



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Civic event to welcome home members of the Royal Irish Regiment and Irish Guards</b>
<b>Date:</b>	17 June 2011
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	<p>The Council at its meeting on 4 April 2011, agreed the following notice of motion:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“The City of Belfast extends a warm invitation to the military authorities to hold a ‘Homecoming Parade’ here in to order to welcome home members of the Royal Irish Regiment and Irish Guards on their safe return from their deployment in Afghanistan.”</p> <p>In addition, the Council agreed to host a reception in the City Hall to mark the event.</p> <p>Subsequent to the issue of the invitation, Commander Field Army responded on 21 April to the Chief Executive stating that due to “both the Royal Irish Regiment and the Irish Guards ...embarking on a very busy period of post operational duties...(and being) geographically dislocated with differing programmes of events (which could not) be disrupted, without infringing on the soldiers and officers taking their full complement of rest and recuperation...it is therefore with regret that...we will be unable to accept the kind and gracious offer made by Belfast City Council, but...offer our sincere thanks for your continued support”. This correspondence was followed up by Headquarters 38 (Irish) Brigade offering support to the Council to further progress discussions on the issue.</p>
1.2	<p>At the special meeting of the Council on 3 May 2011, it was noted that further correspondence had been received from Headquarters 38 (Irish) Brigade indicating that the military were willing to meet with Council representatives to discuss how the commitment of the Royal Irish Regiment and the Irish Guards on their return from Afghanistan could be honoured publicly by the Council.</p> <p>The matter was therefore deferred to enable discussions to be held between the military and Council officers and a report was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.</p>

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Consequent to that decision, officers have been in discussion with military representatives to discuss options for the homecoming event. At the outset, the military re-affirmed their position

that circumstances could not permit them to accept an invitation for a parade for the reasons previously articulated but were happy to explore a number of other options.

The military’s preference is for a “relatively static ceremonial event” that is memorable for both spectators and participants. The regiments can offer a number of event types: an inspection; a review; a mini-tattoo; or an event described by its musical title, e.g. Beating Retreat. Planning for any of these options would include a musical element, the event tailored to any chosen venue/location.

Their representatives are anxious that the event demonstrates the Council’s aspirations for an appropriate civic recognition, whilst at the same time acknowledging that this remains a sensitive issue within the city.

2.2 Based on these discussions, a number of issues have emerged in determining the optimum venue/location for the event:

- Appropriate stature for the event
- Sufficient scope for military event
- Accommodation for families and public to view the spectacle
- Sufficient facilities for civic reception
- Meets security requirements.

Any venue/location would require a detailed assessment by the Police Service NI in regard to security and public safety.

2.3 A number of options for the Council-owned venue/location have been discussed with military representatives. A brief appraisal is below:

Venue	Static display area/ parading area	Wider audience
<b>Malone House</b>	Hard standing within the perimeter fence at front of building for static display. Garden to south of building also available for static display. The sloping nature of lawn would be less satisfactory for an inspection or review.	Available viewing for general public would be severely restricted. Limited numbers (up to 350) for reception.
<b>Belfast Castle</b>	Parade limited to car park. Static area for musical displays in ornamental gardens. Castle as an attractive back-drop.	Available viewing for general public would be restricted. Little space to accommodate staged seating. Limited numbers (up to 350) for reception. There is a concern about entrance and egress for a large number of spectators.

Both locations provide satisfactory facilities to host a civic reception. Neither venue will be able to support a large-scale parade, inspection or review; the extensive grass areas would not be easily utilised for parading during autumn/winter months. Both offer hard standing which could facilitate some carefully planned pageantry.

It is the opinion of the military representatives that both of these options require significant compromise on the type/scope of the event, due to size and positioning of buildings/garden areas at the venues. This may fall short of public expectations.

2.4	<p>Given the limitations presented by Council-owned facilities, discussion also included non-Council owned venues, specifically the King’s Hall and the Mary Peters grounds. It was suggested that both of these options provided more flexibility and scope in terms of pageantry for an event, as well as provide a much larger capacity for the general public:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="264 501 1474 1043"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="264 501 523 568">Venue</th> <th data-bbox="523 501 826 568">Static display area/ parading area</th> <th data-bbox="826 501 1474 568">Wider audience</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="264 568 523 674"><b>RUAS Kings Hall</b></td> <td data-bbox="523 568 826 674">Yes – internal and external</td> <td data-bbox="826 568 1474 674">Larger venue to accommodate dignitaries, invited guests and the general public with accommodation for civic reception</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="264 674 523 1043"><b>Mary Peters grounds</b></td> <td data-bbox="523 674 826 1043">Yes</td> <td data-bbox="826 674 1474 1043">Larger venue which will accommodate greater numbers of dignitaries, invited guests and the general public. However there is no immediate provision for on-site catering which would require the transfer of invited guests to an alternative venue for a reception; this would either be Malone House or City Hall. Such a transfer would require additional logistical support in the form of coaches/buses which will incur additional cost and challenges regarding arrivals at the venue.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Further assessment is required but the military consider the King’s Hall as a potential viable alternative should the Council-owned facilities fail to sufficiently meet all the criteria in regard to public spectacle, offering both appropriate internal and external accommodation to facilitate a military pageant event and civic reception. It also provides the opportunity to maximise the impact for the general public within available resources.</p>	Venue	Static display area/ parading area	Wider audience	<b>RUAS Kings Hall</b>	Yes – internal and external	Larger venue to accommodate dignitaries, invited guests and the general public with accommodation for civic reception	<b>Mary Peters grounds</b>	Yes	Larger venue which will accommodate greater numbers of dignitaries, invited guests and the general public. However there is no immediate provision for on-site catering which would require the transfer of invited guests to an alternative venue for a reception; this would either be Malone House or City Hall. Such a transfer would require additional logistical support in the form of coaches/buses which will incur additional cost and challenges regarding arrivals at the venue.
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3.0	<b>Resource implications</b>
3.1	<p><b>Financial:</b> Will be determined by final choice of venue/location.</p> <p><b>Assets:</b> To be determined</p> <p><b>Human:</b> Officer time</p>

4.0	<b>Equality considerations</b>
4.1	There will be a differential impact in terms of Section 75 groups, particularly on the grounds of religious and political background. However, this event should be seen within the context of a programme of civic events which confer recognition on a diverse range of groups and organisations, reflecting the spectrum of Section 75 groups.

5.0	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	The Committee is requested to advise officers on their preferred location for the hosting of an event and civic reception, in order to welcome home members of the Royal Irish Regiment and Irish Guards on their safe return from their deployment in Afghanistan, which will allow for further scoping with military representatives and allow an approach to the PSNI in respect of a

	security and public safety assessment.
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6.0	<b>Officers to contact for further information</b>
6.1	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive (Ext. 6001)

7.0	<b>Documents attached</b>
	None

8.0	<b>Abbreviations</b>
	RUAS – Royal Ulster Agricultural Society