



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Wreath-laying at the Cenotaph
Date:	24 August 2012
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	At a meeting of the Joint Group of Party Group Leaders Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group, there was preliminary discussion on the arrangements relating to the laying of wreaths at the Cenotaph. This has arisen in relation to a number of requests from Honorary Consuls to join the Remembrance Sunday ceremony.
1.2	There is a further matter in relation to unofficial wreath-laying at the Cenotaph. A second report will be brought to SP&R Committee in due course. This will also include criteria regarding requests for access to the Cenotaph and other related issues.

2.0	<u>Key Issues</u>
2.1	<p>The Cenotaph at City Hall is a focal point for paying respect and honouring the military dead of the two World Wars. The two main large scale public events hosted by the Council are the Somme Ceremony on 1 July and Remembrance Sunday in November; both are organised in association with the Royal British Legion.</p> <p>There appears to have been no formal criteria related to participants at the main ceremony and this 'custom and practice' has been established over the past 30/40 years. The only major change in the VIP wreath laying in this ceremony in recent years has been the inclusion of the Honorary Consul from Poland, because of the size of the Polish population in Belfast and the contribution of the Free Polish forces in the Second World War. In addition, in 2011, the First Minister attended to represent the NI Assembly for the first time.</p>
2.2	More recently, two new requests have been received by the Council. These are from the Honorary Consul of Malta and the Honorary Consul of St. Vincent & the Grenadines. Members should note that there are at least 30 Honorary Consuls in NI.
2.3	Given the civic importance of the Belfast event, the Joint Group reviewed current practice and how best to deal with new requests to lay additional wreaths. Officers advised the Joint Group that some preliminary discussion had taken place with the Royal British Legion (RBL) on the matter. The RBL had already written to the Council asking us to be mindful of the length of the current ceremony in view of the advanced age of the remaining veterans and members of the RBL.

2.4	<p>The Joint Group considered the new requests and noted the potential for further requests. They recognised the importance of the new Honorary Consuls, particularly in the context of the changing diversity of the city and promoting good relations.</p> <p>They also acknowledged that the ceremony is already quite long and is an extended period to be standing outdoors in winter months, particularly for older members of the RBL.</p>
2.5	<p>In recognition of both of these issues, the Joint Group is recommending to SP&R Committee that the current arrangements remain in place for invitations to the Honorary Consuls representing France, India, United States, Canada and Poland.</p>
2.6	<p>In order to accommodate new requests, the Joint Group recommend that a <u>single</u> additional invitation is issued to the other Honorary Consuls. It is proposed that this will be on a strictly rotational basis, ensuring all Consuls are fairly treated, and the attending Honorary Consul will be asked to lay a wreath on behalf of all of the other Honorary Consuls in Northern Ireland (i.e. on behalf of those not included above at 2.5).</p> <p>It is proposed that invitations for 2012 and 2013 are extended to the Honorary Consul of Malta and the Honorary Consul of St. Vincent & the Grenadines in the order of their written requests as received by Council; and in alphabetical order thereafter. Should an Honorary Consul choose not to take up the invitation, it will be passed onto the next on the list, time permitting.</p>
2.7	<p>Any further new requests to lay wreaths at either the Remembrance Ceremony or the Somme Ceremony will be brought to Committee for their consideration.</p> <p>It is anticipated that any new arrangements will be in place in readiness for this year's Remembrance Day ceremony.</p>

3.0	Resource Implications
None	

4.0	Equality Implications
This policy revision has been screened and there are no adverse impacts for any S75 group.	

5.0	Discussion required
<p>Committee is asked to agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the new arrangements for issuing invitations for the Remembrance Ceremony to Honorary Consuls; - any further new requests are brought to Committee for consideration. 	

6.0	Officers to contact
<p>Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager (Ext. 6020).</p> <p>Caroline Wilson, Project Officer (Ext. 3399)</p>	