



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	2011 Christmas Lights Switch-on
Date:	27 September 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Gerry Copeland, City Events Manager, ext 3412

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In December 2010 and February and August 2011 Members were updated on arrangements for the 2011 Christmas Lights Switch-on. At the August Committee Members approved a budget of £138,000 for the overall programme of events but requested that consideration of the hosting of a pre and post Christmas lights switch-on event, in the City Hall, be deferred to a future meeting. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to obtain guidance from Members with regard to the traditional pre and post-Christmas Lights Switch-on reception and to update the Committee on the programme of events.

2	Key Issues
2.1	<u>Background to the Event</u> The level of public interest in this event has developed to the point that the 'switching-on' of the Belfast Christmas lights is seen by many as the 'official start' of the Christmas period. In 2010 the event attracted 9,000 people based around a very successful family orientated event with children's television characters. Alongside the public event there has been a long-standing tradition for a pre and post event reception. This is an informal event where refreshments are served and the attending guests have the opportunity to meet some of the performers from the Switch-on event.
2.2	<u>Programme of Events</u> The budget of £138,000 covers the costs of the Christmas Lights Switch-on event, but also the City Hall festive lighting; a visit to either Royal Victoria Hospital

	Children's Department or Northern Ireland Children's Hospice with the Lord Mayor; the staging of Belfast Christmas Schools Carol event in conjunction with the City of Belfast School of Music and marketing activity for the Council's Christmas programme.
2.3	The Council, at its meeting on 1 September 2011 approved this budget. During discussion at the Council meeting mention was made of the possibility of the City Hall festive lighting being erected in languages other than English. No decision was made to do this and it should be noted that the budget would only cover the erection of 2 signs at the City Hall, which were both in the English language last year. The decision to proceed on this basis was taken at the Committee meeting on 12 January 2011. The issue of signs in languages other than English was not raised as an issue at that time when planning for the event was being considered and, accordingly, no such signage was included in the event plan and no budget was established to provide for this. If the Committee was minded to consider the erection of additional signage in other languages then this would mean that additional money would need to be found. Indeed, it would prove to be extremely difficult, if not impossible to commission the design and manufacture of such signs in time for Christmas this year. The Committee might wish to instruct the Officers to bring a report to Committee early in 2012 which would include options for such multi language signs for the 2012 Christmas campaign.
2.4	The pre and post event reception will be held this year in the East wing and Bobbin Café area given that there is a pre-agreed booking in the main Council function rooms that has already been granted Council approval. The cost of the reception is included in the overall budget for the Christmas programme.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<u>Christmas Switch-on and Lighting Costs</u> The total cost of the entire programme is £138,000. This budget has already been approved by the Council on 1 September 2011.
3.2	<u>Staffing</u> No additional staffing is required as the event will be managed within the Council's City Events Unit.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	As with all major civic events, public events like this have the potential to bring together people from a wide range of backgrounds and therefore promote good relations in the city.

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is recommended to approve of the hosting of the pre and post event reception in the East Entrance and Bobbin Café area for the 2011 Christmas Lights switch on.
5.2	The Committee is requested to note the update on the programme of events for the 2011 Christmas campaign.

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Decision Tracking

To provide Members with post event details as part of City Events Unit's end of year performance review in April 2012.

Timeline: April 2012

Reporting Officer: Gerry Copeland