



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Ulster Hall Operating Strategy
Date:	Wednesday 10 th September 2008
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Mr Tim Husbands, Managing Director, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall, Ext 1400 Ms Jacqui Owens, Ulster Hall Project Delivery Manager, Ext 1208

Relevant Background Information

The £7.5m refurbishment of the Ulster Hall began in June 2007, and the building is due for completion in December 2008, and to reopen in March 2009. The project includes major rebuilding of the rear section to provide a suite of offices across two new floors to be leased to the Ulster Orchestra, and two floors of multi purpose rooms to be used as dressing rooms, education suites, meeting rooms. Public areas will be decoratively restored, new seating introduced, underfloor heating installed, and hospitality facilities enhanced. The Civic reopening is scheduled for March 6, 2009.

Key Issues

The capital development and refurbishment of the Ulster Hall also provides an opportunity for the Council to review the venue's means of operation. The Hall, with the Ulster Orchestra as its anchor tenant, and its administrative support on site, will be revitalized by the project works, and public interest needs to be maximised, with an emphasis on both the heritage aspect of the physical building, and the opportunity to engage the public in a relationship outside of the events programme at the Hall, so positioning it as one of the key cultural tourism products within the city.

A structural review to consider the requirements in terms of an appropriate supporting management and staff structure is being completed by BIS as part of the overall Departmental change management process, to ensure the delivery of the project's key objectives, and to take into account the likely increase in joint working opportunities with the Waterfront.

However, outside of the BIS Review there are a number of key operational issues that need to be addressed to help further define the new product within the Ulster Hall, supporting details for which are included as attached appendices.

1. Relationship with Ulster Orchestra

The Belfast Waterfront Board, after advice from the Council's Legal section, approved in full the terms of a tenancy agreement (attached as Appendix A) between the Council and the Ulster Orchestra, adopted by full Council in November 2006.

The twenty-five year lease agreement is based upon the payment of an annual service charge, covering allowances for rates, rents, and utility costs for the area occupied by the orchestra within the building. This does not include further payment by the orchestra for the use of the main spaces within the Ulster Hall for performances and rehearsals, on the terms and conditions as outlined in the appendices.

The agreement, which was a condition of receiving capital support funding from both DCAL and ACNI, is based on a usage pattern of 99 days during the year, mainly Wednesday to Fridays, supplemented by a further 50 days of BBC related performance work.

2. Ulster Hall Programming Policy

A programming policy document for the Ulster Hall is attached as Appendix B to provide some historical and current context for the future operation of the venue, whilst identifying opportunities for growth, core programming policy objectives, and strategic and programming themes to proactively develop in relation to its events programme. These opportunities exist in terms of self promoted events, together with those in partnership with core event promoters, and as part of city festival programming and development.

3. Ulster Hall – Draft Opening Festival Programme

In order to re-launch the Ulster Hall as a cultural landmark in the city, planning is underway to create a month long celebration of festival events. The intention and reasoning for this initiative is that given the number of days already utilized by the Ulster Orchestra in the main space at the venue, and in order to create maximum interest and awareness across a wide spectrum of audience, it requires such a span of dates in order to demonstrate the breadth of artist and type of event to create that appeal. It should be noted that the programme remains at the 'draft' stage, with a number of events either unconfirmed or at the negotiation stage.

In recognizing the strategic partnership between the Council and the Ulster Orchestra, the formal Civic Opening of the Hall is Scheduled for Friday, 6 March 2009, and will feature the Orchestra, Belfast Philharmonic Choir and Michael McHale, an award winning young Belfast pianist. It is also the intention that this concert would be broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

4. Provision of Catering and Licensing Services

After detailed consideration of the market, it is proposed to initiate a procurement exercise to secure a single catering provider with responsibility for bar services and provision of a foyer café service.

The provision of food services within the main auditorium is outside the remit of this contract, with the intention being to create a *freedom of choice* incentive for clients booking gala dinner events into this space, similar in approach to that taken for the City Hall.

The foyer will house a niche café, reflecting the uniqueness of the Ulster Hall and operating at a high level of service for both food and beverage offerings. The intention is to serve Starbucks branded coffee under the “*We proudly brew Starbucks*” scheme in order to enhance its appeal to visitors to the building, neighbouring office workers and passers by and to take advantage of the Starbucks commitment to staff training and levels of customer service.

(Full details of the options explored and the rationale behind the recommendation are included at **Appendix D.**)

5. Provision of Cleaning Services

A combination of in house house-keeping and contracted out event specific deep clean services is proposed.

The proposed delivery of service will utilise the 2 part-time posts already existing within the original staff structure – offering general daytime housekeeping and administrative office cleans, which will include the Ulster Orchestra offices on a service charge basis.

Event specific evening cleaning will be brought in as required and offered either as additional hours to the part-time posts or to a contract cleaner. A dedicated budget will be established for this purpose.

The catering contractor will be required to provide event cleaning of their areas, as part of the contract specification.

A select list of cleaning contractors will be established to facilitate this strategy.

(The full range of options considered is shown at **Appendix E.**)

6. Provision of Security Services

Provision of Security Services is proposed on the basis of a minimum security presence covering core operational hours with the option to bring in event specific security from a contracted supplier, when required. This will provide a level of security to support the day to day operation of the venue as a public building, and covers the Council’s responsibilities, in effect as landlord of the premises. The provision of additional FOH staff and Duty Managers, who will be brought in to operate standard evening events, will adequately cover the security and evacuation function.

The proposed strategy involves:

- Extending the current BCC security contract provider, to allow for one guard to cover core operational hours 0700 – 1800 Monday – Saturday.
Duties would include:-
Monitoring of CCTV and Fire Management system
Co-ordination of core hours evacuation strategy.
Basic Artiste Liaison function
Daytime security presence for Backstage Door, Café, Box Office, and Exhibition Spaces.
- The security function for standard evening events, will be carried out by the Duty Manager and Front of House Supervisor.
- When required, for exceptionally demanding events additional event security from the existing BCC provider will be allocated. It is envisaged that in most

circumstances (e.g. Rock concerts) the cost for this additional security be passed onto the Client.

- Out of hours access to the building would be controlled by remote access from the City Hall control room. (CCTV and electronic access systems have been specified for this purpose.)
- Key Holding – outside of core and event hours, the responsibility for incident investigation will be carried out by the current BCC key holding contractor.

(A detailed rationale and discussion of all options considered is attached at **Appendix F.**)

Resource Implications

The capital development of the Ulster Hall is a £7.5m project, funded by BCC, supported by ACNI, DCAL, HLF, and EHS.
Provision of services are provided for within the section's revenue estimates 2008/09, and 2009/10.

Recommendations

That members note the contents of the report, and approve the means of provision of services at the Ulster Hall in relation to catering and licensing, cleaning, and security.

Key to Abbreviations

ACNI – Arts Council of Northern Ireland
DCAL – Dept. of Culture and Leisure
UO – Ulster Orchestra

Documents Attached

Appendix A: Ulster Orchestra /BCC Relationship Agreement Executive Summary
Appendix B: Ulster Hall Programming Policy
Appendix C: Ulster Hall Draft Opening Festival Programme
Appendix D: Provision of Catering and Licensing Services
Appendix E: Provision of Cleaning Services
Appendix F: Provision of Security Services