

## **Belfast City Council Consultation Response Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure's Review of Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI)**

### **Background: Functions currently delivered by ACNI**

A description of the full functions of the Council is set out in Article 4 (1) of the Arts Council (NI) Order 1995:

- to develop and improve the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts;
- to increase public access to, and participation in, the arts;
- to encourage and assist: the provision of arts facilities and events; and co-ordination and efficient use of resources for the arts;
- to assist the provision of administrative services and training for or by any body providing facilities for, or in connection with, the arts;
- to advise DCAL and other government departments, district councils and other bodies on matters relating to the arts and such other functions as are conferred on the Council by any other statutory provision;
- to allocate funds made available by central government and the National Lottery for the arts;
- to advocate the causes of the arts to central and local government and the public generally;
- to advise the public and private sectors on artistic matters;
- to assist artists and arts-activists.

### **Background: Belfast City Council's support for culture and arts**

Belfast City Council currently invests £1.5 million in culture and arts through its Tourism, Culture and Arts Unit. This supports approximately 75 organisations, 300 full-time jobs, 130 part-time posts and 700 volunteers and generates a return of investment of £8 for every £1 we spend.

Organisations funded by the Council reach an average audience of 4 million and attract over 140,000 participants per year. We also invest in new capital developments such as the Mac, the Lyric and RISE, the Broadway roundabout public artwork; run a Festivals Forum with over 100 members; and develop new products and initiatives, such as Late Night Art, Literary Belfast and Belfast Music Week.

### **Question 1: Need for functions delivered by ACNI**

#### **Are the services/functions currently delivered by ACNI required?**

Yes/No

**Comments:** ACNI provides a very valuable service to the arts sector, including the provision of funding to arts organisations, the majority of which are in Belfast. The Council believes that these services are not just required, but essential in supporting a healthy arts sector and creative and cultural city.

In particular, we welcome recent ACNI initiatives raising awareness of the opportunities available in Europe. We also look forward to working further with ACNI around creative uses for vacant and underused sites across the city.

With reference to the functions currently delivered by ACNI outlined above, Belfast City Council also delivers on the majority of these. In particular, we would draw attention to the amount of funding the Council invests in arts organisations – currently £1.35 million per year. It is therefore critical, in particular with the transfer of functions under the Review of Public Administration, that ACNI works closely with local councils to streamline their processes and future services.

### **Question 2: Additional services ACNI could deliver**

#### **Are there additional services you would like to see ACNI deliver?**

Yes/No

**Comments:** We would welcome further consideration of the role of ACNI in the international arts market, including support for export and touring.

The Council is currently exploring the feasibility of a per cent for art scheme in line with the Council's Investment Programme. We would welcome the opportunity to work with ACNI to develop this initiative across the city. In particular, under the Council's new Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15, we commit to developing a public art strategy for the city, and we would like this to be developed jointly.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with ACNI in the development of a major gallery in the city.

The Council would like to bring a major cultural event to Belfast and would welcome the opportunity to work with ACNI on this.

### **Question 3: Value for money**

#### **Does ACNI provide value for money? Does the current investment by ACNI in the arts sector achieve effective outcomes for the level of expenditure incurred?**

Yes/No

**Comments:** We consider that the current investment by ACNI in the arts achieves effective outcomes for the level of expenditure incurred. Research reports such as the Digest of Arts Statistics are particularly welcome. However, more advocacy of the impact of the investment is to be welcomed.

We would encourage that these advocacy messages are not just in economic terms, such as employment and return on investment, but social benefits. Care should be taken not to confuse advocacy of creative industries and arts. Arts are about more than job creation and entrepreneurship. The arts can help people become more confident and accomplished. They encourage participation in civic life, create enjoyment, social interaction, build confidence and create opportunities for lifelong learning. They can challenge pre-conceived ideas of ourselves and of others, helping us re-imagine contested space – both physical and emotional – becoming more united, inclusive and outward looking.

There is a perception among some arts organisations that ACNI should invest more of its budget in to arts organisations, rather than in to its own operation – they have less budget but more staff than other arts councils in ROI and the UK. Organisations have also raised concerns about the level of bureaucracy and paperwork required by ACNI, in particular, its 2012/13 annual support for organisations funding scheme. While ACNI has recently consulted on and changed its processes, the Council has received very positive feedback on its own consultation and revised processes. We would be happy to share our learning with ACNI.

ACNI also provides substantial funding to support agencies such as Audiences NI and Arts and Business NI. While the Council recognises that these agencies provide an important service, some arts organisations have raised concerns about their value, quality and representativeness.

Finally, we would request that the level of expenditure is increased, in particular in Belfast. In particular, we would welcome the opportunity to jointly fund projects and programmes and would highlight the opportunity for joint working presented by the Council's Flagship Fund, which is a Cultural Framework initiative. £150,000 is included in the Council's draft budget estimates, and we would like ACNI to match fund this.

#### **Question 4: Effectiveness and efficiency**

**Does ACNI deliver these functions / services effectively and efficiently? In your experience as a customer, does ACNI provide quality advice / guidance?**

Yes/No

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**Comments:** While the advice of ACNI is welcome, there must also be acknowledgement that Belfast City Council is an expert in the city. Care should be taken to recognise our leadership role. We can also provide ACNI with advice and guidance.

In particular, we would welcome recognition of the Council as a partner in the delivery of services and functions that affect the city. We would encourage a closer working relationship with ACNI to ensure that our services and functions are distinct but complementary. This is both at a strategic and operational level. Working together to streamline grants processes will avoid duplication and reduce unnecessary burden on ACNI, councils and the arts sector. This could be a formal agreement through a memorandum of understanding, and some discussions with Council have already taken place.

#### **Question 5: Communication with stakeholders**

**Please provide your views on how effectively ACNI communicates with its stakeholders.**

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We would encourage ACNI to work more closely with local councils, in particular Belfast City Council, which is home to the majority of NI's arts organisations and two thirds of creative media and arts jobs.

Belfast City Council currently invests £1.3 million per annum in culture and arts organisations. Most other councils across Northern Ireland invest in the arts through purpose-built council owned venues – they do not run culture and arts funding programmes. However, while we consulted with ACNI in the development of our new Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15, the Council is not always consulted in the development of new ACNI policies and initiatives, for example, the Intercultural Arts Strategy. This is particularly important as we come to the end of ACNI's five-year Creative Connections strategy and start to implement the Council's Cultural Framework.

ACNI's activities would also benefit from closer engagement and recognition of the general public as stakeholders – the actual or potential beneficiaries of their work – not just artists and organisations. This is particularly relevant with the implementation of community planning. Again, local councils can play a vital role in this and already have considerable expertise in this area.

#### **Question 6: Future delivery model**

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**The Arts Council is an executive Non-departmental Public Body with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure as its sponsoring Department. It receives its principal core funding through public expenditure line. The Arts Council is also a National Lottery distributor.**

**Is this the most appropriate model for the delivery of ACNI functions?**

No comment.

### Comments

The Council recognises the importance of ACNI being a Non-departmental Public Body as this requires an independent board of experts/specialists in the arts.

### Question 7: Future delivery model

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**Do you think some or all of the functions, currently delivered by ACNI, could be delivered more effectively by an alternative model? If so, please select one of the options below:**

- Abolish. The functions are not required
- 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?
- No comment

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**Comments:** While we support the NDPB delivery model, we would like to highlight concerns in relation to the proposed transfer of local arts under the Review of Public Administration. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure wrote to Belfast City Council on 18 January 2010 proposing:

1. Funding for local arts to be transferred to the new district council by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland
2. Allocations for Belfast and Derry to be weighted to take account of their strategic positions; however, it is also the intention is to disburse funding for local arts more equitably across the new councils
3. A potential requirement from new councils to match allocation of funding for local arts as per the Community Festivals Fund
4. ACNI current allocation in 2009–2010 for local arts in Belfast is £628,024 and the proposed allocation under RPA is £322,372 (a 50% reduction). This figure is based on allocation by population with a 10% deprivation weighting to Belfast and Londonderry/Strabane.

The proposed definitions for local, regional and national arts are as follows:

- Local arts is operating within its own boundary
- Regional is operating beyond its own council boundary but within Northern Ireland
- National is operating within Northern Ireland and touring/offering programmes to the rest of the United Kingdom and/or Republic of Ireland

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland will lead on regional and national arts. However, Belfast's unique position is not addressed in this proposal. Belfast City Council plays a unique role in Northern Ireland's culture and arts infrastructure as many of the regional and national arts are based in the city and are currently supported by both Belfast City Council and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Belfast-based arts organisations run programmes in Belfast. However, they also extend these across Northern Ireland (in the case of theatre productions and other performances, this means that they often pay other councils for the use of their local arts centre). In many instances, the audience attracted to Belfast-based events are from outside of the Belfast area.

While the move to assign local arts responsibility to Belfast City Council is welcome, the level of funding should remain consistent with that previously given to the local arts sector in the city.

**Question 8: Any other issues/comments**

**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).**

**Comments:**

Belfast City Council has recently published a new cultural strategy for the city, the Cultural Framework for Belfast 2012–15. Both ACNI and DCAL were consultees, and we look forward to working closer with ACNI across a range of areas.

We would welcome a full review and formal consultation on ACNI.

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