

**MEETING OF THE JOINT GROUP OF THE PARTY LEADERS
FORUM AND HISTORIC CENTENARIES WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of the Meeting of Friday, 13th January, 2012

Members present: Councillor Hendron (Chairman);
Aldermen Ekin and Rodgers; and
Councillors Attwood, Hanna, Kyle, Maskey,
McVeigh and Reynolds.

In attendance: Alderman Stalford;
Mr. P. McNaney, Chief Executive;
Mr. C. Quigley, Town Solicitor and
Assistant Chief Executive;
Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Ms. C. Wilson, Project Officer;
Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; and
Dr. D. Morrow, Independent Facilitator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Aldermen Browne and Newton.

It was noted that Alderman Stalford was attending on Alderman Newton's behalf.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd December, 2011 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th January.

Welcome to Dr. Duncan Morrow

The Chairman welcomed Dr. Duncan Morrow from the University of Ulster to the meeting of the Working Group. She reminded the Members that Dr. Morrow had been requested to assist the Group with its discussions over the next few months and that he would be in attendance at a number of future meetings.

Work Plan

The Working Group considered the undernoted report concerning the development of a Work Plan for the Council Diversity Strategy:

“1.0 Relevant Background Information

1.1 Members will be aware that SP&R Committee at its meeting on 18 November 2011 agreed:

‘that the Party Group leaders meet with the Centenaries Working Group over a defined period of time, as set out (in the report), to explore the possibility of developing a Council strategy on

diversity and agree that the Chief Executive's office liaise with Members to agree a timetable of meetings to be tabled at the first joint meeting of the Historic Centenaries Group.'

1.2 The Committee noted a range of issues relating to cultural diversity on which the Council will have to make decisions in the near future:

- memorabilia and displays in and around the City Hall
- Flying of the Union Flag EQIA
- the Decade of Centenaries programme, events, cultural displays in Council public facilities
- use of the Irish language
- Use of the Ulster-Scots language
- Use of minority ethnic languages
- How the Council deals with homecoming parades
- Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations
- and expressions of distinctiveness within local areas and neighbourhoods (i.e. including public art, signage and symbolism).

1.3 At the first meeting of the Joint Group, given that the Unionist Members had earlier withdrawn from the meeting, the Joint Group decided not to take any decisions in relation to the process for developing a Council Diversity Strategy and requested that the Chief Executive arrange for the next meeting of the Joint Group to focus on the establishment of a key set of principles in relation to the Diversity Strategy and that, in order to assist the Group in its discussions, the meeting be facilitated by Mr. Duncan Morrow from the Community Relations Council.

2.0 Key Issues

2.1 The purpose of this process is to develop a council strategy on diversity which would allow Council to approach all of the issues (listed at 1.2) in a consistent, fair and open manner.

2.2 It is proposed that the aim of the Joint Group is:

To develop and agree an overarching framework of principles as the basis for developing a Council 'Managing Diversity' strategy (*working title*).

The Joint Group will report, at the appropriate times to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

2.3 It is proposed that the Joint Group seeks to expand the principles already agreed by the Historic Centenaries Working Group and approved by SP&R Committee (Appendix 1), and their application to each of the issues listed above. This would enable the Council to develop an overarching framework of principles which, in turn, allows decisions to be made in a consistent, fair and open manner.

Following agreement on any enhancement to the current principles, consideration would need to be given to the political and organisational implications e.g. securing formal Council agreement; resources; staff training; policy development.

2.4 In order to facilitate this discussion, it is suggested that Members may wish to prioritise the issues listed at 1.2. This would be for a number of reasons:

- It will enable the Joint Group to systematically test the principles already agreed (Appendix 1) and their practical application in relation to the issues listed at 1.2;
- There are a number of applications seeking use of Council facilities during 2012, for which external organisations need appropriate notice e.g. Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland; Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The Joint Group will have to consider the applications in the context of the strategy development and provide timely advice to the relevant Committees;
- Members may request research papers to be compiled (internally and/or externally) for consideration e.g. expressions of distinctiveness within neighbourhoods, which will require preparation time;
- Some Members have already received a briefing on the City Hall Displays draft EQIA (arrangements need to be made to brief other parties, as requested) and it may be necessary to timetable a similar presentation on the Flying of the Union Flag draft EQIA;
- Draft policy positions will require a time-line to include public consultation, in line with the Council's Equality Scheme obligations.

It is proposed that Members identify the most pressing issues for early discussion and officers will prepare an ongoing work plan for the next 2 months.

2.5 At meetings of the Historic Centenaries Working Group, there is a common agreement that items will only be forwarded to the formal Committee system when there is cross-party consensus or an agreement to formally consider a range of options. The Joint Group might consider adopting a similar approach. Members also need to be confident that opinions expressed in the meetings will be treated under Chatham House rules.

3.0 Resource Implications

Human: None at present.

Financial: Costs for external facilitation will be covered within existing revenue budgets.

Assets: None at present.

4.0 Equality Implications

Any strategy would have to ensure compliance with existing legal requirements and Equality Commission guidelines and should aim to promote better community relations within the Council and the city.

5.0 Decisions required

1. To agree a prioritised list of issues for discussion
2. To agree the principle of consensus and Chatham House rules for the meetings

6.0 Officers to contact

Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager (Ext. 6020);
Caroline Wilson, Project Officer (Ext. 3399)

7.0 Appendix

Principles that might be used in selection of events to be marked in Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022 agreed by Centenaries Working Group 17th October, 2011 and by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee 21st October, 2011

Appendix

Principles that might be used in selection of events to be marked in the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022

(Agreed by Centenaries Working Group 17 October 2011 and by Strategic Policy & Resources Committee 21 October 2011)

The decade in question marks a number of particularly significant dates that have shaped the history of Northern Ireland and Ireland and therefore our own identities and cultures – see list previously circulated.

The marking of these events provides the Council with an excellent opportunity to broaden our understanding of the past and our respect for the complexity of our shared history.

As a shared city in the twenty-first century, we should be able to deal with difference in a positive and constructive manner, demonstrating openness on the basis of shared civic values within a democracy and a mature respect for cultural diversity within our heritage.

- **Events supported by the Council should provide opportunities to include a range of different perspectives and ideologies, rather than a single viewpoint, aiming to increase understanding and appreciation of other perspectives and identities**
- **They should be based on historic accuracy, robust academic expertise and critical analysis – engagement with universities, museums, libraries, PRONI etc is essential to ensure this evidence base**
- **The interpretation of events should be in a broad historical context and understanding of the national and European setting of the time**
- **The Council should develop strong links with other institutions – i.e. museums, libraries, PRONI and other relevant organisations, to ensure that there is no duplication and that events and programmes are complementary**
- **We will provide/support a range of different types of events – from lectures, discussions, debates to films, drama, activities that attract schools and children/families etc – so that events can not only be educational but participative, creative and enjoyable**
- **We will provide/support events and activities that are not exclusive¹ but are welcoming to all sections of our increasingly diverse community in Belfast**

This set of principles, if agreed, should be applied corporately to any key anniversaries being marked by the Council.”

The Chief Executive reminded the Members of the principles which had been established by the Centenaries Working Group when considering the selection of events to be marked during the period from 2012 to 2022 and suggested that these would be a good starting point for the Working Group in considering the establishment of its own principles in relation to the development of a Council Diversity Policy.

Dr. Morrow stated that his role on the Working Group was to facilitate a wide-ranging discussion and to assist the Members to examine whether there was a way in which a Council Diversity Policy could be agreed amongst the various Political Parties. In order to assist with this discussion, he suggested that it would be useful for the Members of the Working Group to indicate what they hoped to achieve in relation to the discussions; to establish a set of principles that would guide the work of the Group and to agree rules to inform the debate and the reporting of proceedings so as to assist the Group towards its overall aim of establishing a Diversity Policy.

¹ The Council, committed both to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations in the City, will not support events or activities that could be deemed to be triumphalist, to deepen or harden existing divisions, or belittle or demonise other groups. (Adapted from the Irish School of Ecumenics, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism* research)

The Members of the Working Group each stated their expectations of the Work Programme and what they hoped to achieve at the end of the process.

Noted.

Rules of Debate and Reporting of Proceedings

Following discussion, the Working Group agreed that the minutes of the proceedings of its meetings should be concise and focus on the decisions taken. The Working Group acknowledged that Members would be entitled to discuss the broad range of issues outside of Working Group meetings but agreed that any specific discussions or comments made at the meeting by individual Members would not be discussed outside of the meetings themselves.

The Working Group agreed also that the issues discussed would only be brought to the attention of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee where there was consensus and agreement on the way forward or where decisions were time-bound due to the date when events were due to take place. It was agreed that a full report on the Working Group's proceedings would be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee after 2nd March, 2012.

Priorities for Consideration by the Working Group

The Working Group agreed that in its forward work plan the following matters were to be prioritised:

- the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations
- the Equality Impact Assessment on the flying of the Union flag
- the Equality Impact Assessment on displays in City Hall
- an update report on the celebration of the Decade of Centenaries
- a report on a suitable means for the Council to mark the ending of "Operation Banner"

Use of the City Hall for an Event to Mark the Centenary of the Signing of the Ulster Covenant

The Good Relations Manager reported that an application for the Use of the City Hall for an event in April, 2012 in relation to the Centenary of the Signing of the Ulster Covenant had been received from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

The Working Group noted the information and agreed that any applications for the Use of the City Hall should be dealt with in the normal way and be subject to the existing Council policy on the use of the building and the principles already agreed by the Historic Centenaries Working Group.

**Exhibition for the Signing of the Ulster Covenant
and the Home Rule Crisis**

The Good Relations Manager reminded the Working Group that the Council had previously agreed on a programme of key events in relation to the Decade of Centenaries. The programme would be divided into three strands in chronological order, namely 1912 - 1914; 1914 - 1918; and 1918 - 1922. As part of the first strand, the Council had agreed that a major exhibition would be commissioned on the signing of the Ulster Covenant and the Home Rule Crisis and covering a number of agreed individual events within that period. The East Entrance area of the City Hall had been booked for the exhibition which would run from August till December, 2012.

The Good Relations Manager stated that the Council had set aside a sum of £25,000 towards the cost of this exhibition. She stated also that a grant of up to £20,000 was available from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister which brought the available budget to £45,000. However, an exhibition at that cost would now mean that a tendering process would need to be entered into in relation to the Exhibition contract. She sought the Working Group's authority to proceed with the issue of tender documents and requested that the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor be authorised to accept the most advantageous offer received in line with general delegated authority.

The Working Group agreed to this course of action and delegated authority to the Assistant Chief Executive to accept the most advantageous tender received.

Chairman