



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Elections Update
Date:	22 nd October, 2010
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Relevant Background Information

Discussions have been taking place between the Chief Electoral Officer and political parties.

The following is an update on the current proposals for elections in 2011.

Key Issues

Dates of Elections

Members will be aware that elections to both the Local Councils and to the Northern Ireland Assembly are to be held in 2011. In addition, it is expected that a national referendum will also be held regarding the introduction of changes to the method of voting at General Elections.

It is important that these events are co-ordinated as much as possible. The current position is that the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly will be held on the first Thursday in May, that is 5th May, 2011. The Northern Ireland Office has indicated that the setting of the date for the Local Council elections will be included in a General Amendment Order which is to be laid in Parliament in the Autumn. It is anticipated that the date will also be set for 5th May, 2011. The date of the national referendum will appear in the Bill to be introduced to Parliament but, again, it is anticipated that the referendum will also be held on 5th May, 2011. This will mean that Thursday 5th May, 2011 will see elections to both the Local Councils and the Northern Ireland Assembly and also the holding of the national referendum.

Timing of Counts

Until the dates of the elections and referendum are confirmed it is difficult to predict what might happen at the close of poll. Assuming that all 3 events are held on 5th May, then it is anticipated that all papers from the two elections and the referendum will be

held in a secure location overnight. On the morning of Friday 6th May all ballot boxes will be opened for the verification process to take place. When this is completed the ballot boxes for the two elections and the referendum will be separated and, potentially, taken to different count venues.

The timing of the referendum count will have to be the same throughout the United Kingdom and is still being considered by the Chief Counting Officer. Any decision reached might impact on the timing of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council counts. Setting the referendum count aside, it is anticipated that the Assembly count will commence on the afternoon of Friday 6th May and be completed by the evening of Saturday 7th May. The Local Council counts will commence on the morning of Monday 9th May and, in Belfast, conclude on Tuesday 10th May. As indicated earlier, the decision of the Chief Counting Officer with regard to the timetable for the counting of the referendum, might impact upon the other timings.

Changes to Local Government Election Law

A General Amendment Order is expected to be laid before Parliament in November which will establish the date of the Local Council elections. It is anticipated that the Order will also make some changes to the law governing local elections. At the moment, the extent of these changes is unknown. A further report will be presented to the Committee once details have become available.

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislative Proposals

The Northern Ireland Assembly have recently considered a Private Members Bill proposing that once a Member is elected to the NI Assembly, they are not permitted to continue to serve as a Councillor. Clearly if this legislation is passed it will impact upon the membership of the new Council.

Resource Implications

None

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the information provided.