



## Belfast City Council

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| Report to:         | Strategic Policy and Resources Committee                                     |
| Subject:           | Submission of Late Reports   |
| Date:              | Friday, 21st May, 2010   |
| Reporting Officer: | Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services<br>(extension 6325) |
| Contact Officer:   | Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services<br>(extension 6325) |

### **Purpose of Report**

To clarify the position regarding the submission of late reports to Committees.

### **Background**

At the Committee's meeting on 23rd April, authority was sought to submit for consideration two late requests which had been received for the use of the City Hall grounds. While permission was granted to report on the requests and decisions taken, a request was made at the Council meeting on 4th May when the minutes were being adopted for a report to be submitted explaining why advance notice had not been given and written reports were not available.

### **Key Issues**

The established protocol governing the transaction of business at Council Committees is that agendas are drawn up by the appropriate Chief Officer and issued normally seven days in advance of the meeting. All necessary supporting documentation – written reports, associated correspondence, previous relevant decisions, pictorial graphics, maps, etc – and clear and unambiguous recommendations are distributed in booklet-form for ease of reference. In this way all Members are provided with sufficient background information to enable informed decisions to be arrived at. Oral reports are normally made to further explain and clarify issues and to provide, if necessary, information which may not have been available when the papers were being circulated.

There is little doubt that this system is adhered to by the Chief Officers, who appreciate the benefits that clarity of reporting brings to the decision-making process of the Council. Every effort is then made to complete the cycle by compiling clear, concise and unambiguous minutes recording the decisions reached. Generally, this system works well: it is understood by both officers and Members and the benefits – and constraints – are acknowledged and accepted.

However, as with any system, there will always be occasions when difficulties are created because items which are either urgent or potentially controversial arrive at a very late stage. In such cases the Chief Officer is faced with the dilemma of either not reporting the matter because it arrived late – which may be due to the scheduling of Committee dates and not necessarily the fault of those making the request – or raising it at the Committee meeting in order to be fair to and to facilitate the makers of the request. The Chief Officer will normally consult the Chairman and take advice but he or she will normally make every effort to accommodate the public rather than to rely on bureaucracy to avoid having the issue considered.

In the two issues which arose in April, both were brought to the attention of the Director of Property and Projects only on the morning of the Committee. He recognised the importance of making the Committee aware of the issues and took immediate steps to appraise the Chairman, Councillor Hartley, and sought the Committee's advice as to whether it wished him to report on the matters.

While it is accepted that the late submission of reports is less than ideal – for both officers and Members – and every effort is made to avoid such an occurrence, nevertheless it has to be accepted that occasionally such circumstances can arise. However, all Chief Officers are aware that all possible steps must be taken to avoid this.

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| <b>Recommendation</b> |
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| <b>Key to Abbreviations</b> |
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| <b>Documents Attached</b> |
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