.

The division of opinion revealed by the consultation could not be more stark, and the absence of those occupying a middle ground is remarkable and noteworthy for a public consultation of this type.

The lack of certainty as to how the Council will ultimately resolve this matter has undoubtedly not helped to reduce the distance between these polarised views but instead may have served to harden opinion.

Before reflecting on possible ways forward, it may be worthwhile pausing to consider the historical contexts within which decisions were made. For example, the initial decision to rename the park occurred at a time (2001) when community relations were in a very different place to those that we live with and enjoy today (2017).

Good relations work at that time was often focused on single identity initiatives that aimed to grow and strengthen segregated communities to a point where their increased confidence could ultimately enhance the potential for positive cross community engagement. The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (10th April 1998) was aspirational in this regard, but future government initiatives such as *A Shared Future* (March 1st 2005) and its successor, *Together Building a United Community* (TBUC, May 23rd 2013), were not even on the horizon at that time.

When looked at in this historical context, the original decision is more understandable. What is more, with the benefit of hindsight, in the present day it would be much more difficult to see the original decision as sitting comfortably alongside later government and Council initiatives designed to encourage shared spaces and to heal divisions between communities. Indeed the Council's

adopted policy on the naming of its facilities would now preclude the adoption of an individual's name.

Options

Given the depth of feeling that this matter has provoked, and continues to provoke, and the polarised opinions expressed by the two communities, at this time the Council would appear to have few options available for a solution that would meet these divergent and competing aspirations and would help to promote equality of opportunity and good relations locally and across the Council District.

Option 1: Retain the Name, Raymond McCreesh Park

The first option is maintenance of the status quo, i.e. to retain the name chosen by the local community in 2001. The qualitative analysis has confirmed not only continued support for the name within the local community and beyond but also the depth of feeling that the name evokes across sections of the Protestant / Unionist community. While the latter represents a minority community within the Council District as a whole, nevertheless it is a voice that cannot and should not be ignored, in particular as the Equality Commission advises that public consultation should not be treated as a referendum or 'majority wins' exercise. Allied with ongoing legal challenges, this would suggest that this option is unlikely to present itself as a long term and stable solution.

Option 2: Change to a Neutral or Non-Political Name

While this option would be the preference of those members of the Protestant / Unionist community who object to the existing name, and may remove potential barriers to full participation and access, this decision would run counter to the views of the local community who remain committed to the name as a fitting tribute. A decision to remove the name may also bring into question the naming of other facilities etc. across the Council District. Hence, once more this option is unlikely to present itself as a long term and stable solution.

In summary, a decision simply to either retain the name or change the name is likely to continue to provoke a response from either community that can do little to promote either equality of opportunity or good relations. Indeed, it may serve to put back the cause of good relations in the District generally, and in Newry in particular, for many years to come. As respondents acknowledged, this is despite considerable and positive efforts that have been made to make progress over recent years.

As one example, the Council continues to use its Equality and Good Relations Reference Group, made up of elected representatives from all parties in the Council, to tackle contentious matters across the District in a constructive and inclusive manner. The Group has witnessed several successes in helping promote good relations through its works over recent years, for example successfully navigating the management of events programmed during the Decade of Centenaries celebrations, and addressing the issue of signage for the new Council.

Since 2015 the Group has discussed the naming of the park on numerous occasions but has yet to identify a solution that is likely to meet the aspirations of all key stakeholders, and thereby promote good relations within the District. However, recently a more radical solution to this ongoing dilemma may have presented itself fortuitously through a separate Council initiative involving a strategic

review of play facilities, along with a longer term consideration of major capital investment projects within Newry itself.

While the strategic review was undertaken entirely separate from, and not influenced by, the ongoing issue over the naming of the park, it would be foolish to disregard the opportunity that this review may present for a positive way forward that may help to retain good relations within the Council area³.

Specifically, the strategic review of existing play facilities across the District has indicated that the two play areas located within Newry currently fall short of an acceptable standard, as assessed by a number of objective criteria applied to all Council play areas. For example, this includes the standard and quality of equipment, and general usage of the park. (Of the two play areas, the Raymond McCreesh Park was awarded the lower assessment.)

It is noteworthy that in the various discussions of the park name, the actual value and utility of the facility itself to the local community has yet to be afforded due consideration. The strategic review may offer an opportunity for this to happen. This review should proceed mindful that while Section 75 must be shown due regard in any decision-making that is not to say that other matters cannot also be taken into account including financial viability and sustainability.

This consideration could extend to discussions of other potential uses for the area that may better meet the needs or aspirations of the community. However without first engaging with the local community then these opportunities remain no more than speculative.

Option Three: Review the Use and Management of the Land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park

This would involve a three stage approach that would synchronise with the Council-wide strategic review of play areas, but would prioritise this area for immediate consideration.

1. The Council should engage with the local community, through appropriate representative bodies, to determine the current use and value of the facility for the community, and opportunities for enhancement.
2. On the basis of this engagement, the Council and local community should work in partnership, taking forward proposals that may best meet the needs of the local community and yet also complement the Council's emerging play strategy, both in Newry and throughout the Council District.
3. Long-term management arrangements should be established for the area that are fit for purpose and that add value both to the local community and to the Council.

³This resolution would be without prejudice to any ongoing legal disputes in relation to the Council's actions to date.

Appendix 2

Chronology of significant issues from 30 June 2016 to 31 October 2017 re: Raymond McCreesh Park

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| 30 June 2016 | <p>Letter from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to the Council advising that, at its meeting of 29 June 2016, it decided to rescind its earlier decision of May 2015, by which it accepted the Council's decision to retain the name of the park and to close its investigation.</p> <p>The Commission advised that it now considered the Council had not fully complied with its earlier recommendations, specifically in relation to the transparency of its decision making.</p> <p>The Commission recommended that the Council should debate in public the question of whether it should retain the name of the park, vote on it and maintain an adequate record of decision making. It also recommended that Councillors should be provided in advance with a qualitative analysis of the responses provided during the previous consultation process.</p> |
| 11 August 2016 | <p>Correspondence detailing the decision and advice of the Equality Commission was considered by the Council's Strategy Policy Resources Committee.</p> <p>It was decided that the matter should be referred to the Council's Equality Good Relations Reference Group ("EGRRG") for discussion and consideration of how the Council should proceed. This decision was endorsed at a meeting of the full Council on 5 September 2016.</p> <p>For noting: The EGRRG is a working group of elected Councillors containing representatives of all political parties. It was set up in September 2015 to enable Councillors to discuss sensitive issues and decisions facing the Council. The membership includes Mr John Kremer who is a member of the Staff Commission's approved list of Consultants for work in areas such as equality. Mr Kremer provides advice to other Councils and public authorities (including the Equality Commission) on equality related issues.</p> |
| 15 September 2016 | <p>The Council's EGRRG met to consider the decision of the Equality Commission.</p> <p>Three members of the Equality Commission attended at the invitation of the Council: Michael Wardlow (Chief Commissioner), Evelyn Collins (Chief Executive) and Eileen Lavery (Head of Legal Advice and Compliance).</p> <p>The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss in more detail the recent decision of the Commission.</p> <p>It was agreed that a special meeting of the full Council should be convened at which members of the Equality Commission would be invited to attend. The special meeting was to provide a formal opportunity for all Councillors to discuss this issue with the Commission and thereafter to make a decision upon its next steps.</p> |

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| 20 October 2016 | <p>Special meeting of full Council took place. The Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Equality Commission were in attendance at the meeting which was conducted in public.</p> <p>In advance of the meeting, a report was prepared for all Councillors on the background to the issue and the purpose of the meeting.</p> <p>The report contained a recommendation that the Council should commission an independent consultant to undertake a qualitative analysis of the consultation responses and to assist in developing an options paper. It was also recommended that the analysis should then be provided to the EGRRG for discussion and development of the final options paper, with the matter ultimately returning to the Council for final decision.</p> <p>At that time, it was anticipated that the independent analysis and options paper might be concluded in sufficient time to enable a final decision by the Council in early 2017. However, for the reasons set out below, it has taken longer than anticipated and it may ultimately prove unnecessary for the Council to take a decision. Insofar as it is necessary, the Council remains committed to this decision making process which it agreed on 20 October 2016.</p> |
| | <p>Following the Council's decision of 20 October 2016, officials began a search for a suitably qualified consultant from the Staff Commission's approved list of equality consultants in order to undertake the qualitative analysis. One individual was identified and considered to be suitable. He was approached during November 2016 and invited to undertake the task. Following a period of reflection over a number of weeks, he declined the Council's offer of appointment.</p> <p>Officials then identified Mr John Kremer. He is a member of the Staff Commission's approved list of equality consultants and was therefore eligible for appointment. However, he currently facilitates the Council's EGRRG and Mr Kremer considered that it would be important to have the support and confidence of all members of the Group before he could be appointed.</p> |
| 17 January 2017 | <p>The issue of appointing Mr Kremer was considered by the EGRRG during a meeting on 17 January 2017 at which Mr Kremer was present.</p> <p>It was agreed by the EGRRG that Mr Kremer would consider all of the documents and provide the EGRRG with his initial thoughts at the next meeting, prior to making any final decision on his appointment.</p> |
| 14 February 2017 | <p>The next meeting of the EGRRG took place on 14 February 2017. Unfortunately, due to administrative difficulties wherein the agenda was forwarded at relatively short notice, the meeting was not well attended, with both DUP members of the Group being absent.</p> <p>However, the meeting proceeded and the Group discussed the possible form and content of the qualitative analysis. Prior to making any final decision on Mr Kremer's appointment or the form of his analysis, it was decided that he should consider the materials further and provide the</p> |

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| | Group with his initial views at the next meeting. |
| 17 February 2017 | Chief Executive of the Council wrote to all members of the EGRRG advising them of events during the meeting and of the proposal to meet again on 13 March 2017. |
| 13 March 2017 | <p>The Council's EGRRG met on 13 March 2017. Discussions centred upon the possible form of a qualitative analysis to be conducted by John Kremer and also the potential relevance of the Council's Play Strategy which was brought to the attention of the EGRRG.</p> <p>The Play Strategy had been considered by the Council's Active and Healthy Communities Committee on 23 January 2017 and adopted at the monthly council meeting on 6 February 2017. The development of the Play Strategy for the entire district involved carrying out a review of all existing play facilities [167 parks in total] and to provide a rating for each one. The review process identified Raymond McCreesh Park to have a low play value (score of 86). The review also considered that the park crossed over the play provision area of the nearby Barcroft Community Centre which had a higher play value (score of 110). In light of the duplication of provision, the review recommended that the Council should consult further with the local communities with a view to identifying a single location for fixed play and to consolidate the two sites into one.</p> <p>The Group considered that the outworking of the Play Strategy may have the effect of rendering the process of reviewing the park's name to be unnecessary. It also considered that if the process of qualitative analysis was undertaken, it could itself serve to have a detrimental impact upon good relations. The EGRRG therefore agreed to appoint John Kremer to undertake a qualitative analysis but to delay commencement of his appointment until the recommendations within the Play Strategy could be investigated further. During the course of the meeting, the suggestion was also raised that, if Raymond McCreesh Park was to close, the land might be the subject of a community asset transfer.</p> |
| 9 May 2017 | The EGRRG met on 9 May 2017 and members were provided with a further update regarding the park. After discussion it was agreed not to delay matters further and to proceed to instruct John Kremer to prepare a qualitative analysis of the consultation responses. |
| 22 May 2017 | <p>Mr Kremer presented his independent analysis of consultation responses at an EGRRG meeting on 22 May 2017.</p> <p>In addition to analysing the content of the responses, three possible options for future action were identified:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Retain the name Raymond McCreesh Park II. Change to a neutral name III. Review the use and management of the land occupied by Raymond McCreesh Park <p>Some on the group members expressed preference for Options 1 and 2. However, following discussion, the Group agreed to explore further</p> |

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| | Option 3, in line with implementation of the Council's Play Strategy. |
| 31 August 2017 | <p>A private meeting of Newry District Electoral Area Forum considered the Play Strategy recommendations relevant to the Newry District Electoral Area, seeking confirmation for Playboard NI to proceed to the next stage of public consultation.</p> <p>The consultation for consolidation of play facilities at Raymond McCreesh Park and Barcroft Community Centre from two to one is timetabled within Year 2 of the Play Strategy Recommendations, which is anticipated to begin from April 2018.</p> |
| 29 September 2017 | At a meeting of the EGRRG on 29 September 2017 members were updated in relation to progress on the implementation of the Play Strategy recommendations. |