



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Response to DSD Area Advice Centre Locations Consultation
Date:	11 November 2009
Reporting Officer:	Shirley McCay/Tim Husbands, Interim Co-Directors of Development
Contact Officer:	Catherine Taggart, Community Services Manager, ext 3525

### Relevant Background Information

In September 2007 the Opening Doors Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services was published by the Department for Social Development. This set out a plan for the future of modern advice services in Northern Ireland based on a model of local commissioning arrangements led by councils, supported by DSD and operating within an agreed framework of quality standards. The original strategy has been supplemented by two further phases of research. In 2008 Phase 1 considered and mapped existing provision. The paper proposes a BCC response to the second phase of research which proposes the optimum number and location of Area Advice Centres.

Following this consultation process, DSD has advised that Minister Ritchie intends to publish further guidance "in consultation with councils" before piloting the new advice framework in partnership. DSD has indicated its intention to invite expressions of interest from councils to permit a pilot phase in 2010. Furthermore, implementation of the new framework should take account of and fit the new council areas post RPA. DSD indicated that adoption of the agreed model will coincide with RPA implementation time scales currently expected to occur in 2011.

The consultation document includes questions directed to advice providers and funders of advice provision. The attached draft response (Appendix 1) from BCC only addresses funder specific questions.

## **Key Issues**

The consultation document ( Appendix 2) indicates that the Area Advice Centre model will provide:

- Accessible generalist advice, advocacy and support on a range of basic and complex advice issues;
- Offer first line support to those who have specific needs;
- Act as a referral point to specialist agencies where dedicated specialist advice is required;
- Outreach and the use of telephone and online access will be used to ensure adequate advice coverage of an area, this would be agreed and implemented by the council. In Belfast it is envisaged that existing Advice providers/consortia would undertake this function.

After classification of settlements based on population and the level of service provision, 2 further tests were applied to propose locations for the Area Advice Centres.

### 1. Population

What percentage of the population lives within 5 miles of the proposed Area Advice Centres.

This test found that:

75% of population of N.I. live within the 5 mile radius of the proposed centres.

### 2. Deprivation

What proportion of the top 10% and top 20% of deprived Census Output Areas are within 5 miles of the proposed Area Advice Centres.

This test found that:

- 96% of top 10% deprived SOAs are within a 5 mile radius
- 90% of top 20% deprived SOAs are within a 5 mile radius

DSD further analysed whether or not Neighbourhood Renewal Areas could be readily linked to an Area Advice Centre. Information detailed on table 5.2 (page 20) of the DSD document indicates all the Belfast NRPs are aligned.

BCC has been aware of and has been working towards being part of the pilot phase of this strategy for several years. Unfortunately the proposed pilot phase, which was originally planned for 2009, has been significantly delayed.

A review of BCC current Advice and Information Services was undertaken and published in February 2008 (Appendix 3). This was commissioned within the context of reviewing the new consortium based approach and to inform BCC comment on and preparation for the implementation of the Opening Doors Strategy.

The review, which was conducted by Deloitte MCS Limited, is complimentary of the consortium approach taken by the Council while identifying a number of best practice changes. It goes on to make recommendations on our future delivery approach, particularly in light of the new regional DSD strategy. Members would note that this research appears to have been very influential in the development of the DSD Area Advice Centre proposals.

A key principle of the Opening Doors Strategy is to provide an integrated network of voluntary Advice services throughout Northern Ireland and to do so in line with the planned implementation of RPA. In order to support the BCC agreed strategy and action plan to meet this time-scale, officers are currently working with the Policy &

Business Development Unit to:

- Recommend an interim position and funding arrangements for the interim year 2010/11 via a Committee paper in January 2010.
- Develop an action plan to inform a Councillor agreed BCC strategy for Advice & Information Services support post 2011 via Committee paper submitted for consideration in Spring 2010.

While the consultation proposes that each new council area will have one contract to cover provision across that council area, it proposes that in Belfast 4 contracts will be issued on a North, South, East and West basis. The attached draft consultation response highlights the current position with 5 consortia, which includes the City centre.

### **Resource Implications**

There is no recommendation or suggestion of any reduction in services or investment for voluntary advice provision, with implementation of the strategy taking place within existing available budgets. However, it is expected that advice services will be commissioned using a procurement process open to competition and leading to contractual arrangements.

### **Recommendations**

1. Members are asked to consider the draft BCC response to the DSD consultation document on the number and location of Area Advice Centres.
2. Members are further asked to note the contents of the report and endorse the officer proposal to table a further 2 reports in relation to:
  - BCC interim support for advice services in 2010/11 and
  - Arrangements to identify options and agree any future BCC strategy for Advice & Information Services support.

### **Decision Tracking**

1. Following agreement of the draft consultation response the Community Development Manager will issue to DSD noting this is subject to Council ratification.

Time-frame: 27 November 2009

Reporting Officer: Catherine Taggart

2. Presentation of two future committee reports by Community Development Manager.

Time frame: 1 January 2010 & 2 March 2010

Reporting Officer: Catherine Taggart

### **Key Abbreviations**

BCC - Belfast City Council

DSD – Department for Social Development

SOA – Super Output Area

<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1 - BCC Draft response to DSD consultation
Appendix 2 - <u>DSD</u> Consultation document on the number and location of Area Advice Centres
Appendix 3 - <u>BCC</u> Review of BCC's Current <u>Advice</u> & Information Service