



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Culture and Arts Unit Update
Date:	13 May 2009
Reporting Officer:	Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, ext 3470
Contact Officer:	Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

### Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the Culture and Arts Unit brings regular progress reports to Members. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of progress with respect to:

1. Celebration in 2013 of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter
2. Update on Lyric Theatre

### Key Issues

#### 1. Celebration in 2013 of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter

The town of Belfast was formerly established by the grant of a charter by James I on 27 April 1613. This is a crucial date in the City's history and the Council may consider marking the anniversary in a suitable manner and enabling citizens to join in celebrating a shared history.

The establishment of civic governance (including the establishment of a Corporation), political representation and the regulation of markets through charters was a crucial part of the process.

The 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2013 is only four years away and, should the Council decide to celebrate the anniversary, there will be a need to set up a clear process to ensure good planning, maximum effectiveness and use of resources to establish greatest benefit. This is an opportunity to address perceptions and sensitivities through shared learning and activity using a 'Good Relations' approach, i.e., allowing a process of consultation and learning. Engagement in such a process will allow Belfast to take ownership of its history, provide regional leadership and bring in the best expertise, both locally and internationally.

A number of towns across Northern Ireland received charters in 1613, including Limavady, Coleraine and Strabane and there is an opportunity for Belfast to work positively on the commemoration with a range of the new Councils post RPA.

The celebration would also provide an excellent opportunity to establish partnerships with key relevant statutory agencies.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is actively engaged in a related research programme and is eager to work with the Council in the delivery of a symposium. NIEA is already collaborating on a book, due to be published within the current financial year, dealing with the history of Belfast from an archaeological perspective. Queen's University Belfast is also investigating a major multi-author publication associated with the 1613 anniversary.

To establish process, it is proposed that a symposium be held on 4-5 November 2009 in the Ulster Hall. The programme will include five leading speakers. Several leading academics from the USA, Great Britain and Ireland have indicated a willingness to participate. These include representatives from the native community in Virginia USA, the leading expert on sixteenth and seventeenth century colonisation in the north Atlantic world ,(who has a book on the subject in the press and has worked both in the US and Northern Ireland) and a local professor specialising in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The topics of urbanisation and public perceptions of history will also be considered.

A full costing for the symposium will be brought to the June Committee meeting.

## 2. Update on Lyric Theatre

As Members will be aware, at the Council meeting on December 2007 the Lyric Theatre was awarded £1.25 million towards its capital development through the Cultural Legacy Fund. The cost of the capital project is £17.8 million, of which over 95% has already been raised, with the aim to source the final 5% whilst the theatre is being built. It is notable that nearly £4 million of the total has been raised from private funds/non public agencies. Since being awarded the grant, the Lyric has been liaising with Belfast City Council and has provided updates on a regular basis. From December 2008 to present, the Lyric has focused on a number of key areas including design development, business planning, value engineering, stakeholder consultation, site clearance, enabling works and fundraising. The Lyric project is subject to the Government's Gateway Review Programme and all key stages in the capital programme have to be signed off by their investment decision makers. The Lyric has successfully completed a 'level 3' health check.

On Monday 9 March 2009 construction work started on the new build with an estimate of 96 weeks until completion, with the build due to be finished in early 2011. Since the Lyric has been closed, three productions have toured Northern Ireland and they have also developed an Education and Outreach programme which has been piloted in schools and communities throughout Belfast and Northern Ireland.

## **Resource Implications**

Proposed activity will be resourced from within the Culture and Arts Unit current staffing and allocated budget.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members:

1. Agree in principle to the hosting of a symposium to be held on 4 and 5 November 2009, to engage a wide range of stakeholders in an informed discussion about mechanisms for the commemoration in 2013, as well as addressing issues of colonisation in the Atlantic world, urbanisation and the myths and reality of our past, subject to a full costing being presented at the June Committee.
2. Grant permission to approach other Councils whose towns also received their charters in 2013 with a view to possible collaborations.
3. To note the update on the Lyric Theatre.

**Decision Tracking**

Action:

1. A full budget breakdown of costs for the proposed symposium for the Celebration in 2013 of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Belfast's First Charter will be brought to the June Committee meeting.

Timeframe: June 2009    Reporting Officer: Shirley McCay.

**Abbreviations**

RPA – Review of Public Administration.

**BLANK PAGE**