



<b>Report to:</b>	<b>Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Equality Impact Assessments on "<i>Belfast City Hall: Promoting a Good and Harmonious Environment</i>" and the "<i>Flying of the Union Flag</i>" Final Decision Reports</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Friday 23 November 2012</b>
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	<b>Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager</b>

### **Relevant Background Information**

The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 18 May 2012, it considered and authorised the issue of two draft Equality Impact Assessment reports (EQIAs) on "*Belfast City Hall: Promoting a Good and Harmonious Environment*" and the "*Flying of the Union Flag*" for a period of public consultation. The draft reports set out the evidence gathered for each EQIA at that stage and preliminary conclusions. The public consultation period ran for a 16 week period from 11 June – 1 October and allowed for an additional 4 weeks over the holiday period.

The EQIAs and the related consultation process, including the design of the associated questionnaires, were undertaken in accordance with the advice of the Equality Commission and best practice regarding survey methodology.

### **Key Issues**

Information regarding the EQIAs was circulated widely, not only to Equality Scheme consultees, but to encourage members of the public to submit their views. A variety of methods used included information on the Council's website, a press release, a public advertisement and an article in the September edition of City Matters. Questionnaires related to each of the 2 EQIAs were available to facilitate the process but respondents were advised that they could make their comments in any format.

The views of the Council's own employees were also sought as part of the EQIA process, since three Council buildings were affected by the policies. This staff survey was well advertised internally and both an on-line survey and a hard copy questionnaire were available. Arrangements were also made for the 1000 (approx.) front line staff who do not normally have access to a PC to have an opportunity to submit a response. All employees were assured of confidentiality.

### **Analysis of consultation responses**

At the close of consultation on 1 October over 2,200 responses were received to both EQIAs, plus a petition of over 14,000 names. The responses came in a wide variety of formats – i.e. on-line questionnaires, e-mails, hard copy letters and a petition.

To ensure that all views expressed were considered appropriately, the responses were analysed by an independent external consultant with a good track record in survey methodology to

ensure impartiality and a professional input.

The consultants have assessed the range of varying views received and the potential differential impacts of the various options considered and have incorporated the findings from the consultation into the EQIA Final Decision Reports.

### **Joint Diversity Group**

The Joint Diversity Group of the Party Group Leaders' Forum and Centenaries Working Group considered the EQIA Final Decision Reports at their meeting on Friday 16 November 2012. The Consultants who had completed the EQIAs were in attendance and made short presentations on their findings. The Joint Diversity Group made the following decisions in respect of each EQIA:

#### **Belfast City Hall: Promoting a Good and Harmonious Environment**

In relation to this EQIA, the Joint Group agreed to re-affirm the principles contained within the Final Decision Report. The Joint Group also acknowledged that the development of a properly resourced action plan was the next critical step in the process.

#### **Flying of the Union Flag**

In relation to this EQIA, the Joint Group agreed that the Final Decision Report plus Appendices should be submitted to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for its consideration of the various options.

### **Recommendations/Decision required**

#### **Belfast City Hall: Promoting a Good and Harmonious Environment**

The Committee is requested to approve the recommendations within the EQIA. The Committee is requested to grant approval to proceed to draw up an appropriate Action Plan with associated budget in order to progress the work envisaged.

#### **Flying of the Union Flag**

The various options are listed at Section 7.30 – 7.35 of the Consultant's Report.

It may be helpful if the Committee wished to consider the position at the Duncrue Complex and the Ulster Hall separately from the position at the City Hall.

In relation to the position at the City Hall, the EQIA Report has concluded that "it would appear that the policy options which best promote good relations are – in descending order of effectiveness:

- Designated flag days only
- Designated flag days plus specified additional days
- No flag or a neutral flag
- Two flags."

Accordingly, the Committee's views in relation to these options are requested.

### **Officers to contact for further information**

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Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager, ext 6020