



**Report to:** Strategic Policy & Resources Committee  
**Subject:** **IBM Smarter Cities Challenge and the Contribution to Community Planning**  
**Date:** 19<sup>th</sup> June 2014  
**Reporting Officer:** Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive (Designate), ext 3260  
**Contact Officers:** Sharon McNicholl, Corporate Planning and Policy Manager, ext 6009  
Mark McCann, Business Research and Development manager, ext 3622

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To update Members on the IBM's '*Belfast Smarter Cities challenge*' report. IBM are seeking approval for the publication on their website of either their full report and/or the attached executive summary<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.2 Officers are currently integrating many of the report's recommendations into the council's proposals for Community Planning and urban regeneration in the city. These recommendations have been particularly useful in providing independent expertise on possible approaches to jointly measuring the impact of the work of our new community planning partners.

## 2.0 Background

- 1.1. Belfast was awarded an IBM Smart Cities Challenge grant in 2013. A team of six experts travelled to the city to propose more effective approaches to planning and decision-making in the city. The team carried out extensive interviews with elected members, community organisations, academics, community leaders and services providers – particularly those faced with the challenge of tackling deprivation and health inequalities in parts of west and east Belfast.
- 1.2. IBM's final recommendations seek to address the fundamental issue of how Belfast's statutory and non-statutory partners can work together in a 'smarter' way to tackle persistent, complex social problems.
- 1.3. The team presented their initial findings at a conference hosted by the Lord Mayor in October 2013 and subsequently prepared a draft report which was presented to Strategic

<sup>1</sup> [smartercitieschallenge.org/smarter-cities.html](http://smartercitieschallenge.org/smarter-cities.html)

Policy and Resources committee in March 2014. Members deferred a decision on publishing the full report until they received more detail about how the recommendations can be integrated into future governance arrangements for the city.

- 1.4. In the interim IBM wish to publish an executive summary of the report in order to promote their work and the work of the council to a broader audience.

### 3.0 Key issues

3.1 IBM's key findings will be of no surprise to Members, nor indeed to anyone else involved in work that seeks to address the major social issues in our city, whether they are issues of poverty, social inequality, crime, segregation or health deprivation. Their findings confirm the broad consensus of their interviewees that such complex, seemingly intractable, problems require well thought out intervention and the sustained and focused application of resources by many different organisations working together at the local, regional and national levels to achieve shared outcomes. They suggest that this not the case in Belfast.

3.2 In summary their main findings note that:

- I. The problems of deprivation in Belfast are already well known.
- II. There has been an abundance of interventions and funding especially in the most segregated neighbourhoods.
- III. There are many short-term, individual interventions taking place with varying levels of success (often anecdotal or qualitative).
- IV. Measurement strategy focuses on independent individual and city variables, instead of the causal relationships among variables and outcomes.
- V. Many uncoordinated initiatives, agencies and government departments are addressing similar (or the same) issues independently based on individual, agency and political needs.
- VI. Funding support for interventions is often short term and does not address lasting social change.
- VII. Accountability is based on allocation of resources rather than desired outcomes.
- VIII. Belfast lacks an agreed long-term strategy (mission, vision, values, and priorities) that drives measurable initiatives and outcomes.

3.3 The general view expressed by many interviewees was that, while many of the statutory interventions over the past years have been significant and worthwhile, ultimately the core 'intractable' issues of deprivation, inequality, etc. remain largely unresolved. There was a strong sense that the city needs thinking on smart governance and decision-making.

3.4 In developing this smart way of working, the report focuses on three systemic issues:

- **Governance** – The city currently does not have a governance structure that can easily identify shared priorities; agree interventions; or hold partners to account.
- **Co-ordination** – With the involvement of so many organisations (public, community and voluntary) in the city, it is very difficult to co-ordinate interventions and resource allocation in ways that maximise our combined impact.

- **Measuring success** –The city has no common basis against to jointly measure the impact of our work; to understand what has worked and what hasn't; or to share this learning with others.

3.5 The recommendations (summarised in Appendix 1) suggest that the city can begin to deal with these issues in three phases:

**(1) Create a collaborative planning environment**

The city should put in place a Community Planning framework and a shared structure for better community engagement. They recommend the active involvement of community planning partners (particularly in terms of shared decision-making and data collection) and a strong approach to community engagement.

**(2) Define an evidence-based decision-making**

The Community Planning process should foster a planning culture based on outcomes that allows partners to make decisions based on objective data. To measure such shared outcomes the authors make the case for a basket of 'common metrics'. If organisations agree to measure success using standard approaches then it begins to make it easier for partners to find out if their interventions are actually making a difference to people's lives.

**(3) Technology**

The city should put in place suitable software systems to manage the large number of data associated with this approach. The authors identify three key pieces of technology: A web-based portal to makes it easier for partners (and citizens) to engage and to gather and compare results; an analytics tool to support decision making by Members and officers; and a shared database to capture and manage the data over time.

**Taking forward the recommendations**

3.6 The full report is a substantial document that focuses on the technicalities of change management, planning and project management arrangements. At its core however is the judgement that Community Planning, if done well, can help overcome systemic barriers to tackling major social problems facing the city. This conclusion reflects the experience of others particularly the Scottish Government which considers community planning at the local authority level to be central in achieving better outcomes for its citizens.

3.7 The draft report IBM has already informed initial thinking by officers on a new Community Planning process for Belfast including:

- the need to base our planning around a shared outcomes framework that provide opportunities for collaborative gain and to which partners can be held to account;
- The need for partners to agree standard measures of impact, for both individual projects and for the combined work;
- The need to create a management system that can collate evaluation data from all partners and provide analytical tools to support evidence-based decision-making.

## Next steps

3.8 Following publication of the executive summary IBM have offered to facilitate a change management workshop with officers to determine pragmatic next steps for the council in terms of further integrating the recommendations into our design work for community planning. Such steps are likely to include:

**(i) The development a set of common metrics:** The idea of common metrics was warmly received when raised at the IBM conference. OFMdFM are currently testing such measures in relation to measuring the impact of Delivering Social Change which is Government's programme to tackle social inequalities. Council officers are proposing to adopt a similar set of measures to baseline and evaluate the impact of its own work over time. We would also wish to work with relevant partnerships to build their capacity to develop and manage similar measures. Officers continue to engage with OFMdFM on this, with the aim of creating a shared set of standardised measures for community planning.

**(ii) System to manage impact data:** IBM did not provide indicative costs for their technology proposals but this element is likely to prove expensive. (For example, a city technology platform currently being developed in Glasgow<sup>2</sup> has a multi-million pound budget.)

However, as a first step officers are proposing that the council begin with a modest pilot to adapt one of its own in-house data management system for this purpose (eg, the Belfast Citystats system). This would allow us to begin to manage and share evaluation data generated by the council and its partners in preparation for community planning.

The learning from this pilot would inform any future decisions to progress to a more ambitious system. And may also form the basis of joint funding proposals.

**(iii) Data analysis and decision-making:** IBM recommends that the council test how it might use its success measures to inform decision making with our partners. This would enhance in-house analytical skills to support decisions on interventions.

Officers are proposing that could be done in a number of ways. For example, in support of the 'local area working' strand of the community planning programme. The proposal would be to facilitate analysis and decision-making by the Area Working Groups (AWGs) and local partners using neighbourhood area data.

As part of a bid to the Technology Strategy Board, the council has been asked to participate in 'Project Stentor' which seeks to build a system and methodology for supporting local decision-making. If successful, Project Stentor would begin work with the AWGs in autumn 2014.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://open.glasgow.gov.uk/city-technology-platform-glasgow/>

**(iv) Urban data reference group:** In preparations for the IBM research visit, officers established a data reference group which brought together staff from a number of organisations and agencies. Officers are proposing to reconvene this group in order to support the data requirements for community planning in the city.

4.1 None at present.

#### **5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

5.1 There are no equality or good relations implications at this stage.

#### **6.0 Recommendations**

6.1 The Committee is requested to note the proposed next steps and agree to the publication of the executive summary and/or the full report on the IBM website.

#### **7.0 Documents attached**

Appendix 1 : Summary of the IBM recommendations

Appendix 2 : IBM Smarter Cities Challenge: Executive Summary

Appendix 3 - Commentary

Appendix 4 – Full IBM report (via the following link)

<http://poochie:9070/documents/s75507/Appendix%20-%20Final%20Belfast%20Smarter%20Cities%20Challenge%20report.pdf>