



Report to: Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject: Armed Forces Flag
Date: Friday 21 June 2013
Reporting Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager

Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware that each year since 2009 the Council has considered requests from the Ministry of Defence to fly the Armed Forces Day flag for a week leading up to the Armed Forces Day itself at the end of June.

In the first three years, 2009, 2010 and 2011, the Council agreed, in accordance with existing Council policy, that the request to fly the Armed Forces flag at the City Hall be acceded to but that the approval be for one day only.

In 2012, because a request to fly the Armed Forces Flag was not received until June, a Special Meeting of the Council was held on 21 June which agreed to fly the Armed Forces Flag for the period from 25-30 June 2012.

In 2013, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 24 May deferred making a decision on the matter and the Council agreed at its meeting on 3 June that the Armed Forces Flag should fly from 24-29 June 2013. The Council discussed the possibility of establishing a policy on the flying of flags, other than the Union Flag, as outlined in the Flag EQIA and the Chairman undertook to request that a report in this regard be submitted.

Key Issues

It is clear that there has not been a consensus on this matter among the political parties represented on the Council.

In 2010, at its meeting on 23 April, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had determined that that it did not wish to establish a policy position on the Armed Forces Day flag and that each request should be considered annually on an individual basis.

Members will be aware that last year the Council undertook a major EQIA on its policy on flying the Union Flag and began a 16 week period of consultation on this last June.

On 22 June 2012, following the decision of the Council last year to fly the Armed Forces Flag for the 6 day period, the Equality Commission contacted the Council to comment:

"The Equality Commission notes the press reports of the special meeting of the Council last evening, 21 June, to consider the Armed Forces Day Flag. It will be important that the Council monitors any adverse impacts which would assist the Council in any future consideration of such issues. In circumstances where this issue may recur annually the Council should screen the policy in line with its Equality Scheme commitments.

The Equality Commission also notes the ongoing EQIA on the display of flags. It would of course be preferable if the Council's settled policy on flags extended to such displays so that

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| | <p><i>any proposal is addressed within the settled policy and not separately discussed in this way."</i></p> <p>The equality screening which was undertaken in respect of the proposal this year reminded the Council of this, stating that:</p> <p><i>"It should be noted that, during the EQIA of the policy on the flying of the Union flag, the Equality Commission suggested that the Council should ensure that there is a policy framework in which to consider, in a consistent manner, the flying of other flags. They advised that such considerations would include the duration and extent of displays of flags which may be more closely associated with one community background in Northern Ireland, or indeed associated with neither of the two main community backgrounds."</i></p> <p>In view of the fact that this issue is likely to recur annually, the Committee is requested to consider whether it might incorporate the flying of the Armed Forces Flag within its current policy. This would avoid the discussion and dissent which has given rise to tension on an annual basis with consequent negative publicity for the Council.</p> <p>The Committee is reminded that the existing Council policy on the flying of flags allows for flags other than the Union Flag to be flown on specific occasions. The Cross of St. Patrick is flown on 17 March, the European Union Flag is flown on Europe Day on 9 May and the Red Ensign is flown on National Merchant Navy Day on 3 September each year. (see list attached)</p> <p>The Armed Forces Flag could be added to this list if the Committee so agrees.</p> <p>All flags are flown in accordance with standard flag flying protocols.</p> |
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| | <p>Equality and Good Relations Implications</p> <p>The Equality Screening Report completed this year in respect of the flying of the Armed Forces Flag (and previously circulated to Members at the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee meeting on 24 May 2013) had concluded:</p> <p><i>"It is considered unlikely that the flying of the Armed Forces flag would be regarded as being of strategic importance or be significant in terms of expenditure. It is also unlikely that a one-off decision in relation to action on a single day in 2013 would be challenged by way of judicial review. Depending on the decision, the impact on one community or the other may be adverse but only to a minor extent. Clearly the level of offence to one community would be greater if the Armed Forces flag were to be flown for six days rather than one day, but it is considered that neither option would result in a major impact on good relations."</i></p> |
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| | <p>Resource Implications</p> <p>None.</p> |
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| | <p>Recommendations</p> <p>The Committee is requested to consider the issues in the report and decide whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the Armed Forces Flag should be added to the list of other flags which are flown on specific occasions at the City Hall (ii) and if so, determine whether this should be for a single day or a six day period. |
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| | <p>Officer to contact for further information</p> <p>Hazel Francey, Good Relations Manager, ext 6020</p> |
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Dates for Hoisting Flags in 2013

(Department for Culture Media and Sport)

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| 9 January | Birthday of the Duchess of Cambridge |
| 20 January | Birthday of the Countess of Wessex |
| 6 February | Her Majesty's Accession |
| 19 February | Birthday of the Duke of York |
| 10 March | Birthday of the Earl of Wessex |
| 11 March | Commonwealth Day |
| 17 March | St. Patrick's Day |
| 21 April | Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen |
| 9 May | Europe Day |
| 2 June | Coronation Day |
| 10 June | Birthday of the Duke of Edinburgh |
| 15 June | Official celebration of Her Majesty's birthday |
| 21 June | Birthday of the Duke of Cambridge |
| 17 July | Birthday of the Duchess of Cornwall |
| 15 August | Birthday of the Princess Royal |
| 10 November | Remembrance Day |
| 14 November | Birthday of the Prince of Wales |
| 20 November | Her Majesty's Wedding Day |

Additional Flags

Belfast City Council also flies an additional flag as follows:

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| 17 March | The Cross of St Patrick | St Patrick's Day |
| 9 May | The European Union Flag | European Day |
| 3 September | The Red Ensign | Merchant Navy Day |

Flag protocol dictates that these additional flags are flown on the lower flagpole.