



MEETING OF HISTORIC CENTENARIES WORKING GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting of Tuesday, 6th September, 2011

Members present: Councillors Curran, Hanna and Reynolds.

In attendance: Mrs. H. Francey, Good Relations Manager;
Ms. A. Deighan, Good Relations Officer;
Mr. R. Corbett, Records Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apology

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Kyle.

Minutes

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

Election of Chairman

The Working Group agreed to defer to a future meeting the election of a Chairman.

Draft Principles that might be used in 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;

The Council will provide and/or support a range of different types of events – including lectures, discussions, debates, 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 and/or 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 Draft Principles. She informed the Working Group that the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council had, in a discussion paper entitled: 'Marking the Decade of Ideas 2012-22', agreed to adopt the following principles to oversee its approach to identifying events to be marked and supported throughout the decade. In essence, events marked by the Community Relations Council would:

Start from the historical facts;

Recognise the implications and consequences of what happened;

Understand that different perceptions and interpretations exist; and

Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period.

She indicated that the Community Relations Council had agreed that the Decade of Centenaries must be addressed within the context of an 'inclusive and accepting society'. She pointed out that this approach might assist the Working Group in considering its programme of events to be marked over the forthcoming decade.

A prolonged discussion ensued during which the following points were made by the Members:

That the Council, at all times, must be mindful of the current financial constraints when allocating funding towards events to be marked. The view was reinforced that the Council must be able to demonstrate that events marked would provide tangible benefit to the City, provide value for money and be relevant to all communities.

That the programme of events should be inventive and should seek to link into the rich history of the City, identify and acknowledge inspirational figures associated with the period and, at all stages, seek also to involve and address the needs of young people.

That the programme of events should seek to promote and uncover aspects of hidden history related to the era, for example, the part played by the Ulster Unionist Thomas Sinclair, better known as the founder of the Sinclair Seamen's Church, who drafted the 1912 Solemn League and Covenant.

That, whilst the decade was, in the main, related to events that were of interest to both the Unionist and Nationalist populations of Belfast, the Working Group should endeavour to make the events relevant to all ethnic communities within the City. It was noted, for example, that the rich Jewish history of Belfast during the period could be explored in this regard.

That the Council should seek to use a range of methods to promote the Decade of Centenaries and could, for example, utilise resources such as the recently-erected screen within the City Hall grounds to display archive footage of the era or to broadcast relevant programmes.

That the Decade of Centenaries should be promoted consistently by the Council by using a common brand and logo which would emphasise the ideal of a shared history in the City.

After discussion, the Working Group adopted the Draft Principles and agreed to endorse the comments and points made in relation thereto. [The Working Group also agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that these principles should apply to any key anniversaries being marked by the Council.](#)

Comment [WU1]: Barry – the wider 2012 Group has asked for this

Suggested Programme of Key Events and Associated Budget

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

- 1 **The Council has already agreed that the forthcoming Decade of Centenaries provides the opportunity for the Council to contribute to a better understanding of the past and promote respect for the complexity of our shared history.**
- 2 **Any events led by the Council should aim to increase appreciation of a range of different perspectives and ideologies and should challenge simplistic views of history. We should organise and support events that are welcoming to all sections of our community and that illustrate diverse viewpoints.**

Key Issues

- 3 **At its last meeting on 7 March 2011, the Working Group considered a proposal that forthcoming centenaries might be grouped under 3 strands, in a natural chronological order. This would allow each period to be examined separately and for individual events within each period to be identified and marked in an appropriate manner.**

Obviously proposals for the earlier periods are more detailed.

The three periods were:

- 4 **(i) from 1912 to 1914: the Signing of the Covenant and the Home Rule Crisis and including:**

- the rise of the women's suffrage movement
- the emergence of the Gaelic revival
- the signing of the Ulster Covenant
- the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)
- the ITGWU strike (lockout) in Dublin
- the formation of the Irish Citizen Army
- the formation of the Irish Volunteers (IVF)
- gun-running by both the UVF and IVF.

- 5 This period could be entitled either 'Shared History, Differing Allegiances' or 'Rights, Resistance and Rifles'.
- 6 I would propose that an exhibition be commissioned to cover the whole period, where differing allegiances and approaches to politics, nationalism and self-determination could be explored.

Within this, individual events to be marked would include:

- 7 The rise of the women's suffrage movement, in view of the links to the wider work of the Council, and in particular to the current imbalance within City Hall memorabilia of items relating specifically to women. This might be in the form of a drama production, possibly held in the Council Chamber, and archive photographs could be sourced and displayed. These could be supplemented by details on women in the Council over the past 40 year period 1971-2011, with a photograph of the newly elected women Members of Council in May 2011. Other women from Belfast who have been successful in political life elsewhere (e.g. President Mary McAleese) or who have campaigned for women's rights or broader humanitarian issues (e.g. Baroness May Blood) could be included. This could be commissioned immediately.
- 8 The signing of the Ulster Covenant, in view of its significance in shaping Northern Ireland's history, the important role of the City Hall and Ulster Hall in this and the fact that the original table is still in the Council Chamber. The text of the Ulster Covenant could be compared with that in the Irish Proclamation of 1916 and the parallels between the two examined.
- 9 These events could be marked by special lectures (e.g. on the life of Edward Carson, or Joe Devlin), publications, or drama productions. The views of the Working Group are requested on these proposals.
- 10 The Working Group may be interested to learn that in 1962, to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant, the Council hosted a reception at City Hall in the morning and a banquet in the evening of 28 September (Ulster Day). There were various other activities in the city, including the laying of wreaths at the graves of both Carson and Craigavon, and a large parade and service at the main event at Balmoral, but these were organised by the Orange Order.

- 11 Interestingly, the Belfast Telegraph of 29 September 1962 reported that, at the main Balmoral parade, Sir George Clark, Grand Master of the Orange Order 'made an appeal for a calmer climate in Ulster politics'. In a far-sighted speech, he stated that 'It is our duty as citizens of this generation to strive ceaselessly to ensure a better understanding of each other's problems, not only in our day but in those of our children'.

Partnership working

- 12 The Good Relations Manager will continue to liaise internally with other relevant Council staff to ensure a co-ordinated Council approach, given the likely visitor and media interest. To ensure that the Council's programme of events complements those planned by other agencies in the city and to minimise duplication, the Good Relations Manager has contacted a number of other local organisations to ascertain their plans for the forthcoming period.
- 13 At this stage, most organisations have not planned beyond 2012; with the exception of the Titanic-related events, these centre round the Centenary of the Signing of the Ulster Covenant. For example, Libraries NI are planning 2 lectures and an exhibition in the Central Library; PRONI is hosting a book launch for a new publication by Dr Alan Parkinson entitled Friends in High Places – Ulster Resistance to Home Rule 1912-1914; and Double Band Films are preparing a documentary film entitled The Covenant Trail for BBC 1 NI.
- 14 The Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge has specifically requested that the Council organise an exhibition relating to the Ulster Covenant period, covering all aspects, in the City Hall in September 2012 (see separate report on this agenda).
- 15 The Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland has also written to us, stating that they are developing their own exhibition on the Ulster Covenant which will be available for community facilities; they have offered this to us for display in the City Hall during 2012.
- 16 The Linen Hall Library will be holding its own exhibition on the Ulster Covenant from September to December 2012 but staff have indicated that they are happy to be partners in an event and to loan certain relevant artefacts for display in the City Hall to the Council during September 2012. These items include: Lord Carson's personal scrapbook; postcards from the period both pro- and anti- Home rule; photographs and ephemera items; and newspapers and periodicals of the time.
- 17 PRONI holds a number of collections which contain material relating to the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912, unionist opposition to Home Rule generally and the nationalist campaign for self-government.
- 18 The PRONI collection contains correspondence, posters, photographs, postcards, badges, arm-bands etc relating to the Covenant generally and the signing in Belfast specifically; photographs include those of the unionist leaders signing the

Covenant on the table now in the Council Chamber and the 'signing booths' along the ground floor corridors. PRONI also holds the actual forms on which people signed the Covenant as part of the Ulster Unionist Council archive. PRONI has also offered to loan artefacts to the Council for an exhibition, subject to agreement.

- 19 The Ulster Museum also holds various relevant artefacts, including postcards, photographs, but generally requires a year's notice for the loan of material.
- 20 The professional expertise of the Linen Hall Library, PRONI and the local university would assist in ensuring the academic accuracy and historical context of any exhibition and a collaborative approach with these agencies is strongly recommended.
- 21 It is also recommended that some element of community involvement and/or educational outreach be incorporated into each of the 3 periods under review. For example, in relation to the Centenary of the Covenant, the Good Relations Manager has been in contact with the Education, Community Heritage & Outreach Officer (ECHO) from the Ulster Hall. The ECHO is examining a potential educational day-long programme with cross-community schools, including possibly a visit to the Ulster Museum in the morning, viewing artefacts with a talk by a specialist; a tour and educational workshop in the afternoon in the Ulster Hall (also iconic in terms of its role in the Covenant period) on the theme of remembering, facilitated by a local expert; finishing with an inter-active debate in the Council Chamber, chaired by the Lord Mayor or civic dignitary. Such a programme would be beneficial for young people in allowing them to consider a historical event from a non-contentious perspective and to investigate issues around political sensitivity.
- 22 The Working Group may wish to 'retain' a small panel of academics as advisors, for example, Gordon Lucy and Dr. Eamon Phoenix, who facilitated our workshop earlier this year.
 - (ii) 1914-18: World War I, including the Somme and the Easter Rising
- 23 This period could be entitled 'War and Revolution'. I would propose that separate exhibitions for these events be commissioned and that these should be linked and complementary, each clearly referencing the other and showing the wider European context of each.
- 24 One would outline Belfast's involvement in the Great War, particularly the devastating effects on local communities of the news of the huge casualties suffered in the Somme, and the role played by all those Divisions involved, emphasising the recent change in approach to the role of the Irishmen who fought.

25 The second exhibition would examine the rise of Irish nationalism, the events in Dublin of 1916 and the response of the British authorities, and the consequences for the country as a whole, including the legacy in Belfast.

26 In addition, lectures and appropriate drama productions could be organised.

(iii) 1918 to 1921 – Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State.

27 This period could be entitled ‘the birth of two Governments’.

28 It is difficult in 2011 to predict what might be acceptable in 7 years time to what will be a new Council but again I would suggest a mix of exhibitions, lectures, drama and publications.

29 The views of the Working Group are requested on all these proposals.

30 Other anniversaries not listed above, but which have been previously raised within the Centenaries Working Group, include:

2012

31 Former Councillor Adamson had referred to the 1400th anniversary in 2012 of the founding by St. Columbanus of Bobbio Abbey in northern Italy which had been invaluable in the spread of Christianity throughout Europe. A meeting was held with various Council staff to initiate plans to mark this historical event.

32 The Development Committee has now agreed, at its meeting on 15 June 2011, to provide financial assistance through its European Unit towards a mini festival in Belfast in October 2011 to celebrate the Christian and cultural linkages between the Belfast Lough area and Saint Gallen in Switzerland. This festival is to mark the 1400th anniversary of the founding of the St. Gallen monastery in Switzerland, which had been designated a world heritage site.

2013

33 April 1613 will mark the 400th anniversary of the granting by James I of the city’s original Charter, which established the first Belfast Corporation and enabled parliamentary representation. An academic conference entitled Belfast – the Urban Experience 1613-1939, was held in September 2010 as part of the build-up to the 400th anniversary and was organised by the Heritage Officer within the Council’s Culture & Arts Unit.

34 The Heritage Officer is already involved with plans to produce a new book on the history of Belfast, due to be published towards the end of 2012 to mark the 400th anniversary. It is proposed that the issues round this anniversary would be more appropriately dealt with by the Culture & Arts Unit in

accordance with broader ongoing work around the telling of the Belfast Story.

- 35 In view of this, it is not proposed to include either of these two last named anniversaries within the remit of those being considered by this Working Group in the Decade of Centenaries 1912-1922. However, the Working Group is requested to recommend to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that the set of principles agreed should apply to any key anniversaries being marked by the Council.

Resource Implications

- 36 The exhibition to mark the 70th anniversary of the Belfast Blitz cost £15,000. Therefore we could assume that a similar sized exhibition plus a number of supplementary events – photographic exhibition, drama, lectures, publications etc - could be undertaken for around £30,000, for the first period 1912-1914.
- 37 This figure does not include the additional cost of any civic hospitality that the Council may choose to provide at particular events (see separate report re: —a request from the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge). If this is included, at a cost per event in the region of £10,000, the total cost for the 1912-1914 period would rise to approximately £40,000 – i.e. £20,000 per financial year.
- 38 To ensure equality of opportunity and consistency of approach, it is recommended that similar civic hospitality be considered and approved on a case by case basis over future months, to mark other major key centenary events, in accordance with the existing civic hospitality policy. This will have to be balanced with the increasing focus of the Council on value for money, in view of the challenging economic climate.
- 39 Given the current challenging economic climate and the financial position of the Council, it is difficult to predict accurately beyond that period, but it would be fair to estimate a similar expenditure for the likely programme of exhibitions, drama, lectures, publications etc. proposed for the longer period 1914-1918 to be in the region of £80,000 i.e. £20,000 per year.
- 40 It may be possible for the Council to make application for financial assistance for this work to either the Community Relations Council or the Heritage Lottery Fund, but this cannot be guaranteed. Both of these bodies are still actively considering, not only principles to be used and events to be commemorated, but also the reserving of funds for this work.
- 41 Currently, no provision has been made to cover this expenditure. If this Decade of Centenaries is to be marked in this way, the Centenaries Working Group is requested to make a recommendation to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that an appropriate budget stream to support this work be established.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 42 All of the proposals outlined above would have positive implications in terms of the promotion of equality and good relations, if undertaken in an inclusive manner.

Recommendations

- 43 The Working Group is requested to approve the contents of the report; in summary:
- that the Decade of Centenary events be grouped into 3 periods as set out above
 - that an exhibition be commissioned as outlined for the period 1912-1914, in partnership with appropriate external agencies
 - that individual events to be marked should focus on the rise of the women's suffrage movement and the Signing of the Ulster Covenant
 - that public lectures be arranged on key individuals from that period
 - that the outline programme for the later periods 1914-1918 and 1918 – 1921 be adopted, with more detailed reports to be brought back for approval in due course
 - that a recommendation be made to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that an appropriate budget stream to support this work be established.”

Officer to contact for more information

Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager, ext 6020”

The Working Group adopted the recommendations as set out.

Centenary of the Ulster Covenant – Request from the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

- 1 The Working Group will be aware that the Centenary of the Signing of the Ulster Covenant will be in September 2012 and that this will be the first major event to be marked in the forthcoming Decade of Centenaries from 2012-2022.
- 2 As part of their own preparations for this, representatives from the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge have met with the

Chief Executive and the Good Relations Manager and followed this up with a formal written request.

- 3 Their letter notes that the Covenant is an *'historic event in our somewhat turbulent history'* and states that they sincerely hope that the Covenant Centenary, as *'the first of a series of very significant events in our history, will be the benchmark and set the tone for all events in the forthcoming decade of anniversaries'*.
- 4 They have requested a programme that includes the following elements, to be supported both practically and financially by the Council:
 - an exhibition relating to the Ulster Covenant period, covering all aspects, in the City Hall in September 2012
 - a formal civic dinner in the City Hall on 24 September 2012
 - some type of community/educational outreach programme by the Council in partnership with appropriate agencies.

Key Issues

- 5 The Working Group will be aware, from a separate report on this agenda, that proposals are already underway to host such an exhibition and a related educational outreach programme.
- 6 This report has been brought initially to the Centenaries Working Group since it is important that Members are aware of all the aspects of the proposed centenary programme.
- 7 Importantly, as the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge itself notes, the Covenant centenary will, as the first in a series of events, be the 'benchmark and set the tone'.
- 8 To ensure equality of opportunity and consistency of approach, it is therefore recommended that similar civic hospitality be considered on a case by case basis over future months, to mark other major key centenary events, in accordance with the existing civic hospitality policy. This will have to be balanced with the increasing focus of the Council on value for money, in view of the challenging economic climate.

Resource Implications

- 9 The Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge representatives have requested a civic dinner, for which the estimated costs are in the region of £11,000, to cover the costs of the meal and associated drinks.
- 10 The Democratic Services Officer has confirmed that there is provision within the Council's civic hospitality budget to cover a number of civic dinners throughout the year and that

provision can be made for the 2012-13 year, should Members agree to hold the event.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 11 All of the proposals outlined above would have positive implications in terms of the promotion of equality and good relations, if undertaken in an inclusive manner.

Recommendation

- 12 That the Centenaries Working Group recommends to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that approval be granted to the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge for a civic dinner to be held in the City Hall in September 2012 and that, to ensure equality of opportunity and consistency of approach, similar civic hospitality be considered on a case by case basis over future months, to mark other major key centenary events, in accordance with the existing civic hospitality policy.”

After discussion, during which the Democratic Services Officer and the Good Relations Manager clarified a number of matters in respect of the request, the Working Group agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it accede to the request for the use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality as set out.

Unionist Centenary Committee

The Good Relations Manager reported that she had received from the Secretary of the above-mentioned organisation a request to re-enact the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant in the City Hall on Friday, 28th September, 2012. She suggested, given that further information in respect to the potential size and scale of the event would need to be submitted to the Working Group before it could consider the request, that the matter be deferred to enable her to meet with the representatives of the Unionist Centenary Committee and she undertook to update the Members accordingly.

The Working Group agreed to this course of action.

Date of Future Meeting

The Working Group agreed that it would meet again on Monday, 17th October at 12.30 p.m.

Chairman