Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	City Hall Re-opening Programme
Date:	19 June 2009
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Relevant Background Information

The City Hall has been closed for refurbishment for 18 months at an investment of £11m. The City Hall's reopening is being significantly anticipated and will form a key event in the celebrating 2009 year that the Council has been coordinating with other stakeholders in the city. The Director of Development was tasked to bring together a cross-departmental group to consider and bring forward ideas and plans for the formal and public reopening of the City Hall. This report presents a draft plan with indicative costings for the reopening.

Key Issues

The group considered their task in the context of a number of issues:

▪ That any reopening of the City Hall should aim to maximise the number of individuals and groups coming to see the refurbished building and encourage the ongoing 'openness' of the Hall to the citizens of and visitors to the City

▪ That the current economic climate meant that the optimisation of any existing and available resources should be utilised rather than seeking to expand additional resources

In consequence it was recommended that the reopening should take place as a process over a number of days rather than as a one-off event so increasing the numbers and that it should occur at a time when it could be linked to and utilise other events taking place in Belfast.

In looking at the Belfast calendar and taking into account concerns by Property Services and Project Management about when the building would be ready for public

viewing, the period 17th – 31st October 20090 was regarded as the optimum. The draft programme then could bring together some new, but also a number of already planned events and also use direct links to the Festival at Queens, Belfast Fashion Week and the Halloween Festival to maximise impact. It would also serve to kick-start a very significant events programme for the City from mid-October right up to Christmas which could tie in tourism and retail strategies.

The programme that is appended at I sets out the events and costs. In addition, at Appendix 2, a listing indicating the various categories which are targeted by the programme is provided. The programme seeks to attract as wide a range of people and groups as possible and to maximise existing budgets. While the total cost is £175k, the majority of these costs are met by activities already planned and brought in together in this programme to compliment the reopening projects. Good Relations activities amount to £42k, Development activities to £49.8k, Parks and Leisure and Environmental Health activities to £5k and Corporate /Central Activities to £78.2k.

One note for Committee is that at the time of compiling this report, discussions were taking place in relation to the proposed Lord Mayor's Installation Dinner. If this was to happen in October then Committee may wish to consider removing the dinner from the draft plan and so reduce the overall costs and having only one dinner in the City Hall in October, making the Lord Mayor's Installation also the formal opening dinner.

Finally, negotiations have been taking place with the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society to produce an architectural history of the City Hall in time for the reopening. This has a potential cost of £13k.

Financial Implications

The total cost of the reopening programme is £175k, however, a number of these events are already planned and will still take place though not necessarily within the suggested timeframe.

The cost of the architectural history is £13k.

Recommendations

▪ Members are asked to consider the draft programme and endorse it and associated costs.

▪ Members are asked to approve £13k to produce an architectural history of the City Hall

Documents Attached

Appendices 1 and 2   Draft City Hall re-opening Programme