



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Research on the factors influencing people's residency decisions in Belfast
Date:	7 February 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	A request has been received from Councillor Reynolds for an item to be placed on the Development Committee agenda concerning the possibility of the Council commissioning some research to identify the factors that influence people's decisions to live in the Belfast City Council area. Councillor Reynolds has suggested that this would form part of the department's research programme which is currently being developed for 2012/13.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Councillor Reynolds will speak to his proposal at the meeting and the following information is provided in order to give Members some background information when considering Councillor Reynolds' suggestion.
2.2	Members will be aware that Belfast has experienced a sustained period of population decline since the 1960s. While this decline is now less rapid than in previous decades the trend remains downwards.
2.3	In 2006 the department commissioned Regional Forecasts (now called Oxford Economics) to investigate the factors behind population decline in the city. Surprisingly, the study showed that the population had actually grown quite rapidly in the wider Belfast Metropolitan Area but that the smaller City Council area had continued population decline in the decade up to 2006. It has been widely noted that many people choose to work in Belfast or use it for recreational purposes but live elsewhere.

<p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p> <p>2.7</p> <p>2.8</p> <p>2.9</p> <p>2.10</p>	<p>Regional Forecast's research also indicated that at the local level around two-thirds of Belfast's 51 wards lost population between 1991 and 2001, 14 of which are estimated to have declined by more than 10 per cent. At the lower end of the spectrum are those wards that have experienced rapid population decline, losing 15% or more of their populations over the decade. These include Blackstaff, The Mount, Clonard, Duncairn, New Lodge, Crumlin, Woodvale, Shankill and Falls wards.</p> <p>The policy recommendations from this research were presented to a Special meeting of Development Committee in November 2006 and included the need for stronger planning control; balanced housing development; repopulating the urban core; a focus on safety; increased home ownership; provision of high quality education services; and Increased powers to local government.</p> <p>Members will be aware that the Department's research on urban competitiveness (including Michael Parkinson, 2009) has indicated that long term urban success for Belfast is strongly associated with the need for a much larger population than the current figure.</p> <p>The proposed new research piece could take the form of an attitudinal survey which would be designed to identify the factors that influence individuals' and families' decisions on where they choose to live.</p> <p>This research would identify the push and pull factors that have an impact on people's practical decisions about where they choose, or have chosen, to live. It would seek to answer the specific question as to why people choose to live in Belfast or what made people decide to live elsewhere. It would also seek to identify what needs addressed in order to retain existing residents and to attract new (or former) residents to the city. The survey design would ensure sampling across current and former residents and commuters.</p> <p>The information from the research would build on the previous work carried out by Oxford Economics described above. The work would be supplemented by on-going attitudinal research carried out by the Council (e.g., our bi-annual residents survey and the My City: My Neighbourhood engagement programme) and that of our partners (e.g., NI Life and Times Survey).</p> <p>The results would provide the Council with an insight into what makes Belfast attractive and the factors we need to enhance. This is not to say that Belfast City Council has the powers and resources to fully address the problem but it would give the council material with which to lobby and develop approaches with partner organisations. It would also inform a number of strands of the council's work such as the delivery of the Belfast Masterplan; building the city's Rate base; focused neighbourhood working; and the wider marketing of Belfast.</p>
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<p>3</p>	<p>Resource Implications</p>
<p>3.1</p>	<p>If the Committee is in agreement with the suggestion, the estimated cost for commissioning the research would be £25,000. This could be drawn from the Development Department's planned budget for 2012/13.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality or good relations considerations attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to consider the request from Councillor Reynolds and to decide what action, if any, it wishes to take.

6	Decision Tracking
Further to Committees consideration of the report:	
Time line: March 2012	Reporting Officer: Director of Development