



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Research on the factors influencing people's residency decisions in Belfast

Date: 17 September 2013

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| 1 | Relevant Background Information |
| 1.1 | Members will be aware that research was commissioned to identify the factors that influence people's decisions to live in the Belfast City Council area. The purpose of the research was to 'assess the attitudes of current and former residents, commuters and visitors on the attractiveness of the City'. It is widely recognised that a city's population is an important determinant of its economic and social success, as outlined in the impact of anchor institutions research, Belfast City Masterplan, BMAP etc. 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/policies to boost the City's viability and attractiveness as a place to live. |
| 1.2 | The initial findings from the market research were presented to Committee in June 2013. Members will be aware that this research 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. The report is attached at Appendix 1 for information. |

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| 2 | Key Issues |
| 2.1 | The research indicated that population change in Belfast has resulted primarily from natural demographic change - an increasing ageing population with death rates exceeding birth rates and therefore a natural decline in population. The total population of Belfast City Council has remained fairly static since 1991, when 279,237 people lived in the area. Between 2001 and 2011, the city's population rose by 1.3% to 280,962. This contrasts with the population change for Northern Ireland as a whole which increased by 15.8% and compared to other cities in the UK represents a small growth in population (e.g. Manchester's population increased by 19%; Liverpool's increased by almost 5%). |

2.2 Belfast also experienced a lower level of increase in the number of households than Northern Ireland and has a smaller household size (2.3) than Northern Ireland (2.5). Across all areas there has been a fall in household size since 2001.

2.3 Within Belfast, wards in west Belfast 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, wards in south Belfast were most likely to have experienced the greatest incidence of population increase - Rosetta, Shaftesbury, Windsor and Ballynafeigh increased by 28.3%, 24.7%, 14.8% and 12.8% respectively.

2.4 The following table, from the report outlines the push and pull factors likely to influence the choice of residency area.

| Type | Push | Pull |
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| Physical | Noise pollution | Proximity to amenities |
| | House or garden size | Public transport links |
| | Traffic congestion | Access to outdoor environment |
| | | Access to outdoor activities |
| Social/ Economic | Perception of safe environment | Family and friends |
| | Affordable housing | Community spirit |
| | Affordable cost of living | Long term residency |
| | | Opportunities of community engagement |
| | | School provision |
| | | Proximity to employment |
| | | Job opportunities |

The main social factors such as 'close to family and friends' and 'growing up in an area' were the dominant influencing factors; while the most prominent economic factors were 'good public transport' and 'being close to work'.

2.5 Encouragingly, the research showed that the majority of residents surveyed do not envisage themselves leaving the city (85%) and of those surveyed who lived outside the BCC area, those aged 18-35 years were also more likely to consider moving into Belfast. This has important implications for the wider marketing of the city. 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.

2.6 The research identified a number of recommendations which have been categorised into the following themes, which are aligned to Council plans; principally, Investment Programme, Belfast Masterplan and Corporate Plan:

- Physical transformation – create an environment and infrastructure that connects people to opportunities and where people want to live
- Transforming ambition / perceptions – developing and promoting Belfast as an attractive, safe and sustainable city
- Transforming services – maximise the accessibility and availability of the city as a hub for employment and amenities

2.7 Belfast City Council has a role in providing city leadership, influencing and enabling the regional agenda as well as delivering core services such as the provision and maintenance of parks and open spaces. Principally the research provides an

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| | <p>evidence base to help guide the delivery of a number of strands of work such as the Belfast Masterplan; building the city's rate base; neighbourhood working to promote safer and more cohesive communities; promoting the quality parks and open spaces and continuing the drive towards achieving 'Green Flag' quality award for parks. Importantly it will guide the wider marketing of Belfast, particularly at a local level and will directly inform the development of an integrated marketing strategy for the city, as agreed by Committee in August 2013. However, increasing the city's viability and attractiveness as a place to live requires effective partnership with a range of others, as no single agency has complete responsibility for city development and marketing.</p> |
| 2.8 | <p>In addition to the Council's strategies, there are a number of other key strategies that have an important influence on the recommendations to transform the city, its ambitions/perceptions and services; such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 - Economic Strategy for Northern Ireland - Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland - Together, Building a United Community - Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan - a ten year development plan - Urban Regeneration and Community Development framework (DSD) - Housing Strategy for NI (DSD) - District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy- Belfast 2012-2013 (NIHE) - Policing & Community Safety Partnership Plans (Belfast PCSP) - Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012-2015 |
| 2.9 | <p>The review of the Belfast City Masterplan launched for consultation, which will run until November 2013, outlines a number of policy priorities and strategic projects to develop the city and its attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit. It takes a holistic approach to city development and acknowledges the importance of issues such as health, social inclusion, education, access to employment and services, community safety, neighbourhood quality and the environment which impact on quality of life. The population research reinforces the importance of many of these issues in influencing where people choose to live. The quality of life that a city offers, or is perceived to offer, is a key component to attract and retain its population.</p> |
| 2.10 | <p>The Future City Conference in May secured commitment from city stakeholders on the policy priorities and to collaborate on the delivery of the key themes within the masterplan i.e. the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - city centre - accessible vibrant and dynamic centre city driving the regional economy - physical infrastructure and neighbourhoods - engender confident, caring, cohesive and resilient communities - digital city - ultrafast broadband and integrated smart city infrastructure driving innovation and supporting growth and efficient delivery of public services - low carbon city - Clean technology, renewable energy and efficiency will drive further growth in the economy and reduce costs for businesses and households <p>Progressing the workstreams, in partnership with city stakeholders, will be vital for the future vitality, perception and ambition of Belfast as a city where people choose to live.</p> |
| 2.11 | <p>From the Belfast City Masterplan, and other strategies, there are a number of key opportunities to take forward the recommendations arising from the research to</p> |

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| | <p>encourage population and city growth:</p> <p>Physical Transformation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DSD plans for housing-led regeneration includes the selection of four pilot areas, including Belfast Lower Oldpark/Hillview, Tiger's Bay/Mountcollyer and Divis/Albert Street. - Deliver the key projects identified in the Investment Programme 2012-2015 - Deliver the key strategic projects identified in the Belfast City Masterplan; including Rapid Transit and Royal Exchange - Work with DSD and partners to capitalise on the relocation of the University of Ulster campus and its social and economic regenerative impact on the city centre - Use the discussion document for student housing as a lever to reinvigorate the city centre and city centre living <p>Transforming ambitions/perceptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a joint framework for delivery of the OFMDFM programmes: Delivering Social Change and Together Building United Communities - Deliver the city's commitment to the World Health Organisation's age-friendly status to create an inclusive and accessible urban environment and encourage active healthy ageing - Develop the city narrative and International Marketing Strategy to build a positive image of the city to attract tourists, investors, students and residents <p>Transforming services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with partners to participate and take forward the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge in September/October 2013 which will result in a model/route map for decision-making on dealing with local disadvantage including better provision of services and facilities - Deliver the Leisure Transformation Programme - Progress the Integrated Economic Strategy for the city - Work with partners to develop and deliver a city-wide employability and skills strategy and action plan <p>2.12 These actions are additional to the Council's programmes/plans of work which the research will help to shape, as indicated at para. 2.7. Appendix 2 includes an outline of these programmes/actions for Council; however, the development of the Integrated Marketing Strategy will be critical in conveying these messages beyond the city boundaries. Members have also raised the importance of housing mix within the context of growing the city's population and the research pointed to the desire for gardens/space. The Council will continue to lobby central government, within the context of the masterplan, Local Government Reform, including regeneration issues and ongoing work with DSD/NIHE in terms taking forward Strategic Study of Holyland and wider university area. It is also proposed that council officials meet with DSD to examine the pilot programme for housing led regeneration.</p> <p>2.13 Research into best practice in other cities such as Liverpool that have experienced population decline emphasises the need to develop holistic approaches to tackle economic, social and environmental factors that affect population decline and growth. An integrated and planned approach to regeneration and planning policy will support sustained population and city growth. International research recommends a strategic framework for city development to take account of the wider social costs and benefits of different spatial development options and the inclusion of all stakeholders in the decision-making to encourage joint working, efficient use of resources and co-</p> |
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| | <p>ordinated policy implementation. This approach would 'future proof' policies to enable the implications of demographic change to be built into all policy making processes at a local and national level.</p> |
| 2.14 | <p>Local Government Reform will result in an additional 50,000 citizens and an increased geography which will require services to transform but will also bring with it the transfer of planning and regeneration powers from central to local government. This provides an opportunity to integrate planning and regeneration policies to ensure that investment and decisions can be made to encourage the development of declining areas and ensure that accessibility and connectivity is maximised. The introduction of community planning will also bring together the various strands of governance in the city to encourage efficient use of resources and more co-ordinated implementation.</p> |
| 2.15 | <p>Population growth is a significant factor in the economic and social success of the city and as Local Government Reform moves forward it is essential that the city's infrastructure, amenities and services deliver for citizens and visitors. A co-ordinated and integrated approach to growing the city's population is required within the context of the various strategies referenced and particularly the Belfast city masterplan. Changes in the city's population will continue to be monitored and there is an opportunity to build on this research by aligning it to the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Survey which will provide an ongoing mechanism to assess the population and attitudes to city life.</p> |

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| 3 | Resource Implications |
| 3.1 | There are no additional resource implications attached to this report. |

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

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| 5 | Recommendations |
| 5.1 | <p>The Committee is asked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to agree to utilise the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Survey as an ongoing monitoring mechanism for population change in the city - to consider how best take this forward within the context of the strategies referenced - to agree to Council officers meeting with DSD to consider the approach to housing led regeneration pilots in Belfast - to note that consultation on the review of the Belfast City Masterplan will run from September-November 2013. <p>Committee will receive regular updates on the strategies and the efforts to grow the city's population, as outlined.</p> |

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

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| 7 | Key to Abbreviations |
| BMAP – Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan DSD – Department for Social Development NIHE – Northern Ireland Housing Executive | |

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| 8 | Documents attached |
| Appendix 1: Research Report Appendix 2: Summary of BCC actions | |