



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Invitations to attend the 2009 Somme Pilgrimage and A Journey of Remembering
Date:	23rd January, 2009
Reporting Officer:	Mr. L. Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services
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Relevant Background Information

2009 Somme Pilgrimage

Correspondence has been received from the Somme Association enquiring if the Council would wish to be represented on the 2009 Pilgrimage to the Somme, France from 28th June until 2nd July, 2009. The Pilgrimage, to mark the 93rd Anniversary of the battle, will follow the route taken by the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions during their service in the First World War. Services of Commemoration will be held in both Thiepval and Guillemont, in addition to attendance at the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate, Ypres.

A Journey of Remembering

In addition, an invitation to attend "A Journey of Remembering" to Flanders from 6th until 8th March to hold a ceremony to honour Irish people who lost their lives in the war has been received from the Project Director of that organisation. The visit will include a Remembrance Ceremony at the Menin Gate, Ypres, based on the Last Post Ceremony which has been held at the Monument every evening at 8.00 p.m. since 1927, but will involve only people from both the North and South of Ireland. The following day an Inter-denominational Service will take place in the local Cathedral when Irish Clergy from all the main churches will officiate.

Key Issues

In previous years on the Anniversary of the battle, the Committee has authorised the attendance on the Somme tour of a representative of each of the Party Groupings on the Council. Members who have attended have found the event informative and worthwhile in that several of the ceremonial occasions were attended by many other dignitaries and officials, which afforded an opportunity for contacts to be made and relations to be developed on a range of topics and for the profile and image of Belfast to be promoted.

In October, 2007, the Committee approved the attendance of an All-Party Deputation at a Pathfinding Conference in Ypres, which had been organised by the Journey of Remembering organisation and, whilst those who had attended had found the event worthwhile, it was felt that it duplicated the event which was held by the Somme Association.

It should be noted that the Somme Pilgrimage tour coincides with the Council's own Somme Remembrance Ceremony as well as the monthly meeting of the Council on 1st July and accordingly Members who attend the Pilgrimage would be unable to be in attendance at those events.

Resource Implications

Financial

Somme Pilgrimage

The cost per person of attendance is approximately £580 plus the appropriate subsistence allowance, provision for which has been made within the Revenue Budget.

Journey of Remembering

The approximate cost of attending is £440 per person plus the appropriate subsistence allowance.

Human Resources

There are no Human Resource implications associated with this report.

Recommendations

Given the fact that the Council holds its own Somme Remembrance Service, that Services are held nationwide on Remembrance Sunday to remember all those who have suffered and died in conflict in the service of their country, that Members normally attend the Somme Pilgrimage to recognise the sacrifice of the 36th (Ulster) and 16th (Irish) Divisions and in view of the current economic downturn and the associated financial implications, the Committee is recommended to approve attendance on the Somme tour only of a representative of each of the Party Groupings on the Council and the Chief Executive (or his nominee) and authorise the payment of the appropriate travel and subsistence allowances in connection therewith.