



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Community Planning Update & Proposed Study Visit for Members
<b>Date:</b>	07 September 2012
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Suzanne Wylie
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Sharon McNicholl/Kim Walsh

<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>Relevant background information</u></b>
1.1	<p>On 25 April 2012 the Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee approved a recommendation from the cross-party reference group on community planning to support an approach to the development of community planning within Council which included a number of proposals including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That Council proactively responds to the Minister’s invitation to engage with the Department of the Environment</li> <li>• Develop a strategic, coherent approach to Community Planning internally within Council;</li> <li>• Develop a learning programme for Members and officers including possible best practice study visit.</li> <li>• Provide regular opportunities to communicate and engage with wider stakeholders in the ongoing development of Belfast Community Planning.</li> </ul>
1.2	<p>This report provides an update on the DoE’s emerging direction for Community Planning and also outlines the current work being carried out within Council. It outlines a proposed study trip for Members.</p>
2.0	<b><u>Key issues</u></b>
	<b><u>Legislation &amp; Guidance</u></b>
2.1	<p>In 2011 the DoE held a public consultation “Local Government Reform: Policy Proposals”; in July 2012 the DoE published its response to the consultation. Regarding community planning the Department’s response included the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council to lead and facilitate community planning</li> <li>• Council to determine the representation on any structures that they establish to support the operation of community planning across their district</li> <li>• Council required to publish a community plan for its district</li> <li>• There will be flexibility to identify and specifically address local issues</li> <li>• There is to be a statutory link between community plans and local government development plans will be provided in the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill</li> </ul>

2.2	<p>According to the DoE's response, guidance will be provided to support the proposed legislation and will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scope of community planning, its process and the format and content of community plans</li> <li>• engagement with Community and Voluntary sector</li> <li>• scope of duties of participants, including the Departments</li> </ul>
2.3	<p>The DoE have established a number of subgroups to progress streams of work around the RPA. One of these, the Community Planning &amp; Pilots subgroup, has been tasked with developing an action plan to support the introduction of community planning and assist Statutory Transition Committees in their preparation for the new duty. This group is also likely to shape the content of the statutory guidance supporting the community planning legislation. Belfast City Council is represented on this group at officer level by Suzanne Wylie (or Sharon McNicholl).</p>
2.4	<p>Previously a Foundation Programme was developed to support Statutory Transition Committees as they prepared for community planning. It is currently being proposed that the content of this original Foundation Programme be reviewed by the RPA subgroup. The Programme currently recommends the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a "new Council" shared understanding of purpose and potential achievement of community planning within the new Council.</li> <li>• Audit of existing plans/strategies within new council area, to identify duplication, gaps and issues</li> <li>• Audit of existing information sources, gathering and sharing protocols especially between data sharing between sectors</li> <li>• Audit of existing partnership arrangements and identify models of best practice</li> <li>• Commence a programme of engagement – Members; public agencies; private sector; community &amp; voluntary sector</li> <li>• Explore governance structures to support community planning especially thematic and local area working</li> <li>• Audit performance measurement processes across partner organisations to identify issues to enable a coherent approach once community planning is introduced.</li> </ul>
2.5	<p>The draft legislation is likely to be published in October and is expected to recommend the formation of an overarching council-led Community Planning partnership for new Council areas. Guidance is also likely to encourage the development of thematic partnerships and area based planning groups and will require engagement with local communities. A number of areas for consideration arise from this including :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance of existing and new structures (thematic and local) within a community planning model</li> <li>• Development of local area planning</li> <li>• Relationship between regional and local priorities</li> <li>• Representation of the community and voluntary sector</li> <li>• Management of information and information sharing across partner agencies</li> </ul>

2.6	There is no further consultation planned regarding the legislation but it is expected there will be an opportunity for Council to make a submission to the Assembly's Environment committee.
	<b>Preparing for Community Planning</b>
2.7	<p>Members agreed that the focus of current work within Council should support the development of a strategic, coherent approach to Community Planning internally. Key streams of work include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes – Members are leading on the development of a Council-wide outcomes framework to ensure that there is shared understanding of the impact that the Council wants to have in the city; this could form the basis of a city-wide outcomes framework for future community planning.</li> <li>• Inclusion – ongoing development of the Council's consultation &amp; engagement strategy; support of a community planning approach to the Investment Programme (especially within the Area Working Groups).</li> <li>• Planning – the work of the Area Working Groups and consideration of emerging issues will feed into a review of the Council's approach to planning and service delivery at a local level; this is a fundamental aspect of community planning.</li> <li>• RPA – ensuring a strong link between the emerging model of community planning and the transfer of functions such as regeneration and town planning, and the structures and processes that will underpin these.</li> </ul>
	<b>Members best practice study trip &amp; learning programme</b>
2.8	Following approval from the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in April 2012 the cross-party reference group explored the potential of a best practice study trip.
2.9	With support from Professor Deborah Peel from the University of Ulster cross-party Members have designed a proposed study trip to Scotland for October 2012 (with a suggested maximum 12 participants). This includes suggested visits to Edinburgh and Dundee Councils, and proposed meetings with representatives from COSLA and the Scottish Government. It is proposed that Professor Peel will facilitate this study trip.
2.10	The Scottish Government introduced a formal duty of community planning in 2003 and since then there has been significant development of best practice and learning in both policy and implementation. The proposed visit includes cities where there are similarities to Belfast to maximise the amount of relevant and transferable learning. Edinburgh affords the opportunity to examine a council whose boundaries host the seat of government and in which there is the prospect of exploring regional and local relationships. Dundee city has a number of similarities with Belfast in terms of geographic location, size, industrial history, economy etc and provides the chance to consider and observe the progress it has made addressing key issues and needs, as a result of community planning.
2.11	<p>The objectives of the study trip are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To gain an understanding of how community planning is currently operating in Scotland</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore the implementation of community planning in Scotland at regional and local levels</li> <li>• To experience community planning in a variety of local authorities and to hear from a range of stakeholders as to how implementation is being put into effect</li> <li>• To identify examples of best practice and learning points that could: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inform emerging organisational developments within the Council as it prepares for RPA and community planning</li> <li>- Assist the Council as new relationships and structures are developed with partners including the community and voluntary sectors</li> <li>- influence BCC's response to the NI Assembly draft Local Government Reorganisation Bill (due in Nov 2012)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2.12	At the last cross-party Steering Group, Members asked that consideration be given to taking representatives of the voluntary and community sector on this trip. It was suggested that these representatives are invited from the membership of the previous BIG Lottery Funded Community Planning Pilot Steering Group.
2.13	Cross-party Members suggested that, following the study trip, feedback sessions be organised with all Members and the Voluntary Transition Committee, to allow attendees to share their learning to help equip all Members to input into the design of the Council's developing Community Planning model.
2.14	<p>Cross-party members previously identified the desire to provide regular opportunities to communicate and engage with wider stakeholders as community planning develops. Consequently a series of 3 seminars is proposed for the Autumn aimed at Members, staff and wider stakeholders to include sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on RPA and in particular the DoE's response to its Local Government Reform consultation;</li> <li>• Overview of community planning developments in the UK including feedback on the proposed Member's Scottish study trip</li> <li>• Workshop to garner wider stakeholder feedback once the draft Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill is published.</li> </ul>

### **3.0 Resource Implications**

Peace III "Growing a Shared City" funding is being explored to part-fund the study trip. Any remaining Member and staff costs will be met from the Chief Executive's Department revenue estimates. If Peace III support is unavailable, funding for representatives from the community and voluntary sector will need to be sought from an alternative source and it may be that this will not be possible within the timeframe of this study trip. It is anticipated that costs will not exceed £500 per person participating in the study trip.

### **4.0 Equality implications**

The principles of equality and good relations will underpin the approach to community planning as it develops.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

The Committee is requested to:

1. Note the contents of this report
2. Authorise the attendance of the cross-party reference group Members to attend the proposed study trip to Scotland.
3. Authorise the attendance on the study trip of two community and voluntary sector representatives
4. Authorise the attendance at the study visits of the appropriate officers.
5. Note the proposed wider stakeholder Autumn learning programme.