



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Belfast Charter Anniversary
Date:	19 February 2013
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The charter establishing the ancestor of the current council is dated 27 April 1613. A report was to Committee and agreed in November 2012.
1.2	Officers have been progressing Committee's decisions and this report updates members on this work. The Events Unit is delivering a themed programme at Easter based in City Hall and it, and other Council units have working in collaboration with the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit. An outline of the Events programme is Appendix 2. This includes an exhibition which looks at Belfast's developing landscape from early prehistory up to the City Charter and boundary extension of 1892, which has the potential to tour.
1.3	On 24 January the Lord Mayor and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University launched the 'Belfast 400: People, Place and History'. Both launch and book have proved very successful.
1.4	It is also the case that engagement with the anniversary extends beyond Council and a number of major cultural institutions, as well as some smaller, are branding activity this year as 'Belfast 400'. These include the Lyric Theatre, Linen Hall Library and Kabosh theatre company. A special section of the Council website provides the opportunity to publicise related events. A number of the Community Festivals and Project funding applications currently being assessed also relate.
1.5	The Belfast Harbour Commissioners have accepted the 1613 date as marking the formal establishment of the port and have developed a programme and expressed a desire to work closely with Council. They are developing an outdoor exhibition along with landscaping in the currently derelict site just downstream from the Obel Tower, are opening the Harbour Office, running free

	boat tours and engaging with communities.
1.6	A further part of the Council process has been the development internally of a visual identity which might be used in connection with our own events, by partners and in the City Dressing programme. This draws on the imagery of the 1638 Le Squire seal, which is the earliest visualisation of the corporation arms, and to a lesser extent on a series of seventeenth century merchants' tokens, including one issued by the corporation. These connect very strongly with the theme of maritime heritage and provide a useful link to previous Easter Titanic events programmes. Sample images are in Appendix 3
1.7	An important part of this activity is a recognition that the commemoration relates as much to the City's future as to the past. There has been engagement with the Youth Forum which has set up a sub-group to look at the charter anniversary. With a new Youth Forum only meeting for the first time in December, time so far has been limited, but the sub-group is excited about the idea of delivering a citizenship project to schools in the Council Chamber through living history. It is hoped that financial support may be forthcoming from the Heritage Lottery's Young Roots fund.
1.8	A further key partnership is with the Ulster Society for Irish Studies, which is the main body representing professional historians in Northern Ireland. It is running an event on 16 March in the Waterfront Hall, presented as a 'history forum'. There is a distinguished group of speakers who will contextualise the events leading up to 1613 and after. The event is free to the public and it is hoped that it will stimulate frank discussion of the issues.
1.9	The proposed programme so far, with costs, is provided as Appendix 1.

2	Key Issues
2.1	A decision has yet to be made on how the actual date might be marked. Options are currently being considered for a celebratory event at the City Hall on 27 April 2013 and potentially linking with the proposed spring conference to launch the Masterplan.
2.2	Belfast is one of 40 towns across Ireland which got charters in the 1613 period and there is also the option of formally engaging with the current civic entities which represent these places. It does not now appear that the Ministerial Advisory Group for Ulster-Scots is proposing to play any co-ordinating role in relation to this.
2.3	It has also been suggested that some tangible souvenir beyond the Belfast 400 book be produced. One option might be a pewter reproduction of an impression of the first civic seal, the need for which is specifically mentioned in the charter.
2.4	Members will also be aware that a report was taken to committee on 20 November looking at the possibility of making relevant collections from National Museums Northern Ireland more widely available. Officers are continuing to scope opportunities to progress this exciting idea as part of the Belfast 400 programme.
2.5	The possibility of a devising a special display exhibiting the actual charter itself, along with the original mace, seal (to be borrowed from National Museums) and portrait of Sir Arthur Chichester (to be borrowed from Belfast Harbour Commissioners) is being investigated. The cost of this would be in the order of

	£25,000, include a specialist case and lighting with environmental control. The casing would have to meet the detailed specification of National Museums, but would be available subsequent to the anniversary year.
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	The elements of the programme to be delivered within the current financial year by the Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit will be delivered within current budgets and staffing.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	The programme has been compiled with the need to be inclusive and examine shared histories in mind.

5	Recommendations
	Members are asked to consider this report and; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree the programme as set out so far 2. Agree the visuals and their use in a City Dressing Campaign 3. Agree the budget, as set out in Appendix 1

6	Decision Tracking
	There is no decision tracking attached to this report.

7	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Proposed Programme Appendix 2 – Events Programme Appendix 3 – Sample images