



Subject:	Civic hospitality – revised processes
Date:	24 th March 2017
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	George Wright, Head of Facilities Management

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To seek the Committee's approval for a modification to the existing processes in relation to the provision of civic hospitality for externally-booked functions and events in City hall.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Endorse the revised approach set out herein.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> Members will be aware that, at its meeting of 6 th January 2017, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee considered a report dealing with 'revisions to the management of City Hall function bookings'. The Committee decided at that time, <i>inter alia</i> , to discontinue the practice of providing civic hospitality for all external functions and events. This decision was taken primarily on financial grounds, on the basis that it would result in a reduction of approximately £43,000 in rate-borne expenditure to the council in a full year.

3.2	<p>However, since this decision was taken, some concerns have been expressed from a number of sources, as it is suggested that there may be some very limited circumstances in which it may be mutually beneficial to allow this practice to continue. It is suggested that a more nuanced approach may be needed, and therefore that it should still be possible to provide hospitality in the following specific cases only:-</p>
3.3	<p>a) function requests which are so closely aligned with and complementary to the Belfast Agenda and the council's subsisting aims and goals that it would be mutually beneficial to permit the provision of civic hospitality (including alcoholic drinks receptions) up to the previous limit of £500; <i>and</i></p> <p>b) function requests made by smaller but obviously deserving groups (e.g. children's cancer charities etc) where the hospitality provided would normally be non-alcoholic (i.e. tea/coffee/soft drinks etc) and be limited to a cost not to exceed £2 per person.</p>
3.4	<p>The cost of these provisions would be met from the hospitality budget of the Civic HQ Unit (following the necessary budgetary transfer from the Democratic Services Section prior to the commencement of new processes in April 2017).</p>
3.5	<p>In terms of the modalities of this approach, a set of more detailed processes would be needed. Applicants would not routinely be offered the opportunity to indicate their wish for civic hospitality on the application form; instead, for the larger external functions which may qualify under 3.3(a) above the process would be that applications felt to meet the initial criteria by Civic HQ would be forwarded to the Director of Development.</p>
3.6	<p>In circumstances where the Director is prepared to endorse the proposed event this would trigger an offer of hospitality to the organisers along with their letter of acceptance.</p>
3.7	<p>For those smaller events and functions which may benefit from the provision of tea/coffee (or exceptionally an alcoholic drinks reception) these would be identified by the Civic HQ Unit and approved by the Director of Property & Projects, and the organizers then informed of this in their letter of acceptance. There is clearly the potential for some of these functions, if refused, to result in difficult reputational issues and/or adverse media coverage, although set against this will be the need to control spending in this area.</p>
3.8	<p>Members clearly wish to reduce the council's exposure to this sort of expenditure arising from externally-booked functions and events, while at the same time creating a situation whereby, in very specific and mutually beneficial cases only, the council may modestly support an event with an offer of hospitality where there is clear mutual benefit in doing so. Effective procedures</p>

	<p>and tight control will therefore be essential.</p> <p>3.9 It must be emphasized that the Civic HQ Unit will be adopting a conservative approach to the revised hospitality provisions - one which seeks to distinguish only those few requests which very clearly meet the revised criteria - as this flexibility cannot be allowed to become the norm, not least because no additional funding is available to pay for any significant increase in hospitality costs.</p> <p>3.10 The above approach was tabled at the Budget Panel on 9th March 2017 and the Panel agreed to endorse and approve the proposed revised processes subject to the agreement of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.</p> <p><u>Key issues</u></p> <p>The key issue is:-</p> <p>3.11 • whether or not the Committee believes that the proposed mechanisms to address this situation as recommended herein are acceptable, or require further revision.</p> <p><u>Decisions required</u></p> <p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <p>3.12 1) review the need for a more nuanced set of processes around the provision of civic hospitality for external functions, <i>and</i></p> <p>2) to the extent necessary, review, endorse or amend the proposals set out above as a means of dealing with the issues raised.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.13 Budgets for 2017/18 have already been adjusted on the basis of the Committee's previous decision in respect of the provision of hospitality, and consequently any agreed future provision of hospitality will be funded from a reduced Civic HQ budget. It will therefore be necessary to robustly assess booking requests in order to ensure that costs do not arise which cannot be covered from the existing budget, and this is the approach which will be taken by the Civic HQ Unit.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.14 There are no direct Good Relations or Equality implications arising from this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None.