



Belfast City Council.

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.
Subject:	Belfast City Council Participation in the 2010 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Earth Hour
Date:	11th December, 2009.
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects ext. 6217
Contact Officer:	David Cartmill, Acting Head of Finance and Resources Directorate, ext. 6084

Relevant Background Information.

This paper presents a request from the World Wildlife Fund (NI) seeking Council participation in an international promotion to demonstrate support for measures to address climate change.

The World Wildlife Fund in Northern Ireland is part of WWF-UK and seeks to progress a range of environmental matters from a regional perspective. It focuses principally on policy development and lobbying to ensure that environmental issues remain high on local political and media agendas. WWF NI's current priorities are improving the quality of rivers and oceans; promoting sustainable development; and addressing contributors to climate change.

Internationally, WWF has been leading a global awareness campaign entitled "Earth Hour". The campaign invites individuals and organisations to turn off lights for a period of one hour at a designated time as a means of demonstrating support for tackling climate change. WWF emphasises the need for Local Government and individual citizens to play their part in addressing climate change by adopting responsible behaviours. Earth Hour aims to offer people throughout the world an opportunity to express their support and, in doing so, exert influence on political decision makers.

The campaign originated in Sydney, Australia in 2007 when over 2 million people took part in the first Earth Hour. Since then, the initiative has grown substantially. WWF reports that one billion people in 4,000 cities and towns throughout 88 countries switched off their lights for Earth Hour in 2009. Iconic locations that participated included the Great Wall of China, San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, the Colosseum in Rome, the Sydney Opera House and the Houses of Parliament in London.

Belfast City Council took part in the 2009 event when the Lord Mayor carried out an official "switch off" of external lighting at the City Hall including the Belfast Wheel. WWF is hoping to build upon the success of the Earth Hour initiative during 2010 and has approached the Council regarding participation in next year's event scheduled for Saturday 27 March.

Key Issues.

Fit with Council Policy.

Strategic theme 3 in the Council's current corporate plan – Better care for Belfast's environment – commits us to reducing the city's impact on climate change and improving air quality. More recently, (November 2009) Council agreed to subscribe to the Eurocities Declaration on Climate Change, which obliges signatories to tackle climate change, including the development of climate change plans and monitoring greenhouse gas emissions.

The Council's position on climate change is abreast with that of the NI Executive, which has consented to the expansion of the Climate Change Act 2008 to Northern Ireland and has agreed to contribute towards UK targets and budgets.

At a UK level, government's 2009 Low Carbon Transition plan highlights the important convening and leadership role that local government has to play in achieving greenhouse gas emission targets.

Key Issues contd.

Operational matters.

The WWF request for Council participation has been discussed with Facilities Management, Corporate Communications and Events staff. It is concluded that the external lights at City Hall could be turned off without any disruption to other Council activities. (The 2009 event took place while the City Hall was unoccupied.) All necessary health and safety and fire control provisions will be addressed.

World Tourist Attractions, operators of the Belfast Wheel, co-operated with the Council and took part in the 2009 'switch off'. We will again seek the involvement of the company should the Council agree to participate in the 2010 event.

Finally, all publicity and promotional activity regarding Council participation will be overseen by Corporate Communications to ensure appropriate messages are conveyed.

Resource Implications.

Financial.

Negligible – staff costs to oversee the lighting 'switch off' will be offset by the associated energy savings.

Human Resources.

None

Asset and other implications.

None

Recommendations.

It is considered that the proposal again affords the Council an opportunity to demonstrate civic leadership and to communicate its position regarding the need for cities to play an important role in addressing climate change. Furthermore, the initiative may provide a platform to progress Council's objectives on environmental matters by engaging with staff to generate ideas in support of Earth Hour.

It is recommended:

(i) That the Committee approves Council's participation in the 2010 Earth Hour event scheduled for 27 March, commencing at 20:30 and finishing at 21:30.

(ii) Should Earth Hour become an annual event, that the Committee agrees to delegate authority to the Director of Property and Projects to determine future participation

Decision Tracking

Council decision to be conveyed to WWF in January and arrangements, if agreed, put in place by David Cartmill

Key to Abbreviations.

WWF - World Wildlife Fund (also known as the World Wide Fund for Nature).

Documents attached.

None