



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Corporate Management Team
Subject:	FUTURE USE & MANAGEMENT OF CITY HALL
Date:	21 November 2014
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects, Ext: 6217
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1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members may recall that reports were presented to the Committee on 4 th February 2011, the 9 th September 2011 and again on 4 th November 2011 in respect of various aspects of the future use and management of the City Hall building.
1.2	These reports highlighted the fact that the City Hall hosts in excess of 500 functions annually in the 3 prestige function rooms, and that in virtually all cases the use of the building is provided to approved function organisers at no cost, with the associated security, cleaning, supervision, cloak-room and bar staffing costs being absorbed by the council. In some cases drinks receptions are also provided if approved by Committee. In addition, there are no charges for public or private tours of the building which would help offset the increasing staffing costs associated with providing the tours.
1.3	Members will also be aware that representations have been received from local businesses, pointing out that the free provision of prestigious venues such as the Great Hall or Banqueting Hall are having an adverse impact on their ability to let their own facilities at competitive market rates. Further representations of this type continue to be made and the most recent letter from Titanic Belfast is appended to this report.
1.4	The first of the three reports referred to above was considered but deferred by the Committee in February 2011, in order to allow time for detailed party briefings to take place. These briefings were subsequently completed and a further report was tabled on 9 th September 2011. After some discussion, the Committee agreed at this time that, in principle, the council should:-
1.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek to introduce a scale of charges for the hiring of rooms within the City Hall and the use of its grounds on the principle of 'not for profit / not for loss'; • ensure that community, voluntary and charitable organisations should not be affected adversely by the adoption of such a policy and that the needs of the aforementioned sectors should be addressed sympathetically in any scale of charges submitted for consideration; <i>and</i> • ensure that there are no charges for tours of the City Hall within normal opening hours. However, it should reserve the right to recover costs on a 'not for profit / not for loss' basis for those booked outside of normal opening hours and/or on behalf of cruise ship operators.
1.6	A financial charging model was developed by officers on foot of the above decision, and the matter was tabled again in November 2011.

1.7	At that time, the Committee agreed to again defer consideration of the report on the review of future use and management of the City Hall to enable it to be considered in more detail by the political parties on the Council. It was also agreed that further work would be needed in respect of the criteria and processes governing access to the City Hall for functions, in liaison with the Democratic Services Section. No further agreement has yet been achieved.
1.8	Given that the council continues to receive representations from local commercial outlets suggesting that the free availability of the prestige function rooms is damaging to their businesses as well as potentially damaging the commercial return to the Waterfront Hall and also in view of the time which has elapsed since this matter was last discussed, the view of the current Committee on any next steps in this regard is therefore now sought.
1.9	A further issue is that those booking City Hall also book their own catering companies who inevitably leave a lot of work for Council staff in cleaning up kitchens. There is an opportunity to let the catering option out for a fixed period with any functions then being required to use the official caterer. <u>Additional City Hall-related issues</u>
1.10	Members may also be aware that the City Hall grounds are increasingly being used for events. Many are large scale and involve significant periods for setting up and de-rigging in addition to the actual time period for the events itself.
1.11	To ensure more coordination of the use of the lawns and that damage/re-growth etc is managed well, it is suggested that all requests for use of the grounds should go through SP&R rather than individual Committees.
1.12	This could, for example, be achieved by requiring all internal requests for use of the grounds to be addressed to the Director of Property & Projects rather than individual Committees, using the same approach of delegated authority supplemented by the ability to table requests for the larger events at Committee for specific approval as is used for external requests. This would ensure that all events in the grounds are managed consistently, using the same basic mechanism.
1.13	Lastly, the use of the City Hall continues to evolve in a number of ways. In recent weeks, the front gates of the City Hall have been kept open during the daytime on a trial basis.
1.14	This was to improve openness and the reduction in any perceived ‘chill factor’ for the public in terms of accessing City Hall, and indeed the reputational impact and optics of the closed-gate approach. Security staff requested a report from the Security by Design expert in PSNI which highlighted concerns if vehicle access was not properly controlled. However, it is considered that this can be managed effectively in other ways. It would be useful to have the Committee’s guidance in terms of the preferred approach in the future.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The key issue is whether or not the Committee is minded to re-consider any/all of the issues set out in the various previous reports at this time, namely:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the potential to introduce charging for functions taking place in the 3 prestige function rooms subject to appropriate protections for charities and the not-for-profit sector; • the potential to introduce charging for some categories of tours; • To reconsider the catering approach to functions as described earlier; • the criteria & processes governing access to the function facilities in the City Hall building;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the criteria & processes for granting permission to host events in the City Hall grounds; and • the position with respect to the opening of the main gates. <p>If it is the Committee's decision that any/all of these matters ought to be pursued a further report will be tabled as soon as possible, setting out proposed alternative processes, viable costed options and associated potential savings and/or additional costs.</p>
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3.	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>As previously notified, the application of market-oriented charges to external functions taking place in the City Hall function rooms could, on present usage trends, generate up to £35,000 annually in hire charges. In addition, the application of a charge for private City Hall tours offered as part of externally organized commercial package tours could generate further additional income. Should a decision be taken to keep the City Hall main gates open routinely, some significant additional expenditure will be needed in respect of the upgrading of the existing bollards on the cobbled area.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>There are no direct HR implications in respect of this report.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Assets</u></p> <p>The rationalisation of approaches to the use of the City Hall grounds could lead to reduced damage to the lawns and surrounding areas. While the council is indemnified against the costs of making good such damage there are still impacts on public availability and the associated reputational damage, given the public usage which the lawns traditionally attract.</p>

4.	Decision(s) required
4.1	<p>The Committee is requested to consider:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) whether or not to commission further work by officers in terms of applying a commercial charge to some external functions; b) whether or not to approve the development of revised criteria governing access to the prestige function rooms in the City Hall; c) to provide an analysis of a new approach to function catering; d) whether or not to consider the application of a charge to some private tours; e) whether or not to amend the processes governing access to the grounds of the City Hall for special events by extending the remit of the authority currently delegated to the Director of Property & Projects in this regard; f) whether or not to change the position with regard to the main gates (i.e. to routinely have the gates open as opposed to closed during working hours).

5.	Equality and Good Relations Screening
5.1	There are no direct equality or good relations issues arising from this report.

6.	Decision Tracking

Key to Abbreviations	
None.	

Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Letter from Titanic Belfast

Restricted