



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Christmas Lights Switch-on 2009
Date:	Wednesday 12 August 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Tim Husbands, Head of City Events and Venues, ext 1401

Relevant Background Information

Over the last twenty five years Belfast City Council has developed the annual Christmas Lights Switch-on event. Initially the event involved a number of school choirs and took place in the middle of November, with a small crowd in attendance. The event is now attended by thousands (last year the audience was estimated at 18,000) and involves a range of high profile national and local celebrities.

Key Issues

Timing

Members have been presented with details in regard to the timing of the Christmas Lights Switch-on event over the last two years. In April 2008 Members agreed that the event should be staged no later than 7.30pm, a view that was endorsed by the Events Advisory Panel. Members are reminded that the Events Advisory Panel body incorporates BCCM, PSNI, NIAS, NIFRS, DOE Road Service, BCC Health & Safety, BCC Security, BCC Corporate Communications and BCC Legal Services.

Date

In the last number of years this event has been held on the third Tuesday in November. However, it is recommended that for 2009/10, consideration should be given to moving the date of the event to the fourth Tuesday (24 November in 2009) due to the structural re-landscaping of the City centre's pavements and roadways as part of the 'Streets Ahead' programme undertaken by the DSD. Although there is to be a moratorium on any further physical demolition/building within the area of the City Hall as from 22 November in 2009, it would mean that any attempt to stage a large public event in the area, prior to this date, would in essence have to take place in a very challenging

physical environment, visually and operationally equivalent to a 'building site'.

Site Layout

Over the last decade or more Councillors, BCC staff and guests have been able to access the event via a special 'guest area' adjacent to the stage. In 2009 this will not be possible due to health and safety concerns, with a new guest area being moved to the Robinson & Cleaver side of Donegall Square North.

Councillor Participation & City Hall Reception

Due to the change in the 'guest area' position it is recommended that only the Lord Mayor will go on stage to assist with the actual lights switch-on. In addition it is proposed that, given the current financial environment and ongoing budgetary constraints, the normal post event function in City Hall is not held this year but is replaced with a smaller function for guests prior to the event.

Resource Implications

Financial

In November 2008 Members approved the overall annual 2009/10 BCC Events Programme and its associated budgets. The Christmas Events Programme budget of £170,000 covers the Switch-on event, a major Christmas Carol concert at the Waterfront and the maintenance and installation of festive lighting on and around the City Hall.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report and approve the changes to the event as stated, in the areas of site layout, Councillor participation and City Hall Reception.

Decision Tracking

Changes to the event to be implemented:

Timeframe: October 2009 Reporting Officer: Tim Husbands

Key to Abbreviations

BCCM	Belfast City Centre Management
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
NIAS	Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
NIFRS	Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
DOE	Department of the Environment
DSD	Department of Social Development