



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Emerging findings from the research on the factors influencing people's residency decisions in Belfast

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In February 2011, Committee approved research to be commissioned to identify the factors that influence people's decisions to live in the Belfast City Council area. The main reason for the proposed research was that Belfast has experienced a sustained period of population decline since the 1960s. While this decline has slightly reversed in the last ten years (2001-2011), the population trend of the BCC area remains much less rapid than the in the rest of the Belfast Metropolitan Area.
1.2	The agreed objective of the research was to 'assess the attitudes of current and former residents, commuters and visitors on the attractiveness of the City'. The intention was that the results would provide the Council with an insight into the reasons for population decline and enable it to develop plans to boost the City's viability and attractiveness as a place to live.
1.3	<p>Perceptive Insights (specialist Market Research Company) was commissioned in 2012 to undertake this research to address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What factors have contributed to people leaving Belfast and specific areas within the city? – What is the profile of those people leaving the city (and which areas) and what made them relocate? – What is the profile of those people moving into the city (and which areas) and what made them move to Belfast? – What practical policy interventions need to be taken to retain and increase population in Belfast? Specifically those for Belfast City Council.
1.4	The study encompassed a literature review looking at push and pull factors that have

	impacted on peoples choices about where they have chosen to live and an attitudinal study to investigate the current profile of current and past residents of Belfast City Council, those who live in the areas surrounding Greater Belfast, and commuters, who work in Belfast but live elsewhere.
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2	Key Issues									
2.1	The total population of Belfast City Council has remained fairly static since 1991, when 279,237 people lived in the area. It fell by 0.66% in 2001, to 277,392 before rising again by 1.29% to 280,962 people in 2011 (a percentage change of +0.62%). In contrast the population change over the same time period (from 1991 to 2011) for all Northern Ireland is +15.8%. All of the surrounding Councils in the Belfast Metropolitan Area have witnesses much greater changes in population, with Lisburn seeing a 20.8% rise and Carrickfergus a 19.4% rise.									
2.2	While Belfast City Council saw a 0.9% increase in the number of households this compares to 12.2% for the rest of Northern Ireland and is a much less than most of the other councils within the BMA. In addition, household size is smallest for Belfast (2.3) in 2011 compared with both Northern Ireland (2.5) and the other council areas within the BMA. It should be noted that across all areas there has been a fall in household size since 2001. The tables in Appendix 1 provide more detail on the change in the number of households.									
2.3	The map in Appendix 1 outlines a summary of the main findings and the population change between the censal years. The analysis shows that those wards in west Belfast are most likely to have experienced the highest levels of population decline in the last ten years. That is, the Upper Springfield and Andersonstown wards had a 11.1% and 14.7% reduction in population respectively. Contrastingly, those wards in south Belfast were most likely to have experienced the greatest incidence of population increase. In this instance, Rosetta, Shaftesbury, Windsor and Ballynafeigh had an increase of 28.3%, 24.7%, 14.8% and 12.8% respectively.									
2.4	<p>While natural change and migration are the main components of population change, a number of drivers (push and pull factors) influence where a person decides to live. The following table summarises the push and pull factors which may impact on population change:</p> <table><tr><th>Type</th><th>Push</th><th>Pull</th></tr><tr><td>Physical</td><td>Noise pollution House or garden size Traffic congestion</td><td>Proximity to amenities Public transport links Access to outdoor environment Access to outdoor activities</td></tr><tr><td>Social</td><td>Perception of safe environment Affordable housing Affordable cost of living</td><td>Family and friends Community spirit Long term residency Opportunities of community engagement School provision Proximity to employment Job opportunities</td></tr></table>	Type	Push	Pull	Physical	Noise pollution House or garden size Traffic congestion	Proximity to amenities Public transport links Access to outdoor environment Access to outdoor activities	Social	Perception of safe environment Affordable housing Affordable cost of living	Family and friends Community spirit Long term residency Opportunities of community engagement School provision Proximity to employment Job opportunities
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2.5	The emerging findings indicate that the main reasons why respondents may have moved from Belfast City Council were identified as house size and type, affordability of housing and cost of living, a sense of community spirit and being involved in the local community, influence of crime and anti-social and the political situation in Belfast. Conversely, the main factors that people reported as attracting them to move in to Belfast included physical factors, such as proximity to amenities and better public transport network. Officers are currently carrying out an additional analysis with other sources of information, such as the Northern Ireland longitudinal survey, Census, to provide further analysis; which were outside the scope of the contract for the research.
2.6	<p>The initial recommendations in terms of opportunities that may help stem the population decline include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Address concerns in relation to crime and antisocial behaviour in Belfast, with the aim to improve residents' sense of safety and reduce negative perceptions of crime in Belfast; - Continue to enhance and regenerate open spaces to ensure greater availability/access to green space and improved opportunities for physical activity; - Where possible, support, advocate and adopt plans for the development of affordable housing; - Continue to publicise and actively promote positive aspects of Belfast and city living which are deemed to be attractive, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - proximity to shops, entertainment and other local amenities; - access to job opportunities / employment in the City; and - reliability and affordability of the public transport network. - Encourage community spirit and support opportunities for community engagement, particularly in areas of population decline; - Utilise the research to inform the ambitions and delivery of the Belfast City Masterplan and outcomes from the Future City conference which identified population growth as important factor in developing the city
2.7	The research has provided initial useful raw data that needs to be considered fully within the context of Council priorities for the future and the development of the city, to ensure that resultant decisions and actions are of maximum benefit to the city and relevant stakeholders are engaged in the process.
2.8	<p>While this research should be viewed as informing the Council's evidence base, in order to maximise the value of it and ensure a comprehensive analysis is carried out, it is proposed to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use the raw data and link and analyse with other sources of information, such as the Northern Ireland longitudinal survey, Census, - to provide further analysis to enhance the Perceptive Insights report and data; - further engage members in the discussions on the research findings and potential to inform future interventions.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Staff time will be required to produce a more comprehensive analysis to enhance the research.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality or good relations implications, at this stage; however, equality and good relations considerations will be factored in to the further analysis and any resultant actions.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to note the emerging findings and that a further analysis is being carried out and to agree to consider the findings more fully through the Area Working Groups.

6	Decision Tracking
Further to Committees consideration of the report:	
Time line: September 2013 Reporting Officer: John McGrillen Director of Development	

8	Documents attached
Appendix 1: Summary of research on population changes	