



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Exploration of the development of a Council Diversity Strategy
<b>Date:</b>	18 November 2011
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

<b>1.0</b>	<b><u>Relevant Background Information</u></b>
1.1	Members may be aware that the Party Group Leaders have considered this issue recently and requested that it be brought to the attention of the Committee.

<b>2.0</b>	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
2.1	<p>The Centenaries Working Group has been meeting since the spring of 2011 and to date has made recommendations on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the main periods to be highlighted in the Decade of Centenaries</li><li>- a set of principles to be adopted</li><li>- a programme of Council activities for the period 2012-2014</li><li>- a policy around civic hospitality to be provided in relation to the Centenary events.</li></ul> <p>All of the recommendations from the Centenaries Working Group have been agreed by the Council. The Council has also agreed that the same set of principles should apply to any key anniversaries being marked by the Council. A copy of the most recent report to the Historic Centenaries Group setting out the agreements reached so far is included at Appendix 1.</p>
2.2	<p>The Committee will also be aware that two Equality Impact Assessments are under way at present – on the policy of Flying the Union Flag and on City Hall Memorabilia. It is expected that reports on these two Equality Impact Assessments will be presented early in 2012.</p>
2.3	<p>In addition, we have received requests for greater recognition of the use of the Irish language in various parts of the Council, including signage within facilities and use of the language within Council.</p> <p>The Committee will also be requested in due course to consider a report outlining proposals to mark the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee in 2012.</p>
2.4	<p>These items represent some, but not all, of the wide range of issues relating to cultural diversity on which the Council will have to make decisions in the near future. Committee will be aware that some of these issues have been discussed at the Parks and Leisure Committee (most recently 10 Nov 11) and it was not possible to build a cross-party consensus on the matter.</p>
2.5	<p>At recent workshops as part of the corporate planning process, Members have emphasised that they wish to lift their sights from internal, short-term difficulties of city management to the challenges of being a city in a global context, and actively setting out to address those things that have historically weakened Belfast. Good relations and community cohesion therefore are vital ingredients for the city’s future development.</p>
2.6	<p>It is clear that there is an emerging imperative to ‘upgrade’ the management of diversity, both internally and across the city. The Council’s stated commitment to inclusion, equality and good relations needs to be demonstrated in a manner that celebrates fully all the identities in the city,</p>

	<p>including our indigenous cultural traditions. This will require leadership and a commitment to dialogue. Without an overarching agreement there is a risk that issues related to the expression of cultural identity may descend into serious division, distracting Members from their ambitious growth agenda contained within the stimulus package.</p> <p>Members will be aware that a lack of agreement will undermine both the peace-building and economic transformation processes in Belfast; and the impact of this failure will be most acute in the most deprived parts of the city.</p>
2.7	<p><b>Proposal</b></p> <p>There is a need for a broad, commonly-agreed cultural framework rather than a set of ad hoc responses to diversity. It is recommended that the Council should develop and adopt a diversity policy or 'charter of principles' which promotes equality and a commitment to the full inclusion and participation of all communities in the city.</p> <p>This will apply to a range of current issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- memorabilia and displays in the City Hall</li> <li>- Flying of the Union Flag EQIA</li> <li>- the Decade of Centenaries programme, events, cultural displays in Council public facilities</li> <li>- use of the Irish language</li> <li>- Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations</li> <li>- and expressions of distinctiveness within local areas and neighbourhoods (i.e. including public art, signage and symbolism).</li> </ul> <p>The policy would also have an internal focus. The opportunity should be taken to update any appropriate HR policies, possibly under the overall heading of "dignity at work", as a framework for dealing with any potential disputes. This would be timely since the HR Department is already committed to developing a workforce diversity strategy.</p> <p>A diversity strategy would support the Council in addressing issues, such as those outlined above, that have arisen from the expression of local identity. At the conclusion of the process a full report would be presented to the Committee for decision on the overall policy and the individual elements.</p>
2.8	<p>It is proposed that the Party Group Leaders meet with the Centenaries Working Group over an intensive and defined period of time, say 6-8 sessions from December till February, possibly with independent external facilitators, to frame a debate and assist in exploring the possibility of developing a Council strategy on managing diversity.</p> <p>It is suggested that, where the Party Group Leader is also a Member of the Centenaries Working Group, an additional Member from that Party should also participate.</p>

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p><b>Human</b></p> <p>Good Relations and Human Resources staff would be involved in the development of any future strategy.</p> <p><b>Financial</b></p> <p>None at this stage.</p> <p><b>Asset</b></p> <p>None.</p>

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Equality Implications</b>
------------	------------------------------

Any strategy would have to ensure compliance with existing legal requirements and Equality Commission guidelines but should aim to promote better community relations within both the Council and the city.

<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
------------	------------------------

The Committee is requested to agree that the Party Group leaders meet with the Centenaries Working Group over a defined period of time, as set out above, to explore the possibility of developing a Council strategy on diversity and agree that the Chief Executive's office liaise with Members to agree a timetable of meetings to be tabled at the first joint meeting of the Historic Centenaries Group.

<b>6.0</b>	<b>Officers to contact</b>
------------	----------------------------

Peter McNaney, Chief Executive  
Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager  
Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager