

MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRMINGHAM IRISH
COMMUNITY FORUM HELD AT THE IRISH CENTRE ON THURSDAY, 8TH
SEPTEMBER, 1994.

GUESTS:

Cllr. Paul Tilsley	Deputy Lord Mayor
Cllr. Teresa Stewart	Leader, B'ham City Council
Cllr. Abdul Rashid	Chair, R.R.U. Sub Committee
Mr. Jagwant Singh Johal	Team Leader-Community Dev. R.R.U.
Mr. Sean Hutton	Development Co-ordinator FIS.

1. OPENING REMARKS:

Councillor Paul Tilsley opened his speech by thanking the Forum for inviting him. He said he felt he was among friends; he was with us at the first meeting at the Council House and has been to various other Irish functions and is "well used to Brendan Farrell pointing the camera at him". He hopes to make even better friends and made reference to the old 'gag' about there being three kinds of Britons:-

Those who are born in Birmingham
Those who wished they had been, and
those who have got no ambition at all.

He said the City of Birmingham had a commitment to ensure that there is recognition for all groups that make up the Birmingham family and his presence here tonight is partly because of the high regard the City holds for the Irish Community, who have made Birmingham the great international City that it now is. He acknowledged that there are differences between our two Countries and that we can stand together and accept our differences, and what has happened over the last 10 days, i.e. the Peace Declaration, gives us all grounds to rejoice that there is hope for the tensions between the 26 and 6 counties of Ireland to be removed.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Minutes were accepted as accurate. Proposed by Pat McGillicuddy and seconded by Michael Moran.

3. MATTERS ARISING

None.

4. GUEST SPEAKER:

Sean Hutton, Community Care Development Co-ordinator for the F.I.S. congratulated the Forum on the formation of this body, with the comment "In unity is strength". He told us of some of the work of the F.I.S. and the Irish Welfare, which was born out of a need to fill a gap that the mainstream was not doing. He also talked about the S.R.B. (Single Regeneration Budget) and the problems we were having to get funding for the very necessary services of the I.W.I.C.

He also emphasised the importance of consistent monitoring of statistics stating that it was of little use being given ethnic status if no monitoring is being carried out. He gave evidence of discrimination against the Irish, and the humiliation suffered by a second generation girl at a school through Irish jokes depicting the Irish as being stupid.

He made reference to the film "Irishmen" and congratulated the Welfare Centre on the opening of the Drop-In Centre, to tend to the needs of such people.

5. REPORTS

Chairperson - J.A. Taaffe, O.M.I

Monitoring:

Father Taaffe began his report by welcoming the guests. He said that the Irish Community in Birmingham represented approximately 1/3 of the total population, but as no proper monitoring of figures exists, and the 81 and 91 Census are inaccurate, we have no figures to back our argument. He spoke of his frustration in trying to get monitoring of the Irish, having been granted ethnic status, and, following a lot of discussions and meetings, a Planning Group was formed and this led to the establishment of the Irish Forum; in March of this year a Development Officer was appointed, and this post is funded by the Race Relations Unit.

Housing:

Father spoke of the large number of Irishmen who have been coming to Birmingham for more than 150 years, very many of them working in the construction industry and providing housing for thousands, but sadly few of them have been in a position to provide for themselves because of the migrant nature of their work. Many of them are now living in appalling conditions and he hopes that this will be partly remedied at least by the Housing scheme that we are at present pursuing with Cara Housing Association in London. The aim is to provide good quality housing at affordable rents which will be owned and managed by our Irish Community.

Funding:

The Irish Welfare & Information Centre was established 37 years ago, but it was not until 1972 that a nominal sum of £600.00 per annum was received from Social Services Dept. of the City Council. In 1991 this was increased to £52,000 through the Inner City Partnership funding and this was used to provide an additional Social Worker and part-time Out-reach Worker and pay for the increased overheads.

Because of another new Scheme (Single Regeneration Budget) all grants, including Section 11 and Inner City Partnership will cease from 31st March, 1995 and he called on the Councillors present to give their fullest support to ensure that we do not have to make cut-backs or close our doors.

Employment and Training:

Following the 1991 Census which highlighted the disproportionate number of Irish People unemployed, the Forum are keen to establish an Employment and Training Centre and have already visited a number of such Centres in the City and are negotiating with the Economic Development Department in furthering this goal.

Conclusion:

We are the oldest and largest ethnic community in the City: we do not want preferential treatment; all we ask is equal recognition and access to all City services as is our right under Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976. We have a good relationship with the Councillors and City Officers and take seriously as our clarion the motto of our City - 'FORWARD', and in our own language 'AR AGHAIDH'.

Treasurer - Mr. Pat O'Neil (Limerick County Association).

Pat gave a brief resume of the funds for 1993/94. There was a budget of £250,000 given to the Race Relations Unit by the City Council. This covers the rent of the Offices; salaries of the officers and all the overheads. The balance is then divided between the 9 Forum Groups and we received £5,000 for running our offices and general administration. As this was only received in February, we have spent very little and there is a balance of £4,000 left for 1994/95.

Aidan Dillon proposed acceptance of the accounts and this was seconded by Frank Ryan.

6. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION:

Section 6 - Article A1 - reads "the Executive shall consist of not less than 12, including the 4 Executive Members". This is a misprint and should have read "not more than 12". At the last A.G.M. we changed it to "Not more than 16 members including the 4 Executive members".

Father Taaffe proposed acceptance of this amendment and this was seconded by Eddie Falahee.

At this point the Deputy Lord Mayor and Councillor Teresa Stewart left for another engagement, but before leaving Councillor Stewart thanked the Forum for inviting her and said she has a very deep commitment to the continued success of these Fora, particularly the Irish as she had a lot of Irish people in her Billesley constituency.

She said she found Fr. Taaffe's address very stimulating and would like to discuss it at a later date.

7. QUESTIONS:

None received. Liam Kirwan from Redditch said he needed help in setting up an Irish Centre in Redditch and would like some advice from Birmingham.

8. ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

<u>NOMINEES:</u>	<u>ORGANISATION:</u>	<u>VOTES:</u>
<u>Chairman:</u>		
J.A.Taaffe, O.M.I.	Irish Welfare Centre	Unanimous
<u>Vice Chairman:</u>		
Eamon Duffy	Comhaltas Ceoltoiri	34
Pauline Roche	Irish Women's Support Group	9
<u>Secretary:</u>		
Julie Nugent	Irish Studies Group	-

(In the absence of a Nominee, Julie Nugent agreed to stand for election. Pauline Roache proposed acceptance and this was seconded by Eamon Duffy).

<u>Treasurer:</u>		
Pat O'Neil	Limerick Association	31
Susan O'Shea.	Irish Women's Support Group	11
Eddie Falahee	Irish Centre	36
Frank Ryan	Cork Association	36
Brenda Fleming	Tuesday Club	33
Clare Cooke	GAA	32
Kevin McCarron	Coimisiun Rinci	30
Olive O'Sullivan	Irish Welfare Centre	29
Sylvia Brennan	Irish Dancing Academy	26
Ita Markey	Tyrone Association	25
Martin Earlis	Comhaltas Ceolt oiri	25
Susan O'Shea	Irish Women's Support Group	24
Joe Murphy	Mental Health Forum	24
Pauline Roche	do	23*
Mary Connolly	Comhaltas Ceolt oiri	23*
G. Mac an Mhaoir	Conradh na Gaeilge	19
Barney Griffin	Mental Health Forum	17
Denise NiLoinsigh	Conradh na Gaeilge	13
Mary O'Brien	Irish Women's Support Group	13
L O'Malley	Roscommon Association	12
Robert Pasley	College of Food	10
Kath O'Neil	Irish Women's Support Group	9
J Connolly	Roscommon Association	6
Robert Cowan	Conradh na Gaeilge	6
Mary Donnelly	Irish Women's Support Group	5
Anne Doyle	Irish Studies Group	5

*After two recounts there was a tie for the 16th place between Pauline Roche and Mary Connolly. Another vote was taken and the result was Mary Connolly 19 and Pauline Roche 14. Mary Connolly was therefore elected to the Executive and Father Taaffe suggested that Pauline remain as a co-opted member.

Father Taaffe thanked the outgoing members, Michael Reilly and Dawn Casserly for their support in the past; he also thanked the rest of the members and expressed the hope that he could

continue to count on their valuable support and help during the coming year.

9. CLOSING REMARKS:

Councillor Rashid apologized for the uncertainty of his attendance. He was not trying to evade any questions we might want to ask; it was due to the fact that he had had an accident during the day and he was still feeling a bit shaky. He said he would welcome any questions that we might like to ask. He congratulated the Birmingham Irish Forum on their success and said he could identify with a lot of the problems the Irish experience. He referred to the demise of the Section 11 Funding and the fact that we were not included in the Sparkbrook/Ladywood SRB bid and felt that the Irish Welfare & Information Centre should be on the mainstream funding.

He advised us that the Chairman of the R.R.U. had made a donation of £4,000 towards the Irish Cultural Evening.

He was very angry that the report referred to in Fr. Taaffe's report had been removed from the Agenda of three Meetings of the R.R.U. Sub-Committee. He assured the members that the report would be available at the next Meeting of the R.R.U. on the 28th October.

The Chairman read out the list of newly elected officers, viz:

<i>Chair</i>	<i>J.A. Taaffe, O.M.I.</i>	
<i>Vice Chair</i>	<i>Eamon Duffy</i>	
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Julie Nugent</i>	
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>Pat O'Neill</i>	
<i>Eddie Falahee</i>	<i>Irish Centre</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Frank Ryan</i>	<i>Cork Association</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Brenda Fleming</i>	<i>Tuesday Club</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Clare Cooke</i>	<i>GAA</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Kevin McCarron</i>	<i>Coimisiun Rinci</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Olive O'Sullivan</i>	<i>Irish Welfare Centre</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Sylvia Brennan</i>	<i>Irish Dancing Academy</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Ita Markey</i>	<i>Tyrone Association</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Martin Earlis</i>	<i>Comhaltas Ceolt oiri</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Susan O'Shea</i>	<i>Irish Women's Support Group</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Joe Murphy</i>	<i>Mental Health Forum</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Mary Connolly</i>	<i>Comhaltas Ceolteoiri</i>	<i>23</i>

Gobnait, the Development Worker, thanked everyone for their support and said she was enjoying her new post and was very enthusiastic about the future.

The Meeting ended with a Buffet and a display of Irish Dancing and some Traditional Irish music.
