

MEETING OF HISTORIC CENTENARIES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting of Monday, 7th March, 2011

Members present: Councillor Hendron (Chairman); and
Councillors Adamson, Hargey, Kelly and Rodway.

In attendance: Mr. C. Quigley, Town Solicitor and
Assistant Chief Executive;
Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Ms. A. Deighan, Good Relations Officer;
Mr. R. Corbett, Records Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 7th February were taken as read and signed as correct.

Draft Principles for the Selection of Events to be Marked

The Good Relations Manager reminded the Working Group that the forthcoming Decade of Centenaries would provide the Council with an opportunity to contribute to a better understanding of the past and to promote respect for the complexity of our shared history. She added that it was essential that the Working Group carried out its work in a positive, constructive and open manner, based on shared civic values and respect for cultural diversity. Accordingly, she tabled for discussion the undernoted Draft Principles which, she suggested, might form a basis for selecting events to be marked throughout the forthcoming decade:

- Events supported by the Council should provide opportunities to include a range of different perspectives and ideologies, rather than a single viewpoint, aiming to increase understanding and appreciation of other perspectives and identities;
- They should be based on historic accuracy and robust academic expertise – engagement with universities, museums, libraries, the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, etc. is essential to ensure this evidence base;
- The interpretation of events should be in a broad historical context and understanding of the national and European setting of the time;
- The Council should develop strong links with other institutions – that is, museums, libraries, the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland and other relevant organisations, to ensure that there is no duplication and that events and programmes are complementary;

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- The Council will provide/support a range of different types of events – from lectures, discussions, debates to films, drama, activities that attract schools and children/families, etc – so that events can not only be educational but participative, creative and enjoyable; and
- The Council will provide/support events and activities that are not exclusive but are welcoming to all sections of our increasingly diverse community in Belfast.

The Good Relations Manager outlined the main aspects of the principles and reminded the Members that the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund would be hosting a Conference in the City Hall on 21st March entitled: “Remembering the Future”. She added that the principles which would govern the aforementioned bodies’ approach to the forthcoming decade would be discussed at that Conference and that, in turn, could assist the Council in finalising its own principles.

After discussion, it was agreed that the Draft Principles, as outlined, would be forwarded to the Party Group Leaders on the Council requesting that comments, suggestions and amendments be sought thereon, with a view to the matter being reconsidered at the Working Group’s meeting on Friday, 8th April.

**Decade of Centenaries:
Themes and Methods of Approach**

The Working Group discussed the themes and methods which might be used to mark the various centenaries during the forthcoming decade. A number of Members referred to the need for the Council to bear in mind that any programme of events or activities should be approached in an inclusive manner, with a view to engaging all the citizens of Belfast. In addition, the importance of promoting an understanding of the shared history of the City would be essential and that the Council should be mindful that any events marked should not be exclusive to any one community. The Working Group noted that any programme should emphasise the inter-related nature of events and challenge existing perspectives.

The Town Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive emphasised that it was important that the Council sought to make commemorative events relevant to all communities of the City and that it was essential that an agreed programme of key events could be formulated and endorsed by the Council at the earliest opportunity. The Records Manager suggested that the Working Group might consider a three-stranded approach to the commemoration of the forthcoming centenaries, as set out hereunder:

- (i) the period from 1912 to 1914 (which would cover the Signing of the Covenant and the Home Rule Crisis);
- (ii) the period from 1914 to 1918 (this would encompass World War I and the Easter Rising); and
- (iii) the period from 1918 to 1921 (this would encompass the birth of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State).

The Records Manager emphasised that, should the Working Group adopt the approach outlined, it would enable the Council to acknowledge, in an all-encompassing manner, a number of events and different allegiances which would be relevant to all communities across the City. It was pointed out that a three-stranded approach would enable the Council to estimate the associated budgeting considerations on a step-by-step basis.

After discussion, it was agreed that a report outlining a proposed budget associated with the adoption of the three-stranded approach would be considered by the Working Group at its meeting in April.

**Community Relations Council/Heritage Lottery Fund –
City Hall Conference, 21st March**

The Working Group was apprised of a draft programme regarding the aforementioned Conference which would take place in the City Hall on Monday, 21st March. The Good Relations Manager provided an overview of the subjects to be considered and the speakers who would be delivering presentations at the event. She pointed out that an invitation to attend the Conference would be extended to all Members of the Council and emphasised the need for as many Members as possible to attend.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information provided.

Chairman