MEETING OF DIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

Thursday, 3rd December, 2015

Members present: Councillor Dudgeon (Chairperson); Aldermen Kingston and Rodgers; and Councillors Beattie, Hussey, Hutchinson, Long and McAllister.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive; Mr. G. Wright; Head of Facilities Management; Ms. N. Lane, Good Relations Manager; Mr. S. McCrory, Democratic Services Manager; Ms. S. Robinson, Lord Mayor’s Personal Assistant Mr. D. Robinson, Good Relations Officer; Miss. K. Treanor, Lead Communicator; and Miss. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th November were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Decade of Centenaries – Update

The Group was informed of the work which was currently being undertaken in relation to the Decade of Centenaries. The Good Relations Manager summarised the report which included the ongoing development of the planned exhibition, its launch on 7th March, 2016 and the proposed programme of events to be delivered by the Council throughout 2016.

She advised that the agreed content to be included in the 1916 exhibition was being developed by Redhead Conference and Exhibition and that the approved content was at the final research and write-up stage.

She provided an update on the proposed launch of the exhibition “Belfast; Reflections on 1916” on the 7th March, 2016, at 7.00pm in the City Hall. She advised that this would be an opportunity for the Council to formally launch its programme of events and activities for the Decade of Centenaries in a positive way – in keeping with the principles that the Council set out in 2011. She explained that any speakers that would be booked for the launch would also be chosen in-line with these principles and that the ‘dramatic re-enactment’ outlined in the proposal would be a theatre piece on the wider themes of the exhibition and would not be based on one actual event.
Meeting of Diversity Working Group,
Thursday, 3rd December, 2015

The Group was also informed that the proposed Civic Dinner, to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising, was at the early planning stage and that details would be submitted to the Working Group in due course.

After discussion, the Group noted the contents of the report and agreed to the planned work as outlined in the report in relation to the 1916 exhibition, agreed the proposed programme of the launch of the exhibition on 7th March 2016 and the draft proposals for the programme of events to be delivered throughout 2016 on the key events from 1916.

Belfast Blitz – Commemorations

The Good Relations Manager provided an update on the potential activities to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Belfast Blitz.

The Working Group was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd November, had agreed that it would seek to erect a smaller-scale memorial within the grounds of the City Hall and that officers would seek to discuss the feasibility of external funders, such as the Northern Ireland War Memorial, contributing towards the costs associated with the erection of a memorial within the grounds of the City Hall.

It was reported that the NI War Memorial had written to the Chief Executive advising the Council that they had begun exploring costs for a permanent memorial at Belfast City Hall, subject to the council facilitating and supporting the bureaucratic requirements.

The Good Relations Manager also outlined that, as part of the of initiatives to mark the 75th anniversary of the Blitz, the Council had also been asked by the Ulster Historical Society to consider purchasing copies of “The Belfast Blitz: The City in the War Years” by local author Brian Barton to distribute to each secondary school in Belfast, which would cost approximately £700.

After discussion, the Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that:

1. council officers meet the NI War Memorial Representatives to discuss the possibility of them funding a permanent Blitz memorial in the grounds of Belfast City Hall; and

2. it purchase and gift copies of “The Belfast Blitz; the City in the War Years” to each secondary school in Belfast.

Proposed Moving of Stained-Glass Windows

Members were reminded that at the Diversity Working Group meeting on the 5th December, 2014 a number of changes to the locations of existing and planned stained-glass windows had been agreed, namely:-
(a) the Celtic Myths and Legends window be relocated from its current position on the west front corridor to the east end of the corridor in City Hall; 
(b) the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) window would then be relocated to the space vacated by the Celtic Myths and Legends window; and 
(c) The new Women’s window scheduled for installation in February 2016 be installed in the space vacated by the UDR window.

The Head of Facilities Management advised that Alpha Glass had recently been asked to look at the feasibility of removing and relocating both the Celtic, Myths and Legends and the UDR windows to give effect to the above changes. He advised that they had subsequently reported back and highlighted a number of difficulties and concerns around moving either window:

- the stained glass would have to be removed from both windows to allow the frames to be removed from the aperture;
- the stained glass, which had been bonded to the frames and the lead structure with special weather proof putty, had not been designed to be removed;
- additional framing would have to be manufactured for each window to allow the stained glass to be re-inserted; and
- the company had also stressed it would be virtually impossible to remove either window without some of the stained glass being broken.

He reported that Alpha Glass had emphasised that both windows had been designed to be in place permanently and highlighted that in order to remove the Celtic Myths and Legends window, alterations to some of the exterior Portland stone and internal plasterwork would be required. He advised that the cost and the potential for damage would be quite substantial and that the move may also result in some difficulties with obtaining approval from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

In light of all of the aforementioned issues, the Head of Facilities Management suggested the following options for the Group to consider:

1. to proceed as originally agreed on 5th December, 2014 in the knowledge that there was potential for some damage to both windows and works needed to the fabric of the building;
2. to adopt a least-risk approach which would see all existing windows remain in situ with the incoming Women’s window to be positioned in the spare aperture on the East corridor;
3. to proceed with option (2) above but in addition to move the double doors on the west corridor back so that the UDR window was brought
within the public area of the building along with the Army and RUC windows.
After discussion, the Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that Option 1 be taken forward as outlined, as this was in keeping with the original council decision.

The Working Group also agreed that the reports regarding the mechanism for changing any element of the City Hall Memorabilia Project be re-circulated to the Party Group Leaders and that the item be placed on the agenda for a Budget and Transformation Panel.

In addition, the Working Group noted that, following on from the Council's decision of 1st October under the item 'City Hall Memorabilia – Update', RedHead Conference and Exhibition were compiling a comprehensive reports pack on the City Hall Memorabilia Project for publication on the internet.

**Publication of Reports and Minutes - Cllr Dudgeon to raise**

A discussion took place on the publication of working group reports. It was reported that all Working Groups were based on the same overarching principle and they are not decision making bodies. It was pointed out that the Minutes of the Diversity Working Group have been brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval, therefore, the content of each meeting was available for the Public to view. The Working Group was also advised that any reports on issues of significance were submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as separate agenda items and were available for public viewing.

The Working Group agreed that the current publishing process of the Working Group agenda reports should remain unchanged.

**Request to Present – Foras na Gaeilge**

With the permission of the Chairperson, the Chief Executive advised that a request had been received from Foras na Gaeilge to present to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee regarding the guidelines that they had produced to support councils when addressing issues relating to the Irish language and to inform them on issues associated with Irish in the context of the formation of the new Councils.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed that the request should be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration, and that the Committee should also consider inviting the Ulster Scots Agency to present as part of the discussion.

Chairperson