



Belfast City Council

Report to	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Armed Forces Day
Date:	24th May, 2013
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Officer (Ext 6314)
Contact Officer:	

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Committee is reminded that in 2009, 2010 and 2011 the Council considered requests from the Ministry of Defence for the Council to fly the Armed Forces Day flag for a week leading up to the Armed Forces Day itself.
1.2	In those three years the Council agreed, in accordance with existing Council policy, that the request to fly the Armed Forces flag at the City Hall be acceded to but that the approval be for one day only.
1.3	In 2012, due to the fact that a request to fly the Armed Forces Flag was not received until June, a Special Meeting of the Council was requisitioned on 21st June and it was agreed to fly the Armed Forces Flag for the period from 25th June till 30th June.
1.4	It is worth pointing out that there has not been a consensus on this matter between the political parties represented on the Council.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 23rd April 2010, agreed that it did not wish to establish a policy position on the Armed Forces Day flag to allow requests to be acted upon without annual reference to the Committee but rather agreed that each request received be dealt with annually on an individual basis.

2.2	A letter has been received from the Chief of the Defence Staff requesting that the Council consider the way in which it might demonstrate its support for the Armed Forces. In the letter, it is recognised that the flying of the Armed Forces Day flag for the week commencing 24th June and ending on Armed Forces Day itself on Saturday 29th June presents more difficulty in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom, and it is suggested that the Council consider a range of ways in which its support for the Armed Forces might be demonstrated, including the flying of the Armed Forces Flag.
2.3	The Committee is reminded that the existing Council policy on the flying of flags allows for flags other than the Union Flag to be flown on specific occasions. For example, the Cross of St. Patrick is flown on 17 March, the European Union Flag is flown on Europe Day on 9 May and the Red Ensign is flown on National Merchant Navy Day on 3 September each year.
2.4	<p>If the Council were to deal with the request in the same way as in previous years, then the options would be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to accede to the request from the Ministry of Defence for the Armed Forces Flag to be flown at the City Hall for the period from 24th till 29th June; or 2. in line with the decision taken in 2009, 2010 and 2011, to accede to the request but to limit the period during which the flag will be flown to the Armed Forces Day itself, that is, 29th June; or 3. to refuse the request.
2.5	Alternatively, the Council might wish to consider demonstrating its support for the Armed Forces by the organisation of an Event on 29th June.
2.6	It is recognised that this request may need to be discussed within political parties before a final decision is made and that there has not been much time for that to happen. The Committee might find it useful to defer making a decision on the matter until the Annual Council meeting on 3rd June to permit those discussions to take place.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	None.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	The request is in the process of being Equality Screened by Denise Wheatley, who prepared the equality impact report for flags, and this will either be circulated in advance of the Committee meeting or tabled at the meeting, depending upon when it is received.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is requested to either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. decide if and in what manner it wishes to support the Armed Forces day in 2013, or2. defer consideration of the matter until the Annual Council meeting on 3rd June to allow the political parties on the Council time to consider it in more detail.

6	Decision Tracking
<p>Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager</p> <p>June, 2013</p>	

7	Documents Attached
<p>Appendix 1 – Letter from General Sir David Richards GCB CBE ADC, General Chief of the Defence Staff.</p>	