



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Community Archives Process
Date:	14 January 2009
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### **Relevant Background Information**

In January 2007 the Development (Arts) Sub-Committee agreed a proposal for the use of a database system and digital sound recorders to facilitate groups involved in the community archive process. This was to be used as a mechanism to capture the value of Belfast's heritage and deliver benefit to citizens.

Community archives is an established and still developing methodology which enables communities to capture, preserve, communicate and retain ownership of their heritage. Material collected as part of the scheme includes oral histories, photographs and connections to other archives. Further advantages of Community Archives are the application of professional standards in a voluntary context, skills development and social cohesion.

Since the report in January 2007 a number of key activities have taken place which have validated the Community Archive approach and are set out in Appendix 2.

An initial £50,000 from the Dept. of Finance and Personnel has enabled the design and set-up of the overall NI Community Archive website (further information about the site is attached in Appendix 1). Resources in kind have also been provided by the BBC, the Causeway Museum Service and Belfast City Council. This new NI Community Archive website is locally specific to conditions in Northern Ireland and is of the highest international quality standard.

## **Key Issues**

The NI Community Archive website has been developed to the highest standards which will ensure that material once collected will be preserved and available, including audio, video, photographs and written records. The project will provide technical services, specialist training and support.

The Community Archive process supports Aim 2.2 of the Integrated Cultural Strategy to 'provide support and creative responses to the social and political challenges in the City', and Objective G to 'build capacity through work with arts and heritage organizations and practitioners'.

The project answers a real need for a joined up approach and delivers on key strategic goals, including:

- Enabling as many people as possible to experience and appreciate the excellence of our cultural assets
- Promoting creativity and innovation and lifelong learning
- Encouraging respect for and celebration of diversity
- Ensuring the sustainable management of our cultural infrastructure
- Develop and deliver quality cultural products and services
- Reform and modernise service delivery.

To ensure continuity, a steering group is actively seeking central government support. The Public Record Office is very positive about the process and as well as providing limited support from revenue budgets in the new year, may facilitate a development worker.

The quality, practical support and cross-cutting nature of the NI Community Archive means that it has potential to deliver cost-effectively on a wide range of heritage objectives within Belfast, especially when certain core costs are carried externally.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has suggested that it would be acceptable to include costs associated with community archive service provision in projects they fund, and they would welcome the opportunity to support such projects, given that the process provides some guarantee of proper procedure.

It is therefore proposed that members agree to continued involvement in the process with a projected spend of £15,000 in the year 2009-2010.

## **Resource Implications**

### Financial

£15,000 which is included in the draft revenue estimates for 2009-2010 of the Culture and Arts Unit.

<b>Recommendations</b>
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It is recommended that Members note:

Continued approval for the Community Archive process and engagement with the NI Community Archive group.

It is further recommended that Members agree:

Approval of the allocation of £15,000 from the 2009-10 Culture and Arts Budget (subject to approval of the draft revenue estimates)

<b>Documents Attached</b>
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Appendix 1 – Information and detail referring to the NI Community Archive website

Appendix 2 – Outline of developments and key activities since 2007 Report

<b>Abbreviations</b>
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DCAL Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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## Appendix 1

### Northern Ireland Community Archive

The Northern Ireland Community Archive aims to create a digitally inclusive web portal that enables public and community archives across Northern Ireland to come together within a dynamic knowledge and skills sharing network, reaching into all areas of our society, increasing access to, appreciation of and engagement with our diverse heritage.

It seeks to:

- Provide a joined up approach to promoting our cultural heritage
- Engage an international audience with our diverse cultural heritage
- Support the development of genealogical resources and activities
- Enable local and international visitors to engage with the rich heritage of our local communities.
- Build capacity within the community sector to develop interpretive projects for local, national and international audiences.
- Provide community archive groups with support and training through a network of local museum and heritage expertise

The project is led by a steering group of key stakeholders across the cultural sector, including:

- Causeway Museum Service  
(a partnership between Coleraine, Ballymoney, Limavady and Moyle councils)
- Belfast City Council Culture and Arts Unit
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- Public Record Office Northern Ireland
- BBC Northern Ireland I
- NI Screen
- My Group NI
- Department of Finance and Personnel

## Appendix 2

### Outline of developments since 2007 Report

- 1 A national conference 'Engaging your community: putting words into practice' in partnership with the Group for Education in Museums, showcased this work as well as similar practice from Ireland and Great Britain. It attracted national and international attention, which led to benchmarking the process here so far as 'excellent'. Work in Belfast was also presented at the Virginia Association of Museums conference in March 2008 where it was well received. There has also been academic interest in our work from the Netherlands and from MINOM - the international organisation for community museology.
- 2 The Department of Finance and Personnel gave a grant of £50,000 to a steering group to facilitate technical developments and web-hosting on the 'MyGroupNI' platform, which is part of the government's wider digital inclusion initiative. This has produced a highly functional web platform and multi-relational database.
- 3 Existing partnerships have broadened to include the BBC (e.g. direct links to the BBC's own archive, the 'Story Finders' project and the availability of its 'Big Bus' in Belfast for the first time); Northern Ireland Museums Council; Northern Ireland Film Archive; Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, which also represents DCAL in this area; the Department of Finance and Personnel. Currently, the secretariat is provided by the Causeway Museum Service.
- 4 The Lord Mayor, DCAL minister and Coleraine Mayor, among others, spoke at a launch of the NI Archive.org web-site, presented by Ms Donna Trainer on Lagan Legacy's 'Confiance' barge beside the Waterfront Hall. The Minister and senior civil servants spoke very positively about the project, making links to a number of government agendas, including tourism and social development goals, leading to some optimism that central government funding may become available.
- 5 The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported Belfast projects by the Indian Community Centre (£44,000) and Ledley Hall Youth Club (£25,000) based on the methodology and has informally indicated that it may look favourably similar applications, some of which are under development. It also provided £50,000 for a project on the history of volunteering in Belfast by the Belfast Voluntary Services Bureau which is also engaging with the community archives system. All these projects have been supported in kind by the Culture and Arts unit.
- 6 A number of other communities have expressed interest in the process and have made some initial progress, such as Shared Heritage in Partnership based in the Dockers Club, Rosario Youth Club and Lagan Legacy, the latter with an existing archive of international importance.
- 7 Support from the Culture and Arts unit has also been delivered to a project on the history of the Ulster Orchestra and its predecessors.

The community archive process has been crucial in the development of interpretation in the Ulster Hall, associated educational and outreach activities. It will also be important in the continued development of the interpretation and its connection to a wide range of communities.