

Meeting of the Expert Advisory Group on Commemorations

Tuesday, 11th July 2017, from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm
Room 301, Department of the Taoiseach
Minutes

Attendees:

Dr Maurice Manning (Chair)
Dr Martin Mansergh (Vice Chair)
Professor Mary Daly
Mr Gabriel Doherty
Mr Jerry Kelleher (D/Taoiseach)
Ms Orlaith Lochrin (D/AHRRGA)
Mr Feargal Ó Coigligh (D/AHRRGA)
Professor Eunan O'Halpin
Ms Sinead McCoole
Dr Mary Harris
Comdt. Stephen MacEoin

Guest Attendees:

Mr John Green,
Chairman of Glasnevin Trust
Mr George McCullough,
Chief Executive of Glasnevin Trust

Apologies:

Dr Sandra Collins
Mr Francis Devine
Professor Diarmaid Ferriter
Dr. Leeann Lane
Dr Éamon Phoenix

Key Points:

The minutes of the previous meeting (29th May) were agreed and there were no issues arising.

The Chair welcomed Mr Green and Mr McCullough and expressed his appreciation to both for their attendance at this meeting of the Advisory Group.

The Chair re-iterated that the Group's key task over the coming period was to consider the sensitive and contentious issues and events that may arise over the second half of the Decade, where the advice of the Group to the Government would be particularly important.

The Group considered the approaching centenary of the death of Thomas Ashe and positively endorsed proposals for an appropriate State Commemoration, which would be organised in collaboration with Glasnevin Trust. It was noted that Glasnevin Trust has already received multiple requests from interested parties who wish to hold commemorative events to mark the anniversary of his death. Glasnevin Trust has determined that, when a State commemoration is due to take place in the Cemetery, no other commemorative events will be scheduled on the same date.

Mr McCullough and Mr Green provided an update to the Advisory Group with regard to the Trust's commemorative activities to date as well as its future plans. The Chair commended the Trust for their work programme to date and their significant and assured role in managing very sensitive and complex commemorative events and initiatives.

It was noted that 16,000 primary and secondary school children have benefited to date from the Trust's Education Programme, which takes place in collaboration with TCD and the Marino Institute of Education. This programme offers participating teachers an opportunity to examine aspects of the primary and secondary school history curricula.

Mr McCullough and Mr Green also provided an update to the Group with regard to the Trust's on-going plans for the Necrology Wall and they outlined the methodological challenges that it faces in considering its approach over the coming period. The Board of the Trust has considered the issues raised and the Trust's position is that this is a Necrology Wall – a historic record of those who died – rather than a commemorative wall. The design of the wall will accommodate any amendments that may be required to the list of names.

Mr McCullough and Mr Green indicated that the Trust plans to consider further how to effectively frame the narrative and debate around the Necrology Wall and would welcome any input from members of the Advisory Group in this regard.

The Chair re-iterated that this is a significant and important project, which will stimulate debate and discussion as we approach this contentious period in our history. The Chair invited Mr McCullough and Mr Green to attend a further meeting of the Group to continue these discussions.

The Group considered Professor Eunan O' Halpin's proposal – *Uncovering Irish-related records in the National Archives, London*, which was circulated prior to the meeting and endorsed the proposal. Mr Ó Coigligh indicated that one effective project delivery option, which merits further consideration, could be for the National Archives to incorporate this project into its work programme, with appropriate resources from the Department to support this initiative. It was agreed that the key principle underpinning this project is the democratisation of access to the records in question – that the key objective is to make the records freely available to all, unconstrained by any efforts to shape or influence the narrative.

The Chair advised that publicity surrounding the launch and publication of the Group's Second Statement of Principles will present a significant opportunity to begin a process of public consultation, debate and discussion around how the State might approach the commemoration of the difficult period in our history from 1919 - 1923.

It was noted that the Department of Defence does not consider that the Advisory Group's aspiration expressed in its Second Statement, that *'the release of all remaining military service pension files in the Military Archives files, with the aim that the entire collection is freely available online by January 2019'* is achievable within this stated timeframe of January 2019. The Department of Defence has indicated that it will endeavour to arrange for the release of files

to the fullest possible extent, in line with the resources available, by the end of the Decade of Centenaries.

The Group agreed that its role over the forthcoming period will be to advise Government as to key themes, as well as historical events, that could be marked by the State; and, also, to provide guidance on sensitive issues and anticipated difficulties, without adopting too prescriptive an approach. The importance of the role of local authorities and commemorative events led at local level with State support was re-iterated. Further consideration will be required to determine how best to encourage and support local engagement over the second half of the Decade. It was agreed that the provision of guidance and a structured framework would be very helpful to local authorities in this regard.

Submissions to the Chair from members were considered. It was noted that a balanced approach and tone will be important when considering the events of this period, focusing on the civil and political narrative as well as the military element, and addressing the complexities of the period as well as specific historical events. Observations from the Group will be incorporated into the working document going forward.

Finally, it was reported that the Declaration of Independence Day Private Members Bill has passed Second Stage in the Seanad.

No matters were raised under A.O.B.

The date and venue for the next meeting will be confirmed shortly.

Ends.