



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Request to use the City Hall to mark the centenary of the Signing of the Solemn League and Covenant from the Unionist Centenary Committee
Date:	Wednesday, 25 April, 2012
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext 6314)
Contact Officer:	Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer (ext. 6316)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group, at its meeting on 13 January, 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 also the principles already agreed by the Historic Centenaries Working Group which are attached as Appendix 1.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The Unionist Centenary Committee have submitted an application form requesting the use of the City Hall to hold an event entitled 'A historical re-enactment of the Centenary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant' on 29 September, 2012.
2.2	<p>The purpose of this re-enactment is to recreate the events of the day on which the Signing of the Ulster Covenant took place. It is proposed that the event will take the following format:</p> <p>9.00am - 250 people in period costume will parade with a band from the Ulster Hall to the City Hall</p> <p>9.30am - Arrival at the City Hall where 30 people will enter the building to re-enact the Signing of the Ulster Covenant while a further 100 will be invited to enter the building to view the re-enactment.</p> <p>10.30am – Event concludes</p> <p>The organisers have also requested the use of the 'Covenant table' for the re-enactment.</p>
2.3	The event aims to 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. The re-

	enactment will be preceded by an introductory talk which will aim to outline the events which took place in the City Hall, elsewhere in Ulster, the United Kingdom and across the world. The event will seek to draw on the reaction of those events from the different perspectives which existed at the time, both pro and against. This will include editorial and political comment at the time. The re-enactment also aims to be an educative event and will include brief pen histories of some of the signatories which will seek to increase the understanding of the breadth and range of support for the Ulster Covenant.
2.4	The organisers have confirmed that the event will be based on historic accuracy, robust academic expertise and critical analysis. It will do this by gaining input from the historians and academics, such as Gordon Lucy the author and compiler of the book entitled "The Ulster Covenant: a Pictorial History". His advice is deemed critical in ensuring the event is accurately portrayed and that the historical context is captured.
2.5	The organisers are seeking to ensure that the event is non-exclusive and welcoming to all sections of the community in Belfast by inviting the Lord Mayor, all members of Belfast City Council's Good Relations Partnership, the leaders of the Unionist Political Parties, the Churches, Loyal Orders, representatives of the government and the Irish government, representatives from a cross section of churches and minority ethnic communities. The organisers also plan to produce a visual record of the event as well as liaise with the BBC in respect of being able to broadcast the live event from within the City Hall to the 'Big Screen' in the grounds of the City Hall.
2.6	Based on the information received, the application appears to satisfy both the criteria on the use of the City Hall and the principles agreed by the Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group on 13 January.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	n/a

4	Equality Implications
4.1	<p>The Council has agreed that the Decade of Centenaries provides an opportunity for groups and individuals to obtain a better understanding of the past and to promote respect for the complexity of our shared history.</p> <p>If this event is undertaken as described by the organisers and outlined above, in a non-exclusive and welcoming manner, it would have positive implications in terms of the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations.</p>

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is recommended to grant the use of the City Hall for the event as detailed above on 29 September, 2012.

6	Decision Tracking
Officers responsible:	

Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer March 2012
--

7	Key to Abbreviations
n/a	

8	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 : Principles agreed by the Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group	