



## Belfast City Council

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| <b>Report to:</b>         | Strategic Policy & Resources Committee |
| <b>Subject:</b>           | Future use of the City Hall            |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 20 June 2008                           |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Gerry Millar, Director of Improvement  |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   |  |

### Relevant Background Information

The current Council will be historically the last Council of the current BCC organisation. The current Council has also been courageous in taking a tough decision to undertake a major refurbishment, involving a disruptive decanting exercise and a large expenditure.

In considering the future use of City Hall it is important that this Council continues to clearly focus on the future and to set the tone for the new organisation post 2011. Symbolically the use of the building in terms of political, public and office uses will be important in terms of the overall leadership and vision Council wishes to set.

In its deliberations on refurbishing City Hall Committee took into consideration a number of issues including health and safety; opportunity to resolve major items of work; minimisation of potential future maintenance problems and also the possible opportunities for more public use of the building.

To date there has been no definitive Committee direction as to the future use of City Hall although there has been some discussion at earlier Committee meetings and in the Accommodation Working Group as well as anecdotal feedback from individual members. The basic principles communicated to date will be picked up in the body of the report.

### Key Issues

The building work in city hall is now well underway with most of the preparatory work such as asbestos removal, protection of the marble, removal of redundant mechanical and electrical services now complete. To ensure the works are kept to programme and within budget a Committee decision is now required as to future use of City hall and which parts of the council organisation return to City hall.

There are of course all sorts of options and considerations that could be debated ad infinitum. However, before looking at three basic options a number of principles seem

to have some consensus on feedback to date.

1. Members including Party group rooms and Lord Mayor's suite will be located in City Hall.
2. Services most directly and regularly associated with Members must also therefore be located in City hall i.e. Chief Executive; communications; committee and member services; legal services.
3. Services related to running the building also need to be located in City Hall i.e. receptionists, security, facilities.
4. Direct facing public services must also go back to City hall i.e. birth, death and marriages, cemeteries. Some members have made the point that other direct customer contact services should also be accommodated in City Hall.
5. Consideration should be given to creating additional space for more public use of the building.
6. The new emergency room on the second floor will be used as a conference room on a day to day basis.
7. Any decisions must work within the parameters of the current contract.

### Basic Options

The above principles can be applied to these following basic options to a greater or lesser degree and provide a guide to decision making.

#### Option 1

Return everyone to the City Hall as per the October 2007 layout i.e. before we moved out.

This option while seemingly straight forward raises a number of problems.

- A number of Party Groups are unhappy with their current party rooms due to the size of the rooms in relation to Group numbers - this option does not allow us to address that problem
- From a future proofing perspective the issue of having 60 members come 2011 and unknown number of Party Groups is not addressed by this option.
- Some of the Council departments and sections that moved from City hall have changed in terms of responsibilities and structures and would not easily be accommodated e.g. Good Relations has additional temporary staff, Financial Services has a Central Transaction Unit, CIT has additional responsibilities relating to the Corporate plan etc.
- There is no scope to create more space for public use.
- There is similarly no scope to bring other direct public facing services into the building.

#### Option 2

Create a 'political' space on the first floor by locating all Party Rooms and Committee Services on the first floor south in the office space formerly occupied by Financial Services.

There are a number of pros and cons with this option.

- The location of the Chamber, Lord Mayor's suite and Party Groups all on one floor is potentially very effective in terms of political interaction.
- Members on the other hand could become isolated from interaction with the

public and non Committee services staff by all being located on one floor. This position could of course be mitigated by retaining and possibly enlarging the ground floor common room to take in the current PUP room and Members will also be walking to the ground floor for access and committee meetings.

- The option does, however, open up possibilities on the ground floor such as creating a public café/coffee bar where communications were located and bringing in more public facing services.
- The member room layout is based on current circumstances and may not be suitable post 2011.

### Option 3

Reorganise the ground floor to address most of the principles outlined.

- The dissatisfaction with certain Party Group rooms can be addressed by moving the Alliance Party to the SDLP room and giving the Alliance room to the DUP. The SDLP have the possibility of a larger room next door through the removal of a temporary partition.
- Move Legal Services and Communications from the ground floor to allow the public café/coffee facility to be created and some additional rooms made available for public use and also for potential future changes to the political make up of the Council.
- Allocate some ground floor rooms for customer facing services - these would need to be agreed.
- Consider an office suite for all Directors to enable COMT to work more as a corporate team and less as Departmental heads.

### Resources

As things stand with the City Hall works contract any of the above variations can be accommodated within programme and budget as rooms have yet to be fitted out and decorated. The café proposal will depend on fit out options which will require a further report.

The proposals in option 2 and 3 free up 2,300 M<sup>2</sup> (23,000 sq ft) in Adelaide Exchange allowing us to address the expiry of some leases in 2009 and the accommodation consequences thereof. It also allows the disposal of Seymour House and possibly the ISB building as part of a long term accommodation solution.

### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee select option 3.

### Documents Attached

Appendix 1 - Proposed Room Allocation

