

Reflecting the People

a City Hall for the 21st century

FIRST DRAFT REPORT

Prepared for Belfast City Council by

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- Appendix 1** Brainstorming Session for Members – Responses
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared in response to the expressed need of Belfast City Council's Memorabilia Working Group (MWG) to develop ways in which the City Hall, as a public building, might portray a 'more balanced' representation of both the contemporary make-up of the Council and, by extension, the citizens that it serves.
- 1.2 This has emanated from a questioning of the image that is communicated by the Council as a consequence of both the historic fabric of the building and the objects it displays; perceived by some to be primarily Unionist. The extent to which this perception is valid and whether or not it merits significant redress has been discussed at length within the MWG; the differing views and proposed remedies tending to be related to the political background of Members.
- 1.3 In attempting to create a situation where there can be 'buy-in' from all political hues and where the practical outworking of proposals can be meaningful where they interface with the general public, a context and a plan of action (see section 8) have been developed. This attempts to address the need to counter the current perceived dominant 'characteristics' of the City Hall and to provide for 'additional' cultural expression which validates those coming from other backgrounds.
- 1.4 The plan advocates a gradual and long term approach which is based upon adherence to good practice in cultural diversity and which has inclusivity at its core. It aims to bring about an inclusive engagement with the City Hall by its citizens which is supported by political leadership and facilitation. It proposes much more than a supplementation to the bricks and mortar of the building but rather the creation of a programme of activity which signals to the community that they can be proud to have at the centre of their civic life 'A City Hall for All'.

2. HISTORICAL and ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

- 2.1 In 1888, Queen Victoria gave Belfast the title of city and, in due course, it was agreed that a new city hall was needed to reflect this change in status. Negotiations to acquire the one and a half acre White Linen Hall site, located in Donegall Square in central Belfast, began in 1896. The new hall was designed by Alfred Brumwell Thomas and built by local firm H&J Martin. Funding for the building was raised from the profits of Belfast Gasworks for which Belfast Corporation (now Belfast City Council) was responsible. The first stone was laid in 1898 and building work was completed eight years later.
- 2.2 Belfast City Hall opened its doors on 1 August 1906 during a time of great prosperity for the city. Today, the magnificent building is a lasting memorial to Belfast's success and a great source of civic pride.

Renovation and re-opening of City Hall

- 2.3 Belfast City Hall celebrated its centenary in 2006 and has recently undergone a major renovation. It re-opened its doors to the public in October 2009. The occasion was marked by an opening festival which aimed to represent and appeal to the diversity of communities and cultural perspectives within the city. The programme entitled 'A City Hall for All' included a celebration of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, Samhain, the Celtic harvest festival, and special evenings dedicated to the Irish language and Ulster Scots. The inclusion of a café within the renovated building has resulted in an influx of visitors to the City Hall and an impressive 17,260 participated in conducted tours between 17 October and 31 December 2009.

The Building

- 2.4 Inevitably, due to the historic ethos prevailing at the time it was built and the political environment for some time following, the fabric of the building in terms of memorabilia, portraiture etc is primarily reflective of a Unionist political culture. Recent additions to the building such as stained glass windows on the subjects of the Irish Famine and the Belfast Dockers' Strike and a commissioned bust of Mary Ann McCracken (philanthropist, social reformer and sister of the United Irishman, Henry Joy McCracken), have gone some way towards broadening the content of the physical infrastructure. However, it is felt by some that the building is still not reflective of all communities and that this must be addressed in a planned way.

Creating Additional Perspectives

- 2.5 Based upon a period of research and consultation, the report outlines possible mechanisms by which the City Hall might, in a creative and practical way, reflect the life and experience of its citizens and play a proactive part in furthering the Council's contribution to a vibrant, inclusive and optimistic civic society.

3. DEVELOPING A NEW APPROACH

Past, Present and Future

- 3.1 The refurbishment and re-opening of Belfast City Hall has provided an opportunity to reassess the functioning and presentation of the building as a place where citizens of the city can feel an echo of their own history and identity and where they can feel comfortable and 'at home'. There is also a need to engage with the present and to explore what the future may hold for Belfast. A combination of looking back, reflecting on contemporary culture and exploring ideas for shaping the future could generate a programme of activity which would position the City Hall as a key player in the cultural life of the city.

Memorabilia Working Group

- 3.2 The Memorabilia Working Group has been providing leadership in this area and has been addressing ways in which the diverse landscape of civic life, both past and present, can be represented within the City Hall. The appointment of a specialist independent Advisory Panel in 2002 generated a wide range of ideas. In recent meetings, further short term, medium term and long term possibilities have been proposed and discussed. These have included:

- the 'hiring in' of existing and relevant exhibitions from Belfast cultural organisations
- the initiation of themed exhibitions by the Council which are inclusive in content and have a resonance for the community
- the organisation of a series of lectures and debates to accompany exhibitions
- the commissioning of new artworks to address under-representation in relation to cultural heritage and tradition, gender, young people, ethnic minority, working class people
- borrowing work from the Ulster Museum (National Museums Northern Ireland) and the conditions that would have to be met if this proved possible
- the development of an exhibition policy in relation to incoming and self-initiated exhibitions
- interpretation in relation to historic portraits and other artefacts within City Hall (e.g. the Covenant Table)
- the importance of communicating and generating ideas by way of a brainstorming session with other Council members (took place in November 2009)

Contemporary Cultural Life

- 3.3 The desire to reflect contemporary cultural life in Belfast and to showcase the work of the many cultural groups and organisations (across arts, heritage and sport) some of which the Council has been financially supporting over the years has also been highlighted.

Need for Forward and Operational Planning

- 3.4 The need for a rationale to underpin and broaden these initiatives and a forward and operational plan to support their implementation is required. The way forward proposed within this report has built on discussions and suggestions to date and has involved:

- further and broader consultation with Council members to ensure representative views and 'fit' with the needs of specific communities
- the creation of a rationale and set of principles to underpin a future programme
- an audit of the City Hall spaces where material could be displayed
- proposals in relation to the development of 'content' (exhibitions, lecture series, debates, performing arts events, films, readings etc) which is diverse and inclusive, integrates a range of cultural perspectives and is accessible, of high quality and of interest and relevance to local citizens
- development of appropriate themes and integration with other relevant 'public facing' initiatives that the Council may be undertaking
- continued exploration of additional exhibition available from libraries, museums and other relevant institutions
- an exploration of relevant policies in relation to exhibition etc
- the development of commissioning briefs in relation to new artworks
- the creation of an appropriate decision-making framework by which programme content and initiatives can be assessed and agreed
- suggestions as to how the programme would be marketed and promoted
- suggestions as to how the 'new approach' would be communicated to internal staff and the establishment of working groups if deemed necessary
- an approximation of the resources required to support the forward plan including training, where appropriate
- an articulation of roles and responsibilities in relation to implementation.

4. THE VIEWS of COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 4.1 Crucial to the process underlying the creation of this plan are the views of elected representatives. Consultation with Members involved both a brainstorming meeting held on 30 November 2009, attended by 23 Councillors and facilitated by Dr Duncan Morrow, Director of the Community Relations Council, and a series of consultations with individual Councillors carried out by Maureen Mackin.

Brainstorming Meeting

- 4.2 The decision to hold a brainstorming meeting was a recommendation from the MWG. It was felt that there should be discussion with Councillors to ascertain where their priorities lay in relation to prospective themes and approaches to development and an invitation was issued to all Members to attend.
- 4.3 Prior to the commencement of the brainstorming session, Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager, outlined and contextualised the work of the MWG. She related how, as a result of an equality complaint, an independent advisory panel on City Hall memorabilia had been set up in 2002 and that all of the Council's work on memorabilia since that time had been based on the recommendations of that panel, namely, to aim to achieve a better balance and more inclusive interpretation of the history and heritage of the city. This included the view that there should be better acknowledgement of the contribution of the working class, women and minority communities in the life of Belfast. Several actions had been commissioned between 2003 and 2007 including: renaming of the Committee rooms, commissioning of the bust of Mary Ann McCracken, the *No Mean City* exhibition and the Dockers' Strike Centenary window.
- 4.4 In December 2008, in advance of the re-opening of the City Hall, the MWG had been re-established as a cross-party reference group and was continuing as the forum where discussion and actions in relation to City Hall memorabilia and the building's perceived ethos were being addressed. She explained that the purpose of the brainstorming session was to collate ideas and suggestions from a wider group and to use the opportunity to move towards a more favourable balance of artefacts. She outlined that, following the meeting, a report would then be submitted to the Memorabilia Working Group and, thereafter, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in the normal manner.
- 4.5 During the session, Members were asked to consider three questions:
1. **What does 'A City Hall for All' mean?**
 2. **What specific ideas do Members have for action?**
 3. **What in the process makes Members nervous /what are their fears?**
- 4.6 The opening discussion pointed to the need for the City Hall to be:
- reflective of all sections of the community
 - balanced, welcoming and cherishing of people's backgrounds
 - meaningfully representative, avoiding tokenism
 - informed by the cross-community work that is going on across the city

- 4.7 The need to explore history in an inclusive way, to celebrate notable Belfast citizens, to reflect the wide-ranging cultural life of the city and to instil a sense of confidence was emphasised. There was an honest review and analysis of how the Council is perceived externally and Members expressed deep-felt opinions as to what they regarded as priorities as well as what they feared. Overall, the meeting was positive and signalled a desire for change based upon mutual respect. Members discussed the challenges that this would entail but there was general agreement that there appeared to be consensus in relation to about 90-95% of their suggestions (see Appendix 1 for full list of suggestions). The flag issue was regarded as a subject which would need to be treated separately.

Meetings with Individual Councillors

- 4.8 Meetings with Members gave rise to a related set of suggestions which included: the need to fully 'interpret' what is already in place within City Hall, through the provision of labelling and other printed material; ideas for exhibitions; additional art commissions; the need to explore and present the Irish, English and Scottish dimensions of the city and to provide opportunities for young people and ethnic minorities; and the need to explain the historical and political context around key events (see Appendix 2 for the full list of suggestions).
- 4.9 All Members acknowledged the challenges inherent within a shift from a position where the 'fabric' and 'ethos' of the building may be acceptable to some and not others and where moving towards what would be regarded as a more balanced environment would take time and would have to be undertaken with sensitivity and adherence to sound principles of equality.

5. PRINCIPLES for SHARED SPACE and PROGRAMMING

5.1 Belfast City Council is of the view that the City Hall is a key shared space. The MWG in considering the display of art and artefacts agreed that the major public areas of the City Hall should be kept free of any permanent memorabilia that could be construed as being partisan in nature. It also agreed that temporary exhibitions or installations in these public areas and function rooms should be permitted to allow for diversity of expression e.g. exhibitions of cultural traditions or sport, which might include emblems. However, as has been mentioned earlier, the extent to which the current ambience of the City Hall can be regarded as a 'neutral' environment has been challenged by some Members. The task now is to work towards a 'balancing' which is acceptable to all.

5.2 Council research suggests that the principles underlying a shared space should be that it is:

Welcoming – where people feel secure to take part in unfamiliar interactions and experience an overall sense of shared experience and community

Accessible – well-connected in terms of transport and pedestrian links within a network of similar spaces across the city and managed to promote maximum participation by all communities

Good Quality – offers attractive, high quality unique services and well-designed buildings and spaces

Safe – for all persons and groups and trusted by both locals and visitors

These principles build on those advocated by the Community Relations Council in its *Guidelines for a Cultural Diversity Policy* (2001) and referred to in 5.7 and 5.8 in relation to the design and implementation of events.

5.3 In adhering to the many aspects of the above principles, there is now an opportunity for the Council to enhance the overall sense of shared experience and community involvement, to promote maximum participation by all communities and to provide access to attractive, high quality and unique services in relation to the City Hall. The potential nature of these opportunities will be discussed later in this report.

Principles underpinning this Action Plan

5.4 The role of the MWG has been to address the 'cultural ethos' of the City Hall as it pertains to its artefacts including paintings, military plaques, flags, spaces for display, positioning of objects, the commissioning of new artworks and interpretative material including exhibitions. As mentioned previously, in considering 'how to achieve a more balanced and inclusive display which represents all aspects of former and contemporary life in Belfast' an Advisory Panel of specialists was appointed in 2002. In summary, they recommended that the ambience and presentation of the City Hall could become more balanced through:

- the commissioning and borrowing of additional appropriate artworks;

- the production of publications and audio-visual guides to enhance the interpretation of the City Hall and its ephemera
 - the commissioning of exhibitions on popular and inclusive themes
 - seminars and talks in support of the above
- 5.5 In theory, the fabric of the City Hall and the range of objects displayed could be continuously added to, depending on available budget and taking due cognisance of the need to fit with the ambience of a listed building. However, the image of the City Hall might be equally enhanced with a body of well-publicised activity and information-based services which demonstrate that the building is representative of all political persuasions and is open and welcoming to all.
- 5.6 This report recommends that the Council takes a broad approach to development which addresses both the fabric of the building and its displays as well as commissioning additional artwork and developing a high quality programme of events. It is recommended that the programme is wide-ranging with some events being popular, entertaining and targeted at a family audience while others might be more tailored to those who wish to debate their history and heritage and the influences that these have on Belfast today.
- 5.7 While the City Hall aims to address the issues pertinent to 'good practice' in shared 'physical' space, so, too, the events programme would be subject to similar 'proofing' in terms of its content, marketing and promotion, and implementation. The Community Relations Council's *Guidelines for a Cultural Diversity Policy* (2001) contains suggestions for the organisation and implementation of events / event programmes e.g. festivals, which aim to be culturally diverse. The guidance advises that major events classified as cultural diversity events should:
- represent all communities / clients living in the area for which the organisation has responsibility
 - include all age groups
 - cover the whole geographic area
 - involve all abilities
- 5.8 The guidelines also recommend that events and programmes should encompass:
- a range of organisations
 - a range of delivery mechanisms – concerts, exhibitions, workshops etc
 - a range of projects which have the potential of covering all age groups and address:
 - heritage (the past)
 - contemporary interests (the present)
 - creative projects (the future)
 - a wide variety of topics and approaches including:
 - identity (ethnic, religious, political etc)
 - local history
 - heritage
 - arts
 - music
 - language
 - faiths
 - sports

6. PROVIDING LEADERSHIP and MOVING AHEAD

- 6.1 Through the work of the MWG, Belfast City Council is providing leadership in the development of mechanisms which can help to bring about balance and participation in relation to its premier civic building. As one Councillor at the November brainstorming meeting put it: “‘Shared Future’ has been signed up to by parties at Stormont ... the City Hall is now much more visible ... it can take on a leadership role in relation to ‘Shared Future’”.
- 6.2 The process of moving towards ‘balance’ will not be easy and the challenges are recognised by Members. Conflict and violence between and within communities has left a deep and negative legacy in Belfast and Councillors face the consequences of this in their daily work. Despite recent positive developments in the political arena, Belfast people live, attend school, celebrate traditions, play sport and socialise separately. Aspects of our culture have become ‘contested spaces’ (faith, language, sport, cultural heritage and interpretations of history) rather than areas of commonality that we would be naturally disposed to explore together.
- 6.3 Against a backdrop of ongoing and energetic political activity, addressing and presenting the many aspects of Belfast’s civic, social and political history is a challenge which requires sensitivity, skill and collaborative working. Re-claiming our various histories and presenting our cultural backgrounds to one another in an open and non-threatening way will need facilitation and patience. Engaging meaningfully with the contemporary dimensions of the city deserves attention also and will assist in helping citizens to move into the present and forward into the future.

Areas of Action

- 6.4 It is proposed that in order to take the process ahead, a number of strategic areas of action might be considered. This will encourage clarity of purpose at both a strategic and operational level. While the MWG and the Good Relations Unit have undertaken most of the operational work in this area, it is likely that an expansion of the workload, as outlined below, will require additional human and financial resources; this will be considered later in the report. Proposed areas of focus are:
- *provision of physical space and presentational opportunities for additional and differing perspectives (historic and contemporary) through additional artefacts, commissioned artworks, commissioned large-scale photographs, purchased affordable contemporary artworks, exhibitions, publications, multi-media guides, introductory / visitor orientation film;*
 - *implementation of well-defined, Council–initiated events within City Hall paying due regard to community background and geographic spread;*
 - *development of the City Hall as a year-round cultural venue for activities which are aligned with MWG objectives and integrated with other relevant Council initiatives e.g. Cultural Tourism, City of Festivals, Events, Anniversary celebrations;*

- *development of partnerships* with individuals, organisations and institutions with the specialist expertise necessary for the optimum delivery of the programme;
- *creation of 'open access' to relevant opportunities* through a communications plan which is informed by relevant Council departments including Good Relations, Community Services, Tourism, Culture and Arts;
- *formulation of a training programme* for staff and, where desired, for Members
- *creation of a strategy to access the additional resources required* to implement the programme e.g. through Peace III, Heritage Lottery Fund and other relevant agencies;
- *establishment of quality standards* for the activities in relation to content, production values and adherence to cultural diversity principles;
- *establishment of a cross-departmental working group* to discuss, plan, prioritise and direct on-going and future development;
- *establishment of a post of Programme Co-ordinator* in support of the operational programme.

7. DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Building and Existing Public-Facing Services

- 7.1 The City Hall is both a symbol of the city and a gateway to civic democracy. The architectural quality of the building, its city centre position and the intense political activity with which it has been associated throughout the recent conflict mark it out as a place of interest. Although it is a 'working' building and needs to function as such during working hours, it is also a landmark which dominates the city centre and, as such, has the potential to further its centrality within the mindset of locals and visitors alike.

Adding to the Fabric

- 7.2 The historic fabric of the building and its perceived ethos are in the process of being partially addressed through the commissioning of an artwork to reflect the Irish history and heritage of the city and those citizens for whom this is their cultural background. As mentioned at 5.5, the practice of commissioning additional artworks could be employed to further reflect various specific cultural backgrounds or, as has been suggested, to highlight the richness of church architecture or to honour individuals who made notable contributions to the city. As this is one of the only ways to add to the fabric of the building, it is recommended that, funding permitting, additional works on agreed subjects and themes are commissioned (see Section 4.8).

East Entrance Exhibition Space

- 7.3 The exhibition space available at the East Entrance has already hosted a number of exhibitions including one on Sporting Achievements and approximately a dozen more are planned. It is recommended that the opportunity to exhibit in this space is promoted more widely across institutions and relevant groups within the city and, as the proposed programme develops, that this space is used for Council-initiated exhibitions or for those hired in from cultural organisations such as the Linen Hall Library, Belfast Central Library, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and others. This may require the purchase of flexible, self-standing, multi-functional display systems with integrated lighting and, if the inclusion of artefacts is desirable, a number of environmentally-controlled, museum-standard exhibition cases.

Contemporary Art Exhibitions

- 7.4 There is a large amount of wall space available at City Hall (including Ground Floor West and Ground Floor East (on way to 'The Bobbin')) and this could be used as hanging space for exhibitions; whether of historic or contemporary works. Many City Halls throughout the world have an ongoing programme of contemporary art exhibitions and this could be considered for Belfast. Providing an opportunity for both younger and more established artists to show their work, it would lend a contemporary feel to the building as well as introducing new audiences. An annual open submission process could be established with selection made by a different high-profile guest curator each year. Contemporary fine craft which could be displayed in the glass-fronted cabinets behind the main reception desk would also create interest and provide a showcase for an important element of Belfast's growing creative industries sector.

- 7.5 Contemporary aspects of Belfast could also be reflected through the commissioning of a series of large-scale photographs depicting life in the city today and including, for example, images of the Diwali and Chinese New Year festivals. A set of very large, colourful images could have a significant impact and could be located in an area with high footfall.

Borrowing from Other Institutions

- 7.6 Borrowing paintings and other artefacts from cultural institutions will require BCC to sign up to standard lending requirements and conditions. This should be explored with the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI). Reproductions of works are always an option and can be discussed with NMNI and other institutions as relevant.

Communicating the Council's Diversity – through portraits

- 7.7 The portraits of the Council's mayors reflect the make-up of the Council and its political developments over the years. It is essential that the conducted tours continue to include the mayoral portraits and that guides explain the political diversity therein. It is recommended that in order to create access to contemporary political life within the Council, a photograph of the current Lord Mayor is placed at the reception desk.

Communicating the Council's Diversity – through tours

- 7.8 The tours of City Hall provide an important opportunity for visitors to get to know the magnificent building and its history. They have been enhanced by the creation of seven themes prior to the recent opening (history of the City Hall, 'Freedom of the City' recipients, Belfast in the two World Wars, notable Belfast citizens, Titanic and Belfast's Lord Mayors, civic regalia and display of civic gifts). The tours also provide an opportunity for participants to hear about the political history of the Council and how its profile has changed. This will require some additional material to be incorporated within the tour script. The recent additions to the City Hall, e.g. the bust of Mary Ann McCracken and a number of stained glass windows commissioned to assist in achieving balance, should also be included.

Multi-media / Interactive Guide

- 7.9 There is also, perhaps, a need to 'orientate' visitors with the provision of an introductory film and / or multi-media interactive guide to the City Hall and to the city as a whole. This would serve to contextualise the city within its historic and political framework, demonstrating to visitors that the city is coming to terms with its past and envisaging a peaceful and optimistic future.

Enhanced Interpretation

- 7.10 There is a need to provide labelling and other printed material in relation to portraits and other ephemera within City Hall. This could be subcontracted to a specialist historian with the objective of creating interpretative material which is informative and accessible to a general audience. It will be important to ensure that material is available in languages other than English and in a variety of formats.

Conservation

- 7.11 The City Hall possesses important artefacts including paintings and documents as well as textile-based material. The Council has a civic responsibility to ensure that irreplaceable artefacts are properly conserved for future generations of citizens. There is a need to create a conservation plan for these in order to preserve them and prevent further deterioration. Previous conservation assessments should be referred to and appropriate action taken. Where repair is required this should be carried out as soon as possible.

Exploring Differing Perspectives

- 7.12 Dealing with the historic aspects of our culture and addressing issues of identity and political allegiance based upon personal and collective interpretations of history is a challenge in Northern Ireland. A lack of knowledge in relation to the complexity of history or a disinclination to engage with it can result in skewed interpretation which when presented as the 'final word' on a subject can cause confusion and misunderstanding. There is a need to explore the complexity of our society as it was in the past and as it is now. The Heritage Lottery Fund in its series of discussions about heritage and identity which it recently held across the UK (London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast), explored issues of 'nationhood', multiculturalism and social cohesion in relation to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Academics, heritage professionals, journalists, broadcasters and popular media figures debated how the past has shaped national identities, whether heritage can instil confidence or create conflict and how 'identities' change and re-invent themselves. This model worked well and could be adapted for Council use with the input of similar specialists.
- 7.13 Another model employed by the 'Cultural Traditions Group' in the late 1980s and 90s brought together expert speakers and facilitators in a series of talks, discussions and debates (the so-called 'Varieties' conferences) to explore issues around Irish, British, Scottish and European identity. The proceedings of these conferences were published and may provide a reference point for the MWG.
- 7.14 Exploring cultural heritage as a collective pursuit may be useful. The MWG may wish to consider the creation of a number of formats, whether in 'closed session' for participation of Council Members (and / or staff) only or open to the public, where specialists (including international experts) make presentations and facilitate debate on pertinent issues. The cost of this could be met through Peace III funding already obtained by Council.

Historic Exhibitions

- 7.15 In considering the hosting of exhibitions, whether already in existence and available from local cultural organisations, or to be initiated by BCC, the issue of contextualisation is, again, important. It is recommended that the MWG consider an over-arching theme of '**Belfast: Century by Century**' (working title) and within this context present exhibitions such as The United Irishmen (Linen Hall Library), The Famine Decade in Ireland (LHL), the Williamite Trail (Grand Orange Lodge Ireland). These episodes in history can then be seen within their own contemporary context. Accompanying talks and seminars would also contribute to enhanced exploration and understanding.

Themed Exhibitions

- 7.16 Themed exhibitions which are more contemporary or which involve 'notable citizens' are more self-contained and could be shown as they are, provided that the content reflects good practice in cultural diversity. BCC-initiated exhibitions on famous citizens should make use of the scholarship contained within the Dictionary of Ulster Biography as well as that of the Ulster History Circle, both of which have online access to material.

Anniversaries

- 7.17 The forthcoming decade will see a number of important anniversaries in the Belfast calendar. It is recommended that preparations for these commence as soon as possible in order that events will be of good quality and inclusive in terms of content and community involvement. It is also recommended that an over-arching title is used here again. The title '**Belfast – a century ago ... a hundred years on ...**' would point to both years, past and present, and allow both the historic and contemporary stories to be told. For example, 1912 is the year of the signing of the Ulster Covenant while 2012 is the Olympic year. The signing of the Covenant would be explored within a wide historic context and the contribution of Belfast to the Olympics plus other significant contemporary events could be included. The inclusion of an exhibition on boxing in 2012 might be appropriate and an excellent exhibition recently curated by the Ulster American Folk Park might be pursued. The 400th anniversary of the signing of Belfast's charter will take place in 2013; the historic and contemporary could be explored and presented (in this case, a different over-arching title would be required to indicate 400 years). Other events could be similarly treated e.g. 1914 (beginning of First World War) / 2014; 1916 (anniversary of Easter Rising) / 2016.

Making Greater Use of Space – City Hall as a Venue

- 7.18 The City Hall contains magnificent function rooms of differing sizes which allow for differing scales of events. Although not regarding itself as an 'arts centre' (the new MAC in Cathedral Quarter and the re-furbished Crescent Arts Centre will provide state-of-the art facilities in that regard), the City Hall could become a venue for the presentation of cultural events. This would undoubtedly be welcomed by cultural groups as a recognition of the importance of the work that they do and would provide access for members of the general public to a prestigious and alternative venue. It would also help to ensure the inclusion of diverse groups including young people who will be represented in cultural organisations such as Wheelworks, Trans / Urban Arts Academy, Youth Action's Rainbow Factory and the Belfast School of Music. The re-launch of the City Hall in October 2009 provides a good precedent for this. This programme included a variety of cultural events with activities for older people, young children, families and community groups. Cultural organisations involved included the Belfast Film Festival, Belfast Festival at Queen's, Beat Initiative, Young at Art, Artsekta, Ulster Scots and Irish language groups. The events attracted an audience of approximately 18,000 over the two week period and there was widespread positive coverage on TV, radio and in the press.

Integration with Council Strategies

- 7.19 Operating as a venue, the City Hall could align itself with the 'City of Festivals' initiative, working with promoters to host a selected (one or two, perhaps) events from festivals taking place throughout the city across the year. This would adhere to good practice in cultural diversity facilitating participation from widespread community backgrounds.
- 7.20 Engagement with cultural content would enable further integration with Council strategies. BCC is currently developing policies which encompass music, literary and heritage tourism and the City Hall could be instrumental as a venue / information point for this. The decision to locate a tourism information desk within City Hall substantiates this opportunity and will provide an additional opportunity to profile the city of Belfast as a whole with all of its traditions. An annual Summer School or set of Memorial Lectures in honour of famous Belfast artists and based in the City Hall, might be considered as a possible cultural tourism initiative. The Council should explore relevant partnerships with existing initiatives in this regard.

Fund-Raising and Development

- 7.21 The programme outlined can be delivered holistically or in parts, depending upon the urgency with which the Council wishes it to be implemented. It will take time to develop partnerships and to decide which elements of the proposed programme are best suited to deliver the Council's objectives. There is also a need to source external funding to support the programme, both from internal and external sources. Engagement with relevant and expert partners will substantiate the case for funding in that mutual benefit and collective impact is likely to be high. BCC's profile within the city, Northern Ireland and beyond will enhance its prospects for attracting appropriate funding and its ability to involve large numbers of people in high quality activity would also augur well. .

Staffing and Management

- 7.22 The potential changing nature of the work of the MWG with its emphasis on the development of new projects and programming would require additional human resources to make it work. At the moment, the Good Relations Unit is progressing the actions agreed at the MWG; however, an enhanced programme would entail a significant amount of practical implementation and this would require a dedicated member of staff.
- 7.23 It is proposed that the position might have a similar description to that of the Education, Community, Heritage and Outreach Officer at the Ulster Hall. The Ulster Hall, like the City Hall, possesses a range of important heritage resources and the need to achieve community ownership of the facility. It is proposed that the Programme Coordinator would work to deliver the programme as agreed by the MWG, researching, developing, organising and delivering projects and liaising with relevant external individuals, groups, organisations and institutions. External advice and support would be sought when necessary. It is envisaged that the post would initially be an externally funded full-time fixed-term post.

- 7.24 It would be important that the postholder would work closely with the Good Relations Unit (and possibly be located there) in order to continue the work with the MWG and to ensure an adherence to agreed objectives. Reporting to a cross-departmental grouping of relevant City Hall staff would be crucial in order to achieve commonality of purpose and 'joined-up' management. This group should be chaired by a Chief Officer.
- 7.25 Effective and informed marketing and promotion would be important in the implementation of what could, at times, be sensitive subject areas. There will also be a need to provide dedicated web presence for the programme and to target specialist audiences when appropriate including community groups, opinion formers, potential funders and sponsors, central government and appropriate agencies.

Concluding Remarks

- 7.26 This report sets out a framework which attempts to define and maximise the role that the City Hall could play in providing a positive and outward-looking manifestation of the Council's relationship with its community. There is a sense in which the Council – its elected representatives and its staff - constantly needs to 're-introduce' itself to its citizens, explore their needs and wants; their hopes and aspirations. There is a great sense too in which the citizens look to the Council to provide leadership in relation to issues where as individual citizens and communities they would find it difficult or impossible to have significant influence. The City Hall as a major physical edifice is a symbol of how the city regarded itself a century ago. Over one hundred years on, there is a challenge to 'make manifest' what the city feels about itself and its citizens, past, present and future, and to express this in an imaginative way within its walls.

8. SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 It is recommended that underpinned by good practice in cultural diversity, the Council takes a broad approach to the development of 'balance' within the City Hall through the commissioning of additional artworks and the implementation / hosting of a high quality and diverse programme of events. The MWG should have the role of overall co-ordination of any future work related to memorabilia, ensuring that all items on display are of high quality, interesting, relevant and in keeping with their surroundings.

In summary, resources permitting, it is recommended that the Council:

Additional Artworks

- commissions additional artworks (to add to the 'fabric' of the building) on agreed subjects and themes;

Events Programme

- facilitates the development of a programme of activity ranging from popular, entertaining and family-friendly events to opportunities for discussion and debate on history and heritage and its influence on the Belfast of today;

Exhibitions and Display

- presents both self-initiated and hired-in temporary exhibitions from cultural institutions and organisations in the East Entrance area and the Ground Floor East and West corridors;
- publicises the availability of the East Entrance exhibition space to relevant institutions and groups within the city;
- considers the purchase of flexible, self-standing, multi-functional display systems with integrated lighting for exhibition purposes and other secure fixtures and fittings for wall-based displays;
- considers displaying the work of contemporary visual artists (both young and more established) accessed by way of an annual open submission process;
- considers the display of contemporary fine craft by local artists in the glass-fronted cabinets behind the reception desk;
- commissions a number of very large-scale colour photographs depicting life in the city today including, e.g. images of the Diwali and Chinese New Year festivals;
- explores the possibility of borrowing paintings and other artefacts from the National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) on the basis of agreed lending requirements and / or arranges for reproductions to be made where relevant;

- displays a photograph and brief biography of each year's serving Lord Mayor at reception desk;

Tours

- makes amendments to conducted tour scripts in order to reflect political diversity and recently commissioned work (bust of Mary Ann McCracken, stained glass windows);

Multi-Media Interactive Guide

- commissions a multi-media interactive guide which would act as an 'orientation' for visitors, contextualising the city within its historic and political framework and including current and future plans for its regeneration;

Enhanced Interpretation

- provides improved labelling for portraits and artefacts and accessible printed material (leaflets, text panels) where appropriate;

Conservation of Historic Artefacts

- develops a plan for conservation of historic artefacts;

Exploration of Differing Heritage and Identity Perspectives

- establishes a training programme to explore issues of heritage and identity involving academics, heritage and cultural commentators and other relevant professionals with distinctive strands for Members, staff and the general public;

Historic Exhibitions

- provides appropriate 'context' (through seminars, debates, performances, printed materials) when exhibitions which are historic in nature are on display in order to promote discussion and understanding of complex issues;

Anniversaries

- begins to prepare for forthcoming anniversary celebrations in order to ensure that events will be of good quality and inclusive in terms of content and community involvement;

City Hall as a Venue for Cultural Events

- develops and promotes the City Hall as a venue for cultural events, partnering with festivals and other cultural organisations throughout the year;

Integration with Council Strategies

- integrates City Hall initiatives with other Council strategies including 'City of Festivals' and cultural tourism and establishes specific City Hall-based events e.g. summer schools, lecture series;

Funding

- creates a strategy for the sourcing of external funding in support of the programme;

Staffing and Management

- creates a dedicated post to support the development and implementation of the programme;

Marketing and Promotion

- increases the visibility of the City Hall and its programmes through the development of a strong marketing programme targeting both the media and the general public;

Cross-Departmental Working Group

- creates a cross-departmental working group chaired by a Chief Officer in order to achieve clarity and shared purpose in relation to planning and implementation of all aspects of the programme.

9. TIME-TABLE and ESTIMATED RESOURCES

ACTION	Estimated Budget
Short term	
Prepare application to Heritage Lottery Fund	N/A
Prepare internal bid to Peace III	N/A
Establish cross-departmental working group	N/A
Assess applications for 'Irish ' heritage artwork	N/A (budget already agreed)
Make amendments to tour script	N/A
Display Lord Mayor's photograph at reception desk	N/A
Explore potential partnerships in relation to events, festivals and lectures	N/A
Promote East Entrance exhibition space	N/A
Devise secure hanging arrangements for temporary exhibitions	Existing budgets
Agree and implement temporary exhibition programme	Hire fees to be agreed with institutions
Agree and implement associated lecture and seminar programme in connection with exhibitions	Fees to speakers
Medium term	
Appoint Programme Co-ordinator	£40k (subject to funding)
Appoint specialist to create text for portraits and paintings	£6k (subject to funding)
Plan future programme including exhibitions	N/A
Commission introductory multi-media presentation	£15-£20k (subject to funding)
Build relationship with NMNI and agree lending arrangements for artefacts where possible	N/A
Arrange for reproductions and framing of NMNI works as appropriate	£20k
Commission an up-dated conservation plan for City Hall artefacts	£5k
Continue to build external partnerships	N/A
Host relevant festival events	N/A
Commission additional artwork on agreed theme	£20k (subject to funding)
Establish training programme involving specialists as outlined	£20k (Peace III)
Long term	
Plan for and implement anniversary celebrations	£100k+ (HLF large grant) cross Departmental potential
Plan and implement annual open submission visual art exhibition	N/A
Commission additional artwork on agreed theme	£20k (subject to funding)
Continue with exhibition and event programme	£50k per annum

Appendix 1

Memorabilia Working Group Brainstorming Session for All Members of Council Monday 30 November 2009

Response of Members

During the session, Members were asked to consider three questions:

1. **What does 'A City Hall for All' mean?**
2. **What specific ideas do Members have for action?**
3. **What in the process makes Members nervous /what are their fears?**

Responses were as follows:

1. What does 'A City Hall for All' mean?

- visibility
- fairness
- accessible and expansive
- balanced programme
- holistic
- sense of celebration and confidence
- more than orange and green – minority ethnic communities in the new Belfast
- working building versus museum
- welcoming – by both Councillors and staff
- security
- leadership – this is key in embracing difference
- acknowledgement of diverse social class i.e. the working class
- external features
- balance needed
- cherish all backgrounds
- ownership by all
- modern and up-to-date
- meaningful – not tokenistic
- importance of the individual
- attractive building
- controversial but not offensive
- non-confrontational

2. Specific ideas for action

- tension in achieving the balance of taking away or adding to
- temporary v permanent exhibitions
- representation of diversity and experience
- timescale for dealing with the challenging bits of the agenda
- how do we represent the parts of the past that were not represented in this building at that time e.g. 1916?
- contribution of music

- deal with flag issue
- historical reflections on political parties
- work of community groups
- work of churches
- contribution of sporting bodies/personalities
- address the current imbalance
- work & development of Trade Union movement
- work of Charities
- women
- history of Republicanism
- United Irishmen
- Irish language
- scientists and inventors
- minority ethnic communities
- poets
- Orange Order
- industrialists of Belfast
- statue of women mill workers at the front of the City Hall
- faith communities
- young people
- medical pioneers
- Belfast-born citizens who have been successful/famous elsewhere
- genealogy 'touch screen' exhibition
- 'plinth' idea (like Trafalgar Square) outside the City Hall
- white board for comments
- in-depth tours
- social history
- evolution rather than revolution

3. What in the process makes Members nervous/what are their fears?

- inclusive Somme resolution needed
- use of the term 'my party'
- triumphalism
- discussion of the Union flag
- members should not fear equality
- equality and balance not being achieved
- image of the Council if there is no consensus
- stalling tactics
- deliberate provocation / suggestions made to be divisive and create dissent
- 1st & 2nd World War representation and sensitivities around this
- so hung up on past, may miss potential of the future
- invisibility of certain groups
- fear of looking foolish if we don't get the work done

Appendix 2

Memorabilia Working Group Suggestions for Inclusion in City Hall Programme

- the need to fully 'interpret' what is already in place within City Hall e.g. the portraits of mayors and notable citizens, through the provision of labelling and other printed material
- additional stained glass windows to reflect Irish history and heritage, possibly based upon Irish myth and legend e.g. Cuchulainn, Children of Lir
- an artwork to mark Scottish influences upon the city
- the need to explore and present the three-fold – Irish / English / Scottish dimensions and histories of the city and how this has influenced how Belfast has evolved as a city and a community
- provision of opportunities for young people to present their creative output and ideas at the City Hall
- temporary exhibitions from Belfast-based cultural organisations e.g. Linen Hall Library, Belfast Central Library, Public Record Office, BBC, universities etc
- the need to trace the origins of contemporary politics and find a way of presenting this
- a presentation of the broad historic and political context pertaining to key historic events e.g. the First World War, 1916 rising etc and their relevance to Belfast
- the need to present the social history of East Belfast and Shankill
- exhibition about the Somme
- a monument to mark involvement in the Spanish Civil War
- an exhibition on football and famous Belfast footballers
- an exhibition on boxing and famous Belfast boxers
- theme of Revival / Evangelism is important within the history of the Protestant community
- history of 'religion' in Belfast could be explored
- Orange Order important as an historic and contemporary theme

Reflecting the People
a City Hall for the 21st century

- exhibition about those who have achieved e.g. in medicine, engineering, innovation etc
- enable children to discover the history of their grandparents and help to connect them to where they live
- Protestant / Ulster Scots writing – poetry and drama, both historic and contemporary
- need for sense of celebration
- exhibition on Belfast people who became famous in the USA
- exhibition on philanthropists e.g. Barney Hughes
- exhibition on educationalists e.g. Vere Foster, Sister Genevieve
- a stained glass window to honour Nationalist politicians e.g. Paddy Devlin, Gerry Fitt
- a window featuring well-known Belfast churches e.g. St Malachy's, Carlisle Memorial, St Mary's, St Anne's Cathedral, St Peter's Cathedral, Rosemary Street and oldest Presbyterian Church in Belfast
- a window in honour of ethnic minority communities