

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Tuesday, 7th November 2017, from 1.15 pm to 3.00 pm
Room 301, Department of the Taoiseach

Minutes

Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (Chair)
Dr Martin Mansergh (Vice Chair)
Dr Sandra Collins
Professor Mary Daly
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Professor Patrick Geoghegan
Dr Mary Harris
Dr. Leeann Lane
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin
Mr Jerry Kelleher (D/Taoiseach)
Mr Feargal Ó Coigligh (D/AHRRGA)
Ms Sinéad Copeland (D/AHRRGA)
Ms Orlaith Lochrin (D/AHRRGA)
Mr Rónán Whelan

Apologies:

Mr Francis Devine
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Ms Sinead McCooile
Professor Eunan O'Halpin
Dr Éamon Phoenix

Key Points:

The minutes of the previous meeting (25th September) were agreed and there were no issues arising.

An update was provided to the Advisory Group regarding plans for the State commemorative programme to mark the centenary of the death of John Redmond. The programme is currently under development and will comprise the symposium on 6th March 2018 which takes place in collaboration with the NUI and RIA, commemorative events in Wexford and Waterford and other initiatives and events. The chair invited the members to submit any ideas that they may have around a ceremonial event to commemorate John Redmond.

The Group discussed further plans for a conference which would explore how other countries have experienced Civil War and its aftermath, including potential speakers and possible themes. The Chair invited the members of the Group to revert with their ideas following the meeting.

The Advisory Group considered possibilities for a formal solemn ceremony in remembrance of those who lost their lives during the Civil War. Possible venues were considered, including the

Obelisk Memorial at Leinster House. A venue of this stature at the centre of parliament would signal that democracy ultimately prevailed and politics was the way forward.

It was agreed that a significant State ceremony of remembrance and reconciliation could be held on a neutral date, free from association with any single or sequential historical events - possibly in October 2022.

The Advisory Group envisages that a small number of low-key ceremonial events and initiatives would be held by the State, thereby creating a space for other parties to make their own plans. The question of engagement with relatives arose and it was noted that the relatives of those who fought and died during the civil may comprise very different and complex groupings. The Department will consult with colleagues in the Department of Defence to enquire if they hold any relevant details in this regard.

The Advisory Group considered the potential role of the Defence Forces in the commemorative programme over the second half of the Decade of Centenaries. It is anticipated that a significant volume of requests for participation by the Defence Forces in commemorative events are likely to be received. Consideration will need to be given to the development of appropriate policy and protocols to guide the decision-making process around this. Consideration will also be required concerning the role of and participation by the Defence Forces over the remainder of the Decade of Centenaries. It was agreed that the resources of the State, including participation by the Defence Forces, should be preserved and prioritised for the State commemorative programme.

It was reiterated that the Military Archives and the Military Service Pensions collection are continuing their release of significant archive files into the public domain, which are a valuable resource to support local research and endeavours. It is anticipated that the National Archives redevelopment project will be well-progressed in advance of the centenary of the Civil War.

It was noted that the Department is currently liaising with the National Cultural Institutions to ascertain their plans to remember the significant historical events that took place over the second half of the Decade of Centenaries. It is envisaged that these institutions will have a significant role to play in facilitating an organic cultural interpretation of these events and themes. The important role played by the local authorities over the remainder of the Decade was also reiterated.

Dr Sandra Collins indicated that the National Library may have a photographic exhibition in place for the autumn of 2018 focusing on the War of Independence and that she would be happy to explore the possibilities for a similar exhibition focusing on the Civil War. Dr Collins advised also that the Library is also planning to digitise a collection of the correspondence and papers of John Redmond and it is hoped to have the digitised collection available to coincide with the centenary of Redmond's death in March 2018.

It was agreed that the tragedy of the Civil War was not just in the loss of life but also the loss of heritage our heritage and records, with the destruction of the Public Records Office. It was suggested that a commemorative event/initiative to mark the destruction and reconstruction of Dublin may be appropriate.

It was agreed that plans to mark the foundation of the State will be considered at a later date.

An update was provided to the Advisory Group around the launch of the public consultation process.

It is anticipated that the 2019 commemorative stamp programme from An Post is likely to be notified to Government early next year and the Advisory Group will be kept updated.

It was provisionally agreed that the next meeting of the Advisory Group would take place on Monday, 4th December.

Ends.