



BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	City Hall coffee-shop facility - theming
Date:	23 rd January 2009
Reporting Officer:	G Wright – Head of Facilities Management
Contact Officer:	G Wright

Relevant background information

Members will recall that, at its meeting of 12th December 2008, the Committee approved the provision of a coffee-shop facility in the City Hall located on the ground floor south-east corner of the building, together with an exhibition area and an enhanced merchandising space. However a number of Members expressed reservations about the proposed theming of the coffee-shop area.

This concern largely centred around the proposed theme – a close replica of one of the first-class cafeterias on the Titanic - and the principal reason given for this concern was that the theme did not adequately reflect the broader industrial, working-class history and culture of the city, and may consequently be of limited significance to the majority of local people. The Committee therefore instructed the relevant Officers to review the proposed theme and to report back with any viable alternatives.

Having reviewed the matter and consulted with a range of interested parties including Consarc, Good Relations, Councillor Conor Maskey (who had expressed particular concerns) and relevant BCC staff, it is proposed that the Titanic theme be replaced by a 'Belfast Works' theme which would highlight the city's nineteenth and early twentieth century role in ship-building, linen & textile manufacture, engineering, tobacco production, rope-making and other heavy industries. Such a period theme also fits in well with the historic nature of the City Hall itself.

The coffee-shop area would be fitted out using period materials and fittings so far as possible, and these could be supplemented by additional items of art and artefacts on public display in the area. Some aspects of the Titanic story could also be addressed via the shipbuilding elements of the theme, and it is obviously important to retain this link if at all possible given the high degree of international recognition and interest in this topic.

The exhibition area adjacent to the coffee-shop can be used to cater for the many requests for exhibition space which the Council receives each year and which are currently accommodated in the Rotunda, marble, East entrance or other areas of the building, however in addition it is proposed that two or three standing exhibitions linked to the 'Belfast Works' theme would be developed and rotated periodically at times when no external exhibitions are being hosted.

It will also be necessary to review the stock of merchandising goods sold by the Council in the light of these proposed changes before the merchandising franchise comes into effect.

Key Issues

The key issue is whether or not the Committee regards the 'Belfast Works' theme as preferable to the Titanic theme and is happy to proceed on that basis, or would wish further work to be done on alternative themes (or does not wish to have a theme at all). In this context it should also be noted that time is increasingly of the essence if the necessary work is to be designed and completed to coincide with the re-opening of the City Hall later in 2009.

It should further be noted that if the 'Belfast Works' theme is adopted it may necessitate some additional modest expenditure on research and interior design. This is because whereas with the Titanic proposal photographs of the actual layout exist and can simply be re-created, the revised theme will need to be researched and subsequently designed to give the desired effect.

Resources ImplicationsFinancial

It is unlikely that the 'Belfast Works' proposed theme will cost significantly less than the original Titanic theming (i.e. approx £40,000), and indeed there may be some modest additional research and interior design costs as outlined above.

Human Resources

There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

Asset & other implications

There are no direct asset implications arising from this report in terms of the fabric of the building or its systems and services.

Recommendations & Decisions

It is recommended that the Committee approve the theming of the City Hall coffee-shop on the basis of the 'Belfast Works' theme as set out above, together with the associated expenditure in respect of fitting-out, research and interior design.

Key to Abbreviations

None.

Documents attached

None.