



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Council Accommodation Update
Date:	20 February 2009
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement
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1. BACKGROUND

The City Hall refurbishment will be completed over the summer and detailed plans are now being worked up for decanting Members and staff back into the building and consequent knock on effects on other Council buildings.

2. KEY ISSUES

The Council has staff in a number of City Centre offices some of which we own and others which we lease. A number of the buildings are legacies from decisions taken over a long period.

The general approach is to reduce the number of buildings held by the council and the reopening of the City Hall offers an opportunity to move this approach a step further.

There remain a number of uncertainties in that the Council is due to consider a major review of the centre of the organisation, and while the RPA is now moving more rapidly it will probably be the end of 2009, early 2010, before we have a clear idea on staff numbers transferring and any additional assets being made available.

In addition, property is a fairly illiquid form of asset in that it takes time to rent, buy, sell, close down leases etc which means that we have taken an incremental approach to date.

In 2008 we have closed leases on Callendar Street and the Scottish Amicable Building. With the reopening of City Hall the opportunity exists to close a lease on Linenhall Exchange and to vacate one of our own buildings Seymour House thus creating a potential asset for disposal.

Committee have already agreed to the services that will return to City Hall. The vacant space in Adelaide Exchange to be occupied by Business Improvement Service (BIS) who currently are in Linenhall Exchange. In addition, Human Resources which Committee have agreed to merge with BIS can also be moved to Adelaide Exchange as can Internal Audit.

Moving Human Resources from the Cecil Ward Building reduces some of the overcrowding that has been apparent in the CWB for a number of years and creates the opportunity for the Parks and Leisure Department to bring in a number of staff who are based in some Parks buildings under one roof.

CWB will contain thus the Development Department, Parks and Leisure and approximately half of the Health and Environmental Services Department. Building Control and Cleansing remain in Lanyon Place as they have only recently moved.

The main ISB Building will continue for now although it would be an overall accommodation aim to free up this asset as well.

Given the numbers of staff involved per section and the uncertainty surrounding the future shape of the organisation together with RPA unknowns this option is the most prudent approach.

The Members Accommodation Steering Group went through the myriad possibilities and agreed this was the best first step. Members should note that the decanting and refitting associated with this option will not be complete until 2010. Further work now needs to be done with the Accommodation Steering Group to work out a longer term accommodation solution as we get more detail in regard to RPA and begin to define what is best suited to Council for the future.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Financial

The decanting and refit costs are included in the Facilities Management budget for 2009/10.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the report.