



Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of future use and management of the City Hall
Date:	22 nd October 2010
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects
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1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	The City Hall is the most prestigious building in the city of Belfast and is one of the most instantly recognisable symbols of the city. It has a unique, iconic status and is very much seen as the 'heart of the city'. Constructed at the turn of the 20th century, it was opened officially in 1906 and celebrated its centenary in 2006. It was closed temporarily in October 2007 for a period of 2 years for an £11m refurbishment programme and was reopened in October 2009. It is a Grade A listed building.
1.2	The City Hall is a working building which is in daily use as the civic headquarters of the Council. One of its key uses is to facilitate the 51 Elected Members of the Council in their role as civic leaders for the city. It also provides an office base for approximately 200 staff as well as offering a number of services to the public including a new exhibition area, visitor information point and coffee-shop. It also houses the Birth, Deaths and Marriages suite.
1.3	The building has three prestigious function rooms, namely the Great Hall, the Banqueting Hall and the Reception Hall, all of which are heavily booked for both civic and non-civic functions. These rooms typically generate around 600 functions per annum, attracting over 30,000 guests each year. There are also exhibitions occasionally held in the City Hall. The grounds of the City Hall are frequently used for high profile public events including the Christmas and Spring Continental markets. The City Hall is open to the public Monday to Saturday and offers public tours with tour numbers and participants increasingly significantly over the past number of years
2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	<p>The City Hall is the Council's most high profile and impressive asset; however, due to historic reasons and with the passing of time the lines of accountability and responsibility for the use and management of the building and its grounds have become blurred. There are no explicit, transparent policy frameworks in place for a number of key areas in relation to the management of the City Hall including -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the booking of functions rooms which has led to a degree of confusion over who is responsible for what – for both internal and external events. - the charging for room hire - the catering of events - the use of the grounds <p>This lack of clarity re accountability and responsibility is a high risk for the Council.</p>
2.2	Many of the functions held in the City Hall are non-civic and booked by external organisations. In such circumstances, approval is based on compliance with a number of fairly general and

	<p>somewhat dated criteria. Members will note that complaints have recently been received from the commercial sector, asserting that providing free access to the City Hall is unfairly and unnecessarily depriving local businesses of commercial opportunities.</p>
2.3	<p>At present there is no income generated from any of these events and, in fact, up until June 2010 the Council offered an uncapped level of civic hospitality for particular events in the form of drinks receptions and dinners. The level of hospitality provided in such circumstances has now been capped to £500 by Committee in June 2010.</p>
2.4	<p>Within this context, a review of the overall management and use of the City Hall and its grounds had been initiated a few months back. An initial draft options paper is being finalised which considers the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -General issues in respect of the management & governance arrangements for the City Hall -Use of City Hall facilities (including grounds) and the associated process for booking -Tours -Scope to introduce a potential scale of charging for functions in the City Hall -Catering for events <p>This options paper has taken into consideration best practice in civic buildings elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.</p>
2.5	<p>Members are asked to note some of the emerging issues from the initial review including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The fragmented nature of the management and governance for the booking of City Hall functions and the inconsistency in approach to dealing with internal and external functions - The lack of a single point of accountability in relation to the management and use of the City Hall - The criteria for use of the City Hall is somewhat dated - Establishing a clear role for the SP&R Committee in approving usage - The need to test the appetite for the option to potentially introduce some form of commercial charge (in particular circumstances) for the use of City Hall function rooms and/or City Hall tours - Detailed financial modelling needs to be undertaken to explore the emerging options and any associated scale of charges - Future accommodation requirements and the future role of City Hall will have to be clarified.
2.6	<p>Members will appreciate that this is a complex piece of work. Essentially it raises the issue of 'what is/should be' the role of the City Hall? E.g. do we continue to expand its accessibility to, and usage by, the general public? Should it remain an open free building for all, should we ensure that costs are covered, or should it operate on a more commercial basis? This is linked to ongoing discussions in respect to the future accommodation needs of the Council.</p>
2.7	<p>While a detailed Phase I report is currently being finalised and will be submitted for the future consideration of the Committee, Members are asked to consider the appropriateness of scheduling a series of Party Group briefings to enable Members to inform the options paper being developed. Alternatively, the proposal to establish a Members' Accommodation Working Group could be utilised to progress this issue.</p>

3.0 Resource Implications

There are no Human Resources or financial implications contained within this report

4.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i) note the contents of this report and, in particular, that a further detailed options paper will be submitted for the consideration of Committee in November 2010
- ii) consider the appropriateness of scheduling Party Group briefings to enable Members to be briefed on and input into the emerging options paper or alternatively consider whether this issue could be progressed by the Members' Accommodation Working Group