



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Request to use the City Hall for two of the four Belfast Counts in the 2010 Westminster Parliamentary Election
Date:	Friday, 20 th November, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (ext. 6325)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Gareth Quinn, Development Officer (ext. 6316)

Relevant Background Information

The Belfast Area Electoral Officer has submitted a request for the use of accommodation in the City Hall in respect of the Westminster Counts for two of the four Belfast Constituencies, namely, Belfast South and Belfast West.

Key Issues

Members should be aware that the Chief Electoral Officer has made it clear that the Westminster Count will take place through the night following the close of poll. Furthermore, while no definite announcement has been made, it is widely anticipated that the Westminster Election will be held in the Spring of 2010.

Although, in principle, there would appear to be no reason to object to the two Belfast Counts being held within the City Hall, it is important to ensure that the building can accommodate the expected volume of people, along with the technical requirements as outlined by the Electoral Office and that such use would not contravene any of the health and safety measures which are currently in place.

Members will be aware that in 2005 the Westminster Counts for the four Belfast Constituencies were held in the City Hall as no alternative venue was available within the City.

However, Members will also be aware that, at its meeting on 23rd March, 2001, the Committee had decided not to permit the Westminster Counts to be held in the building on the grounds that if the Local Government Elections were to be scheduled on the same date it would be doubtful whether the building would be able to cope with the large number of people who were expected to attend. Therefore, should a Local Government Election be scheduled on the same day as a Westminster Election it would not be appropriate for the City Hall to be used for the counting of the votes in respect of the Westminster Election.

Resource Implications

Any expenditure which is incurred as a result of the Count being held in the City Hall would be recouped from the Electoral Office.

Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to agree in principle to the use of the City Hall for the Westminster Counts in respect of the constituencies of Belfast South and Belfast West on the condition that the building can accommodate the specific needs of the Electoral Office and that the appropriate health and safety requirements are adhered to. Furthermore, the Count will only be permitted to take place within the building so long as the City Hall is available and that the Local Government Elections are not being held on the same day as the Westminster Elections.

Decision Tracking

If the Committee adopts the recommendation the Electoral Office will be advised of the decision and asked to contact Facilities Management once the date of the Election has been confirmed.

Officer responsible – Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services.