

## Appendix 1: Consultation questions and draft response.

### Introduction

As part of normal government practice, we periodically review the functions delivered by our Arms Length Bodies. We are currently carrying out a review of Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC). We would very much welcome any views or comments you have regarding the services provided by NIMC, and on how these services are delivered.

The Review of Public Administration recommended that the functions of NIMC should transfer to central and local government. During this review the Department will consider future delivery of NIMC's functions, including which functions should transfer to local government and which should transfer to central government.

The Department has no preconceived views on a preferred outcome for this review.

The Department will usually publish a summary of responses but if you would prefer your response to be treated as confidential, please let us know, stating your reasons clearly.

You record your answers by clicking your choice from a row or column and adding your comments in the box provided. It is not necessary to answer all the questions, only those questions where you feel you can respond. We would welcome any specific examples. You navigate through the survey by clicking "Next" or "Prev" at the bottom of each page and clicking "Done" when complete.

If you would prefer to respond by completing a paper copy of this survey you can [email me](mailto:paul.mcallister@dcalni.gov.uk) or write to me at the address below.

Please complete and return by Friday, 31 August 2012

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### 1. What is the name of the organisation on whose behalf you are responding?

Belfast City Council

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Established in 1993, the NIMC is the principal advocate for the sector and the lead body for the development and support of local museums in Northern Ireland. It is the conduit for the central government support to nonnational museums and receives funding from the Northern Ireland Assembly, through the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

NIMC also provides information and guidance on a vast range of museums related matters, to Government, to the museums sector, and to the population as a whole.

NIMC's Corporate Business Plan is directly linked to the Northern Ireland Museums Policy which has the vision of

*"A coordinated and sustainable museum sector that*

- Develops, preserves and interprets its collections to the highest possible standards*
- Delivers quality services that inspire, educate and engage local, national and international visitors and users*
- Harnesses its strengths and diversity to support economic, social and cultural development in Northern Ireland and a shared and better future."*

The Strategic Priorities of the NIMC Business Plan are those of the Museums Policy:

- Developing audiences
- Education and learning
- Collections development, care, management and use
- Infrastructure, investment and resources

The main functions of NIMC are:

- Grants administration
- Support to local / independent museums to secure accreditation from Arts Council England
- Research and data collection
- Provision of advice and guidance on collections care and public services
- Training provision.

*2. Are the services / functions currently delivered by NIMC required?*

Yes

Please provide your comments

Many of the above are subsets of the essential need to develop capacity and standards within museums, which are objectives that we encourage. We see Museums as playing an important role in both supporting our communities and also in helping to develop tourism.

However, there is some discontinuity between the strategic priorities and the main functions delivered by NIMC. This is probably a result of the limited budget and hence very small staff with a consequential limited set of skills and experience. For example, there is limited museum expertise and experience within NIMC to deliver higher level advice on the specialist area of collections care and interpretation.

Accreditation is another potential problem area. The current scheme is the responsibility of the Department for Culture Media and Sport and administered by Arts Council England in partnership with CyMAL: Museum, Archives, Libraries Wales; Museums Galleries Scotland and the Northern Ireland Museum Council. However, the system is becoming more specific to England, with levels of support, such as Renaissance in the Regions, not available elsewhere.

*3. Are there additional services you would like to see NIMC deliver?*

Yes

Please provide your comments

Given the current EU priority round cultural heritage, the Arts Council Ireland's advice and support function, in terms of accessing European funding for museums, might be worth examining as one which could sit within NIMC, DCAL or even ACNI. European funding requires very specific knowledge and expertise.

*4. Does NIMC provide Value for Money?*

*(Does the current investment by NIMC in the local / independent museums sector achieve effective outcomes for the level of expenditure incurred?)*

No

Please provide comments

In the financial year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 the published accounts indicate that NIMC received £389,730 from DCAL. Grants awarded totalled just over £81,300, or c. 21%. Whilst all additional resource is useful, the sums involved are very small – less than £7,000 for either the research or specimen purchase categories. It also seems that it is the larger, and already better funded, museums which possess the capacity and ability to apply for grants. As these have larger total budgets, the proportion received from NIMC is even less significant. The grant scheme may make a bigger impact if more

emphasis was placed on developing the capacity or improving standards among the smaller museums.

*5. Does NIMC deliver these functions / services effectively and efficiently?*

*Does NIMC provide quality advice / guidance, what is your experience as a customer of NIMC?*

No

Please provide comments

We do not avail directly on NIMC services, but governance arrangements for NIMC seem very top heavy (13 board members) for a relatively small budget and staff of approximately 4 people.

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NIMC is a company with charitable status. It is managed by a board composed of representatives from the national, local government and independent museums sectors. It is accountable to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. It is principally funded by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure for Northern Ireland, although it also receives support for its work from its membership, a wide range of trusts, foundations and other grant bodies.

*6. Is this the most appropriate model for the delivery of NIMC functions?*

No

Please provide comments

NIMC is in part a membership body which takes subscriptions and there is a danger that this can cause conflicts in terms of regulatory roles relating to accreditation. The rationale for NIMC acting as an intermediary for externally funded grants is sometime not clear and the sector has the capacity to put together consortia to apply directly – as in the case of Peace funding or HLF – may at times be a more effective model.

*7. Do you think some or all of the functions could be delivered more effectively by an alternative model?*

For example:

- Abolish. The functions are not required
- Retain as an NDPB.
- Move out of Central Government. Is there an existing provider (or providers) in the local government, voluntary or private sector that could deliver this function (or some part of the function)?
- Bring In House.
- What are the benefits of bringing the function into DCAL or establishing an executive agency within the Department?
- Merge with another body. Does the function duplicate work undertaken elsewhere? Are there any other areas of central government delivering similar or complimentary functions?
- Split functions across a range of providers (please provide comments on where each group of functions could be delivered).

*Please comment on why you would recommend your chosen option.*

Throughout the RPA process NIMC has been identified as a body to be abolished, with the assumption that functions be devolved to local government. Similar models exist across the UK and in the Republic of Ireland. If museums are regarded as part of a wider heritage context, some NIEA functions are also transferring under RPA and there is the opportunity to utilise museum expertise as well as aligning activity in these areas.

There are already examples of major non-national museums being funded by local government and local authorities also tend to help smaller museums, and museum analogues, as part of their general cultural support. The larger post-RPA bodies ought to have more capacity to deliver further in this area and have the ability to co-ordinate service strategically in terms of preferred community planning models. The two regional museum services centralise core specialist functions and this model is worth revisiting in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. In Belfast, we already invest heavily in cultural infrastructure across capital, core and revenue costs through strategic, multi-annual and programme grant schemes.

With regard to specific training, there is potential capacity, which could be developed, in the Cultural and Creative Skills body's representation as it already covers cultural heritage.

In terms of accreditation, this is currently dealt with by one part-time post, which has additional responsibilities within NIMC. This resource could presumably be out-sourced or repositioned centrally. As mentioned earlier, there is a feeling among some in the sector that the current accreditation scheme is unsustainable and in danger of becoming counter-productive, though the concept of accreditation is vital in ensuring public stewardship and standards.

In the Republic of Ireland there has been considerable investment in the Museum Standards Programme, delivered through the Heritage Council. This includes mentoring, training and professional development, some of which is delivered by the University of Ulster. There is also a much more in-depth and hands-on assessment process in terms of a context-appropriate accreditation system.

As well as the Ulster University connection, there have been other collaborations such as the all Ireland 'Museum of the Year' competition, joint tourism initiatives, and a small number of Northern Ireland museums have already sought accreditation under both the UK and RoI systems. Therefore, this does appear to be an area where cross-border collaboration might achieve synergies and economies of scale.

*8. We would appreciate any other general comments or suggestions you may have (taking into account the current economic climate, any reform programs / government initiatives or other relevant issues).*

Currently, grant aid provides a short lever to move activity towards governmental priorities. Cultural heritage is a vital element in Northern Ireland's tourism offer and mechanisms to better connect the museum sector with this are needed. However, the grant aid provided by NIMC is a small fraction of current museum budgets. It might make a bigger impact if the organisation's total cost were reallocated to local government grants (similar to the approach used for the transfer of community festivals funding to local government). Even then, the amount of monies provided is relatively small in comparison to that provided by HLF and other parts of government like DETI / NITB.

*9. Do you want your response to be treated as confidential?*

No

*10. Please state clearly your reasons for requesting confidentiality.*

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your comments.  
Please click the "Done" button to submit.