

THE FEDERATION FOR ULSTER LOCAL SOCIETIES

Bulletin 1

26 March 2007

Dear Hon Secretary

PRESERVING THE FEDERATION FOR ULSTER LOCAL STUDIES

The background

On 23 February 2007 the Management Committee of **the Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited** circulated members announcing that the Federation would cease to function and would close on 31 March 2007. It went on to explain that this was due to the loss of funding from the Community Relations Council and the failure to secure alternative government funding.

The decision to wind up the Federation had been taken at a meeting in Dungannon on 10 the February 2007. That meeting had been called to “discuss the future of the Federation”, not to close it down. In fact the notice convening the meeting urged members to “urgently bring this matter to the attention of local MPs, MLAs and Councillors.” Enclosed with the notification was supporting material for use by Societies in their efforts. However, the meeting did not deal with the matter in this way and the only way forward offered by the Management Committee was the need for an immediate decision to wind the Federation up. Faced with this it was difficult for those present to give a reasoned response especially since they had not had to opportunity to discuss this doomsday solution with their own Societies.

It is fair to say that, apart from the Management Committee, nobody at the meeting wanted to close the Federation down but it has not proved possible in the intervening period to change the Committee’s mind on this, although advice from the Companies Registry and other professional sources makes it clear that the Company could continue to exist provided it is solvent. Although the final accounts have not yet been completed, we believe that the Federation will remain in the black at the end of the Financial year. Thereafter the only sources of income immediately available to it would be members’ subscription income and income received from the Insurance Scheme. This is sufficient to continue to operate the Federation in a voluntary capacity.

The closure of the Federation would abort also the other Province-wide activities such as **Due North** and the series of events organised in different locations. While it is inevitable that much of this effort would have to be put on hold for a while there is every reason to hope that it can be picked up again as conditions improve.

Insurance cover

A major casualty of the present position is the loss of the Insurance Cover provided by the Federation. The existing cover expires on 31 March and unless it is renewed, Societies will have to make their own arrangements. There are two major problems with this approach

1. The cost in relation to membership numbers is high. Most quotes that have been received are in the region of £165 which for the smaller societies may be prohibitive,

and, more seriously;
2. Societys’ liability in the event of claims would be unlimited. This means that in the (unlikely but possible) event of a major accident involving a society’s activities, the £1million public liability cover might not be sufficient to cover the awards. In these circumstances it is our understanding that the additional cost would fall to the personal liability of the officers and possibly the members of the Society involved.

The Federation's liability, on the other hand, is limited to £1 per member. This is why the protection of Company Law is so important. Indeed it is so important that if the Federation were to wind up the Societies would need to recreate it.

In these circumstances it is both unnecessary and unwise to allow the Federation to disappear when it can continue as a limited company run by voluntary effort.

An Alternative

The meeting held in Donaghmore Heritage Centre on Saturday 24 March 2007 was called for the express purpose of continuing the work of the Federation on a voluntary basis and to preserve the insurance scheme. Twenty-six societies were represented and all of them were determined to do what they could to maintain the Federation as a viable limited company.

The meeting focussed on two main approaches –

1. Preserving the Federation for Ulster Local Studies Limited

- It was agreed to seek an Extraordinary Meeting of the Federation, under Article 8 of the Articles of Association, for the purpose of rescinding the Dungannon decision to wind up the company and determining how best to maintain the Federation as a going concern.
- Lecale Historical Society undertook to host this meeting at its own expense.
- Member Societies not represented at the meeting to be asked to complete the requisition form, a copy of which is attached. To meet the conditions for Extraordinary meetings the article requires societies representing not less than one fourth of the total voting rights of all members having a vote to sign the requisition. This is complicated and means that a substantial proportion of the membership need to request the meeting.
- All twenty-six societies present signed the requisition. However, without all the voting figures, which are not available to us, we can not be sure that these votes alone are sufficient. The meeting therefore asks member societies to complete, and return urgently, the requisition forms to the address at the end of this Bulletin.

2. Continuing the Insurance Scheme

This is more difficult. The Federation will not renew the scheme and although it remains available for renewal, it is not legally possible for any group of members to club together to renew it. One avenue open, in the short term, since members need cover for their activities from 1 April onwards, is to set up a separate organisation that represents the present Federation members. Such a body could take out the group insurance, probably with the same provider, at substantially the same premium.

The meeting agreed to establish such a body and those present undertook to become members. The organisation is named the Federation for Ulster Local *Societies*, with aims and objectives and membership identical to the existing Federation. A copy of the interim Constitution was agreed and an Executive Committee appointed. The Committee held its first meeting after the general meeting and appointed the officers, as follows

Chairman: John Dooher - Strabane History Society Tel: 02871883006

Vice –Chair: Bridgeen Rutherford – New Buildings and District Arch. & History Society
Tel: 02871861696

Secretary: Berkley Farr - Lecale Historical Society Tel: 02844830442

Treasurer: Pat Devlin - Lecale Historical Society Tel: 02844612986

The other members of the Committee are –

William Devlin – TCD Association of NI Tel: 01844831783

John Hulme – Carrickfergus and District Historical Society Tel: 02893361215

Roy McCullough – North West Arch. And Historical Society Tel: 713416230

Doreen McBride – Banbridge Historical Society Tel: 40623782

Edward Darling – TCD Association of NI Tel: 02892612982

Allan Walbridge – Templepatrick and District Historical Society Tel: 02894432795

John Bradley - West Tyrone Historical Society Tel:

The Committee agreed that all member Societies should receive a report of the proceedings and be invited to –

- Complete the Extraordinary Meeting requisition
- Apply for membership of the new Society – same fee as in previous years
- Apply for insurance cover – same terms as in previous years.

The Committee also agreed, in view of the urgency of the position, to accept the offer of Lecale Historical Society to use its bank account (through a separately identified account) for its financial transactions until its own banking arrangements could be established.

The main focus of the meeting and the Executive Committee is on the drive to maintain the limited company. The new Society will remain in existence only until that is achieved at which point a meeting will be convened to wind it up and transfer its affairs and assets to the company. However, should that effort fail, the new Society will be in a position to replace it, albeit at unnecessary bother and expense.

Enclosed with this bulletin are copies of the Extraordinary Meeting requisition form, Membership Renewal form and Insurance request form. Copies of the Interim Constitution are available on the Lecale Historical Society's website at –
<http://www.lecalehistory.co.uk/FULS/constitution.html> .

Of particular urgency is the need to return the membership and insurance forms, with the necessary payments. Time is of the essence if we are to get the insurance scheme underway as soon after 1 April as we can. To do this we need the funds to pay for it.

Cheques should be made payable as set out on the forms and posted to the address printed thereon.

The completed Extraordinary Meeting forms should also be sent to

Patrick Devlin
Lecale Historical Society
18 Ardmore Avenue
Downpatrick
Co. Down BT30 6JU

Conclusion

This is a rather long bulletin but we believe the members are entitled to a full explanation of the position and of the approaches we believe will achieve the objectives of preserving the Federation as a viable organisation and maintaining the valuable insurance scheme.

Pat Devlin
Treasurer