



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Use of City Hall lawns by Belfast Community Circus (Festival of Fools)</b>
<b>Date:</b>	24 October 2008
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	George Wright – Head of Facilities Management – Ext.5206
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Peter McKay – Ext. 6233

### Relevant Background Information

As Members will be aware, the Committee has recently delegated authority for routine requests for use of the City Hall grounds etc. to the Director of Corporate Services, on the basis of an agreed set of criteria. However it was recognized that there would be occasions on which the nature, scale and/or scope of the request means that it is appropriate to place the matter directly before the Committee. The request detailed below falls into this category, and the direction of the Committee is therefore sought.

A request has been received from The Belfast Community Circus School to use the City Hall east lawn as a venue for a “**Festival of Fools**” event taking place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> May 2009 (inclusive of set-up and break down times). The Festival of Fools event was established by Belfast Community Circus School in 2004 and is Northern Ireland’s only street theatre festival. Members may recall that a similar application was made in respect of this event in January 2007 but the Committee rejected the request on that occasion.

The centre-piece of the event - which would cover a 18m x 16m area on the east lawns - would be a high quality maze installation called “Get Lost”. If approved, it would be the first time that this installation will have been toured in Northern Ireland.

The event is essentially walkabout theatre in an enclosed space - actors in fantasy costume travel around a maze (constructed of Heras fencing covered in plastic privet hedge) interacting with participants and visitors to the City Hall Grounds. The maze will be open for 5 hours per day, entrance is free of charge and the maze is fully wheelchair accessible. The event is described by the organizers as “an artistic vision combining elements of fairytale, myth, comedy, art and landscape”. “Get Lost” will be aimed at family audiences from across Belfast through an extensive advertising campaign, and to visitors from outside the city through websites and press coverage. The organizers anticipate that the installation will attract around 1,000 visitors per day. Visitors in queues will be entertained by walkabout performers from the Festival Of Fools.

This event is financially supported by Belfast City Council through an annual grant administered by the Culture and Arts Unit. If approved, the event is scheduled to commence on the 2nd May 2009 after a media launch which is anticipated to attract a crowd in the order of 300. It is then scheduled to run for a further 3 days ending on 5<sup>th</sup> May.

All additional security and stewarding will be provided by the organisers at their expense. The grounds of the City Hall will be kept open for the event however the timings are mostly within the normal opening times of the grounds. Security will be paid for and overseen by the organisers; this will include appropriate daytime and overnight security. The Council would be required to give access to the 3-phase power supply available in the grounds for the PA system. The organisers are willing to re-turf the lawn if necessary, and they will also provide

changing facilities for the artists in the form of a tent in the grounds.

A risk assessment will be carried out on the site in conjunction with the organisers and Belfast City Council's Workplace Health unit. Public Liability Insurance has been organised. Stewards will be in place to guide visitors on the site. A PA system will be set up for low-level music and announcements.

From a practical point of view there would be little potential disruption to the normal routines within the City Hall grounds.

If this request is approved, further meetings with the organisers, together with representatives from Corporate Communications, Events and the Culture and Arts Units will be held to progress planning for the event. This event has the potential to enhance the profile of the City Hall and the Council, particularly during the closure of the building.

### **Key Issues**

As already indicated, the Committee has, in 2007, already refused a request to host this event. However Members may take the view that, on this occasion, the event could assist in the important task of keeping the City Hall in the public eye during the period of closure, and may therefore be worth considering again.

The organisers have provided assurances in principle in respect of the following key issues;

- that an appropriate level of indemnity in respect of loss, damage or personal injury will be provided for the Council;
- that the impact on the normal operation of the grounds will be minimal;
- that all incidental costs associated with the event, including additional stewarding and security costs, will be borne by the organisers;
- that signage used for the event will have due regard for the status of the City Hall as the political and administrative home of the Council; *and*
- that the lawn will be kept intact as far as possible, and re-turfed if necessary.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

There are no significant direct costs for the council associated with this request.

#### Human Resources

No additional resources are required, as all additional security and stewarding staff are the responsibility of the organisers.

#### Asset and other implications

There are no significant implications for the integrity of the Councils assets.

### **Recommendation/Decision**

The Committee's decision is sought in respect of the application to host the Festival of Fools event in the City Hall grounds on the dates set out above.

### **Documents Attached**

None.