



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Future use of the City Hall
Date:	22 August 2008
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Relevant Background Information

The current Council will be historically the last Council of the current BCC organisation.

The current Council has also been both courageous and farsighted in taking the tough decision to undertake a major refurbishment, involving a disruptive decanting exercise and major expenditure. In considering the future use of City Hall it is important that this Council continues to clearly focus on the future and to set the tone for the City and the new organisation post 2011.

Symbolically the use of the building in terms of political, public and office uses will be important in terms of the overall leadership and vision Council wishes to set.

In its deliberations on refurbishing City Hall Committee took into consideration a number of issues including health and safety; opportunity to resolve major items of work; minimisation of potential future maintenance problems to reduce cost growth and also the possible opportunities for more public use of the building.

To date there has been a definitive Committee decision as to location of Party Rooms however a number of other location decisions now required to ensure the scheme finishes on target and budget.

Key Issues

The building work in City Hall is now well underway with decisions regarding floor boxes, partition walls etc having to be taken. To ensure the works are kept to programme and within budget a Committee decision is now required as to future use of City Hall and which parts of the council organisation return to City Hall.

Members have agreed that it is important to have customer facing services in City Hall and to ensure the building is best utilised in terms of its political function, it's public role and as an administrative headquarters. There is now a once in a lifetime opportunity to get this balance right and allow for future flexibility.

Such decisions need to be made in the light of the changing local government scenario as envisaged by RPA ie:

1. There are likely to be boundary changes for BCC with additional workload from neighbouring boroughs together with new functions from various NICS Departments and Agencies.
2. The current Council organisational structure will have to change to accommodate these new functions, boundaries and additional staff. In fact the Council organisation is changing now as we prepare for RPA with more centralisation of transactional activity for efficiency purposes eg Better Business Project and as we extend the role of the Council to address social ills eg Safer City. An additional pressure for restructuring is a number of succession planning issues that will arise at Director level over the next 18 months.
3. Customer Focus will become a greater priority for Council driven by central government; Councillors seeking greater value for rate payers and increasing expectations and demand from citizens.

In view of the above and in order to give us some built in flexibility for the future it is proposed that all staff in Adelaide Exchange with the exception of backroom Financial Services and Core Improvement staff return to City Hall ie Chief Executive, Legal Services, Member and Committee Services, Communications, BDM etc.

Greater Public Use

Members via the Accommodation Steering Group have advocated the desire for greater public access to the City Hall and have discussed the potential of a coffee bar/café facility following which the Committee then requested a business case. The business case for a coffee bar/café facility is attached at **Appendix 1**.

In summary, so long as a decision is made soon, the £300,000 expenditure associated with the adjustments to the works arising from this change to the brief can be accommodated within the contingency allowance set aside for such introduced variations.

On completion of the Major Works contract Facilities Management will create a theme of '*Titanic*' for the coffee bar/café facility. A very conservative approach to customer numbers suggests an £8,500 subsidy is required. However this can be offset to breakeven by the merchandising opportunities availed of in many other Cities. Alternative public uses for a number of City Halls across the UK is attached at **Appendix 2**.

The coffee/café facility can only be accommodated on the ground floor if there is sufficient room to relocate Communications to the upper floors of City Hall – which is made possible by retaining some staff in Adelaide Exchange. The area formerly occupied by Communications in City Hall is the most readily convertible due to the offices having been created by stud walls.

Customer Focus

The Members view of more customer focused services being located in City Hall can be accommodated as follows:

The ground floor area in City Hall formerly occupied by Legal Services consisted of a number of small offices created on an ad hoc basis over a number of years. The refurbishment has recreated the rooms as original and Legal Services would no longer fit unless a further unsuitable partitioning took place. Again as with Communications Legal Services could be accommodated on the upper floors although it would be beneficial for the Director of Legal Services to retain a ground floor office for ease of access by Members and Chief Executive.

The remaining rooms on the ground floor provide options for creating customer facing one stop shops and/or additional meeting rooms for Members and Constituents.

A further use for one of these large rooms is a permanent location for a City model which is currently being explored with UJQUB and Planning Service. Such a model would be of interest to visitors, and the general public and provide a useful tool for interfacing between Members and developers in regard to planning matters. See ***Appendix 3.***

Member Use

A Final issue which needs agreed is a proposal to enhance the kitchen facilities for Members. The current kitchen in the Members Common Room is unfit for purpose. A Solution exists in moving the Members Common Room to the former PUP room (which has been enlarged due to removal of asbestos filled partition) and dividing the existing Common Room between the PUP and a new kitchen facility as detailed in the attached drawing at ***Appendix 4.***

Resources

The £300,000 expenditure can be accommodated within the contingency allowance included in the overall project budget.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Members agree to staff sections returning to City Hall as suggested ie everyone from Adelaide Exchange except Financial Services and Core Improvement.
2. Members agree space is created on the ground floor of City Hall by relocating Communications and Legal Services to upper floors.
3. Members agree ground floor is made available for customer facing services and constituency meeting rooms as the organisations role and structures change.
4. Members decide if a café as proposed is desirable and vary the contract accordingly.

5. Members agree to the suggested changes to the Common Room.

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - The business case for a coffee bar/café facility

Appendix 2 – Alternative public uses for a number of City Halls across the UK

Appendix 3 – Photos of City Model

Appendix 4 – Members Room drawing