



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Request to use the City Hall to mark the centenary of the Signing of the Solemn League and Covenant
Date:	Friday, 17 February, 2012
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext 6314)
Contact Officer:	Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer (ext. 6316)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group, at its meeting on 13 January, was advised that an application had been received from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland requesting the use of the City Hall for an event in April, 2012 to mark the centenary of the Signing of the Ulster Covenant.
1.2	The Working Group agreed that such applications for the use of the City Hall should be dealt with in the normal way and be subject to the existing Council policy on the use of the building and also the principles already agreed by the Historic Centenaries Working Group on 13 January, which are attached at Appendix 1.

2	Key Issues
2.1	The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has submitted an application form requesting the use of the City Hall to hold an event entitled 'Citizenship, Covenant and Christ' on 19 April, 2012.
2.2	The purpose of this event is to acknowledge the particular relationship between Presbyterian history and the signing of the Ulster Solemn League and Covenant by holding an event which will include academics who will provide insight from different perspectives, a panel discussion and an question and answer session. The event seeks to provide a platform to acknowledge the centenary in a manner which promotes the fact that different opinions can be shared and discussed across civil society without fear or mistrust.
2.3	The event aims to 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. It will do this by involving historians and academics from across the island of Ireland who

	<p>will speak during the event from different perspectives as well as considering theological matters. A range of non-governmental organisations and groups will be invited to participate in the day and to bring a question from their perspective to the panel which will be made up of the above mentioned historians. Representatives of all the political parties will be invited together with representatives of all the churches across the Island.</p>
2.4	<p>The event aims to 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. It will do this by gaining input from the historians and academics which the organizers deem as being essential to making this event inclusive and broad in its perspective. One of the aims of the event is to provide a platform where people with different views of the past can talk and listen to one another.</p>
2.5	<p>The organisers are seeking to ensure that the event is non-exclusive and welcoming to all sections of the community in Belfast by inviting representatives from the churches, all political parties and a range of non-governmental organizations, such as 'Healing Through Remembering', 'Unionist Centenaries Committee', 'Ulster Scots Association' and 'Relatives for Justice', who have an interest in the past. There will be representation from across the Island in each of these spheres thus ensuring broad participation and bringing together in Belfast a significant and highly representative group of people.</p>
2.6	<p>The organisation has made it clear in their application that as information is released about the event, they will be keen to accommodate requests from other groups interested in participating and/or attending the event. The organisers hope that this event will help to recall other stories of the Signing of the Covenant and that together there can be a new and clearer focus on citizenship across the Island of Ireland.</p>
2.7	<p>Based on the information received, the application appears to satisfy both the criteria on the use of the City Hall and the principles agreed by the Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group on 13 January.</p>

3	Resource Implications
	N/A

4	Equality Implications
4.1	N/A

5	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is recommended to grant the use of the City Hall for the event on 19th April, 2012.

6	Decision Tracking
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Officers responsible:

Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer

March 2012

7	Key to Abbreviations
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8	Documents Attached
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Appendix 1 : Principles agreed by the Joint Group of the Party Leaders' Forum and Historic Centenaries Working Group