

Consultation on the establishment of a Belfast city centre waiting list.

July 2011

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to outline the analysis and recommend the establishment of a new Common Landlord Area (CLA), which would be used to manage a waiting list of applicants seeking housing in the Belfast city centre area.
- 1.2 The creation of a city centre waiting list has four main objectives;
- To take advantage of development opportunities for social housing to address housing need.
 - To contribute to Planning Service and DSD policies and strategies aimed at regenerating the city centre.
 - To support the wider Good Relations agenda.
 - To ensure that city centre living is an option for everyone in the wider Belfast area.
- 1.3 The downturn in the housing market has increased the opportunity to develop new social housing within Belfast city centre. However, the absence of a defined city centre waiting list restricts how new social housing can most effectively meet housing need and meet the objectives set out above.
- 1.4 Developing a city centre waiting list is integral to promoting shared housing in the city centre. It will assist in promoting shared living and shared space for all, irrespective of religion or ethnic background. It recognises that the city centre is not the sole preserve of those communities surrounding the city centre. The establishment of a city centre waiting list would allow the option of city centre living to be accessible to everyone on the waiting list for Belfast and the wider urban area.
- 1.5 This proposal introduces a new approach to the creation of a Common Landlord Area (CLA) and a detailed equality screening report is attached. (Appendix 1)

2.0 Current situation

- 2.1 The Housing Executive administers and maintains a Common Waiting List which is the 'gateway' into all social housing in Northern Ireland. Applicants applying for housing or requesting a transfer normally select two locations, known as Common Landlord Areas (CLAs), where they wish to be housed.

2.2 For administrative purposes the area which includes Belfast city centre is currently covered by eight distinct CLAs. These CLAs were created in 2001 reflecting previously long established Estate Allocation Areas and are based on inner city single identity communities. These eight CLAs are;

- Cromac/Markets, South Belfast.
- Sandy Row, South Belfast.
- Donegall Pass, South Belfast.
- Carlisle New Lodge, North Belfast.
- Carrick Hill, North Belfast.
- Brown Square, Shankill.
- Hamill/John Street, West Belfast.
- Bridge End, East Belfast.

These are set out in Map 1.

3.0 Strategic context

Living with diversity and difference in spatial planning terms is a central challenge for urban living around the world. The majority of UK cities have designed strategic policies to enhance inclusion and community cohesion.

3.1 Planning Context

The planning context for Belfast is set out in the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025; Shaping our Future and the Belfast Metropolitan Plan (BMAP) due to be adopted this year. Their objective is to create a thriving metropolitan hub centred on a revitalised Belfast city. The plans' housing strategies include the following aims;

- To accommodate as much housing as possible within the existing footprint rather than expansion of the suburbs.
- To create balanced local communities by providing housing choice through mixed tenures.
- To support the role of city and town centres, arterial routes and urban villages and encouraging city centre living.

3.2 Housing Market Context

Until recently residential property surrounding the city centre was either located in a number of long established single identity communities or was new luxury private residential developments concentrated in the Laganside locality.

The post millennium property boom was characterised by a rapid expansion of high density apartment developments on brownfield sites within the city centre. Recent research by the Housing Executive has identified potential for 11,500 apartments to be located in the city centre of which 3,900 are completed (3,000 private and 900 social), and 1,048 are under construction with a further 6,400 apartments with planning approval or have planning applications pending. The economic downturn which began in late 2007 slowed the expansion of high density residential development in the city.

This has created opportunities for social housing. A number of potential social schemes have already been identified. These new homes will be delivered either as stand alone social housing schemes, for example 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments) and the annex adjoining the Obel building (49 apartments) or as part of a larger comprehensive development site such as Titanic Quarter and the former Sirocco Works site in East Belfast.

3.3 City Centre Regeneration Context

Regeneration in Belfast city centre has been largely focused on comprehensive development of strategic schemes, such as Laganside, the Gasworks, Lanyon Place, the Victoria Centre and Titanic Quarter. DSD's Belfast City Centre Regeneration Strategy, while focusing on promoting and facilitating regeneration that reinforces economic development and improvement to the public realm, also recognises the potential for housing and inner city living as part of mixed used developments for individual 'Quarters', such as Northside and Westside. These envisage mixed tenure housing with the Housing Executive promoting shared future for social housing.

3.4 A Shared City Centre

At a strategic level, the promotion of good relations is a statutory duty under Section 75 (2). The Programme for Government for Northern Ireland prominently recognised the need to develop a shared and better future for all in Northern Ireland. The OFMDFM is currently considering the responses to the draft CSI (Cohesion, Sharing and Integration) Programme whose main focus is to tackle sectarianism, racism and hate and promote cohesion, sharing and integration for all sections of society. The programme aims to "build a strong community where everyone, regardless of race, colour, religious or political opinion, age, gender, disability or sexual orientation can live, work and socialise".

At a local level the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council have existing strategies to promote good relations, contribute to safer, stable neighbourhoods and promote a more inclusive society.

The establishment of a city centre waiting list could draw on a wide and diverse waiting list catchment and promote shared housing which will assist Belfast City Council in its strategy to secure shared city centre living and “to secure and expand the public places of the city, from which no citizen feels excluded and through which all citizens can travel freely and safely”

The provision of shared residential city centre space also aligns with the wishes of the community who have clearly indicated their preference to live in mixed communities (80% of those questioned in the NI Life and Times survey indicate they would prefer to live in mixed neighbourhoods)

4.0 Options and their consideration

4.1 A range of options including a ‘do nothing’ option and a number of permutations in terms of the scope and geographical boundary of a new city centre CLA were considered. Three options were assessed in terms of meeting the objectives. (See Maps 2 and 3)

4.2 **Option 1, Do Nothing.** The status quo does not address objectives 2, 3 or 4 and only partly addresses objective 1. The inadequacy of the existing arrangements can be highlighted on examination of the potential acquisition of accommodation for social housing in the Obel complex. The Obel development is located at Donegall Quay adjacent to Custom House Square and is clearly a city centre development. However, under the current boundary arrangements allocations would be made solely to applicants on the Carlisle/New Lodge waiting list. Similarly, 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments) is currently located within Sandy Row CLA. It is clear that these arrangements are not inclusive, sustainable or practical.

4.3 **Option 2, Belfast City Centre including existing single identity communities.** The boundary of the new Common Landlord Area (CLA) in this option mirrors the boundary of Belfast city centre as defined by Planning Service in the Belfast Metropolitan Plan (BMAP). This includes the 8 CLAs and the proposed social housing developments located within the city centre.

4.4 The boundary of this option is clearly defined and unambiguous. However, option 2 only partially meets the objectives in establishing a city centre waiting list. It would assist in contributing to regeneration strategies and promoting shared space. This option may be unacceptable to a large number of applicants who would wish to be housed in a particular single identity estate. Potentially, a Catholic household could be offered accommodation in Sandy Row/Donegall Pass or a Protestant household accommodation in the New Lodge. This could act as a barrier to attracting

new applicants to a city centre waiting list and again would be very difficult to manage on a practical level.

4.5 Option 3, Belfast City Centre excluding single identity communities.

This option is similar to option 2 but excludes the established single identity social housing estates, Cromac/Markets, Carlisle New Lodge, Carrick Hill, Brown Square, Hamill/John Street, Sandy Row and Donegall Pass.

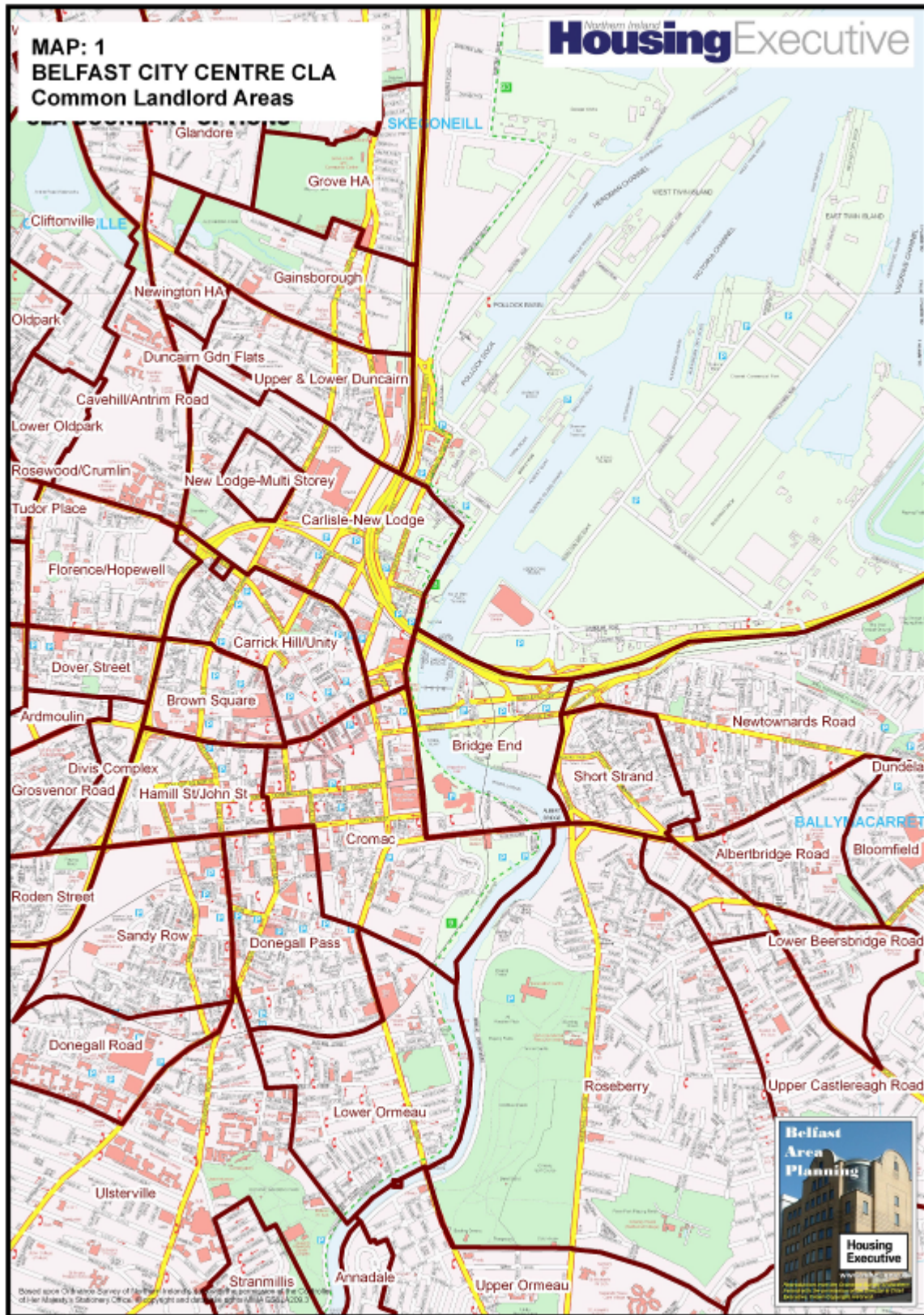
- 4.6 This option best meets all the objectives in terms of making the best use of development opportunities, assisting regeneration strategies and promoting shared space and widening the opportunity of living in the city centre. Applicants requesting rehousing in the new city centre CLA would be considered for all new social housing and future relets for schemes completed after 2011.

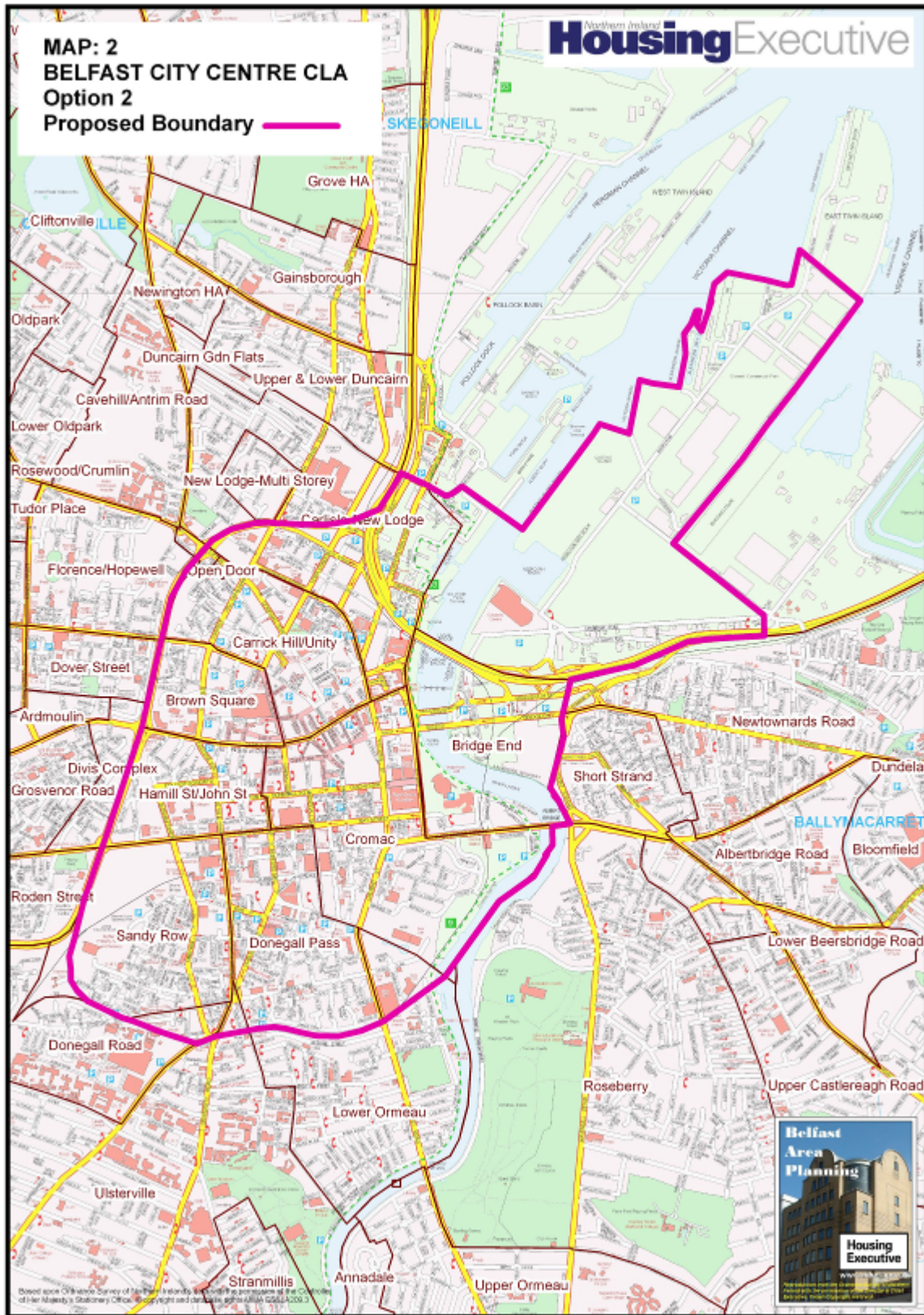
This option would give applicants a definitive choice and clearly demarcates the city centre from the single identity CLAs surrounding the city centre.

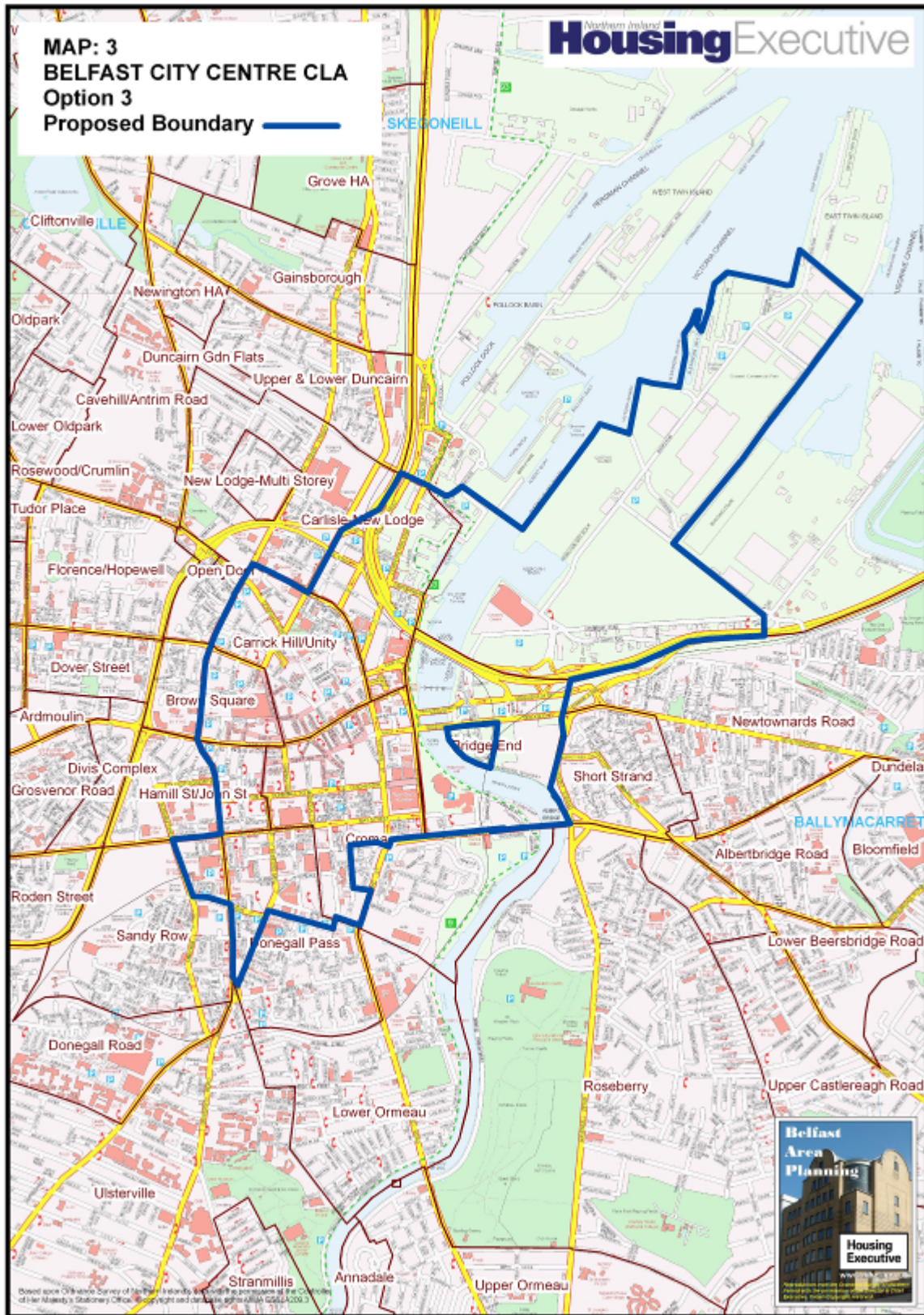
5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 It is recommended that a Belfast city centre waiting list is created on the basis outlined in Option 3. It is believed that this proposal;

- allows social housing providers to take advantage of development opportunities and favourable market conditions
- promotes shared living and Good Relations
- supports existing city centre regeneration strategies
- widens the opportunity for city centre living to the greater Belfast area
- pays due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity.







Appendix 1: Housing Executive Equality Screening Template:

This screening template is based on the Equality Commission template which was issued in April 2010.

The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Screening enables a public authority to identify those policies which are more relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties and on that account be considered for an equality impact assessment. It also helps to identify policies which offer better opportunities for the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties for people in any of the equality or good relations categories.

This template acts as a record that the Housing Executive has taken equality of opportunity and/or good relations considerations into account.

Part 1. Policy scoping

This Screening Report should be read in conjunction with the Belfast City Centre Waiting List Board paper.

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

The establishment of a Belfast city centre waiting list.

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Revised Policy

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

To create a Common Landlord Area (CLA) covering new housing opportunities in Belfast city centre. (Please see attached consultation paper for a more detailed explanation.)

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

If so, explain how.

This proposal will expand social and affordable housing opportunities in Belfast city centre, an area where this did not exist (to any significant level) before. Therefore this will benefit all people who would like the opportunity to apply to the waiting list for Belfast city centre. No Section 75 group will benefit significantly more than others.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Robin Hawe, Area Planning, Belfast Area

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Director of Corporate Services/Director of Housing and Regeneration

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

NONE

If yes, are they:

Financial

Legislative

Other, please specify _____

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

Staff

Service users

Other public sector organisations

Voluntary/community/trade unions

Other, please specify _____

One of the objectives of this proposal is to ensure that the opportunity to live in a shared, safe city centre is open to as many people as possible from the Housing Executive's waiting list. On this basis the main stakeholders are the citizens of Belfast who have (now or in future) social housing needs.

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they?

Internal:

- Housing Selection Scheme and Allocations
- Homelessness
- Supporting People
- Community Cohesion
- Strategic Guidelines for Social Housing Development Programme

External:

- Belfast City Council Good Relations Policy
- OFMDFM's pending Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Policy
- Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	Waiting List and Allocations data
Political opinion	BCC Good Relations Strategy General Equality and Good Relations information
Racial group	Various BME reports including specific mapping studies
Age	Not relevant
Marital status	Not relevant
Sexual orientation	Not relevant
Men and women generally	Not relevant
Disability	General information and Liaison with Disability Representative groups
Dependants	General information and Liaison with Representative groups

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	<p>The city centre is currently divided into administrative zones, each associated with the 8 bordering social housing Common Landlord areas. These CLAs are single identity areas (4 Protestant and 4 Catholic). Each of these areas perceives a territorial claim on the city centre zones linked with their CLA. If this current system remains then any new social housing allocations will be made to applicants who select the current Single identity areas. This will maintain these areas as single identity within the city centre.</p> <p>Conversely, this equality screening is conducted on the basis that the city centre CLA should be an area independent of other social housing areas, making it a unique choice for people who express a desire for living in the city centre.</p>
Political opinion	
Racial group	<p>The issue of safe, accessible, housing is important for minority ethnic people, migrant workers etc. Maintaining the current status of the 8 CLAs would restrict opportunities for minority ethnic households, many of whom have no specific ties to areas of Belfast but, for whom, living close to places of employment is vital.</p>
Age	No significant issues
Marital status	No significant issues
Sexual orientation	No significant issues
Men and women generally	No significant issues
Disability	<p>Physical accessibility and good design are important features for disabled people. These issues are not directly associated with this policy but it is important to take on board the principle that any new social housing opportunities in the city centre will be</p>

	open to disabled people.
Dependants	It is important to note also that city centre living will involve high rise high density developments. This will not preclude families from living in these areas but private leisure space will be limited.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

This section will determine whether there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment.

The Equality Commission's guidance states that

*“If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out.”*

*“If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure”.*

*“If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:*

- *measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or*
- *the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.”*

Screening questions

1 What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none																																																		
Section 75 category	Details of policy impact					Level of impact? minor/major/none																																												
Religious belief	This impact screening considers the three options set out in the attached Board paper.																																																	
Political opinion	<p>The equality duty extends to all Catholics and all Protestants who have housing needs and have the potential to apply to the city centre CLA and not just those who have a link to this new area, by the virtue of the existing single identity CLA they have chosen. Option 1 (do nothing) fails to promote equality of opportunity for both Catholics and Protestants because it restricts housing allocations only to single identity CLAs.</p> <p>In terms of Option 2, of the single identity estates that makeup the 8 city centre CLAs, 4 are predominately Protestant and 4 are predominately Catholic. The religion/community background makeup of the combined waiting lists for these eight CLAs are set out below. (Table 1)</p> <p>Table 1: City Centre Waiting List</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th></th> <th>Catholic</th> <th>Other</th> <th>Protestant</th> <th>Undis-closed</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="6">P1A*'s on WL for Social Housing in 8 CLAs in Inner Belfast</td> <td>Number</td> <td>276</td> <td>67</td> <td>144</td> <td>135</td> <td>622</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mean Av Months</td> <td>35.6</td> <td>16.9</td> <td>23</td> <td>21.7</td> <td>27.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Av Months</td> <td>25</td> <td>11</td> <td>13</td> <td>11</td> <td>14.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mean Av Points</td> <td>65.3</td> <td>53.2</td> <td>32.3</td> <td>51.3</td> <td>53.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Median Av Points</td> <td>50</td> <td>30</td> <td>30</td> <td>30</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Religion of Top 100 Ranked by</td> <td>63</td> <td>8</td> <td>4</td> <td>25</td> <td>100</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>								Catholic	Other	Protestant	Undis-closed	Total	P1A*'s on WL for Social Housing in 8 CLAs in Inner Belfast	Number	276	67	144	135	622	Mean Av Months	35.6	16.9	23	21.7	27.7	Median Av Months	25	11	13	11	14.5	Mean Av Points	65.3	53.2	32.3	51.3	53.3	Median Av Points	50	30	30	30	30	Religion of Top 100 Ranked by	63	8	4	25	100
		Catholic	Other	Protestant	Undis-closed	Total																																												
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	Median Av Points	50	30	30	30	30																																												
	Religion of Top 100 Ranked by	63	8	4	25	100																																												

	Points					
	Religion of Top 40 Ranked by Points	27	4	0	9	40

* Position 1 Applicant

This clearly shows that the waiting list has a significantly higher number of Catholic households (276) when compared to Protestant households (144). The likely profile of offers based on 100 units becoming immediately available showed that 63 would go to Catholic households and only 4 to Protestant households (with 25 undisclosed).

Option 2 implies that the city centre is the preserve of only those areas that immediately surround it and is a barrier to other city dwellers from the choice of city centre living. Also with Option 2, any relets of existing accommodation and newbuild opportunities that arise in the existing housing estates that surround the city centre would be offered almost exclusively to Catholic households which includes traditional Protestant/Unionist areas like Sandy Row and Donegal Pass.

The existing waiting list for the eight CLAs in Option 2 does not have the capacity to sustain the potential additional supply of social housing that could be generated within the city centre area, as identified earlier in this paper.

This option would also fail to promote equality of opportunity for both Catholics and Protestants in the wider city as the unnatural merger of single identity areas with the new city centre dilutes the appeal of a new unassociated area. It also presents a risk that housing allocations could be made to a single identity area where the applicant may not feel secure.

A wider scenario, Option 3, was therefore considered, i.e. that the city centre living should be an optional choice for everyone who has made an application to the Common Waiting List for the wider Belfast Area. This was regarded as more reasonable as the city centre was not an optional choice for any applicant at the time they applied for housing. In this context, and particularly with Option 3, an assumption could be made, that the profile of those who would switch housing choice to the city centre CLA would mirror the general profile of the total Belfast city waiting list. Table 2 sets out the waiting list religion profile for this scenario.

Table 2: Belfast City Waiting List Analysis

		Catholic	Other	Protestant	Undisclosed	Total
P1A's* on WL for Social Housing in 108 CLAs in Belfast Area	Number	4085	922	3478	1593	10,078
	Mean Av Months	32.2	18.9	32.0	24.8	29.7
	Median Av Months	21	11	17	11	16
	Mean Av Points	67.0	51.9	40.5	43.9	52.8
	Median Av Points	50	30	28	28	32
	Religion of Top 100 Ranked by Points	53	11	21	15	100
	Religion of Top 40 Ranked by Points	21	5	10	4	40

* Position 1 Applicants

In this analysis the waiting list contains 4085 Catholic households and 3478 Protestant households. The likely profile of allocations (based on 100 units being immediately available) would be mixed to a level that would support and sustain shared living, i.e. 53 offers to Catholic households, 21 to Protestant and a further 26 to those others or undisclosed. Option 3 which defines a city centre exclusive of existing single identity housing estates also means that any new build will not be viewed as territorially owned by one single identity area or the other.

This approach is clearly favoured. Option 3 provides the basis for marketing the city centre as a new and unique option, not tied in any way to existing housing areas. By offering the choice to all Belfast city applicants this also assumes that the city centre is open to and accessible to everybody.

This option takes account of the duty to promote equality of opportunity for people of different religious backgrounds from the wider Belfast area. However, at the local CLA level, the single identity areas could argue that

	<p>they are losing out on opportunities that they perceive as belonging territorially to them (as set out in Option 1 and to a degree in Option 2). In equality terminology this would represent an adverse impact particularly for Catholics, but only those in the 8 CLAs. This should be mitigated by the fact that so many more people, including Catholics, would benefit from the new city centre choice.</p> <p>CONCLUSION: MINOR IMPACT</p>	
Racial group	<p>The recommended option (3) would ensure that the city centre option would recognise the specific needs of some BME groups, particularly migrant workers. Various research has shown that, quite often there is a reliance on walking or public transport to get to work.</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>
Age	<p>There are no significant age issues. Children's issue are considered under the DEPENDANTS section</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>
Marital status	<p>No issues</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>
Sexual orientation	<p>No issues</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>
Men and women generally	<p>No issues</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>
Disability	<p>It is important to note that the size and design of social housing units would be determined by planning, DSD Design Guidelines and financial constraints. These are outside the influence of the Housing Executive or social housing providers involved in developing schemes.</p> <p>With regard to people with disabilities, physical accessibility standards will be designed into dwellings with bespoke design included for specific housing needs, where practicable. However all households, including those with disabled family members will be advised that city centre social housing will favour medium or high density living.</p>	<p>CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT</p>

Dependants	The issue for families with children is similar. The choice of the city centre CLA will be available to them and any housing design could include three bedroom apartments or duplex dwellings. However, this type of provision restricts private leisure space (gardens). Applicants will be made aware of these considerations and the range of housing options available (outside the city centre) which would include less dense housing and/or housing with gardens.	CONCLUSION: NO IMPACT
2 Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?		
Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief		Option 3 pays due regard to promoting equality of opportunity with regard to these groups.
Political opinion		
Racial group		Option 3 pays due regard to promoting equality of opportunity between people from different racial groups.
Age		No significant issues
Marital status		No significant issues
Sexual orientation		No significant issues
Men and women generally		No significant issues
Disability		Option 3 pays due regard to promoting equality of opportunity between people with disabilities and those without.
Dependants		Option 3 pays due regard to promoting equality of opportunity between people with dependants and those without.

3 To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none		
Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Religious belief	Option 3 provides the basis for marketing the city centre as a new and unique option, not tied in any way to existing housing areas. By offering the choice to all Belfast city applicants this also assumes that the city centre is open to and accessible to everybody. This approach aligns with Government's Cohesion agenda and with Belfast City Council's Good Relations Strategy. The effect will be to create the environment for better relations.	CONCLUSION: MINOR IMPACT
Political opinion		
Racial group	Option 3 provides the basis for a shared housing area with no identity ties to more traditional areas of Belfast.	CONCLUSION: MINOR IMPACT

4 Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?		
Good relations category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief	<p>The key objectives of this proposal include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the Good Relations agenda, and Belfast City Council and OFMDFM's position on Community Cohesion. To ensure that city centre living is an option for everyone in the wider Belfast area. <p>Option 3 fulfils these objectives and therefore pays regard to promoting good relations.</p>	
Political opinion		
Racial group		

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

The equality screening concluded that there were some minor impacts but that these were addressed in Option 3.

On that basis the decision is that an Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated or an alternative policy be introduced.

Option 3 pays due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity and pays regard to the promotion of good relations. No further mitigations are necessary.

Part 4: Monitoring

Systems are in place to monitor the impact of this policy. Monitoring reports, based on the equality characteristics of waiting list applicants for the new CLA and allocations to the new CLA will be made available to Directors and the Board on a regular basis.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	Position/Job Title	Date
Tony Steed	Equality Unit Manager	
Approved by: Esther Christie	Assistant Director of Corporate Services	
Gerry Flynn	Assistant Director of Housing and Regeneration	