



Belfast District Council (Shadow)

Report to:	Shadow Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Geographical options for new area working groups
Date:	20 February 2015
Reporting Officer:	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
Contact Officers:	Sharon McNicholl, Corporate Planning and Policy Manager (x6009)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In March 2014 Council agreed to a programme of work that would prepare the organisation, and the city, for the introduction of community planning from April 2015. The aim of community planning is to ensure that by working together with the Council public bodies can deliver better services that have maximum impact of the lives of our residents.
1.2	The Council's programme has a number of inter-connected strands of work. The initial focus of the programme has been at the city level, with Members and senior officers working with key partners to establish a long term vision and outcomes for the city, while at the same time beginning to identify medium term priorities for actions. The further development of this work (which is required under community planning legislation) is the subject of a second paper before Committee today.
1.3	Alongside the 'city level' strand, Members were also keen to develop the Council's approach to community planning at the local level by addressing such questions as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to establish local outcomes that are reflective of local priorities and that also align with city outcomes?• How can we work better with local partners to improve service delivery at a local level?• How can we identify, manage, and maximise the impact of local interventions?• What are the most effective geographies for local community planning?
1.4	Members agreed that their Area Working Groups would provide an important channel through which to explore these issues in a practical manner. These Groups were established to assist Members in identifying local needs and priorities and opportunities for action. Members have been enthusiastic about this way of working and have suggested that they continue as building blocks for the Council's emerging approaches to local area working.

1.5	However, Members will be aware that the boundaries for the existing five Area Working Groups are based on District Electoral Areas (DEAs) which will change from 1 April 2015 (as a result of Local Government Reform). Thus in order for the Area Working Groups to continue to meet from April, new boundaries will need to be established that reflect Members' electoral constituencies and which can form the basis for future thinking on local community planning.
1.6	To address this, Transformation Committee agreed in June 2014 to commission expert support for Members to establish a new pragmatic geographical model for the Area Working Groups as part of wider preparations for future local community planning. Following a procurement process Deloitte were appointed to engage closely with Members and officers to develop pragmatic options for approval. This paper presents these options.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Deloitte were commissioned in November 2014 to engage with Members on the issues associated with area working and to develop proposals for new geographies. Deloitte were asked to draw upon current practice in Council and the approaches of other cities as a basis on which to develop criterion-based options for consideration by Members.
2.2	As part of this work the consultants engaged with Transformation Committee in December; sought the views of Party Group leaders and the Budget Panel; and held a number of workshops with senior officers on the implications for local service delivery. They also carried out desk research looking at the structures in other cities, and the existing local boundaries of our other partners in the city.
2.3	<p>Feedback from Members suggested that there were points of consensus for a future model including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support for a four-area model based on 'clusters' of new DEAs. (There was also some limited support for a three-area model.) • Giving their alignment with Members' political constituencies, there was no support for splitting individual DEAs as this was seem as undermining Members' accountability to their constituents. • There was support for the need to closely link the work of future Area Working Groups with the outcomes and priorities of the Belfast Agenda at the local level • There was support for better cross-working between individual Area Working Groups. • The city centre was seen as a separate strategic issue and not directly relevant to the options appraisal process; however, city centre residents needed to be factored into the thinking of future AWGs.
2.4	<p>Following an analysis of the engagement feedback and the desk research, Deloitte developed the following criteria as a basis for prioritising a 'best-fit' geographical option:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the new areas align with Members' political constituencies? • Are the areas the right size to reflect local need and support the development of local solutions? • Will the number of areas be expensive to administer? • Is there a good balance of populations between areas? • Will the new areas make it easier for the Council to work with partners who also have local boundaries?

2.5 The standard 'building block' for all the options under consideration was the District Electoral Area. This was to ensure that all options under consideration aligned with Members' political constituencies. On this basis Deloitte began with a long list of options that included a ten-area model (ie, an Area Working Group for each of the city's ten DEAs) through to a three-area model based on 'north and west', 'south and west' and 'east and south' clusters of DEAs. However, when examined against the criteria most of these options proved to be flawed. (For example, a ten-area model would be very expensive to administer; while a three-area model would be unlikely to support local solutions.)

2.6 The analysis arrived at two options both of which are based on four 'clusters' of DEAs (referred to as **Option 4(a)** and **Option 4(b)**). Maps of both options are included as Appendix One.

2.7 The key difference between the options is the location of the Court DEA (which is made up of Forth River, Ballygomartin, Shankill, Woodvale, Clonard and Falls wards.) In option 4(a) Court is clustered with Castle and Oldpark DEAs in the north of the city. In option 4(b) Court is clustered with Black Mountain and Collin in the west. Deloitte noted that Option 4(a) offered a better population balance between the four clusters. However, Option 4(b) offered a stronger precedent in terms of previous approaches to area working. Their individual characteristics are presented below:

2.8

Option 4a				
Area 1: Castle, Oldpark, Court				
Area 2: Botanic, Balmoral				
Area 3: Titanic, Ormiston, Lisnasharragh				
Area 4: Black Mountain, Collin				
	Castle, Oldpark, Court	Botanic, Balmoral	Titanic, Ormiston Lisnasha rragh	Black Mountain Collin
Population of each area:	96,176	68,597	98,249	70,704
Difference between the smallest and largest areas: 29,652				
Number of councillors in each area:	18	10	19	13
Current Political representation				
SF	6	2	1	10
DUP	5	2	6	0
SDLP	2	2	1	2
UUP	1	2	4	0
All	1	2	5	0
PUP	2	0	1	0
Other	1	0	1	1

2.9

Option 4b				
Area 1: Castle, Oldpark				
Area 2: Botanic, Balmoral				
Area 3: Titanic, Ormiston, Lisnasharragh				
Area 4: Court, Black Mountain, Collin				
	Castle, Oldpark	Botanic, Balmoral	Titanic, Ormiston Lisnasha rragh	Court, Black Mountain Collin
Population of each area:	63,807	68,597	98,249	103,073
Difference between the smallest and largest areas: 39,266				
Number of councillors in each area:	12	10	19	19
Current Political representation				
SF	4	2	1	12
DUP	3	2	6	2
SDLP	2	2	1	2
UUP	1	2	4	0
All	1	2	5	0
PUP	1	0	1	1
Other	0	0	1	2

2.10

Applying the preferred model

Once agreed by Members the preferred geographical model will be applied to the re-organisation of new Area Working Groups allowing these groups to begin meeting again from April 2015 and allowing Members to develop a new programme of work for the Groups to support local community planning.

2.11

One of the initial tasks of the re-organised Area Working Groups is likely to be a consideration of their link to wider local community planning. In a review of their work in April 2013 Members acknowledged the positive impact the Groups have had – and recommended that the on-the-ground practical approach to local issues would offer an important contribution to emerging thinking on local area working.

2.12

Members will be aware that the Area Working Groups were originally established by SP&R Committee in April 2012 to play an advisory role, informing the implementation of the Belfast Investment Programme. Committee agreed that they would have no delegated authority. Ultimately, they make recommendations to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on local investment decisions. This has included recommendations associated with the Local Investment Fund (LIF).

2.13

	Members should note that any decision on future iterations of LIF (or other local investment vehicles such as a new neighbourhood renewal programme) will have to be considered by the relevant Committee post April 2015. This would include consideration of any related criteria and allocation models. These decisions are separate from the decision for a preferred geographical model for new AWGs.
--	--

3	Resource Implications
3.1	The budget for the development of the geographical options has been supported by Department of the Environment's LGA fund.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Equality and good relations implications will be considered as part of the development and implementation of this work.

5	Call In
5.1	This decision is subject to Call In.

6	Recommendations
6.1	Members are asked to: Agree on a preferred option as a basis for the re-organisation of new Area Working groups post-April 2015.

7	Decision Tracking

8	Key to Abbreviations
	DEA: District Electoral Areas LIF: Local Investment Fund

9	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Option maps

Option 4(b)

