

APPENDIX 1

AREA ADVICE CENTRE LOCATIONS

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Belfast City Council expressed broad support for the content of the DSD proposals however requested that officers reflect and reinforce the following:

1. BCC welcome the opportunity to comment on this regional strategy and support the methodology of determining the location of advice services via population, deprivation and accessibility. Members are however cautious of commenting on any particular issue without reference to the overall strategy or process.
2. As a crucial investment partner, members believe that any future strategy should allow councils the flexibility to define provision based on our own assessment of local need.
3. BCC have an established pattern and system for our Advice Services investment in the city. An independent review (Deloitte 2008) concluded that the consortia model represents best practice in advice delivery. Any future strategy should note this significant investment to date and the positive evaluation of the consortia model.
4. BCC are committed to this consortia approach and to the different providers within the advice sector. Any strategy and future provision must not unbalance the relationships which characterise this joint, co-ordinated working model and which have taken time and resources to build. Indeed, our future strategy should improve and consolidate relationships.
5. Any future strategy must ensure a whole Belfast approach making sure areas of need, including those outside Neighbourhood Renewal areas, are serviced appropriately by Advice providers.
6. There is general agreement on the need for a city centre location advice centre. The most effective resource and management option however needs to be further explored.
7. Consortia should define and propose outreach processes to ensure an effective, comprehensive and accessible service including, for example, the use of temporary advice locations, utilisation of established and new technologies, mobile service delivery, etc.

8. The move to advice services being commissioned via a procurement process could have a detrimental effect on the service model in the city. Further discussion should be initiated with local government to agree the most effective methodology to support advice services in order to ensure a high quality and accessible service. BCC are keen to ensure that the agreed methodology will not have a detrimental impact on our current model and the investment to date in capacity and relationships, both of which are keys contributors to its success.
9. No mention is made of an appropriate financial model for the investment. BCC reserve the right to consider and define the most effective financial model in the preparation of our strategy for Advice Services Support next year.
10. Opportunity must be taken to maintain and improve standards of service provision (both within Advice Centres and via outreach provision). DSD might give consideration to an Advice standard and clarify the support roles of the regional Advice organisations.
11. There is a need to recognise and identify the role of volunteers in advice service provision.
12. The commitment in Open Doors to a single IT system is not covered in the DSD document. BCC is committed to supporting the advice sector to align its IT systems.
13. The consultation document indicates there are no additional funds available to resource the proposals or the reform process. BCC are concerned that the main focus for any additional financial support may fall to councils. This is likely to be a major barrier to progress in terms of implementation of the strategy.

ANSWERS TO DSD SPECIFIC QUESTIONS SHOULD BE READ IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMENTS ABOVE.

Question 1 – (question for all stakeholders)

What is your view of this proposal?

2 – Support proposal

The Opening Doors strategy and in particular a move to specified area advice centres, marks a significant opportunity for both the advice sector and BCC.

It gives the opportunity to implement an advice structure across the city that is replicated across the province, with key advice locations in place that are based on recognized need.

Implementation of the strategy will allow best practice changes to be implemented particularly in the areas of consortia structure and working, targeting need and improving monitoring and evaluation of the service.

BCC however would note the following:

- BCC welcome the opportunity to comment on this regional strategy and support the methodology of determining the location of advice services via population, deprivation and accessibility. Members are however cautious of commenting on any particular issue without reference to the overall strategy or process.
- As a crucial investment partner, members believe that any future strategy should allow councils the flexibility to define provision based on our own assessment of local need.
- BCC have an established pattern and system for our Advice Services investment in the city. An independent review (Deloitte 2008) concluded that the consortia model represents best practice in advice delivery. Any future strategy should note this significant investment to date and the positive evaluation of the consortia model.
- BCC are committed to this consortia approach and to the different providers within the advice sector. Any strategy and future provision must not unbalance the relationships which characterise this joint, co-ordinated working model and which have taken time and resources to build. Indeed, our future strategy should improve and consolidate relationships.

Question 2 – (question for local councils)

Do you agree with the locations for Area Advice Centres indicated by our research for your new council area?

4 – Disagree

We would wish to make the following observations:

- The proposed locations of the area advice centres align well to the areas of deprivation and are sited on or near the main arterial routes in Belfast.
- The emphasis on the delivery of advice services in Neighbourhood Renewal areas is welcomed but we recognise that at varying times many people from across the city, or those across the province who live in rural areas, have the need to make use of advice services. Therefore the promotion of appropriate outreach, telephone and on line access needs to be given high priority.
- Any future strategy therefore must ensure a whole Belfast approach making sure areas of need, including those outside Neighbourhood Renewal areas, are serviced appropriately by Advice providers. BCC recognise a strength of the consortia partnership model is their flexibility to respond to advice needs across the whole of the city.
- BCC are committed to our current and established consortia approach and to the different providers within the advice sector. Any strategy and future provision must not unbalance the relationships which characterise this joint, co-ordinated working model and which have taken time and resources to build. Indeed, our future strategy should improve and consolidate relationships.
- Consortia should define and propose outreach processes to ensure an effective, comprehensive and accessible service including, for example, the use of temporary advice locations, utilisation of established and new technologies, mobile service delivery, etc.

Question 3 – (question for local councils)

What are the key difference between the locations of Area Advice Centres indicated by our research for your new council area and the locations at which you currently fund voluntary advice provision?

While in Belfast the proposed locations of the Area Advice Centres are in the main already locations for CAB Advice Services, it is potentially very damaging to the progress that has already been made in the city to single out CAB as the main provider of Area Advice Centres. This approach may create competition, status and mistrust as opposed to building relationships and increasing current levels of co-operation between Advice providers.

Proposed sites v actual advice locations:

North:	- Carlisle Circus/ Antrim Road	= Antrim Road CAB
	- Shankill Road	= Shankill Road CAB
South:	- Lisburn Road	= Lisburn Road Bradbury Centre CAB
East:	- Newtownards Road	= Arches Health Centre CAB
West:	- Falls Road	= Falls Road CAB
	- Andersonstown Road	= Suffolk and Andersonstown CAB
	- Poleglass/Twinbrook	= currently Lisburn CAB outreach

City Centre - = No present location as CAB moved from Callender street to Duncairn Gardens.
An alternative location for city centre advice will have to be sourced.

This approach could therefore lead to a two tier system of advice services with CAB being seen as the preferred area advice provider and the Independent Advice providers being seen as fulfilling a more local / neighbourhood advice function.

We note that as BCC is committed to the consortia being made up of both CAB and Independent Advice providers, this approach may be problematic. To recognise one organisation as the preferred provider of Area Advice Centres would give them an inappropriate advantage within any consortia structure.

There is general agreement on the need for a city centre location advice centre. The most effective resource and management option however needs to be further explored.

At present the consortia appoint a lead organisation and, in a similar way, it is felt that the consortia should propose the location and organisation of an Area Advice Centres within an agreed framework.

The proposal for the establishment of Area Advice Centres is a step forward in the coordination of Advice services but in addition clarification needs to be given on the role and status of both Outreach and Specialist providers.

Question 6 – (question for funders of generalist advice provision)

What impact will the research findings have on your current and planned funding of voluntary advice services?

1 – Significant impact

The move to advice services being commissioned via a procurement process could have a detrimental effect on the service model in the city. Further discussion should be initiated with local government to agree the most effective methodology to support advice services in order to ensure a high quality and accessible service.

BCC are keen to ensure that the agreed methodology will not have a detrimental impact on our current model and the investment to date in capacity and relationships, both of which are keys contributors to its success. If a procurement process goes ahead, there should be local / BCC flexibility and input into the specification so as to safeguard the level of service that is required in Belfast.

We would also make the following comments

- As already noted, in Belfast the advice consortia way of working is already established along with the concept of outreach from established advice centres. The current consortia model is based on 5 area consortia. The consultation document proposes this will have to be adapted to 4 consortia with attendant implications for current consortia members. BCC reserve the right to further review and comment on the appropriate model for the city.
- BCC consider that consortia will have to decide and define outreach processes, with the possibility of consortia members making use of temporary advice locations i.e. community centres, doctor's surgeries, home visits and an expansion of the use of telephone and online access and consideration of mobile facilities.
- BCC believe that the standard of advice given in both Area Advice Centre's and within outreach sites must be of the same standard and as such be resourced adequately.
- The need for, and levels of, outreach should be written into the contract. This is also applicable to the level of interaction and inclusion of specialist advice providers, i.e. can specialist advice providers be part of the proposed consortia and if so how and at what level will they be funded? Will it be a set amount or will it be dependent upon how they are used?
- There is an agreed formula for calculating the percentage level of funding to each group;

this would have to be revisited with any potential recalculation influencing the levels of funding individual groups will receive.

- The move to advice services being commissioned using a procurement process will also be a major change and could, given the amounts involved, lead to interest from new groups/organisations. This might include interest from the private sector, from outside of Belfast and / or from outside Northern Ireland.
- There is a fear that the focus of a tender approach to the commissioning of services is motivated by a potential reduction in investment. While any future provision must include the consideration of VFM factors, the focus should also be on quality service outcomes.
- It must be made clear as to whether the 4 Belfast contracts are to be with specific Area Advice centres or with the proposed 4 consortia.
- While our current investment model is focused on the provision of generalist advice to the community at large, it should be noted that in many cases this core funding underpins the provision of specialist services in area advice centres. While not a direct investor, any future strategy for the provision of generalist advice services is therefore crucial to future availability localised specialist advice support.