



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Test Drive the Arts Update – Audiences NI
Date:	10 December 2008
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### Relevant Background Information

Audience NI is the Audience Development Agency for Northern Ireland, with mission to 'enable Arts and Cultural organisations to diversify audiences for the arts'. Test Drive the Arts is a means of breaking down barriers to attendance in the Arts. It encourages people to experience an aspect of the arts for the first time with aim of bringing in new audiences and diversifying attendance in the arts. The scheme uses unsold capacity in arts venues and offers unsold tickets, free of charge, to specially targeted non-attenders. Tickets are offered at no cost to the project by participating venues. The scheme was intended to develop a longer term relationship with the new attendees with follow-up offers, a personalised approach and after sales service. This model supports the development of a lasting relationship with the new audience.

Members will be aware, a pilot Test Drive the Arts Initiative was approved as part of the Celebrate Belfast programme funded by the Millennium Commission at the Development Committee 17 August 2005. Audiences NI administered all external elements of the project and co-ordinated a centralised database from which non-attenders were targeted and relationships managed. The original scheme was modelled on similar schemes operating in Manchester and elsewhere which enabled members of the public with a Belfast postcode to be eligible. Subsequently, Audiences NI completed a programme which included the production of a Classical Arts NI database to ensure that beneficiaries were new and not previous attenders.

This work aimed to build on research work undertaken by Audiences NI, in partnership with the Council, to examine attendance based on Super Output Areas developed by NISRA, and the MOSAIC NI analysis, which characterises households by demographic, lifestyle and targeted areas of geographical proximity to the venues and within the top 10% of the most deprived areas (as identified through the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure and representing a range of areas across the city).

This initiative represented the first time that Belfast household's were selected in this way, to target areas of low penetration of arts attendance and was intended to inform the development of 'barriers to access' strategies, which target areas of high deprivation and promote access to the arts. The pilot project was extremely successful establishing a baseline that represented a spread of geographic/wards in the Belfast region. A full report on the outputs is included in **Appendix A** for Members' consideration.

### **Key Issues**

A revised programme, delivered and managed through Audience NI would present a modified model 'Test Drive the arts NI Online' a web-based initiative, is proposed to be delivered in 2009-2011. The Aims & Objectives of the proposed 'Test Drive the Arts NI Online' is outlined in **Appendix B** for Members' consideration.

Within the Integrated Cultural Strategy (ICS) under **Strategic Leadership, Aim 1.2** council has agreed to provide and support creative responses to the social and political challenges in the city. A revised programme 'Test Drive the Arts NI Online' fits well with this aim and in particular with an objective to enhance opportunities for cultural engagement to enable greater levels of social inclusion, community development and inter-community contact. It also fits appropriately within **Quality of Life, Aim 3.1** under objectives to make culture more accessible and to grow audiences and support web-based integration to improve audience access to culture and arts information to ticketing, as well as **Aim 3.5** to build audience intelligence to identify target audiences which reduce barriers to access to arts and heritage activity and develop a pilot programme.

In addition, within the aims and objectives outlined above, it is pertinent that a programme of this nature is both relevant and timely in a climate of economic downturn. The proposed project will enable Council and arts organisations to take a pro-active position in terms of maximising attendances that will give value to the public and funders.

Within the ICS, Council's two main strategic partners are the Department of Culture Arts and leisure (DCAL) and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). It is within this context that this initiative demonstrates an excellent potential to promote and enable a collaborative approach to audience development and establish a shared area of work. ACNI has agreed, in principle, to match fund that contribution of Belfast City Council, to enable the proposed Test Drive the Arts Online NI to go forward.

The proposed programme will require a total funding package of £120,000 over a two year period. In respect of this, it is proposed that Members agree a 2 year service level agreement with Audience NI to enable this audience diversification programme be progressed, on the basis that ACNI match fund any level of contribution by Belfast City Council.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

Within the department's draft revenue estimates, 2009/10, Council has proposed £30,000 for the Test Drive The Arts Online initiative.

#### Human Resources

This is part of the ongoing programme of work of the Culture and Arts Unit.

#### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that Members approve a two year Service Level Agreement with Audience NI to deliver 'Test Drive The Arts NI Online', to the level of £30,000 per annum, on the basis that ACNI match fund the initiative.

#### **Documents Attached**

**Appendix A:** Report on pilot Test Drive The Arts 2007

**Appendix B:** Proposed objectives of the initiative as outlined by Audience N.I.

#### **Abbreviations**

NISRA – The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

DCAL – Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

ACNI – Arts Council of Northern Ireland

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