



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources
Subject:	COUNCIL CHAMBER SEATING ARRANGEMENTS
Date:	22 August 2014
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	George Wright, Head of Facilities Management (Ext. 5206/6232)

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Members will recall that, at its meeting of 24 th June 2014, the Committee considered a report in respect of the possible enhancement of seating capacity in the Council Chamber.
1.2	This report was tabled because, on foot of the creation of the new council (initially in shadow form but subsequently in permanent form), the number of elected members will increase from 51 to 60 in total, and the number and size of party groupings have also changed.
1.3	The existing Council Chamber provides a total of 62 seats for elected members (60 on the floor of the Chamber in 2 blocks of 30 and 2 on the raised dais for the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor). It was pointed out that although the total number of seats is physically sufficient to accommodate all elected members in the new, larger Council, there is unfortunately no way to achieve a situation in which all members of each party can be seated together.
1.4	Based on the current configuration it would therefore be necessary for one or more party groupings to agree to have members distributed across both sides of the Chamber.
1.5	On this basis, a number of potential options were presented to the Committee, and the Committee decided that, subject to a costing of the work being submitted for consideration, the option involving the addition of 4 additional pods (seating 2 members each, located on both sides of the Chamber) would be preferred.
1.6	It must be emphasized that the work needed in order to complete this option is specialised and highly complex. It involves digitally scanning the very detailed bespoke woodworking which adorns the existing pods, transferring this to computerised lathes to make wooden cut-outs which are then affixed to the bare pods and then hand-stained in order to colour-match with the existing furniture.
1.7	Of the 6 companies approached only one has submitted a price for the work, and this price is £95,000 in total. This price is more than had been anticipated, and initially it was difficult to gauge its competitiveness as no other suppliers have come forward to submit prices. However some further informal research into pricing indicates that this price would be broadly comparable with other potential suppliers, or alternatively the process could be repeated.

1.8	It should also be noted that there would be additional costs associated with necessary alterations to the carpet and the extension of the microphone system to the new pods etc, all of which will cost in excess of £10K.
1.9	There would therefore appear to be 3 options available to the Committee at this time, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) accept the price submitted and commence the work as soon as possible; b) re-run the procurement exercise in an attempt to attract more competition and keener pricing (which will of course delay completion considerably); c) in light of the cost of carrying out the work, to agree to use the existing seating only and not to commission any permanent additions or changes. This option has advantages given the possibility of future change in the political make up of Council.
1.10	If the existing price submission is accepted, there would be a lead time of approx. 16-18 weeks before completion, meaning that it would be January 2015 at the earliest before all of the necessary work could be completed.
1.11	If the Committee is minded to proceed on the basis of the pricing set out above and within the stated timescales, it will also be necessary to approve the use Standing Order 62(a), which provides that in special circumstances the relevant Chief Officer may seek authorization to amend the normal procurement processes. This report therefore seeks authorization to utilise a competitive quotation process instead of the full tender process to procure the necessary services, in order to expedite the work identified herein.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	The key issue is whether or not the Committee believes that the expenditure of a sum of at least £95,000 to make permanent modifications to the Council Chamber in order to provide contiguous seating for all members of all parties represented on the council is appropriate and necessary.

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	The cost of the specialist wood-working element of this work would be in the order of £95K if the current submission is accepted. Additional costs in excess of £10K will also be incurred in relation to a number of ancillary pieces of work needed.

4	Call-in
	This decision is subject to call-in.

5.	Decision(s) required
5.1	The Committee is recommended to consider the following options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) whether to proceed on the basis of the submitted price of £95,000 for specialist works immediately; or (b) to re-run the procurement exercise in an attempt to reduce costs; or (c) to cancel the proposed alterations in light of all of the above and agree to use existing

	seating. Approval of the use of Standing Order 62(a) will be required if either (a) or (b) above is agreed.
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Key to Abbreviations
None.