

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Wednesday, 13th March, 2024 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Presentations

- (a) Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024-25 (Pages 1 - 42)

3. Restricted Items

- (a) Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 Update (Pages 43 - 50)
- (b) Belfast Zoo - Quarter 3 Update (Pages 51 - 56)
- (c) Belfast Bikes - Quarter 3 Update (Pages 57 - 68)
- (d) A City Imagining Investment Programme: Cultural multi-annual grants Amendment (Pages 69 - 78)
- (e) Markets Update and St George's Market business plan (Pages 79 - 90)

4. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**
 - (a) Housing Led Regeneration All Party Roundtable (Pages 91 - 96)
5. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**
 - (a) Draft response to ACNI strategy consultation (Pages 97 - 130)



Subject:	Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024-25
Date:	13 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture and Tourism Kerry McMullan, Tourism and Events Development Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2024-2025 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.</p> <p>Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at the Committee to present the detail of its 2024-25 plan.</p>

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2024-25. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council. - Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,076,424 for 2024-25, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 460 partner businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.
3.2	Visit Belfast is a public / private partnership. It's current Chairperson is Marie-Thérèse McGivern and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Hanvey, Councillor Clíodhna Nic Bhranair and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.
3.3	The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast had been going from strength to strength as Belfast continued to drive the regional tourism economy. In 2019, in the last - published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.9m trips accounting for one third of all tourism trips to Northern Ireland and tourism spend amounted to £417m, 40% of Northern Ireland tourism spend. Council has worked with Visit Belfast over the past three years to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy re-emerging stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging.
3.4	The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city: " <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> " sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus

	<p>on: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city’s position through marketing and communications.</p>
3.5	<p>Belfast’s <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m per year by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast has developed its new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and 2024-25 business plan to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Plans to promote and encourage the exploration of Belfast’s neighbourhoods by visitors, thereby adding to our city-wide destination proposition, is a primary aim of Visit Belfast’s new strategy. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.</p>
3.6	<p>Visit Belfast’s new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and one-year business plan (2024-2025) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast’s Tourism Plan: <i>Make Yourself at Home</i>, focused on delivering for the city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grow the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way ● Position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out; ● Enhance the Experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and; ● Sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast’s sustainability story.
3.7	<p>Tourism Outlook – despite the outlook being far from certain, tourism can contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The reporting of tourism statistics and meaningful visitor analysis at a local level continues to be impacted by the delayed resumption of surveys and statistics by NISRA. While tourism related surveys including passenger and household travel surveys have resumed, it remains unclear when we will see</p>

	<p>a full return of annual government tourism statistics particularly at a local level. However, a range of data analytics from a number of sources have provided valuable metrics illustrating recovery has been stronger than expected including for example:</p>
3.8	<p>The accommodation sector has seen strong performance, with hotel room occupancy between January and October 2023 at 79.2%. This represents 5.5% growth compared to 2022 and 5.1% growth compared to 2019. Furthermore, weekday occupancy during this period was 77% (seeing an increase of 7.1% on 2022 and +5.7% on 2019), while weekend occupancy was 84.9% (+2.1% on 2022 and +3.8% in 2019), pointing to the recovery of the leisure market in the city.</p>
3.9	<p>With two airports, Belfast Harbour as well as road and rail links, the city is driving overall tourism growth in Northern Ireland. This, combined with its extensive leisure and business offer, is attracting visitors. 52% of all visitors to Northern Ireland came to Belfast. Overall, the city accounts for 32% of all overnight stays in NI and the city generates 40% of the region's tourism spend. Since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist consumer spend within Belfast has increased by £82 million (88%).</p>
3.10	<p>During and since the pandemic, tourism on the island of Ireland has performed particularly strongly, helping to mitigate the shortfall of international visitors. This has been particularly noticeable among visitors from ROI to NI. In fact, residents from the Republic of Ireland took over 1.1 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2022 (51% increase from 2019 levels), staying for 2.6 nights (42% increase) and spending £233 million (65% increase). This is significant for Belfast because 3 in 4 visitors from the Republic of Ireland state that a 'City Break' is their preference when travelling to Northern Ireland.</p>
3.11	<p>The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.</p>
3.12	<p>Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast's business plan 2024-25 include:</p> <p>Directly deliver on the ambitions and priorities set out in <i>Make Yourself at Home</i> tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of Neighbourhood tourism; new ways of measuring impact; Belfast 2024; Accelerating digital innovation; Data driven decision making; Enhancing perceptions of Belfast amongst visitors; Increased collaboration; Telling Belfast's sustainability story; and Enhancing the visitor experience and touchpoints.</p>

3.13 **Operational Targets for 2024-25:** based on projected levels of growth in 2024-25, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2024-25 as agreed by their board:

Total Output	Target
Leisure Tourism Bed nights	350,000 bed nights
Leisure Tourism Day trips	200,000 day trips
Business Tourism Bed nights	95,200 bed nights
Business Delegates	34,000 delegates
Cruise Visitors	296,000 pax & crew
Visitor Enquiries	766,000 enquiries

Economic Impact	2024-25 Target
Leisure Tourism	£60m
Business Tourism	£35m
Cruise Tourism	£20m
Visitor Servicing	£18m

Visit Belfast Economic Impact	£133m
Budget	£4.5m
ROI	£1 : £64

3.14 A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council's 2024-25 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council's tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.15 In the current financial year, Belfast City Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,035,710. The City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 9 March 2022, approved a multi-annual funding agreement for the 3 years from 2022-25 and an inflationary increase of 2% in Year 3 of the Business Plan which results in a funding allocation of £2,076,424 to Visit Belfast in 2024 / 2025

3.16	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership.
4.0	Appendices
4.1	Appendix A: Visit Belfast Presentation of Business Plan 2024-25

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Housing Led Regeneration- Proposed All Party Round Table
Date:	13 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Adrian Ferguson, Senior Development Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision
After Council Decision
Sometime in the future
Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1	To seek approval in convening All Party Round Table meetings, across Members, on various strands of the Housing Led Regeneration programme.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) to approve convening an All-Party Round Table regarding Housing Led Regeneration work strands across the city that will provide an opportunity for Members to have a focused and informed discussion around this strategic priority, with representation from Party Group Leaders or their nominees. ii) Note the updates below in relation to the Inner North West Development Brief; the procurement of a Development Partner / Institutional Investor for the delivery of £630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration at scale in the city; city wide strategic site assessments and the City Centre Living Vision.
4.0	Main Report
4.1	All Party Round Table discussions
	<p>Members will be aware that Housing Led Regeneration is a strategic priority of this Committee as set out in the Committee Plan under “Maximising Housing Development and Regeneration Opportunities”, which aligns into the Strategic Priority of “Maximising Housing Development and Regeneration Opportunities’ as set out in the Corporate Plan. Of relevance to highlight is the further synergy to the refreshed Belfast Agenda and the priority theme of ‘Housing Led Regeneration’ under the area of “Our Place”. This strategic priority involves the commitment and input from a diverse array of stakeholders, including Council, DfC, other Government departments, NIHE and importantly communities. This includes the work being taken forward by the Community Planning structures via the Housing Led Regeneration Group as part of the Belfast Agenda and via the City Development Board.</p>
4.2	<p>Following recent discussions between officers and Elected Members regarding various matters associated with housing led regeneration including city centre living and given how it cuts across various Committees and via the Community Planning process, it has been proposed that it may be helpful for Members to convene an All-Party Round Table meeting (with PGL or their nominees) to ensure they can see all this work holistically, which is not always possible via the current structures. It will provide an overview of the various streams of work underway including the work of the Housing Led Regeneration Group; NIHE, Housing Association, developer and investor discussions; planning; funding issues etc and where they feed into Council’s strategic priorities and governance structures.</p>
4.3	<p>Members will be aware of various updates brought to Committee in relation to housing led regeneration activities and by way of very brief update on some of these, the following is highlighted:</p>

- As reported to this Committee in September 2023 (subsequently SP&R Committee 2023) the **Inner North West Development Brief** for lands at Little Donegall St/Library St /Kent St was being reissued following input from DfC (as landowner of part of the lands) and NIHE. Members will recall that this Development Brief process had previously been paused at the request of Members. In line with the Committee decisions of September '23 the reframed Brief has now been issued to all 15 developing Housing Associations, with a deadline for return in June 2024.
- **Development Partner / Institutional Investor:** Following the Housing Led Regeneration Programme update to this Committee and agreement at SP&R Committee in September 2023, Council launched the process which seeks procurement for a long term partner for the delivery of £630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration in October 2023. As Members will recall this includes the inclusion of significant identified Council lands in the city centre, as part of a multi-site residential-led mixed-use regeneration development opportunity, with the potential for further sites across the city to be identified over the course of the partnership. Through this process Council are seeking a long-term partner to fund, develop and where appropriate to own and manage assets delivered through the partnership as part of a comprehensive regeneration scheme. The process is in line with the scheduled procurement programme. The Selection Questionnaire and de-selection stages have recently concluded, with 3 bidders now progressing through to the imminent Competitive Dialogue stage. The process is continuing in line with the procurement programme and is currently on schedule, with recommendations to be brought back to Members later in the year and with prior updates as this progresses.
- **City Wide Strategic Site Assessments (SSA Phase 2):** feasibility assessment including planning appraisals are currently being undertaken and as previously agreed by Members these will be brought to Area Working Groups, with updates to Area Working Groups from May onwards. It is worth noting that this forms part of wider work with the Housing Led Regeneration Group which is also assessing other public sector lands inc NIHE and DfC lands and this wider assessment work will also be brought to Members aligned to the governance mechanisms for the other public sector bodies.
- **City Centre Living Vision:** As reported to this Committee and referenced also to the Committee Workshop in January 2023 on City Centre Living, the City Centre Living Vision work has now completed. This is supporting an evidenced based approach to building a sustainable city centre residential vision; producing clear recommendations acknowledging the role of Council and its partners in delivering this vision; recognising the current and emerging social, demographic, economic and political landscape of the city and region; considering demand, supply, community and social infrastructure, urban design, viability and case studies from elsewhere. The summary findings and recommendations on this City Centre Living Vision will be brought to the proposed All Party Round Table.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is worth highlighting that there are a significant number of consented residential units / schemes that have come through the planning system in the city centre particularly, and that these have not progressed for various reasons including issues around policy, viability, infrastructure etc, many of which are out with Council's responsibility, however the proposed roundtable will provide an opportunity to discuss these matters with Members.
4.4	<p>There are internal and external plans that aim to drive forward housing led regeneration in the city and the Belfast Agenda is key to focusing on these priorities and setting out measurable actions that will be delivered by Community Planning partners. As Members are aware the refreshed Belfast Agenda and supporting action plans were endorsed recently by Council at the beginning of March 2024, and that under the auspices of Community Planning a Housing Led Regeneration Group was established with the purpose of; <i>Supporting integrated planning and greater collaboration across partners in relation to the assessment and identification of city-wide public-sector lands to facilitate housing led regeneration, as well as identifying potential strategic private sector land opportunities, either on their own or in conjunction with adjoining public sector owned lands, as well as; Exploring mechanisms to establish partnerships for development of homes and ways of investing in housing throughout the city, as well as identifying barriers to delivery and potential solutions and to assign route map and parties to help overcome these identified barriers.</i></p>
4.5	<p>This Group currently includes representatives from BCC, NIHE, SIB, DfC and LPS and is chaired by the Chief Executive of the NIHE. The proposed Roundtable will provide an opportunity to update on the work of this HLRG and including barriers to delivery and potential solutions.</p>
4.6	<p>Key to the successful delivery of the of the priorities for Housing Led Regeneration as set out in the Belfast Agenda and Council's Corporate Plan is the ability of Council to collaboratively work with external public and private sector partners in relation to strategic opportunities and overcoming challenges. It is important to note that whilst housing led regeneration is a strategic priority of this Committee and of Council, the powers and responsibility for a significant amount of delivery lie with DfC, including for example, housing, urban regeneration, community and voluntary sector development, social legislation.</p>
4.7	<p>Subject to Members approval, it is proposed to convene an All Party Round Table meeting focused on housing led regeneration, which will provide an opportunity for Members to have a focused informed discussion and to consider ongoing activity, potential opportunities and the work of the Community Planning, Housing Led Regeneration Group. This will build on the engagement of previous City Growth and Regeneration workshops on Housing Led Regeneration which took place in January 2022 and January 2023 and allow an opportunity for specific Committee Plan priority updates on for example City Centre Living, City Wide Strategic Site Assessments, City Centre Living</p>

	Vision and Inner North West Development Brief etc, and wider issues around barriers and opportunities in respect to driving forward housing led regeneration.
5.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None
6.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.
7.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	Draft response for ACNI Strategy Consultation
Date:	13 th March 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation, or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to: Note the contents of report and agree the draft response to the consultation laid out in Appendix 1
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Members will be aware that the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) opened consultation on their Draft 10 year Strategy for Northern Ireland, with the consultation period closing on the 5 th April 2024
3.2	The Arts Council (ACNI) develops and champions the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy. This is facilitated through distributing Public and National Lottery funds. This funding creates opportunities for more people, from all backgrounds and communities, to enjoy and take part in the arts. Supporting, developing and championing arts and cultural activity by supporting artists, arts practitioners, organisations, venues and communities throughout Northern Ireland.
3.3	This is ACNI's first ten-year strategy and it was developed over the course of 2023, including five months of extensive engagement with artists, arts organisations, key representatives across government, businesses and the wider public sector.
3.4	<p>The strategy looks to address the challenges facing society and the sector. Many of the issues that the sector faces were underlined to during engagement to develop this strategy. Some of the key issues facing the sector identified in the strategy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standstill funding • Return on investment • Short term funding cycles • Public value placed on arts and artists • Attendance and participation • Climate emergency • Representation and EDI

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment in the arts • Digital economies <p>The draft Strategy outlines mission, visions and values aligned to delivery;</p> <p>MISSION <i>To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.</i></p> <p>VISION <i>A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.</i></p> <p>The document identifies the key challenges and opportunities for growth with outcomes aligned to both the arts sector and society.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A more financially stable arts sector 2. A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive 3. A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation 4. A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment 5. More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences 6. A sector that is more valued across society and government <p>ACNI now wants all interested parties to consider the draft proposal and sees this as an opportunity to help shape the final strategy and next steps.</p> <p>A summary of the questions posed and draft responses to each of these have been collated and are attached in Appendix 1. Members are asked to review the draft responses and confirm their agreement that this can be submitted to ACNI as the Belfast City Council response to the consultation or to raise any other matters that they wish to incorporate.</p> <p>From the perspective of Belfast City Council, we believe that strategic alignment between Belfast City Council and the Arts Council Northern Ireland is essential for realizing our shared vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich Belfast. As a result our draft response recognises our ambition to support continued innovation, collaboration and partnership in advancing our mutual goals for the arts sector. We welcome the recognition within the strategy that takes cognisance of cross cutting objectives and shared resources that focus efforts and facilitate effective delivery.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>No specific financial or resource implications.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>ACNI have conducted and published their EQIA as part of the consultation process.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached

	Appendix 1 – Draft Belfast City Council Response to Consultation & associated cover letter Appendix 2 – Draft ACNI 10 year strategy
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1. To what extent do you agree with the mission, vision and values

- Strongly agree X
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you have any further comments on the mission, vision and values?

We commend ACNI in commitment to developing and championing the arts through investment and advocacy. We believe that a vibrant arts sector is essential for fostering creativity, enhancing well being and driving social and economic prosperity. As stewards of our city's cultural landscape we understand the importance of expertise in ensuring the highest quality of artistic experiences for our residents and visitors. We are dedicated to creating opportunities for participation and engagement across all segments of our community.

Collaboration is essential for leveraging resources and expertise to maximise the impact of arts initiatives. BCC is committed to partnering with ACNI, local arts organisations and artists, and other stakeholders to foster a thriving arts ecosystem that benefits our city and its residents.

The mission, vision and values align well with those of Belfast's cultural strategy 2020-2030, *A City Imagining*; and our community plan the Belfast Agenda, which recognises the power of culture and arts to help make our city and region a better place to live, work, and visit. Furthermore, the mission, vision and values complement our ongoing strategic outputs, including UNESCO City of Music plan, Belfast 2024 cultural programme, and Neighbourhood Tourism Plan. We look forward to continuing our partnership to advance the arts and cultural sector in Belfast and Northern Ireland.

2. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 1

A more financially stable arts sector

- Strongly agree X
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 2

A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive

- Strongly agree X
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

4. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 3

A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation

- Strongly agree X

- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 4

A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits, and cares about the environment

- Strongly agree x
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

6. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 5

More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences

- Strongly agree x
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. To what extent do you agree with Outcome 6

A sector that is more valued across society and government

- Strongly agree x
- Agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you have any further comments on the outcomes or actions:

In alignment with Belfast City Council's cultural strategy, "A City Imagining," and our commitment to the delivery objectives of Belfast 2024, we fully support the endeavour to develop a more financially stable arts sector. Cultivating financial stability within the arts sector is paramount for sustaining and enhancing cultural vibrancy, creativity, and community engagement.

A financially stable arts sector not only ensures the longevity of artistic endeavours but also fosters economic growth and social cohesion within our city. It enables artists and cultural organizations to focus on their craft and innovation. This stability encourages diverse artistic expressions, fosters talent development, and attracts investment, tourism, and new audiences to Belfast.

Moreover, financial stability allows for greater resilience during times of crisis, ensuring that the arts continue to thrive even in challenging circumstances. By investing in the financial stability of the arts sector, we are investing in the well-being and prosperity of our communities, fostering a dynamic

cultural landscape that enriches the lives of all residents and visitors alike.

We fully endorse the need to develop a sector that prioritises the well being of its people and embraces inclusivity. Nurturing a sector that looks after its people is essential for fostering creativity, resilience and sustainability. By prioritising the welfare of artists, cultural works and practitioners we create an environment where individuals can thrive, innovate and contribute meaningfully to our cultural landscape ultimately delivering against our vision of a vibrant and diverse Belfast. Embracing inclusivity ensures that the richness of our cultural heritage is celebrated and that all members of our community have equitable access to participate and engage in cultural experiences, opportunity and resources.

Through collaborative efforts and meaningful partnerships we can break down barriers, amplify marginalised voices and create a more inclusive and equitable arts sector that reflects the true essence of Belfast's identity.

We recognize that fostering an environment of experimentation and innovation is crucial for the continued growth and vitality of our cultural sector. Innovation drives progress, and by encouraging experimentation, we not only empower artists and cultural organizations to push boundaries but also cultivate a dynamic and resilient cultural ecosystem. Through initiatives such as providing funding for innovative projects, facilitating collaboration between artists and technologists, and offering support for transformation, we aim to nurture creativity and drive positive change within the cultural sector. These are core principles that have underpinned the development and delivery of Belfast 2024, our major cultural programme, which will lead to positive multiple legacies for the city.

In alignment with the objectives of Belfast 2024, our city's cultural strategy emphasizes the importance of nurturing a creative ecosystem that generates social cohesion, fosters innovation, and drives economic growth. We recognize the significant role that the arts and culture play in enriching people's lives, enhancing well-being, and creating opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

Moreover, we are fully committed to the principles of "People, Planet, and Place" as the underpinning values guiding our city's development and the Belfast 2024 programming. In line with these principles, we believe that a sustainable cultural sector is essential for the well-being of our communities and the health of our environment. By integrating environmental considerations into cultural programming, infrastructure development, and organizational practices, we can minimize our ecological footprint and contribute to a greener, more resilient city.

Regarding the statement concerning the accessibility of arts experiences to people from all backgrounds, we wholeheartedly agree that fostering inclusivity is paramount in enriching our cultural landscape. Our commitment to this principle is embedded within the Belfast Agenda and Belfast's Cultural Strategy 2020-2030 *A City Imagining*, and is aligned with delivery objectives and strategic outputs such as Belfast 2024

Our Cultural Strategy, *A City Imagining* emphasizes the importance of democratizing access to the arts, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds can actively participate and engage with cultural experiences. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement initiatives, and targeted programming, we aim to break down barriers to access and create opportunities for everyone to enjoy and contribute to our vibrant arts scene.

Belfast 2024 further underscores our dedication to inclusivity through its core principle of co-creation and open procurement of projects, and by prioritizing projects that promote cultural diversity, foster social cohesion, and empower marginalized communities. By investing in grassroots organizations, supporting emerging artists, and facilitating cross-cultural exchanges, we strive to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable cultural ecosystem.

In alignment with these overarching frameworks, we are fully committed to collaborating with the Arts Council Northern Ireland and other stakeholders to advance our shared goal of expanding access to arts experiences for people from all backgrounds. By working together, we can harness the transformative power of the arts to build a more connected, resilient, and inclusive society.

We wholeheartedly endorse the notion that the arts and cultural sector should be more valued across society and government. Our city's cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, embodies this sentiment by recognizing the integral role that arts and culture play in shaping Belfast's identity, fostering creativity, and promoting social cohesion.

As we look forward to the delivery objectives outlined in Belfast 2024, it becomes even more apparent that the arts are not merely a luxury but a fundamental component of a thriving and inclusive society. Through initiatives such as cultural festivals, community arts projects, major cultural events, and public art installations, Belfast continues to demonstrate the transformative power of the arts in enriching lives, stimulating economic growth, and bridging divides.

However, for the sector to truly flourish, it requires robust support and recognition from both society and government. This includes adequate funding, policies that prioritize cultural development, and partnerships that foster collaboration between government agencies, cultural organizations, and communities.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Arts Council Northern Ireland to champion the cause of valuing the arts across all sectors of society and government. By doing so, we can ensure that Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole continue to be vibrant, innovative, and culturally rich places to live, work, study, invest and visit.

Belfast City Council fully supports and welcomes the objective outlined in the draft strategy and stands ready to collaborate with the Arts Council Northern Ireland and other stakeholders to achieve these shared objectives.

8. What would you view as the 3 most important themes associated with the draft final 10 year strategy

- A more financially stable arts sector
- A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive
- A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation
- A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits, and cares about the environment
- More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences
- A sector that is more valued across society and government

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Subject: Response to Arts Council Northern Ireland Strategy Public Consultation

Dear [Recipient],

On behalf of Belfast City Council, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the Arts Council Northern Ireland's strategy public consultation. Our response aligns closely with our ten-year cultural strategy, "A City Imagining," which aims to foster a vibrant and inclusive arts and cultural landscape in Belfast.

Firstly, we commend the Arts Council NI for their dedication to supporting and promoting the arts sector in Northern Ireland. As a key stakeholder in the cultural development of Belfast, we recognize the importance of strategic alignment to maximize the impact and effectiveness of both our efforts and those of the Arts Council NI.

In alignment with "A City Imagining," we advocate for:

Increased Investment: We support efforts to secure additional investment for the arts sector, particularly initiatives that promote accessibility, diversity, and innovation. We welcome joint strategic efforts in seeking ways to increase investment from wider sources to ensure the long term stability of the sector.

Community Engagement: We emphasize the importance of community engagement, co-creation and collaboration in cultural projects, ensuring that the arts are inclusive and accessible to all residents of Belfast. This is a central tenet within our investment criteria and strategic initiatives such as Belfast 2024.

Creative Economy: We endorse strategies to strengthen the creative economy, recognizing the arts as a valuable driver of economic growth, tourism, and job creation in Belfast.

Cultural Infrastructure: We advocate for investments in cultural infrastructure, including venues, studios, and public spaces, to support the growth and sustainability of the arts sector.

Arts Education: We emphasize the significance of arts education in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among Belfast's youth, and we support initiatives to enhance arts education in schools and communities, and the arts' contribution to lifelong learning

Digital Innovation: We encourage the integration of digital technologies into arts programming and engagement strategies, recognizing the potential of digital platforms to enhance accessibility, reach, and audience engagement.

Diversity and Inclusion: We prioritize efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts, supporting initiatives that amplify underrepresented voices and address systemic barriers to participation and representation.

Sustainability: We advocate for sustainable practices in the arts sector, including environmentally friendly initiatives and efforts to reduce carbon footprint and promote environmental stewardship. We are currently supporting the Green Arts Collective NI to lead from grass-roots to promote sustainable approaches across the sector.

International Collaboration: We support active participation in networks and collaboration with partners on joint initiatives to foster international collaboration and exchange in the arts, promoting cultural diplomacy and showcasing Belfast's cultural richness on the global stage.

Evaluation and Impact: We emphasize the importance of robust evaluation mechanisms to measure the impact and effectiveness of arts initiatives, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. We would welcome more collaboration in this area in order that we can better expose and share the deep and wide impact of our investment. This will enable us to advocate for increased recognition and investment from a broader range of beneficiaries.

In conclusion, we believe that strategic alignment between Belfast City Council and the Arts Council Northern Ireland is essential for realizing our shared vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich Belfast. We look forward to continued collaboration and partnership in advancing our mutual goals for the arts sector.

Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Position/Title]

Belfast City Council

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

10-Year Strategic Plan, 2024-34

**FINAL DRAFT FOR PUBLIC
CONSULTATION**

January 2024



Chair's and Chief Executive's Foreword

On behalf of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, we are pleased to present our strategic plan for 2024-2034. This plan represents our unwavering commitment to championing the arts sector in Northern Ireland and propelling it to new heights of recognition.

Northern Ireland's arts sector is a beacon of inspiration and talent. Our artists, creators, and organisations have consistently demonstrated their ability to captivate, challenge, and enrich our lives through their innovative and thought-provoking work. They are the driving force behind our vibrant and diverse artistic landscape, and they deserve our utmost admiration and support.

However, it is a regrettable truth that government investment in the arts sector in Northern Ireland has not always matched the incredible potential and impact it holds. Opportunities have been missed, and the growth of this wonderful sector has been hindered by a lack of adequate resources and recognition. But we refuse to be disheartened, for we firmly believe that our arts deserve better.

Artists are not just creators; they are innovators and entrepreneurs who push boundaries, challenge conventions, and shape the world around us. They are the catalysts for change and their work has the power to inspire and transform society. They have an uncanny ability to provoke conversations, bridge divides, and ignite imaginations. In a time when our society needs healing, connection, and fresh perspectives, the role of artists has never been more crucial.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to ensuring that artists are at the centre of the change Northern Ireland needs. We will continue to advocate tirelessly for increased government investment in the arts, for we firmly believe that investing in our artists is an investment in the future of our society. We will work relentlessly to create an environment where artists can thrive, where their voices are heard, and where their contributions are valued and celebrated.

Our strategic plan for 2024-2034 is an ambitious, but realistic, long-term roadmap that charts our course towards a future where the arts sector in Northern Ireland flourishes. It outlines our commitment to supporting artists, promoting inclusivity and diversity, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that the arts are accessible to all. We are determined to create an ecosystem that nurtures and empowers artists, enabling them to unleash their full potential and make a lasting impact on our society.

Together, let us embark on this journey, united by our shared belief in the transformative power of the arts. Let us seize this opportunity to shape a future where the arts sector in Northern Ireland is not only recognized but celebrated as a vital pillar of our identity and heritage. Let us dare to dream, to create, and to inspire. Over the coming decade, with the Arts Council's Strategic Plan 2024-34, we can build a brighter, more vibrant, and more culturally rich Northern Ireland.

With gratitude and determination,

Liam Hannaway, Chair
Roisín McDonough, Chief Executive

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

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The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is committed to making information available in large print, Braille, audio, and Easy Read and will endeavour to provide information in languages other than English as well as British and Irish sign language on request.

Accessible versions of the document can be found here: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/10YearStrategy>

An EQIA has been developed for the strategy. That can be found here: <https://artscouncil-ni.org/10YearStrategy>

1. ABOUT THE ARTS COUNCIL OF NORTHERN IRELAND

What we do¹:

Support and develop high-quality arts activity – we invest public funding to create opportunities for more people, from all backgrounds and communities, to enjoy and take part in the arts.

Distribute National Lottery funds – through applications to our National Lottery funding programmes, we're able to fund projects that develop new arts activity, supporting individuals, communities and organisations.

Develop and improve the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts – we produce strategic research and intelligence and work with partners in the cultural sector to advise the Department for Communities, Local Authorities and other bodies on matters relating to the arts. We also have strong international links in the UK and beyond.

Increase public access to and participation in the arts – we want to create an innovative, creative and diverse society where people can fulfil their potential and contribute fully to society.

Raise the profile of the arts in Northern Ireland – we're the national voice for the arts in Northern Ireland, promoting the quality, value and importance of the region's artists/arts organisations and the impact that they make.

Influence decision-makers - the arts take place in many different settings. They can have a dramatic impact on the quality of people's lives and the places in which they live and work. The arts are also frequently at the heart of initiatives for economic and social regeneration. Our job is to ensure that the contribution that the arts can make is recognised.

Develop international opportunities in the arts – we have developed partnerships with cultural organisations such as the British Council and we work collaboratively with all the UK nations to promote Northern Ireland art internationally. We encourage international exchange and collaboration between artists and arts organisations.

Work collaboratively with stakeholders and the public – seeking and listening to feedback through our formal consultations and open conversations, we ensure that our programmes of work deliver public benefit.

Work across art forms – including community arts and education, circus and carnival, creative industries, drama, dance, festivals and venues, literature, music, opera, theatre, traditional arts, visual arts, craft and many more.

Foster innovation between the arts and the wider creative industries – by facilitating skills development and knowledge transfer in digital technology for the arts sector, encouraging collaboration, leveraging additional funding and expertise through key partners, and encouraging the creation of digital artwork to ensure the arts evolve with audiences.

¹ [The Arts Council \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1995 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

We believe:

1. that **public investment** is a key component for a thriving arts sector. We know that the sector leverages further investment based on this vital support and that the benefits from all this investment, derived for both individuals and communities, is substantial.
2. in the **value of artists**. We acknowledge the crucial role that artists play in society and the importance of supporting their creative practice, professional development, and fair remuneration.
3. in the **fundamental value of the arts**. We understand that the arts have inherent worth and contribute to the overall wellbeing and cultural richness of society, beyond economic and social considerations.
4. that **all art forms should be respected equally**. We value and support diverse art forms, recognising their unique contributions to cultural expression and creativity.
5. that **everyone should have the right to creativity**. We uphold the principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises the right of every individual to freely participate in and enjoy cultural life, including access to artistic expression and creative experiences.
6. in the **added value of collaboration**. We know that the sector thrives when organisations work collaboratively with one another, and when we add value by working across the sector to create a collective energy that is more than the sum of the individual parts of the sector.
7. in the value of **artistic expression in all its forms** from **everyone in society**. Participation in the arts as a hobby or as part of the community fosters creativity and overall wellbeing. We support arts organisations and artists that promote and encourage deeper engagement with the arts.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

In developing this strategy, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (the Arts Council) has taken account of key government documents to ensure our plans reflect the ongoing policy context. We have considered the Programme for Government 2016-2021²; The NI Civil Service 'Our Giant Ambition'³, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations⁴, which all member states signed up to in 2015; 'Building Inclusive Communities'⁵, the strategy of our sponsor department, the Department for Communities (DfC), as well as their work with the sector on the ten-year Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy. It is worth noting that the DfC Culture, Arts, and Heritage task force report⁶ holds significant importance and aligns with our approach. We will work with DfC when the strategy is launched to understand our role in the delivery of the outcomes. We have also looked back at our own track record⁷ and considered our impact from 2019-2024.

It is a challenging time for society and the sector. The economy is not expected to grow above 2% in the next 4 years. Whilst the growth of the NI working age population has slowed down significantly, job growth is not expected to reach 1% any time between 2023 and 2027. Policy changes around the UK's departure from the European Union and the need for climate action will mean significant changes in cost structures and consumption patterns. Many of the issues that the sector faces were underlined to us during our engagement to develop this strategy. Below, we have summarised some of the key issues facing the sector:

Standstill funding

- Public investment in the arts has fallen by 28% in cash terms over the last decade, from £14.1m to £10.1m, closer to a 49% reduction when inflation is considered.
- Northern Ireland has the lowest levels of per capita Government spending on the arts in the UK, and the disparity of funding continues to grow. Based on the most recent budgets, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland received only £5.07 per capita (2023/24), contrasting sharply with our nearest comparator Wales at £10.51 (2023/24) and the Republic of Ireland at £21.90 (2022)⁸.

Return on investment

- Currently, the Annual Funding Programme (AFP) is our largest investment in organisations. Looking at this programme alone, for every £1 of investment,

² [Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2021 | Northern Ireland Executive](#)

³ [People. Planet. Prosperity – Our Giant Ambition | NI Bureau](#)

⁴ [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#)

⁵ [Department for Communities Building Inclusive Communities Strategy 2020-2025 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Investing in Creative Delivery – A report from the Culture, Arts & Heritage Strategy Taskforce | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Infographics2023-FINAL.pdf \(s3-assets.com\)](#)

⁸ Please note these figures are subject to change based on annual budgets and exchange rates. The most recent figures can be found here: [artscouncil-ni.s3-assets.com/ACNI-2023-Advocacy-Cards.pdf](#)

organisations are able to raise £1.35 in other funding sources, even after taking into account their location and art form⁹.

- AFP organisations have shown increasing capacity to diversify their funding sources, with non-government funding between 2010 and 2020 amounting to more than £199m in total. Without this core support, these arts organisations would see their abilities to raise additional funding and opportunities for growth curtailed.
- Similarly, it is estimated that for every £1 of AFP investment, arts organisations are able to pay an additional £1.37 in salaries.

Short term funding cycles

- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the only Arts Council in the UK that does not provide multiannual funding to their regularly-funded organisations, due to risks associated with annual budget allocations from the government. All other Arts Councils provide some version of a multiannual commitment to these organisations.
- Two reviews of the Arts Council's Annual Funding Programme (AFP), in 2016 and 2022, recommended moving to three-year contracts with AFP clients. Three-year funding agreements would reduce administrative costs for the Arts Council, releasing more time and resources to support arts organisations in delivering their activities and outcomes. It would give greater financial stability to arts organisations and enable them to plan and manage risk more effectively. It would also encourage and consolidate partnership and collaboration with local, national and international organisations. Conversely, being locked into three-year arrangements could limit flexibility both for organisations and the Arts Council; also, expectations would be raised with the arts sector, which perhaps cannot be met if funding is reduced.

Public value placed on arts and artists

- Support for the arts, artists and public funding of the arts are all high amongst members of the public. In the most recent General Population Survey commissioned by the Arts Council¹⁰ (2023):
 - 79% of respondents agreed with the statement, *'I believe it is right that there should be public investment in arts and cultural organisations'*.
 - 73% agreed with the statement, *'I support my local councils in investing in arts and culture in my area'*.
 - 70% agreed with the statement, *'I believe it is right that there should be public investment in individual artists'*.
 - 58% would vote for a political candidate who advocated increased spending on arts and culture.
- There is a clear understanding of the value of the arts in society and the economy. In that same survey:
 - 87% of respondents believe that arts and creativity play a role in good health and wellbeing.
 - 81% believe that arts and creativity contribute to creating a shared future / cohesive communities.

⁹ [Annual funding survey results 2021-2022 | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/annual-funding-survey-results-2021-2022)

¹⁰ [General Population Survey 2022-23 | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/general-population-survey-2022-23)

- 81% believe that arts and creativity play a role in stimulating the local economy.
- 56% believe that arts and creativity have a role to play in providing a sustainable environment.
- However, when asked in that same survey for their funding priorities, the arts came 7th out of 9 options (including health, well-being and education). There is clearly room to highlight to the general public how the arts could contribute to the delivery of these other funding priorities.

Attendance and participation

- Attendance at arts events has recovered from the pandemic. According to the most recent General Population Survey (2023), 74% of adults in Northern Ireland attended an arts event at least once in the past year. However, this type of engagement with the arts tends to be higher for those classified as part of the higher socio-economic group (81%) in comparison to the working class (69%). Younger people (18-34) are also more likely to attend arts events than older adults (60+), at 87% v 61%.
- The level of participation in arts activities, unpaid or as a hobby, is 52%. Similar to the profile of those who attend arts events, participation is influenced by social class.
- The rate of volunteering in the arts is 8%, which is significantly lower than overall volunteering levels across the sectors, which, according to NICVA, is around 28% in 2019-20.
- Efforts to increase and deepen attendance and participation in the arts are hampered by lack of data, resources and experienced staff to design and implement long-term marketing and audience development strategies. A recent study by Thrive (2023) indicates that the sector needs more audience development professionals, and indeed, many of the arts professionals interviewed did not understand the difference between audience development and marketing. Similarly, many organisations lack the infrastructure to collect, clean and analyse data about their audiences and participants.
- Thrive concludes that partnerships are needed with all stakeholders with “skin in the game” (e.g., Local Authority venues and Tourism NI) to align priorities and reporting to reduce the cost of data collection. The Arts Council could ensure that budgets for marketing, audience development, and evaluation are prioritised when making funding decisions.

Climate emergency

- The arts sector has an important role to play in helping Northern Ireland prepare for the climate-changed future. Artists and arts organisations are in a unique position to challenge, inform and engage audiences in conversations about climate change and the impact it is having.
- As the urgency of the climate crisis increases, so does the need for our sector to understand its carbon footprint and to sustain a means of producing and sharing art, which supports our transition to a global low carbon future.
- All other UK nations are implementing ambitious plans to mitigate carbon emissions and adapt to the future climate in line with existing national targets. With the NI Climate Act (2020) now in place, our strategy will support and enable the sector to reach its goals by building on the huge range of work already being delivered.

Representation and EDI

- The percentage of minority ethnic groups living in NI has risen and accounts for 3.4% (65,604) of the usual resident population, an increase of 1.6 percentage points on the 2011 Census¹¹. It is important for the Arts Council to continue to create opportunities for specialised training, research, cultural exchanges, networking and learning for individual artists, creative practitioners and arts administrators from minority ethnic and migrant backgrounds.
- The Census shows that, while the overall population increased by five percent, the number of people aged 65 or more grew by nearly 25 per cent. These NI population estimates are continuing to show an ageing population, highlighting the importance of focussing programmes in this area.
- There is still a significant proportion of the arts workforce where disability is not known. However, we do know that there are significantly more non-disabled artists than disabled (89%) in 2021/22.
- The Arts Council also acknowledges other underrepresented groups e.g. rural/urban, gender identity, working classes and cultural identity.

Precarious nature of employment in the arts

- The most recent General Population Survey shows that people have an accurate perception of the working conditions of artists in Northern Ireland: Only 35% agreed with the statement, *'I believe artists receive a fair compensation and have good working conditions'*. In effect, artists in Northern Ireland face precarious working conditions. For instance:
 - the 2023 UK census of musicians¹² (including those living in Northern Ireland) indicates that the average annual income from music is £20,700 (21% lower than the median salary in Northern Ireland, according to NISRA¹³). For 44%, a lack of sustainable income is a barrier to their music career.
 - Similarly, a 2023 study on the working conditions of dancers on the island of Ireland found that 59% of dancers had an annual personal income of under £17,300¹⁴ (45% lower than the median salary in Northern Ireland, according to NISRA). 18% reported that the majority of their work is unpaid.
 - Finally, the Royal Society of Literature reports that only 1% of authors in Northern Ireland earn more than £30,000 from their writing¹⁵. The equivalent figure for Scotland is 7%. For London and the South of England it is 33%. Author incomes in Northern Ireland fell by almost three quarters between 2016/17 and 2020/21, according to the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society.
- We know from our own funding programmes that more than 1,800 artists applied for the Covid emergency funding, whilst the number of applicants to the Support for Individual Artists Programme (SIAP) keeps on increasing. This demand has revealed the wide range of needs of artists in Northern Ireland. The pressure on individual artists has been further increased due to a 32.5% reduction on expenditure on artists by AFP organisations from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

¹¹ [2021 Census | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/2021-census-northern-ireland)

¹² [Help Musicians | The first ever Musicians' Census report launched](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/help-musicians)

¹³ [Employee earnings in NI 2022 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/employee-earnings-ni-2022)

¹⁴ [Dance Counts Report 2022 - Dance Ireland](https://www.danceireland.com/dance-counts-report-2022)

¹⁵ [Literature in Britain Today | Ipsos](https://www.litmag.com/literature-in-britain-today)

Digital economy: opportunities and threats for the arts

- In 2022, the UK digital economy was worth £52.5 billion, according to DCMS and the ONS. One key indicator of how the digital world has penetrated the art world is the world of cryptocurrencies, or more specifically, non-fungible tokens (NFT). Whilst their overall growth has decreased since late 2021, NFTs in the arts have recorded sales of more than £734 million around the world. Similarly, it is expected that by 2027, gaming will become the highest-grossing media segment in the world, overtaking TV and digital media. In the UK, the gaming industry is expected to increase its revenue by 43% (Statista, 2022). This sector is not only growing, but it is also evolving dramatically. Since 2015, more developers are working on AR & VR solutions and headsets. This is offering gamers a more realistic and interactive experience. It is likely that the cost of producing this technology will decrease significantly in the next few years, helping it increase its consumer reach.
- The metaverse and artificial intelligence are bringing all of the key developments in the digital economy together, promising significant changes in the way we do everything. The metaverse is likely to become the user-friendly interface that powers the decentralised web 3.0. The metaverse is likely to change the way we understand, for instance, music concerts (e.g., Warner Music is creating a music themed world within the metaverse of the Sandbox gaming platform), museums (e.g., Musee Dezentral is the first decentralised NFT museum) and personalised content (e.g., Disney is working to develop content using the metaverse for its entertainment products and services). The metaverse is still developing, betting on stronger artificial intelligence to help it build differential and inclusive experiences.
- All of these changes represent opportunities for the arts sector, in terms of providing artists with new tools and techniques, new forms of artistic expression and collaboration, the chance to provide personalised experiences to audiences, increasing reach and impact, and generating new work. However, during the strategy engagement sessions, artists expressed concerns about the monetisation of these digital tools. Related to issues around copyright and limited bargaining power, it is perceived that artists are being asked to provide their work for no or little compensation, letting major corporations financially appropriate the value of their work. There are also concerns about job displacement, which in turn will push salaries even lower for most artists.

Developing the strategy in this context

The development of this strategy has been a team effort across the Arts Council and across the sector. Engagement has been completed both internally and externally. External discussion sessions ran from 17th July 2023 to 10th September 2023, with some sessions delivered face to face across various locations in Northern Ireland and some offered online. Engagement was sought across individual artists and organisations, in a range of locations, both urban and rural, and with as wide a range of art forms as possible. Several sessions were also delivered by arts resource organisations based across Northern Ireland. We are indebted to all those who gave their time to take part in these discussions. In total, 264 people gave feedback. A wide range of issues were discussed in the sessions. A summary of the feedback from these sessions can be found here¹⁶.

¹⁶ [Summary of engagement feedback during development... | Arts Council NI \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](#)

3. ARTS COUNCIL: MISSION, VISION & VALUES

MISSION

To develop and champion the arts in Northern Ireland through investment and advocacy.

VISION

A society where all people can experience a thriving arts sector that is recognised as essential to creativity, wellbeing and social and economic prosperity.

To achieve this vision, we will work tirelessly to build an arts sector that thrives on collaboration, innovation, and ambition. We will advocate for increased investment in the arts, recognising that such support is an investment in the wellbeing and prosperity of our society as a whole. We will forge partnerships, break down barriers, and ensure that the arts are integrated into every aspect of our community, from education to healthcare, from urban centres to rural landscapes.

This is not a vision that we can accomplish alone. It requires the collective effort and support of artists, cultural organisations, policymakers, and society in general. Together, we will create a future where the arts are appreciated as an essential thread woven into the fabric of our society.

VALUES

Expertise

We use our experience and expertise to support the arts sector in NI through investing, advocating and evidencing the impact of the sector.

Inclusion

We recognise the importance of diversity in the arts sector and are committed to being inclusive and accessible to all.

Collaboration

We value our strong relationships with partners and their ability to enhance arts programmes across NI and beyond.

Integrity

We are open, transparent, and fair in how we distribute public funding.

4. OUTCOMES AND PRIORITIES

We have taken an outcome-based approach to the development of our strategy. This means that we have focused first on what we would like to see achieved for the arts sector, and then used this to inform what we do. This document focuses on the strategic outcomes and priorities that we want to achieve, with some basic information on areas of activity over the next ten years, and how we will track our progress.

Detailed three-year organisational business plans will be published and reviewed annually. They will provide much more detail, as will a detailed monitoring and evaluation plan.

OUR OUTCOMES

We have derived a set of outcomes for the art sector, and a set of outcomes that the sector then delivers as a result for society. The outcomes overlap and are reliant on one another.

ARTS SECTOR

- A more financially stable arts sector.
- A sector that develops and looks after its people and is more inclusive.
- A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.

SOCIETY

- A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment.
- People from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.
- A sector that is more valued across society and government.

Under each outcome area, we have developed priorities that we believe, if delivered, will directly influence the achievement of that outcome:

Outcomes for the arts sector

Outcome 1: A more financially stable arts sector.	Outcome 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive.	Outcome 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.
<p>1. We will pursue an approach to investment in the arts that is long term and outcomes based.</p> <p>2. We will generate more income for the arts.</p>	<p>3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce.</p> <p>4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society.</p>	<p>5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector.</p>

Outcomes for society

Outcome 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment	Outcome 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.	Outcome 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government.
<p>6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges.</p> <p>7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change.</p>	<p>8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants.</p>	<p>9. We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and peoples in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts.</p> <p>10. We will work as an effective and efficient organisation.</p>

A performance monitoring tool with indicators to track our journey towards these outcomes is available here¹⁷

¹⁷ [Performance Monitoring Tool \(s3-assets.com\)](https://s3-assets.com)

OUTCOME 1: A more financially stable arts sector.

Context:

The arts sector plays a crucial role in enriching society, fostering creativity, and driving economic growth. However, financial challenges often hinder the sector's ability to fully realise its potential. Artists and arts organisations face various funding constraints, including limited resources, unpredictable income streams, and increasing costs. These challenges can impede artistic innovation, limit access to the arts, and create barriers to sustainable careers in the sector.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges that addressing these financial challenges requires a comprehensive and strategic approach. By prioritising financial security and stability, we aim to create an enabling environment that supports the arts sector.

Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 1. We will pursue an approach to investment that is long-term and outcomes-based, through:

- Launching a strategic arts investment programme that will be a 3-year cycle and outcomes based.
- Developing a set of investment principles for all investments.
- Strengthening how we monitor and evaluate our investment programmes, including designing and implementing an outcomes framework to guide investment processes.
- Collecting and analysing official statistics about the financial status of arts organisations.

Priority 2. We will generate more income for the arts, through:

- Advocating to DfC for further resources each year and in-year.
- Undertaking a scoping exercise to assess how the Arts Council can generate more income for the sector (opportunities across private, public and philanthropic funders).
- The development of more partnerships with the private sector.
- Supporting programmes for financial sustainability in the sector.
- Exploiting the opportunities to partner with other Departments presented through the new DfC cross-government strategy.

OUTCOME 2: A sector that develops, looks after its people, and is more inclusive.

Context:

The arts sector relies on the creativity, skills, and expertise of its workforce to produce high-quality artistic experiences and engage diverse audiences. However, challenges such as limited employment opportunities, unequal access to resources, and lack of diversity and representation can hinder the sector's ability to attract and retain talent.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges these challenges and is committed to supporting the sector to address them.

Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 3. We will create the conditions to grow artistic talent and develop the wider arts workforce, through:

- Investing in a three-year programme to support mental health, training and wellbeing of artists.
- Considering additional support beyond grants (mentoring schemes, opportunities for artist collaboration).
- Supporting artists and individuals by investing in specific programmes (e.g. Support for Individual Artists Programme [SIAP], Individual Artists Digital Evolution Programme for Individuals, Travel Awards and manage the Rosemary James Memorial Trust Award).
- Developing local, national and international showcase opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Working with Local Authorities on areas of shared interest (e.g. residencies, studio spaces).
- Ringfencing support for new and emerging artists.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy and supporting extension of Art Work apprenticeship scheme.

Priority 4. We will ensure that the arts sector in Northern Ireland is inclusive and reflects society, through:

- Ringfencing investment with underrepresented groups (e.g. minority ethnic residencies and mentoring scheme, supporting rural artists).
- Refreshing and developing Minority Ethnic and Rural Forums for artists to engage with the Arts Council.
- Building a stronger and deeper knowledge base of artists' working and living conditions and the impact our funding has on them.
- Introducing new measures of diversity (e.g., socio-economic background) to strengthen the evidence we have to inform decisions.
- Developing schemes with partners to improve access to the sector for disabled, D/deaf and neurodivergent artists and other workers.
- Publishing regular equality reports using data to ensure that we actively engage with underrepresented artists.

OUTCOME 3: A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation.

Context:

We know the value of creativity and that artists are innovators, entrepreneurs and risk takers. They play a pivotal role in driving social and economic outcomes, making our region a vibrant and inspiring place to live and work. We want to foster innovation and provide a space for experimentation that is essential for the growth and development of the arts sector. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to create an environment that supports artistic innovation, nurtures risk-taking, and enables the sector to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges that traditional approaches to investment may not always meet the needs and expectations of audiences and artists. Therefore, we are committed to prioritising creating an environment that encourages experimentation, supports innovation and fosters the development of new artistic forms, ideas, and methodologies.

The Arts Council will be measuring innovation and experimentation in terms of the work the artists and the sector does in the following areas;

- Conceptualisation – new ideas, approaches that challenge norms.
- Originality – distinct and unique from previous works.
- Audience engagement – engage audiences in a new way.
- Collaboration/interdisciplinary – different art forms/sectors.
- Technological integration – use of new technologies.
- Impact/influence – role in the sector to influence others.

Experimentation and innovation are encouraged in processes and methodologies as well as products and outputs for both artists and people engaging with the art.

Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 5. We will enable innovation and artistic risk taking in the arts sector, through:

- Strengthening opportunities for artists to collaborate and exchange ideas within our investment by facilitating networking and making connections.
- Encourage and enhance R&D within existing investment (e.g. 3-year funding cycles).
- Ensuring outcomes measurements cater for personal development and risk taking.
- Raising the importance of personal development within our outcomes framework.
- Developing an annual knowledge exchange event across art forms, across the sector.
- Developing Creative Industries programmes focused on assisting artists, arts organisations and entrepreneurs to undertake projects using digital and immersive technologies.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to support digital development and innovation in sectoral organisations.

OUTCOME 4: A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment

Context:

Arts have the power to inspire, challenge, and provoke change. The arts sector has a unique role to play in influencing and reflecting societal values, promoting dialogue and fostering a sense of community. The arts sector is already leading change and positively impacting social and economic outcomes like health, wellbeing and tourism. We want to protect and enhance this work. As the world faces urgent environmental challenges, it is crucial for the arts sector to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable practices and environmental responsibility.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland acknowledges the sector's potential to effect positive change and aims to harness that potential through its strategic focus on this outcome. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to create an arts sector that both contributes to positive change and demonstrates a commitment to environmental sustainability.

Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 6. We will support arts projects that address contemporary societal challenges, through:

- Developing one National Lottery programme that contributes to social and economic benefits (this amalgamates current programmes with the intention of streamlining the process for clients and the Arts Council).
- Independently evaluating the impact of all lottery investment to demonstrate impacts against key social and economic outcomes.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to expedite cross-departmental and public sector collaboration in relation to health and social care.

Priority 7. We will support the sector and act as a catalyst to drive awareness, engagement and positive change in response to climate change, through:

- Adding climate as a theme within all of our investment areas to support and enable artists and organisations to respond to the climate crisis.
- Involvement in a sector climate action group for knowledge sharing and insight gathering.
- Encouraging sustainable policies and practices within all of our investment.
- Investing in partnerships with organisations in GB and ROI that are working on the response of the arts sector to the climate crisis.
- Undertaking an organisation-wide environmental review and publishing a corporate climate policy and action plan on energy, water, waste and business travel reduction.
- In collaboration with the Four Nations group, actioning ways to reduce the carbon footprint of international touring.

OUTCOME 5: More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences.

Context:

Access to arts experiences plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, personal development, and bringing communities together. However, certain barriers, such as physical, financial, social, and cultural factors, can limit individuals' ability to participate fully in the arts. The Arts Council believes that access to arts is a fundamental right for all individuals.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland recognises the importance of addressing barriers to engagement with the arts. By prioritising this outcome, we aim to break down those barriers and ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland can engage with and benefit from arts experiences. We are committed to promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equal access to the arts.

Example of some of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 8. We will invest in the arts sector to deepen, widen and diversify audiences and participants, through:

- Prioritising activities to specifically increase the involvement of groups of people with low engagement in arts activities.
- Promoting and raising awareness about arts projects across all media channels targeting under-represented groups.
- Supporting the Arts Council Collection, the leading public contemporary art collection for NI, to reach more people.
- Developing local, national and international opportunities for arts organisations and artists.
- Commissioning the General Population Survey of participation and attendance to arts and cultural events yearly.
- Collecting national statistics about the activities and outputs of arts organisations.
- Supporting organisations who work within the sector to help develop audiences.
- Working with the UK/Ireland Arts Councils on launching the UK-wide Access Scheme 'All In', supporting venues to ensure d/Deaf, neurodiverse and disabled audiences have access to arts experiences.
- Valuing marketing and audience development activities in investment decisions as equally as other areas.
- Encouraging venues we support to share audience data with organisations that they are working with.
- Working within DfC CAH strategy to deploy technology and innovation to reach and build audiences.

OUTCOME 6: A sector that is more valued across society and government

Context:

The arts sector contributes to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Northern Ireland in numerous ways. It stimulates creativity, encourages innovation, promotes reconciliation and brings communities together, and supports tourism and economic growth. However, the full potential of the arts sector may not always be recognised or prioritised across all government departments. The Arts Council seeks to address this by advocating for the value of the arts and fostering stronger relationships between the arts sector and government entities.

By prioritising this outcome, we aim to foster a greater appreciation and recognition of the arts sector across all government departments in Northern Ireland. We believe that the arts have a significant impact on various aspects of society, and we strive to ensure that this impact is acknowledged and supported by all levels of government and people in Northern Ireland.

Example of our activities to deliver this outcome:

Priority 9. We will work in partnership to demonstrate to policy makers, decision makers and people in Northern Ireland the positive impact of the arts through:

- Commissioning and undertaking research and evaluation projects.
- Monitoring and evaluating our investment programmes focusing on the short- and medium-term outcomes of arts organisations.
- Developing an advocacy strategy and dedicated webpage as a sector resource for advocacy.
- Sharing case studies and promoting projects across media channels.
- Commissioning the General Population Survey yearly.
- Working with the sector on joint advocacy messaging.
- Exploring specific campaigns to demonstrate the value of arts in NI.

Priority 10. We will continue to work as an effective and efficient organisation, through:

- Ensuring we are accountable and transparent to the public through effective operations that promote best value for money.
- Fostering a skilled, agile and diverse workforce.
- Working in an efficient and timely manner.
- Modelling diversity, equity and accessibility through all of our activities.
- Investing in our technology for processing applications, monitoring and evaluation activities, and streamlining data end to end (application – assessment – impact).
- Developing a staff training programme.
- Collecting data on perceptions and satisfaction of our work from our partners.
- Commissioning an annual staff engagement survey and developing action plans.
- Exploring suitable premises to support agile working.

4. GLOSSARY OF DEFINITIONS

The following glossary provides more detail on some of the wording that we use in the strategy.

<p>Arts</p>	<p>When we use the term ‘arts’ we are referring to a wide range of creative activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community arts and education (including youth arts, carnival and circus, arts and health, disability arts) • creative industries • drama and dance • festivals and venues • literature (including poetry, novels/novellas, short stories, performance-based work, scriptwriting, non-fiction, essays and criticism, storytelling, children’s books, graphic novels), • music and opera • theatre • traditional arts • visual arts and craft. <p><i>(Please note this list is not exhaustive).</i></p>
<p>Creative Industries</p>	<p>Under the UK government’s definition, the ‘Creative Industries’ consist of the following subsectors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advertising • architecture • crafts • design and designer fashion • film and TV • radio • photography • museums and galleries • libraries • music • performing and visual arts • publishing • software and computer services (including video games). <p>The Arts Council recognises that arts and creativity are fundamental elements throughout the Creative Industries. We support projects that forge collaboration between arts and other creative sectors (e.g. the intersection of arts and technology).</p>

<p>Innovation</p>	<p>The Arts Council considers innovation to be the creation and exploration of new ideas and forms of artistic expression to bring fresh, exciting experiences for artists and audiences. This could mean the integration of technology, exploring interdisciplinary collaborations or introducing unconventional concepts or themes to inspire, provoke thought and contribute to evolving artistic practices. This could not only include a new product or output but also using new methodologies, techniques and processes to realise and bring ideas to life.</p>
<p>People in the arts</p>	<p>This includes all those who are involved in the creation and sharing of artistic practices, processes and outputs in some capacity. This includes many who would meet the traditional definition of an artist, practitioners, freelancers, arts managers or administrators, technicians and support staff. This also includes volunteers. This will be described throughout the strategy document as ‘workforce’ or ‘sector’.</p>
<p>Society</p>	<p>Society is people in general, thought of as a large, organised group.</p>

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