



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to</b>	<b>Strategic Policy and Resources Committee</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Election Protocol</b>
<b>Date:</b>	24th January, 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	The Committee will be aware of the existence of an Election Protocol which guides officers on the organisation of events and meetings, particularly those involving elected Members, in the immediate run-up to elections in Northern Ireland.
1.2	The Protocol has been updated and is submitted to Committee for approval in advance of the Local Elections on 22nd May, 2014.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The current Election Protocol has, in the past, led to some confusion for Departments in that the principles set out were held to apply strictly for the "Purdah" period – the period from the publication of the Notice of Election to Polling Day – but Departments were required to give consideration as to whether the same principles should be applied for an unspecified additional period of time leading up to the Purdah period.
2.2	In order to make the Protocol more easily understood and, consequently, more likely not to be breached, it is suggested that a change should be made. Effectively, the change would remove any ambiguity about the organisation of events or meetings in the period immediately before the Purdah period. Essentially, what is being suggested is that the Protocol would apply <b>only</b> for the Purdah period itself and that any events and meetings in the period leading up to that would be permitted to continue as normal. The report suggests that the Committee give consideration to two options for when the Purdah period should commence – 1st April or 14 April (if that is the day upon which the Notice of Election is published). The longer the Purdah period the more the Election Protocol will impact upon the normal interaction between members, Officers and

	members of the public. For that reason, it is recommended that the Committee agree that the Protocol should apply from the date of the publication of the Notice of Election (expected on 14th April) to polling day on 22nd May inclusive.
2.3	It is suggested that this change would be beneficial both to Departments and to elected Members by removing the current uncertainty as to when the Protocol becomes active.
2.4	It should be noted that the provisions of the Protocol set out in Sections 4.1 – 4.3 will continue to apply for the period leading up to the Local and European elections in May, 2014 as it is expected that the receipt of Royal Assent for the Local Government Bill will not be in place prior to the nomination period for those elections having ended. Accordingly, the possibility, as included in the Bill at present, of an officer of the Council standing as a candidate in the local elections, will not in fact materialise and officers will be excluded from being able to stand as candidates under the existing provisions of the 1972 Act.
2.5	If the Local Government Bill is passed in its current form, then the Protocol will have to be revised accordingly for the local elections to be held in 2019
2.6	A copy of the suggested amended Election Protocol is attached at Appendix 1 for consideration and approval.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	None.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Implications</b>
	None.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	The Committee is recommended to adopt the amended Election Protocol and agree that the Purdah period will be from the date of the publication of the Notice of Election (expected on 14th April) to polling day on 22nd May inclusive.

<b>6</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Draft Election Protocol