



Belfast City Council

Report to	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Proposed Hustings Event(s) in City Hall
Date:	21st March, 2014
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (Ext 6314)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council has received a proposal from DCP Strategic Communication Ltd about the possibility of the Council hosting a hustings event or a series of such events in the run up to the Local Elections in May.

2	Key Issues
2.1	A hustings event is one where election candidates or parties debate politics and answer questions from an audience.
2.2	DCP organised a similar event in South Antrim in 2010 where it was very well received. The proposal is outlined in the attached Appendix and is for the holding of 4 events on a North, South, East and West Belfast split during the period from 5th till 16th May. The audience, of approximately 150-200 at each event, would be drawn from Schools and Further Education Colleges and would consist of young people who will be first-time voters at the elections in May. The stated aim of the events would be to encourage first-time voters to participate in the democratic process. The proposed dates of the events would fall within the exam period for students and DCP has indicated that there might be difficulty in securing the numbers to attend. If that were to prove to be the case, then it might be that only one event would be held to cover the whole of the City.
2.3	Members will be aware that the use of the City Hall for political events is generally not permitted under the existing policy but such an event where the aim is to raise voter participation is specifically permitted under the policy.
2.4	In discussion with DCP it has been stressed that, should the organisation of such an event or events be approved by the Council, there would have to be an understanding that each political party which has a candidate or candidates in

	<p>the DEAs concerned would have to be invited to have a representative on the panel and that any independent candidates would also have to be invited. In this way the proposed events would not be in breach of the Electoral Commission's guidance on hustings events.</p>
2.5	<p>DCP has indicated that the cost, on a non-profit making basis, for them to organise the 4 events, including event management, administration, photography and PR would be approximately £1,500 each or £6,000 in total. If there were to be only one larger event then these costs would be reduced to approximately £2,500. The Council would not be able to pay an amount over £3,000 to DCP for the events as to do so would breach the procurement policy. If costs were to be greater than £3,000 then the Council would be obliged to ask for quotations from a few companies for the organisation of the events.</p>
2.6	<p>DCP are actively seeking sponsorship for the events and it might well be that the cost to the Council would be much less than that estimated currently. Both the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland and the Electoral Commission have been approached about sponsorship but have declined. The Council would also be asked to grant the use of the City Hall for the event(s) and to provide some tea, coffee and soft drinks hospitality.</p>
2.7	<p>At this point, the Committee is requested to consider whether it would wish to grant authority in principle for the use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality on the understanding that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The direct costs to the Council would not exceed the quotation limit of £3,000; • All political parties and independent candidates at the local elections would be invited to participate on the appropriate panel(s); and • That efforts would continue to be made to seek sponsorship for the event(s) so as to reduce the Council's costs as far as possible.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p>Not to exceed £3,000 direct costs and the costs of providing hospitality for the event(s). These costs can be met from within existing budgets.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	<p>There are not any equality or good relations considerations connected with this report.</p>

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is requested to consider the proposal and to decide if it wishes to proceed on the basis set out at point 2.7 above.</p>

6	Decision Tracking
Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager May, 2014	

7	Abbreviations
DEA – District Electoral Area	

6	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 – Proposal from DCP	